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“Pilgrimage, Connection, Community: In Honor of Theofanis G. Stavrou”

Theophilus Prousis, University of North Florida

I first presented these comments at the 44th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (New Orleans, November 2012), as part of a roundtable discussion that honored Theofanis G. Stavrou’s fifty years of service to Mediterranean, Slavic, and Eastern Orthodox Studies. With a few alterations and updates, these words stand as an appropriate conclusion to this volume of essays exploring the main topical interests—Eastern Orthodox Church history, Modern Greek literature, Russian history and culture, the history of Cyprus, and several other areas—in the truly outstanding scholarly career of Theo Stavrou.

We all thank Theofanis for his profound and permanent impact on our professional development in the field he founded and nurtured: Greek-Slavic relations in modern times, a natural extension of his passion for Slavic, Mediterranean, and Eastern Orthodox studies. He has shaped our intellectual transformation, encouraged our scholarly projects, and remained our dear friend over the decades. We have all benefited enormously from his guidance, commitment, and inspiration—and from his unique vision that created a dynamic, exciting, and challenging program of study. All of us, in different ways, have used our scholarship to bridge diverse regions and issues, to locate points of contact and interaction across cultural frontiers, and to honor his enduring influence. And it was fitting that we got to celebrate his wonderful career at a conference that highlighted “Boundary, Barrier, and Border Crossing.” He has, after all, practiced this throughout his life.

His achievements as an exemplary teaching and publishing scholar have been remarkable and far-reaching. He has received honors and awards, including a Fulbright, from various institutions such as the Ford Foundation, IREX, the Smithsonian, the Academy of Athens, the University of Athens, the University of Minnesota, Indiana University, and the Greek Ministry of Culture. Thus far, he has supervised the publication of twenty-seven volumes in the Nostos series on Modern Greek History and Culture, thirty-one volumes of the international scholarly journal *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook: A Publication of Mediterranean, Slavic, and Eastern Orthodox Studies*, and twenty monographs in the Minnesota Mediterranean and East European Monograph series. He has directed the Modern Greek Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, under whose auspices he initiated the annual Celebration of Modern Greek Letters and the annual James W. Cunningham Memorial Lecture on Eastern Orthodox History and Culture. And when did he find the time to become one of the founders of the University of Cyprus? Since 1964, he has served as executive director of SPAN (Student Project for Amity among Nations), a program that contributed immensely to the globalization of the curriculum at the University of Minnesota, and he currently serves on the Board of Directors of The Museum of Russian Art in Minneapolis. He has delivered countless lectures on the history of modern Russia and the Near East, the intellectual and cultural history of modern Greece, the history and culture of Eastern Orthodoxy, and Modern Greek writers to thousands, probably tens of thousands of students. He has organized superb symposia and conferences on such topics as “Russia under the Last Tsar,” “Russian Orthodoxy under the Old Regime,” “Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” and “The Mediterranean and Its Seas.” Lastly, he has mentored and supervised to completion approximately fifty Ph.D. dissertations, many of them published as

monographs or as articles in scholarly journals. By any measure, this is a staggering and impressive array of accomplishments.

So many aspects of his impact stand out among his former students. His lectures made Russian history and culture come alive with dramatic force and energy, introducing us to the likes of Chichikov, Bazarov, and Stavrogin, and he assigned map exercises based on the shifting frontiers of the Russian Empire. His courses touched on virtually every poem by Cavafy and Seferis; and nearly every work by Kazantzakis, including *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, 33,333 lines of verse picking up the story where Homer left off. Several generations of students met in his office cloister every week to discuss this classic and Kazantzakis's insightful travel account of Russia during her momentous upheaval in the 1920s. But more was to come: Professor Stavrou brought engaging speakers to campus and made sure his students spent time with them. For most of us, his direction aroused curiosity to probe the interactions between the various peoples who resided, traded, and traveled in the Greek or Orthodox East, that expansive domain encompassing Eastern Orthodox lands and communities from the Neva to the Nile. He advised the imperative of investigating these intersections through primary sources left by observers, especially those eyewitnesses who conveyed their experiences in a lively, interesting, and generally reliable manner. His enthusiasm, dedication, and relentless confidence in our success have enriched us all. We all emerged from Theofanis's "Overcoat," spun from the trinity of pilgrimage, connection, and community.

Pilgrimage, because he has journeyed tirelessly across the spacious terrain of the Eastern Orthodox world, firmly convinced that travel offered limitless horizons of learning and that all students must figure out their own distinct paths. He traversed intellectual boundaries and academic disciplines, promoting and disseminating knowledge in multiple settings. He asserted

that pilgrimage to sacred shrines in the Greek East represented “the most visible expression of Orthodox religious behavior,” and he emphasized the importance of pilgrimage and travel reports as “an underutilized source” for excavating the history of Russian ties with the lands and seas of the Levant.¹ He certainly prompted our own pilgrimages, not just to Mount Athos, Cyprus, and Sergiev Posad but to the archives and libraries of Russia, Ukraine, Greece, Britain, and other lands.

Connection, because he connected the Greek and Slavic worlds with his ideas, lectures, publications, and conferences. He linked, to name just a few, Russia and the Levant, the Russian and Ottoman Empires, Dostoevsky and Kazantzakis, Mayakovsky and Ritsos, Papadiamantis and Solzhenitsyn. He connected seemingly disparate regions of the globe; bridged the social sciences and humanities; and brought together scholars and students from North America, Western and Central Europe, Greece and Russia. Indeed, with today’s fashion of “cross-cultural,” “transnational,” and “comparative” history, he must feel perfectly at home, because cross-cultural and transnational connections have characterized his approach to the study of Greek-Slavic relations for decades.

Community, because he has underscored the channels of Greek-Slavic contact and interaction, the interplay of encounters and exchanges that generates a sense of community between the Greek and Russian wings of the Orthodox realm. Indeed, if he did not actually coin the phrase “Orthodox commonwealth,” after Dimitri Obolensky’s innovative notion of a Byzantine commonwealth for the Byzantine era, he undoubtedly did the most to endorse and popularize this thought-provoking concept. It perfectly describes the community of shared interests and challenges that define the Greek-Slavic arena from the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople to the outbreak of World War I. Equally crucial, he has fostered a worldwide

community of scholarship, a network of researchers, teachers, specialists, and students, centered in Minneapolis and extending outward to other parts of North America, to Britain and Greece, and to Russia. One of his most important accomplishments, the *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, definitely epitomizes this global community of learning. Since its founding in 1986, the *Yearbook* has provided an international forum for established scholars and new voices, offering an extraordinary variety of articles, essays, translations, archival descriptions, and reviews. His pathfinding role in creating the 1995 Moscow Exhibit on Russian Travelers in the Greek World, and his leadership in organizing the 2005 Athens Conference on Russia and the Mediterranean, further attest to the international community of scholarship which he has stimulated. In all these ways, the trinity of connection, pilgrimage, and community has framed and guided his students' teaching and scholarly careers in Slavic, Eastern Orthodox, and Mediterranean studies.

Thanks to Theofanis's guidance and supervision, scholarship on a broad spectrum of Greek-Slavic history and culture found a home at Minnesota. The Minnesota Project, as we like to call it, focusing on the multifaceted relations between the Orthodox East and Russia, inspired and trained five cycles of graduate students to explore these rich and varied links, part of a two-way process of communication and collaboration between the Greek and Slavic worlds. Just a sampling of these topics affirms his central place in a field he has designed and shaped for well over half a century. Greek enlightened churchmen traveled to Muscovy and Imperial Russia, contributing to Eastern Orthodox culture and education. Russian-Ottoman wars and treaties forged opportunities for Russian-Greek cooperation in naval, military, and commercial endeavors. Greek merchant centers flourished in Odessa and New Russia, while Greek émigrés served in the diplomatic corps and other areas of tsarist officialdom. Russian travelers and

pilgrims crisscrossed the Greek East, drawn to the holy shrines of Mount Athos, Constantinople, and Palestine, while Russia's government and public launched enterprises of religious, educational, and cultural philanthropy in the Near East. With the help of Greek educators and translators, classical and Byzantine studies flourished in late tsarist Russia. And Russia's state and society responded to Balkan stirrings for liberty and autonomy, most notably the Greek War of Independence, and involved themselves in the intricate but messy realities of Balkan nation-state building. Fault lines in the Orthodox commonwealth, such as the disruptive forces of ethnic nationalism, secular modernity, and ecclesiastical rivalry, also attracted scholarly attention and research.

All these themes in Greek-Slavic affairs not only opened new perspectives in Russian history and culture but also redefined the Eastern Question, Europe's dilemma over what to do with the receding or regressing Ottoman Empire. By underlining the religious, cultural, and commercial dimensions of the Eastern Question, he encouraged students to widen their views beyond the confines of diplomatic, naval, and military history. The contours of our Eastern Question today, a more complex and dynamic subject because of his efforts, include not just great power rivalries, treaties, and conflicts but also mentalities, perceptions, and images. The teaching and research activities of all those who profited from the Minnesota Project testify to the long-term success of Theofanis's initiatives.

Current and future prospects for scholarship in the Greek-Slavic field he pioneered look promising indeed. The resurgence of Orthodoxy in Russia has encouraged a younger generation of talented historians to conduct research on Russian religious and cultural ties with Greece, Palestine, and other parts of the Near East. Travel across the Orthodox commonwealth has become more common, as has broader participation in international conferences. A wealth of

newly available archival and manuscript documents on philanthropy, diplomacy, pilgrimage, piracy, commerce, education, and culture awaits researchers poised to make their own discoveries. The Universities of Athens and Minnesota have inaugurated an exchange program, a result of their longstanding partnership in promoting research on Hellenism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Greek-Slavic relations. And we can continue to celebrate his unstinting service to Mediterranean, Slavic, and Eastern Orthodox studies with the publication of his *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: The Essential Texts*, a joint endeavor coauthored with Bryn Geffert.² This attractive and engaging volume is no doubt a fitting tribute to Theofanis Stavrou's lifetime of contributions and achievements. The field is thus thriving, resonating with his lasting imprint and epic spirit. And it was fitting that we got to celebrate his wonderful career at a conference that highlighted "Boundary, Barrier, and Border Crossing." He has, after all, practiced crossing/crisscrossing throughout his life.

Notes

1. Theofanis G. Stavrou, "Russia and the Mediterranean in Modern Times," 2: 400. This essay, summarizing the conference presentations of an international group of scholars, appears in the published proceedings of the First International Conference on Russia and the Mediterranean. See Olga Katsiardi-Hering et al., eds., *Rosia kai Mesogeios (Russia and the Mediterranean. Proceedings of the First International Conference, Athens, 19-22 May 2005)*, 2 vols. (Athens: National and Kapodistrian University, 2011).
2. Bryn Geffert and Theofanis G. Stavrou, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: The Essential Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).