

Emilio Cecchi's Travel to Greece Among Arcadian Myth, Modernity of Antique and Western Intellectual Stereotypes

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Abstract

In 20th century, an increasing number of people have started to travel to Greece considered as the cradle of Western civilization. However, in some cases when lots of travelers couldn't find the reality as they imagined, they got disappointed and denigrated the Modern Greek society and landscape. Greece image of Emilio Cecchi (1884-1966) who is a writer, literary critic and art historian, is completely different from this thought. He traveled to the Hellenic territory in 1934 and wrote a travel book entitled as *Et in Arcadia ego* by using his experience. This "fanatic of classical antiquity" is interested in Classical Greece's history, art and literature that exists in memories and continues to live in the landscape. In this article, we intend to reveal the stereotypes in *Et in Arcadia ego* that is a product of a general ideology reached nowadays by examining this approach.

Keywords: Emilio Cecchi, Travel to Greece, Arcadia, Ancient, Stereotypes

ARKADYALI MİT, ANTIĞIN MODERNLİĞİ VE BATILI ENTELEKTÜEL STEREOTİPLER ARASINDA EMILIO CECCHI'NİN YUNANİSTAN SEYAHATI

Öz

20. yüzyılda, giderek artan sayıda insan, Batı medeniyetinin beşiği olarak kabul edilen Yunanistan'a seyahat etmeye başladı. Bununla birlikte, bazen hayalindeki gerçeğin bulunmadığını gördüğünde birçok seyyah, hayal kırıklığı yaşayıp modern Yunan toplumunu ve topraklarını kötüleştirdi. Yazar, edebiyat eleştirmeni ve sanat tarihçisi Emilio Cecchi'nin (1884-1966) Yunanistan imgesi bu düşünceden tamamen farklıdır. 1934'te Yunan topraklarına gidip tecrübesini kullanarak *Et in Arkadia ego* ("Ben de Arkadya'da") başlıklı bir seyahat kitabı yazdı. Bu "klasik antik çağın fanatiği", anılarda var olan ve manzarada yaşamaya devam eden klasik Yunanistan'ın tarihi, sanatı ve edebiyatıyla ilgilenmektedir. Bu makale, bu yaklaşımı inceleyerek günümüze uzanan genel bir ideolojinin ürünü olan *Et in Arcadia ego* eserindeki stereotipleri açığa vurmaya hedeflemektedir.

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INTRODUCTION

In the realization of the contemporary travel and in its planning the contribution of the readings done before the departure is decisively important. As expressed by the philosopher Michel Onfray, the travel begins first in the library (2010, p. 23); therefore, through various readings writer/traveler realizes the first perception of the territory that he/she will visit. For this, we can define the desire to verify the concordance between the real place and the information and ideas acquired through reading as "eroticism of the travel" (Onfray, 2010, p. 24). This tendency is a sort of "paradox" (Rossetto, 2010, p. 15) because traveler experiences the *elsewhere* bringing with him beliefs and images that influence the direct perception of the places (Scaramelli, 2008, pp. 84-86). This discourse becomes more valid in the case of Greece, which has always had a significant role in the formation of western intellectuals and was represented firstly as a mythical and literary reality, and rarely as a territorial and real place.

Starting from these considerations, this article aims to analyze the travel book *Et in Arcadia ego* (1936) by the Italian writer and critic Emilio Cecchi. The text, which narrates the author's journey in the Hellenic territory, made in 1934, gives the opportunity to study the way in which Greece was perceived at the beginning of the 20th century. We have to remember that in Italy – like in other countries – the perception of the classical world is often affected by a stereotyped idea given during scholastic and academic studies. However, Cecchi's intent is not simply to carry out an archaeological-erudite description of a lost world, but to underline the modernity of the ancient, seen as a historical period that is still reflected in the contemporary world.

The writer presents Greece –the cradle of western civilization – as a land pervaded by mythical atmosphere and characterized by bucolic and pastoral landscapes that recall the ancient Arcadia. This fact should not come as a surprise because Cecchi comes from an academic and cultural environment interested in classical studies and, therefore, tries to find all those traces of antiquity that are still present in the panorama of modern Greece. For this, the writer reads the modern through the parameters of the ancient, trying to bring back to life what has disappeared. Rarely Cecchi's writing is characterized by a romantic and nostalgic sentiment for the past and, in any case, he prefers a clear and aesthetically perfect language, which reproduces the composure of classical art.

However, to understand Cecchi's experience in Greece and his perception of the ancient better in the perspective of modernity, firstly we intend to make a brief description of

the tradition of the “travel to Greece” from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in Italian literature.

1. TRAVEL TO GREECE AND THE MYTH OF ANTIQUITY

Greece was the Balkan country that attracted the attention of the western traveler since the early eighteenth century. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, traveling in Greece for the rediscovery of the lost classical Hellenic civilization was often difficult due to the mistrust towards the Ottoman Empire. We can see that in the early eighteenth century, with a general re-discovery of the antiquity, most travelers prefer to reach Rome, Naples or Sicily to study the classical ruins of the Roman-Greek antiquity directly (Bedin, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, on the



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heels of the aesthetic theories of the archeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), some traveler tried to visit the Greek territory to see the sites of the ancient Hellenic cities, like Athens, Mycenae, Delphi, about which they read in classical texts, despite the problematic relationship with Ottoman Empire.

Regarding the eighteenth-century Italian travelers, we must mention Severino Scrofani (1756-1835) who was in Levant between 1794 and 1798 and who wrote an interesting travelogue about Greek territory (see the bio-bibliographic note in Clerici, 2009, pp. 1383-85). The Italian traveler shows interest not only in the traces of the antiquity, but also in the historical-political situation of this region, standing away from some erudite and classicist visions of the time and recording the disastrous situation of Greek peninsula (Ricorda, 2012, p. 41). Another Italian traveler of this period is Santorre di Santa Rosa (1783-1825), who was a revolutionist exiled in England and who went to Greece in 1825 to participate in the Greek liberation movement. As well as Lord Byron (1788-1824), the Italian irredentist dies during the liberation battles. We can read the account of his Greek stay in some letters written during his exile. In these writings, he expresses a love for Greek people, because they share the same fate of foreign domination with Italians. In one of his letters, he writes that he “feel[s] for Greece a love that has something solemn [...]. The people is clever and good and the centuries of slavery couldn’t completely destroy their beautiful character” (Santa Rosa,

1969, p. 455, translation is mine). The negative vision of Turks is deeply influenced by the fact that Santa Rosa considers them the Greek equivalent of the Austrians, foreign invaders of Northern Italy. Indeed, the Hellenic territory becomes the reflection of Italy.

Following the foundation of the Greek state (1827-1832) and the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1922-1923), an increasing number of travelers arrive in Greece. We must remember that Greece, sought by travelers from Western Europe is a non-existent entity; its image is formed through readings of ancient texts and books on its art. Therefore, the visitors try to re-discover a kind of ghost of the past that does not exist anymore, but that is wished to be brought back to life by hundreds of years of historical transformations. Often it happens that these travelers ignore the Byzantine historical period and the long Ottoman domination in their travel books, focusing only on fascinating and fascinated descriptions of a pastoral and bucolic Arcadian landscape, embellished by ruins of temples and ancient theaters (Jusdanis: 1991: 13-48).

In Italy, where the study of Latin-Greek literature and culture represents an important part of every student's education, the idea of Greece is formed through a cultural background composed of classical myths and Arcadian atmospheres. For this, as Brigitte Urbani (2011, p. 16) points out, the Hellenic territory is almost a "mental" representation of a non-existent place.

The Greek journey of Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), who traveled in Greece during the summer of 1885 and wrote a long poem entitled *Maia* (1903) after this experience, seems to be described in accordance with this logic. In this poetic "travelogue", which traces back to a real journey, the writer focuses only on mythical and bucolic atmospheres, by ignoring completely the reality of contemporary Greece that certainly disappointed him. Indeed, we witness a considerable influence of the myth that suffocates and crushes the visited reality (Urbani, 2011, p. 19). Moreover, D'Annunzio's interest for Greece is fundamentally linked to a poetic research close to Hellenism: as he communicated to the publisher Treves before starting his Greek journey: "I will go to the East for five or six weeks: to the excavations of Delphi and Mycenae, at the ruins of Troy. These votive visits are required by my current studies. I've gone back to Hellenism." (Letter of 10 July 1895 quoted in D'Annunzio, 2014, p. 1, translation is mine).

As well as in the case of D'Annunzio, very often we can find the disappointment of western travelers for the discovery that the dreamed reality of classical Greece does not exist. Thus, we note a sort of rejection for contemporary Greece and a negative view of the historical developments in Byzantine and Ottoman periods that have provoked a devolution of the original western culture.



Mario Praz

Mario Praz (1896-1982), an important literary critic and Italian art historian, has the same idea. He underlines his disappointment with the disappearance of the picturesque Greece and the splendor of classicism in his book *Viaggio in Grecia*, written in 1931 – in a historical period in which Fascism exalts the myth of ancient Roman superiority. Indeed, according to the writer “the Greek picturesque has disappeared for a long time [...]: the debris, the scum of a world that is neither modern nor ancient, is a *nowhere*, in the sad limbo of what has no reason to exist” (1942, p. 10,

translation is mine). The fault of this is the overlapping of the miserable and disordered present reality in classical grandeur: in this context, the grace and harmony of the ancient is “glazed” by the decadence of contemporary civilization. The ruins of the classic culture create an expectation that disappoints the western traveler because he/she expects to find a Greece modeled according to the canons of neoclassical aesthetics. For this, the sense of failure and the melancholic awareness of the transience of every civilization – even of the great classical civilization – is an omnipresent element in Praz’s travel book (De Pascale, 2001, p. 102).

Therefore, we must argue that in general the traveler seeks a Greece that does not exist, a spatial reworking of the Arcadian myth of stillness and grace and people that look like the statues of Polykleitos or Phidias (Urbani, 2011, p. 27). Sometimes, it may happen that the western traveler is so focused on the image he intends to find that he purifies the space he sees from any element that does not belong to the idea of the classic. This is the case of the travelogue *Et in Arcadia ego* by Emilio Cecchi.

2. ET IN ARCADIA EGO: A TRAVEL TO AN ILLUSORY AND MYTHICAL REALITY

2.1. Ideas and Stereotypes of Ancient Greece

The vision of Greece by Emilio Cecchi (1884-1966), writer, literary critic and art historian, is totally contrary to that of Mario Praz. He traveled to the Hellenic territory in 1934 and wrote a travel book on this experience, titled *Et in Arcadia ego*. The first nucleus of the text is composed of articles written for *Corriere della sera*. In each case, as in his travel books, the definitive organization of the story follows an inner logic, which transfers an image and a very personal interpretation of the places visited (Ghilardi, 1997, p. XVIII).

The title of the book is a reference to Baroque painting and in particular to a work by Guercino (Di Biase, 1983, p. 92). The phrase, which does not appear in ancient texts, implies

the presence of the verb “sum”, so its translation is “I too am in Arcadia”, where the implied subject is the Death (see Erwin Panofsky, 1955, pp. 295-320). It is possible that Cecchi chose this title to indicate that the process of decadence has altered also the Arcadia, the mythical reality symbolizing the incorruptible classical perfection. Therefore, the title, apparently idyllic, conceals a pessimistic sentiment that, however, is not directly reflected in the travel book. Nevertheless, it is also possible that the writer referred to the idyllic idea of the painter Poussin, who interprets the phrase as “I too was in Arcadia”, where the subject is a dead shepherd, buried in a monumental tomb. In this case, Cecchi expresses the consideration of having seen with his own eyes this mythical territory of Greece. Whatever the interpretation of the sentence is, it should be remembered that the writer claims pessimistically that “we are too loyal to the idea of an impeccable Greece, like eighteen carats gold.” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 34, all translations of *Et in Arcadia ego* are mine). In any case, the writer frees himself from the feeling of disappointment by focusing on what interests him the most – that is the traces of classical antiquity – and by accepting the impossibility of bringing the past back to life. Indeed, at Olympia the writer makes some reflections on the transience of life using a pictorial description:

In the shadow of the branches, I think a tizianesque allegory of the three ages; with putti, the loving couple and the bald monk who considers the skull, but without hypocritical mortification and without terror. It seems somehow that at Olympia one is helped to understand, almost taste, one's own transience and at the same time the bliss of existing; to humble oneself in a tender and virile acceptance of one's fate; to cancel oneself with gratitude in the sense of that harmony, of the justice that governs the souls and things, and consumes and transforms them; no negligence and disdain (Cecchi, 2015, p. 63).

Cecchi is a “fanatic of classical antiquity” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 91) and, for this, he seems to be interested mostly in the history, art and literature of classical Greece that exists only in memory, but which continues to live in the landscape – even if in the form of ruins. Therefore, Cecchi’s interest is more figurative than sociological: the writer focuses on the description of the ancient cities such as Mycenae, Epidaurus and Olympia, which he visited. In this context, the political problems are deliberately set aside (except the chapters on Basil Zaharoff) to leave space for a route that becomes a journey similar to a perfect and orderly “artwork”. However, Cecchi’s positive view of the Greek territory certainly has an ideological value: ignoring some important historical developments of medieval and modern history leads to downplaying the forces that have acted on the territory for centuries and that altered it. As Gaia De Pascale (2001, p. 100) sustains, Cecchi is a part of the group of Italian intellectuals who traveled to Greece to test the validity of his own readings and knowledge about antiquity.

In *Et in Arcadia ego*, we can notice that the nature is interpreted and evocated through the measure of the classical finiteness. In this text, Cecchi's prose reaches the stylistic perfection that made him one of the most important figures of Italian art prose (Binni, 1963, p. 203-205). The book represents the writer's style and his tendency to evoke the mythical classical world at its best (Di Biase, 1983, p. 93).

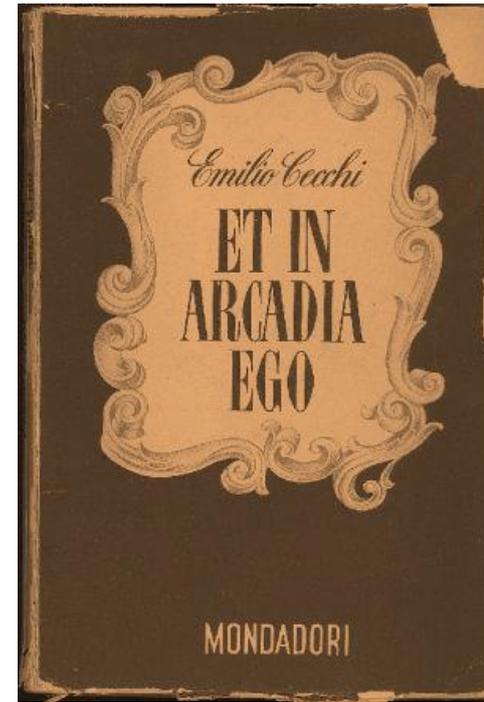
2.2. Traveling in Greece between Ancient Ruins and Imagines of Classic

One of the first places visited by Cecchi is Crete. The writer, aware that, in this territory, he is entertaining an experience with a Pre-Hellenic phase of the Greek history and art, remains fascinated by the ruins of the Minoan palatial art, known through the restorations of Sir Arthur Evans at Knossos and of Italian archeologists at Phestos and Agia Triada. He could notice the distance of the Minoan and Mycenaean culture from the neoclassical idea of Hellenism: according to his point of view, "Knossos looks like an antediluvian skeleton, brecciated, amputated" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 19). The atmosphere, in which the writer is immersed, is a living and speaking reality and this fact provokes a sense of unease in him: "The sense of disturbance is more acute, the more certain parts of the palace are in themselves living and talking. The small room with its graceful alabaster throne: for a tremendous dynasty of Minos, this is a throne so modest that a vice-priest would not be satisfied with it" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 19).

In these Cretan pages of Cecchi's book, a special and outdated Orient is described: it is not the Muslim geographic East of modernity, but "a capricious and enormous Orient [...]: an Orient as it is in Homer" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 21). In this ancient oriental dimension, suspended between East and West, the author even imagines an unrealizable meeting with Arianna:

Finally Arianna: the holy Arianna [...]. I thought about her in the theater where she danced so many times. In these staircases, throwing a blanket over her thin tunic, she would break up to her room. How many things could have taught me; and I would not left her. And she too, unattainable; and so present. [...] In round figures, among leftovers of Minoan age, and centuries of Greek and Roman prehistory and history, added all the medieval and modern age, I have lost my date with you for three thousand and five hundred springs (Cecchi, 2015, p. 21-22).

As we can notice in this quotation, for Cecchi Greece is a land where the past cohabits with the present and "the present 'occupies' the tradition, relives it and reincarnate it" (Di Biase, 1983, p. 94). In this dimension, the past does not really disappear and everything seems petrified and frozen: this imaginary reality, imagined by the writer, comes alive as a



mirage, breaking away from the memories of classical readings and images of museums, repopulating rooms and arcades (De Pascale, 2001, p. 100).

After Crete, the other civilization of the “Hellenic Middle Ages” that impressed the attention of Cecchi is Mycenae. Cecchi argues that this city-state, administrated by an autocratic and tyrannical political system, looks more like the Minoan civilization than Hellenic one. Indeed, in Mycenae “there is [...] all the bizarre cortege of deities and demons that forms the Cretan pantheon; and that, in the climate of Crete, it takes place with naturalistic carefree, in a sort of magic spring, still enveloped by the golden native of the East. In this other climate, the same things and figures seem to take on a remote aspect and sense” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 47).

The “infernal” atmosphere of the Mycenaean ruins is modeled according to the literary memories of the epic events of the Atrides. The bloody vicissitudes of the Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* are recalled to describe the location of the archaeological site – similar to a medieval castle crumbling on impervious mountains – and to give an idea of what the inhabitants of this city were like. In the writer’s imagination, formed through classical readings, the Mycenaean men are like furious “devils and proud” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 49): “they must have been men of iron: tall, bearded, with wide chest and narrow hips, like the Egyptian and Cretan type, but with more massive muscular relief” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 48). The Pre-Hellenic culture becomes the background not only of the archaic epos, but also of the classical theatre of the 5th century: for this, it turns into the highest example of Hellenic tragic perfection.

At this point Cecchi moves from the Hellenic prehistory of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilization to the desired experience of classicism, by immersing himself in the ruins of Delphi, the seat of Apollo’s oracle. In this archeological site, the writer grieves for the destruction of this important religious center of the ancient culture and at the end of the chapter, he makes a melancholy reflection of sadness:

A sense of emptiness, of desert, within which this details swarms, first exalts us with its own immensity, with its mysterious promise. But gradually it worsens and weighs on the heart. It is the void where life was most fruitful, the irreparable desert, where the gods lived. The beauty of the marbles, the sublimity of their proportions can console us on the Athenian Acropolis and in the solitude of Olympia, among great tree cover, it is a serenity of melancholy humanism. But at Delphi, the multitude of monuments without a face disintegrates and equals the indifferent mountain; one of the greatest human testimonies returns to dust and blind nature. Apollo has disappeared, leaving in the air a luminous eddy and the thrill of imploring (Cecchi, 2015, p. 37).

As we can read in this quotation, the melancholic reflection of the corruption of the holy city of Delphi contrasts with the fascination for the monumental remains of Olympia

and the Acropolis of Athens. Therefore, Olympia is a place that fascinates the writer most for its pastoral and Arcadian landscapes. The ruins of the great temple of Zeus with its enormous colons reflect the eighteenth-century picturesque and the tradition sensation of the lost antiquity. The ancient remains of the Olympic architectural complex “remain hidden and enveloped in the bush” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 61). However, what attracts the attention of the writer is the romantic atmosphere that surrounds this place of mystical peace and tranquility and that reminds some paintings of Titian.

At the same time, it took away from all styles, materials and proportions; as if what I saw was not the superstitious wreckage of a congeries of buildings that grew and collapsed, one on top of another, for eight or ten centuries; but it was the product of a single mind, of a single inspiration. I seemed to find myself in a artwork, tidy and conscious; and that even my emotion was transfused and was part of it; neither more nor less of the chiaroscuro of the sky and of the severe shades of the colors, of the members of an order of pillars and of the design of a meander; or the slow movement of the shepherd down there, collecting sticks from her hearth, followed step by step by a red goat (Cecchi, 2015, p. 62).

Great examples of Hellenic sacred statuary were found from the plain of the temples and buildings of Olympia, defined by the writer as an expanse of “marine limestone” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 63) and they are now in the museum that is particularly appreciated by Cecchi. The description of sculptures that were on the two fronton of Zeus’ temple – that represented the myth of the Pelops and Oenomaus’ chariot race and the war between Lapites and Centaurs, symbol of the contrast between *hubris* and *sophrosyne* (see De Vecchi et al., 1991, pp. 97-99) – occupies a large part of the chapter on the statues discovered in Olympia. In particular, Cecchi sustains that:

For the novelty and evidence of the story, the robustness of the symmetries and the richness of the rhythm, for the simplicity of the concept of religious and social concept, in the hierarchy of figures, divine, heroic, human and animal, for the diversity of inspiration, dramatic and hieratic, probably it is the two greatest statuary complexes throughout the history of art (Cecchi, 2015, p. 65).

Unlike Olympia, Athens seems like a conglomerate of different, disparate and disharmonic realities. Between these cosmopolitan atmospheres, the places where the attention of Cecchi is focalized are the examples of the old monumental glory of the city, as the Parthenon and the Acropolis.

The first time one arrives in Athens, immediately he runs to the Acropolis. We return and return to the Acropolis. And the last glances from the window of the hotel are turned towards the Acropolis, while gathering the stuff in the suitcases we think that tomorrow we will not be here anymore. It was a simple collective suggestion, a commonplace of enthusiastic rhetoric, and it would be worthwhile to

investigate its content, mechanism, authorities. But there is no place for any cheesy emphasis in the Acropolis impressions. The historical references have very little. And it is not a trace of that obscure reverence, of that mystic dismay, from which we feel ourselves struck at Delphi, at Olympia, at Mycenae. The Acropolis impressions converge on the Parthenon. And perhaps we can not say much more on the Parthenon, when we said that it is inactable as a glass of water, simple as a *paternoster* (Cecchi, 2015, p. 87).

The writer has a great consideration for the Parthenon: this idea comes out from a veneration for the classic statuary of Phidias. The long digression about the sculptures of the ancient Greek artist occupies the majority of the chapter on Acropolis. The splendor of this sacred building obscures the other ruins of the ancient Athens. According to the writer, “The other monuments of the Acropolis and Athens cannot in any way approach the Parthenon” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 90). The Propylaia, the Erechtheion, the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the Library of Adrianus do not stand comparison with the Parthenon, which is considered the highest example of perfection that the Hellenic civilization was able to create.

Cecchi’s travel book gives space to many digressions on Greek art, a subject well known by the writer. In particular, besides digressions on sculpture and ceramics, the writer focuses on Greek painting, of which only very few examples remain today. Regarding painting, the author makes a praise, considering it much more important than sculpture, which is the only genre of classical art that has remained till today. The writer in these chapters shows a critical prose passionate, never boring, that leads away from aridly erudite academic writing. At this point, we can place the stylistic novelty of this travel book and match it with the critical studies of the art historian Roberto Longhi, with whom Cecchi was a friend (see Gauna, 2004, pp. 187-196).

In his descriptions on Greek art, the writer places the artist and his works in his historical context emphasizing his privileged position in the 5th century Athens. In this context, the artist is a citizen well integrated in a society that uses to protect it. According to Cecchi, this situation occurred in Florence during the Renaissance, where the artist was included in the municipal institutions. Making a comparison between Athene and Florence, the writer elevates his hometown to the heir of classical culture in the modern age. In this case also, we can see the tendency of Cecchi to transfer concepts of antiquity into the modern era, underlining the immortality of classical elements.

2.3. Contemporary elements and the fascination of Antiquity in the Greek landscape

To consider the expressive potential of the landscape in the Cecchi’s travel book, we must start from the description of Athens, which is an example of a mixture of modern and

ancient. The writer describes in this way the atmosphere of the new Greek capital, which generally creates disappointment in foreign visitors:

Those who do not know Athens on books and on geographical atlases, where they do not remember and show that ruins with a legendary name, it is easy for the real Athens to have a skidding effect on them. With the exclusion of some incomparable, the monumental antiquities of Athens are not worth their fame. And the general appearance of the city is full of tears (Cecchi, 2015, p. 66).

The image is that of the ancient Middle Eastern cities: “The oriental and turbulent air of the bazaar and the caravanserai, the tumultuous regurgitation of the port access, creeping in between the Hellenic colonnades, the Roman pillars, the Byzantine churches and the modern buildings, bring you a variety, a sense of distances, a disorder, a brutal, dusty animation” (Cecchi, 2015, p. 66).

Despite the negative impression on Athens, bucolic landscapes have a preponderant presence in the description of the Peloponnese and Argolida hinterland. This is because the writer is mainly interested in representing the idea of Greece that inspired the Italian and European literary imaginary for centuries and that is linked to the mythically idyllic territory of Arcadia. We can notice this fact in the rural and pastoral description of the landscape in Delphi:

The flock of sheep and goats had already been sheltered from the sun under the thatched roofs on four antennas; to which a trellis had appeared, to sleep the shepherd, in midair, more ventilated. [...] The expanse of the countryside seems to be crossed by small sailing boats, all of which go from the same part. The plowed with horses or with a horse and a donkey paired to a small iron plow (Cecchi, 2015, p. 29).

Cecchi’s descriptions focus on an objective representation of what he actually sees during his journey, trying to avoid romantic sentimental images. However, the landscape is constantly present in every stage of the travel and this element succeeds in overcoming Cecchi’s antiromantic thrusts (De Pascale, 2001, p. 99). An example is the description of the sunset at Amfissa:

The strangest thing was this sunset: in a landscape, that is very open, reddish, was the most helpless and feminine sunset; without blows of chiaroscuro, without clouds, without contrasts; made of a pellucid and sensual substance, with bluish, violet, and verdant tones; colors almost of women’s shirts, and that, artistically, also have, I do not know why, something not very serious, not very authoritative. Here, instead, inside the recesses and the fractures of the Gulf of Salona, the sea was very long, in the shape of a bronze. Nevertheless, the mountains behind which the sun fell, mottled, pearly, traversed one on top of the other, like a *velarium* on a

velarium, giving a placidly luminous and vaporous sense of distances that interpenetrated endlessly. Everything seemed still (Cecchi, 2015, p. 31).

In Cecchi's imagination, the Greek landscape is the place where a balanced mix of ancient and modern is achieved. Greece is therefore the place where "the present has no time" and "the ancient and the modern coexist in naive unity" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 15). According to the writer, the Hellenic culture also presents a static and immobile tradition, pursued with obstinacy and loyalty, but in any case without genuineness. Certainly these considerations of the author do not take into consideration the hundreds of years of transformations that have shaped the modern Greek society and culture, which, despite its attachment to its past, maintains the historical vicissitudes in its traditions traces.

In any case, we must notice that references to these extraneous elements are visible in some descriptions of the population or buildings. Indeed, only in passing some figures remind the Byzantine or Muslim past of the Greek territory. In the ship traveling to Crete, the writer notices men that hold in their hands the *tasbih*, which "seems a devotion, but is only a harassment, a killer: a residue, perhaps, of Muslim atavisms" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 13). In Corfu, Cecchi compares the women at mystical "Byzantine" images: "Pale faces, framed with black cloths, starry eyes, quilted garments and composed in pleats and right angles" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 8). Other times, images of everyday rural life are described with reminiscences of Venetian-Renaissance painting:

In a small valley where the water glistened among flowering sprigs, I saw another of these 'sacred families', but more solitary, almost wonderer. A bed with nothing, a table with a mirror; and a donkey next to it, with one who puts his pack. With a blue cloak on her head and a red skirt, a young woman nurses her baby. I would have come to see a *Fugue in Egypt* (Cecchi, 2015, p. 60).

Nevertheless, in most cases the population is presented as a reproduction of classical statuary, making comparisons with ancient examples: therefore people of all ages appear to appear "classically posed" as "on the mausoleums" and "old bearded men, with a semblance of ancient rivers, they had around, like the statue of the Vatican Nile, broods of cherubs" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 60). In the little town of Amfissa, near the archaeological site of Delphi, even in the oriental aspect of the village, the writer is able to see traits recalling the ancient statuary in the local people: "I saw a porter, shaggy and sullen: true double of the most beautiful bronze boxer in the museum of Athens" (Cecchi, 2015, p. 29). As we will notice further, the landscape described by Cecchi tends to become a translation of a conceptual image that he has about the Hellenic perfection and the Arcadian harmoniousness. For this, very often human and territorial elements are represented as the reflection of the Hellenic statuary or the bucolic and pastoral Renaissance painting.

A parenthesis on modern history can be considered the two chapters concerning Basil Zaharoff, a Greek merchant who attracts the attention of the writer with his resourcefulness. The part dedicated to this figure is a kind of refined and brilliant *bozzetto letterario* (literary sketch) to which, however, the next chapter on Theseus is contrasted. The writer then creates a contrast between two controversial figures, linking past and present, myth and reality. Therefore, it turns out that Cecchi is interested in most cases to present a reality still suspended between present and past, where every element of the landscape, culture and history is linked directly to the classical tradition. On the other hand, the elements that appear extraneous to this tradition are barely mentioned, becoming fugitive and irrelevant images: everything is functional to the rendering of a classical image of Greece. For this, the Greece represented by the writer is therefore a reality that is both real and imaginary, mythologized and filtered by his judgment and his interest as a critic and art historian.

CONCLUSION

The vision of Greece by Emilio Cecchi is characterized by some interesting peculiarities and, as shown in the first part of this contribution, appears quite different from the image developed by other travelers of the time. In fact, against a general disappointment experienced by many Italian intellectuals who traveled in the Hellenic territory, the writer appears to show a positive view of modern Greece, seen as a mirror of its ancient splendor.

Cecchi, “fanatic” of classical antiquity, seems to be interested just in the history, art and literature of classical Greece, which continues to live in the contemporary landscape. Everything seen during the journey shows parallelism with antiquity and is interpreted according to classical schemes. Therefore, the author’s interest is more figurative than sociological: the writer focuses on the description of ancient cities, ruins, old theatres and pastoral landscapes. In this context, political problems are deliberately set aside to leave space for a journey that becomes a travel towards a mythical and enchanted dimension. The writer pauses to describe the beauty of the landscapes and to give a precise account of the works contained in the museums and in the archaeological areas. In any case, there is no lack of references to the people encountered during his journey and descriptions of the behavior of the local people. The Greek people are described with the parameters of Greek sculpture or Renaissance painting, which had reproduced the perfection of ancient art.

It is necessary to underline that in *Et in Arcadia ego* Cecchi intends to recreate a prose that can describe the refinement and grace of antiquity. For this reason, we can define that this travel book is one of the most perfect expressions of the writer’s art prose. Thus, the classical models become a source of inspiration for the creation of a text that must primarily become an artwork, worthy of the subject in question.

In conclusion, we can argue that the classical view of Greek territory, created by Cecchi, assumes an ideological value: ignoring a part of medieval and modern history, focusing only on a present modeled on stereotypes that derive from an ancient reading of modernity leads to a misunderstanding of contemporaneity. The writer is therefore part of that group of Italian intellectuals who went to Greece to test the validity of the modernity of the ancient, but in doing so they set aside, ignore or deliberately eliminate historical factors that formed the Greek society of the twentieth century.

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