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Renaissance Studies in Greece

Since the 19th century, Renaissance studies have gradually gained autonomy from Medieval and the Early Modern studies. In countries like Greece, where the traditional view was that no Renaissance occurred in the Balkan Peninsula during the 14th - 16th centuries as a result of the Turkish occupation, Renaissance studies had to struggle to gain autonomy and distinct presence in the curricula of Greek universities. This article aims to present the current status of Renaissance studies in Greek universities and to give a critical account of it.

In Greece, there are 21 universities where 9312 lecturers, assistant, associate and full professors offer their services. Only 21 of these professors, namely 0,22%, have the term "Renaissance" in their official academic assignment, indicating that they were elected so as to promote research and teaching on the Renaissance. Specifically, they are distributed as follows: 6 in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 7 in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - which is the largest in Greece -, 4 in the University of Ioannina, 3 in the University of Crete and 1 in the Athens School of Fine Arts. It is obvious that only the oldest Greek universities have chairs dedicated to Renaissance Studies. Despite the fact that some of the other, more recent, universities have departments and schools of humanities, they do not feel the need to include Renaissance studies in their plan of academic development. It is worth noticing that certain Greek universities and the large part of the Greek academia consider the Renaissance as a rather short and underrated part of the early modern period. As a result, they think that scholars who research and teach the early modern period cover the needs of the universities as far

as the Renaissance, despite the fact that usually their research is focused on the 17th and 18th century.

Regarding the academics, I. Vivilakis, in the Department of Theatre at the University of Athens, is associate professor of "Theory of Theatre – History of Religious Theatre in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period". Vivilakis' research is focused in the Byzantine period and the connections between the ancient theatre and the rituals of the Eastern Christian religion.

[1] In the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Athens, associate professor Maria Ntourou-Eliopoulou[2] and assistant professor N. Giantsi teach "History of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period". Ntourou-Eliopoulou is a specialist in the history of the Latin dominion in the Greek region from the 11th till the 17th century. Giantsi's research is focused predominantly on the period of the High Middle Ages in Western Europe. In the same Department, K. Gaganakis is assistant professor of "Modern European History 16th - 18th century".

[3] His research is focused on the Reformation and 16th century France, subjects that refer to the Renaissance, namely that of Northern Europe. It is worth noticing that in the Department of Italian Studies of the University of Athens, only R. Demopoulou concentrates her research on the Renaissance, her area of specialization being "Medieval and Renaissance Latin Literature". Demopoulou studies the Latin literature from the 14th to the 16th century and the texts of the Latin travelers who visited Greece during the Renaissance so as to comment on their remarks. "Last but not least", Georgios Steiris, assistant professor of "Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy" in the Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy, Psychology of

the University of Athens: Steiris focuses his research predominantly on the 15th and 16th centuries and the Italian Renaissance. Moreover, it is worth noticing that the University of Athens is the only Greek university ever to establish a chair for Renaissance philosophy.[4]

The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is the largest Greek university. H. Savvopoulos - assistant professor of "Modern and Contemporary Art from the Renaissance until the Present" in the Department of Pictorial and Applied Arts - focuses his research on contemporary Greek art and not the Renaissance. Very interesting is the work of Th. Kitsos, lecturer in the Department of Music, who studies "Medieval and Renaissance music".[5] His research is concentrated on the interaction between 16th century Italian music and the early Baroque of the 17th century. Tina Krontiris is Professor of "Renaissance literature and drama" at the Aristotle University. Her research is focused on 16th and 17th century England, especially the role and social status of women. She also studies Shakespeare's plays.[6] St. Litsardakis is assistant professor of "French Literature of the 16th century". A significant number of her papers and books deal with the work of Michel de Montaigne.[7] The Department of History and Archaeology at the Aristotle University has three professors whose official area of specialization is "History of Medieval and Modern Art in the West". In addition, professors E. Myconiatis,[8] M. Papanikolaou[9] and A. Charalambides[10] concentrate their research on Greek art of the 19th and 20th centuries. N. S. Litsardopoulou is lecturer in "History of Modern European Art from the Renaissance until Baroque" in the Department of Arts History and Theory. Her research is focused on Rubens and the 17th century painting, which is not part of the Renaissance.[11]

In the University of Ioannina, Th. Markatou is assistant professor of "Art History from the Renaissance until the present" in the Department of History and Archaeology. Once again, as far as it concerns professors of art history in the Greek universities, she studies Greek

art history of the 19th and 20th centuries. The same applies to A. Sarafianos-Bogiatzis who also does research on the 19th century English art.[12] In the same university, but in the Department of Plastic Arts and Art Sciences, while A. Christou[13] is associate professor of "Art History from the Renaissance until the present" and A. Adamopoulou is assistant professor of "Art History from the Renaissance until the present".[14] Both of them focus their research in Greek art of the last two centuries.

In the University of Crete, E. Mathiopoulos is associate professor of "Western Art History" in the Department of History and Archaeology. His work is concentrated on Greek art of the 20th century.[15] P. Ioannou is assistant professor of "Art History from the Renaissance until the Baroque" in the same Department. Ioannou studies Renaissance art, especially Greek painters who worked in Renaissance Europe in the 15th and 16th century. His research involves Belisario Corenzio and Domenico Theotokopoulos.[16] P. Cornezou, lecturer in "Western Art History from the Renaissance until Romanticism", serves in the same Department. Her research is dedicated to 17th century French art, while she seems to be interested also in medieval art.[17] In the same Department, E. Sakellariou is assistant professor of "Western Medieval History". Despite her official assignment, Sakellariou's research involves the Renaissance, especially in the Italian peninsula from the 15th to the 18th centuries.[18]

In the Ionian University at Corfu, in the Department of History, N. Karapidakes is professor of "Western Medieval History and Institutions' Transmission in the Eastern Mediterranean". Aspects of his work involve the relations between Greece and Venice during the Renaissance.[19] In addition, Th. Nicolaidis, who is assistant professor of "Modern European History", studies Machiavellianism in 16th and 17th century France.[20] As for the Democritus University of Thrace, P. Tzivara is lecturer in "Greek History under the Venetian Occupation" in the Department of History and Ethnology.[21]

Besides the staff, a survey of Renaissance studies in Greece should not exclude the curricula. Courses dedicated to the Renaissance exist in several departments and universities. First of all, in the Department of Philosophy and History of Science of the University of Athens, students are required to take the course "Art History I". According to the syllabus, this course, beginning in the Duecento, also deals with the Renaissance and Mannerism.[22] In the Department of French Language, the course "From the chivalric ideal to Renaissance humanism" deals with the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance, focusing on the differences between the two periods, while the course "History of French Literature: The Renaissance" elaborates the social, economical and political milieu of French Renaissance.[23] In the Department of History and Archaeology, the course «The Western European Societies of the Early Modern Period (16th - 18th centuries)» refers to the social and political situation in early modern Europe and the formation of national identities. Of special interest is the course «The witches' persecution in Western Europe 1500 - 1700». The scope of the course is to instruct students in the perceptions of magic and its social impact. The courses «Medieval History I and II» study all aspects of the medieval world, but they also present 15th century Europe, so as to denote the paradigm shift of the Renaissance. In the same Department, the course «Art History I» deals with Renaissance art and Mannerism.[24] Of special interest is the curriculum of the Department of Music of the University of Athens. Namely, there are three courses: "Theory and Practice of Renaissance Music", "Greek Composers in the Renaissance", "The Climax of the Renaissance: Schools of Rome and Venice". It is obvious that the Department shows noteworthy interest in Renaissance music, while its point of view is not ethnocentric, as it would otherwise be expected for a Greek University Department. [25] In the Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology the course "Renaissance Philosophy" deals with the philosophical traditions of the 15th and 16th centuries.[26]

In the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in the Department of Greek Philology, there are two courses that refer to the Renaissance. The first is entitled «Neo-Latin Literature», the second, «Greek and Latin Literature in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance»; the latter deals with the interaction of the two traditions, Greek and Latin, in a long-standing period.[27] In the Department of History and Archaeology, Renaissance art is being examined in two courses that separate the period: «Early Renaissance Art» and «Late Renaissance Art and Mannerism». There are also two courses that refer to Renaissance History, although it's difficult to discern their differences: «Early Modern Europe» and «Modern European History 15th - 18th centuries».[28] In the Department of Philosophy, the only course that deals with the Renaissance is «Modern Political and Social Philosophy from Machiavelli to Marx». The Department does not have an independent course on Renaissance Philosophy yet.[29] In the Department of English Literature, the course «English Literature and Civilization: Renaissance Literature» focuses on 16th and 17th century England.[30] Nonetheless, broader is the scope of the course «Renaissance and Humanism», that is being taught in the Department of French Language.[31] Furthermore, in the Department of Architecture, the course "European Art from the Renaissance to Neo-Classicism" focuses on the Early Modern and Modern Art.[32]

In the University of Ioannina, in the Department of Philology, there is only one course on the Renaissance that is dealing with the "Cretan Renaissance", the reception of the Renaissance in Crete under the Venetian dominion.[33] Moreover, in the Department of History and Archaeology, the course "European Art from the Renaissance to the Rococo" is the only course including the Renaissance, a fact that is rather peculiar for such a Department.[34] Finally, a similar course, "Renaissance Art - Mannerism", is part of the curriculum in the Department of Plastic Arts and Art Science.[35]

Apparently, there is more interest in the Renaissance at current in the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Crete. The course “Raphael and classical art” focuses on the Italian Renaissance, especially the school of Rome. In addition, the courses “The Art of the Counter Reformation”, “Flemish Art from Van Eyck to Bruegel”, “Caravaggio and his school” and “Art in Spain and its colonies (16th - 17th century)” deal with other aspects of Renaissance art, helping students to strengthen their knowledge about Renaissance art. There are also two courses on Renaissance history: “Constitutional History and Political Thought in England 14th - 16th century” and “England’s secession from papal influence: from the anticlericalism of the Late Middle Ages to Reformation”. These two courses deal with uncommon subjects of Renaissance history.[36] In the Department of Philosophical and Social Sciences, the course “History of Renaissance Philosophy” is part of the curriculum, although it is seldom taught.[37]

In the Department of History at the Ionian University at Corfu, the course “History of the Greek territories under Latin dominion” examines the presence of the Latin speaking conquerors in Greece in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[38] In the Democritus University of Thrace, the Department of Greek Philology teaches “Neo-Latin Literature” to its students.[39] In the University of Peloponnese, in the Department of History and Archaeology, there are two courses that deal with the Renaissance: “History of Art: Middle Ages – Renaissance” is the only course in the Greek University system that combines Medieval and Renaissance Art. In addition, the course “Modern European History: From Renaissance to the Conference of Vienna” focuses on the Early Modern and Modern European History.[40]

In the post-graduate level, there is no specified Renaissance program in the Greek universities. There are Ph.D. candidates who do research on various aspects of Renaissance civilization. However, because of the scarcity of

current bibliography, it is not an easy task to trace their writings and be informed for their research before the defense of their theses.

To sum up, the facts prove that the interest for Renaissance studies in Greece has not increased. Usually, Greek scholars and students feel awkward towards that period because they think of Renaissance as something alien to their culture. It is common among scholars of humanities when they refer to the period from 1450 - 1600, to use the term “post-byzantine” instead of Renaissance. Also, Renaissance studies do not have a rich tradition in Greek universities. There were no major academic figures who were experts in the period so as to promote Renaissance studies and leave a legacy of students and written works. Other Greek scholars maintain that the Renaissance is not a distinct period and should be studied within the scheme of the Modern European period.

From my experience, I would like to remark that students, when they follow courses on the Renaissance, show interest and appreciate Renaissance studies. Some of them continue their studies of the period, mainly in European universities. The problem is one of a brain drain: usually such students build their careers abroad and do not return to Greece to enhance Renaissance studies.

Endnotes

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