

2-1-1983

Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece, by Michael Herzfeld

Gerasimos Augustinos
University of South Carolina - Columbia, augustg@mailbox.sc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/hist_facpub



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *American Historical Review*, Volume 88, Issue 1, 1983, pages 141-142.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~ahrweb/>

© 1983 by University of Chicago Press

This Book Review is brought to you by the History, Department of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

tute its vanguard. This conflict has arisen despite an implicit social compact under which, in exchange for social peace, the party has promised full employment and improved living standards in a terror-free and egalitarian society.

A downturn in the world economy, together with growing scarcity of resources under socialism and the end of an early period of great upward mobility, have put the Communist rulers under renewed pressure to improve the efficiency of their centrally planned economics by means of market reforms. This would bring the elimination of over-employment, greatly increased wage and salary differentials, strict discipline on the shop floor, and, at least for a time, reduced living standards. The proletariat is understandably unenthusiastic. The regimes attempt to persuade it by putting greater emphasis on worker participation in the industrial decision-making process, but such participation will remain symbolic unless the party is willing to surrender the principle of democratic centralism. Nor will Soviet subsidization of East European living standards put off the day of decision. Strikes, riots, and other labor troubles, which have been rare during the thirty-seven years of Communist rule, are therefore expected by our authors to escalate significantly. In the end, Soviet control of Eastern Europe may be at risk.

Blue-Collar Workers in Eastern Europe is to be welcomed as a first effort at the systematic and comprehensive treatment of the industrial working class under socialism and, as well, for the substantial body of survey data it brings together.

I would have thought, however, that the implicit social compact could be as well or better understood as a reflection of Khrushchev's COMECON-wide policy of "goulash communism." Such legitimacy as, in the eyes of the workers, the regimes possess is probably based on the regimes' achievements in modernization as well as on egalitarianism and is in any case minimal for patriotic reasons. The apolitical character and the rarity of violent worker outbreaks (as well indeed as their spontaneous and explosive character) are to be explained primarily by the absence of autonomous worker institutions as well as by the heavy overburden of repressive agencies characteristic of Marxist-Leninist governments.

Neglected also is the impact of the international demonstration effect. For how else could a price increase affecting no more than 2 percent of the meat supply trigger a great Polish crisis after real wages had risen some 40 percent? Survey returns presented in the volume show that two-fifths of Polish manual workers thought their living conditions in 1970-78 had either not improved or had deteriorated and 67 percent evaluated the family budget as "highly strained" in any case. Nor could I

agree that worker dissatisfaction alone constitutes the chief threat to the stability of the East European socialist state. There were two major crises, the Czech in 1968 and the Croatian in 1971, in which the industrial workforce refused to follow the lead of dissident elites, and three others (Poland and Hungary in 1956, Poland in 1980), in which the unhappiness of the proletariat had to merge with the dissidence of the intelligentsia in order to produce regime destabilization.

So far as the reader can discern, no commentators were invited to the meeting at Stanford in May 1980, which put together the present volume. Instead, graduate students who were present during the proceedings offered written comments afterwards. No doubt this explains in some measure the lacunae adverted to above. Conference volumes are generally thought of as uneven in quality and fuzzy in focus. This one is no exception. The place of the anonymous referee in evaluating manuscripts submitted to a university press is in the conference volume normally taken by the tactful commentator. An earlier book edited by Triska and Paul M. Cocks, *Political Development in Eastern Europe* (1977), appeared without the papers of discussants who had been invited and even without reference to their having participated in that capacity. Both volumes, furthermore, include chapters not presented at the organizational conference without any indication of which were presented there and which not. It is clear that an editor must exercise the right of eliminating papers and commentaries that do not advance our understanding or our knowledge of the subject at issue and of adding others which do, but this certainly does not provide license to dispense with the service of competent critics in the production of conference volumes. In my judgment that would constitute a threat to the integrity as well as to the standards of the profession.

R. V. BURKS

Wayne State University

MICHAEL HERZFELD. *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*. (Dan Danciger Publication Series.) Austin: University of Texas Press. 1982. Pp. x, 197. \$17.50.

Kai pali dika mas. Every schoolchild in Greece knows by heart the folksong to which these words form the last line. That song, a lament on the taking of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks, serves as a focus for a study with a dual but connected theme. Michael Herzfeld, an anthropologist, sets out to examine the development of folklore studies in Greece and to define its relation to the construction of a nationalist ideology in the new state during the nineteenth century.

The sociopolitical and cultural framework of his study will be familiar to those versed in the circumstances surrounding the development of modern Greece, whose territorial markers did not match up with the ethnic ones of a nation. Complicating matters further, the Greeks viewed themselves and were seen by others as directly related to two divergent cultural and socioeconomic realms: the civilization of the West with its spiritual roots in the classical Greek world and the Eastern imperial and theocratic domain of the Byzantine and Ottoman states. This dual perception generated a controversy among the culturally conscious segments of this nascent nation-state, which was reflected in their efforts to create a coherent and satisfying image of who the modern Greeks were. To those struggling to create the edifice of a new state the answer was clear: the nation (*ethnos*) was one of Hellenes. And this view, as the author rightly points out, was determined as much by foreign interests as by domestic considerations.

In using this commonly accepted duality as a framework, with its attendant ramifications in all areas of modern Greek society, the author finds another dimension to it. He posits a polarity between an outward-looking, Western-oriented "political Hellenism" and an introspective, "Romeic" outlook, with overtones of an Eastern way of life. The former is an intellectual exercise in nationalist ideology; the latter leans toward a psychosocial value system. To carry the duality forward in time in this form may be necessary in terms of the author's scholarly discipline, but it may also confuse the issue when it comes to understanding how a liberal, secular ideology became conservative and irredentist.

Folklore as a discipline in Greece did not become established until the second half of the nineteenth century with the work of Nikolaos Politis. By that time the country's national identity was bound up with the vision of the *megali idea*. Both the discipline and the ideology were affected by intellectual and political criticism emanating from Western sources. The failure of these now-liberated Greeks to conform to the political and cultural expectations of their European patrons resulted in the disillusionment of the latter with the Hellenes and their new state. Political affairs in the country came under sharp attack, and, most distressing of all, was the denial by some Westerners of a direct link between the modern Greeks and those of classical times.

In pained response the country's intellectual and political circles sought to demonstrate the unity and the continuity of their nation. Because of his interest in the development of folklore studies in Greece, the author in his discussion of the attack and the response begins with the latter, discussing the work of Zambelios, and then takes up the former, the

Fallmerayer controversy. In this way the importance of the historical moment (the 1830s) that the Fallmerayer episode represents is lessened. Greek intellectuals who reacted to the German's attack (including Zambelios, but more importantly Paparrigopoulos), first endeavored to establish ties between ancient and modern Hellas. By mid-century, shifting intellectual currents in Europe offered them an opening to establish another theme, continuity from classical to modern times with increasing importance accorded to the link between these eras, Byzantine civilization.

In a way this study might just as easily have been entitled "From the Politics of Revival to the Politics of Survivals." For the development of a modern Greek nationalist ideology runs from the didactic, impassioned efforts of Korais on behalf of the *ethnos* to Politis's defense of it through his research into the folkways of the *laos*.

This is a useful and worthy addition to the all too meager scholarly literature on the subject.

GERASIMOS AUGUSTINOS
University of South Carolina

CAROL IANCU. *Les juifs en Roumanie, 1866-1919; De l'exclusion à l'émancipation*. (Études Historiques, number 4.) Aix-en-Provence: Éditions de l'Université de Provence; distributed by Jeanne Laffitte, Marseille. 1978. Pp. 382.

Carol Iancu's book provides a very useful analysis of Romanian antisemitism before World War I, thereby helping to fill a significant gap in both Jewish and Romanian historiography. Against the backdrop of evolving independence and nationalism, the author presents a multifaceted account of Romanian attitudes toward, and treatment of, Jews. Iancu sees antisemitism as indigenous to Romania, with strong roots in the Orthodox church, but not endemic to the Romanian masses, who, he claims, frequently have come to the aid of their Jewish neighbors. He attempts to uncover the socioeconomic, political, and ideological, as well as religious and xenophobic, underpinnings of the official government policy of systematic discrimination against Jews. The main focus of the book is diplomatic and political developments, although the author ambitiously tries to employ psychological and intellectual history approaches as well with somewhat less success.

The most disappointing aspect of the book, to my mind at least, is the fact that it does not live up to its title and does not deal very fully with Romanian Jewry itself. Although there are chapters ostensibly dealing with the Jewish community and Jewish reactions to antisemitism, they merely whet one's appetite rather than satisfy it. The major Jewish actors on the scene are Adolphe Crémieux of