



# Images of the Balkans

National Word and the Balkan Wars

Political developments, historical context, memory and literature

Penelope Delta

Fifth Lesson

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# The historical context

- The period of the preparation, conduct and aftermath of the Balkan Wars
- In this period, the Balkan myth is directly intertwined with the phenomenon of **nationalism**
- The Balkan Wars reflect the beginning of an era in which the European political scene was characterized by **nationalist tendencies**
- Bloody and cruel national conflicts
- **The First Balkan War.** (Between October 1912 and May 1913): The intra-Balkan **alliance** of Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia rose up against the Ottoman Empire.
- **The Second Balkan War** (shortly afterwards, in the middle of the summer of 1913). Military conflict between the above-mentioned Balkan allies, this time with Bulgaria.

# The First Balkan War



Political Boundaries in the Balkans before First Balkan War



# The First Balkan War in the West Press



# The Second Balkan War- The final territorial gains



# Balkans Wars- Constructing and consolidating Stereotypes

Political changes in the region-Instability and violence

The Balkan conflicts are associated with the attempt to achieve full independence from the Ottoman empire, as well as with national, historical myths (roots in Middle ages of earlier)

Cruelty, Violence, Primitivism, Ethnic Division, Savagery, Non-Europe

# The Greek images over the Balkan states

Less romantic  
depictions

National Word and  
national interests

Production and  
consolidation of extremely  
negative stereotypes  
(especially for the  
Bulgarian Other)

# Which Balkan nation have the most depictions in the Greek literary production?

- **Bulgarian Other:** The ethnicity with the most representations during the Balkan Wars
- The **Bulgarian and the Montenegrin Other** are the two ethnic groups with the most depictions (in this time frame)
- Due to the national dispute with Bulgaria, ethnic groups such as the **Romanians, Serbs and Albanians** are **temporarily relegated to a secondary role of interest.**
- Usually Romanians are depicted as *allies of Bulgarians*
- The **Albanian Other** and the ambiguous Greek depictions (*enemy and friend*)
- The **Serbian Other**, the *hostile depictions*, and the *'Christian bond'*
- Attempts to negotiate the **'Macedonian Other'**



# The Bulgarian and the Montenegrin Other

- The consolidated perception of the Bulgarian nation based on the notions of violence, cruelty and a tendency towards barbarism
- **Historical Explanation:** The Balkan Wars, the claims of part of the Macedonian territory between the two nations, and the Bulgarian cooperation with the German occupation forces during the Second World War
- These ethnic conflicts formed a **clear, negatively charged perception of the Bulgarian Other** in the Greek imagination
- The **contemporary era** and the aforementioned stereotypes
- The **Montenegrin Other:** geopolitical developments in the Balkan region and literary images
- **Romantic tendencies** to emphasize heroism and the sense of freedom, but also references to primitivism, incompleteness and backwardness

# The Greek literary production regarding the Balkan Wars

- Penelope Delta (*medieval legends*), Ion Dragoumis (*nationalist word*), Kostis Palamas (*poetic compositions*)
- History and interesting alterations of the images (difference between image-stereotype)
- Significant increase in the number of texts dealing with the Balkans and its ethnic groups.
- National aspirations, fictional writing and highly homogeneous, national discourse.
- *Political developments and literary images*- the creation of mainly negative stereotypical representations (consolidation)
- Depictions of the 'naïve' Western factor (also as opponent of Greek interests)
- **Negotiating the Ottoman administration:** *a suffering, collapsing Other or an enemy of the Greek nation, friendlier to the other Balkan nations?*
- The search for potential Balkan allies and the ideological conflict with potential Balkan enemies

# The Greek literary production regarding the Balkan Wars



# Imagology, politics and memory

- Politics, historical memory and literature-The role of the varying images
- Contemporary political developments, historical memory and the Other
- The role of literature in consolidating Stereotypes
- **Positive images for friendly nations** and **negative images for hostile nations**- A recurring pattern
- The paradigm of the Bulgarian Other

# The main Greek authors of the period

- **Penelope Delta**: the most characteristic literary voice of the period under consideration
- The undoubted success of her novels among the Greek readership
- The successive republishing of her works (different generations and readers)
- **Literature and the national interests**
- The goal to address to a children's readership
- **Ion Dragoumis**: National Word and the Macedonian struggle
- **Kostis Palamas**: The Greek national poet and the Balkan Wars
- **Lesser-known Greek writers**: Balkan Wars, Macedonian region, national Word
- **Strongly nationalist writing, negative stereotypes, national aspirations in the foreground**
- War memoirs, short stories in magazines and novels

# Importance of Penelope Delta's Work

- For the shake of Fatherland (1909) and In the Heroic Age of Basil II- Emperor of Byzantium (1911)
- Narration takes the reader back in time to **Byzantium** (Basil the 'Bulgar Slayer'- 10th and early 11th centuries)
- **Ambiguous historical context:** on the one hand associated with **prosperity** for the Byzantine Empire, but also marked by **military disasters**
- The place: Macedonian region

# Choosing the *Macedonian Region* and *Byzantium* as narration framework

- The choice of this particular time and place should be seen as anything but accidental;
- Setting of the narrative in Macedonia **reflects Delta's interest in this region** (relationship with Dragoumis)
- The contemporary Macedonian Struggle (1904-1908)
- *The unity of the Greek nation (Antiquity- Byzantium- Modern Greece)*
- The tendency to choose Byzantium as a narration framework. The role of the historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos

# Greek Identity and Byzantium

“The goal was to **strengthen the positive image** of Byzantium in the circles of scholars and writers, and the search **for the unity of Hellenism over time**. The discovery of Byzantium by Greek scholars gradually took place **during the 19th century**, while **Byzantine history was considered part of the history of European civilization**”

“The **reappearance of Byzantium**, both as a **missing link (connecting modern Greece with ancient Greece)** and as the bearer of a transitional present, not only **ensured for Greece the much-desired cultural continuity**, but, more importantly, legitimized **Greece as a modern civilization**; which was metonymically equivalent to **European civilization.**”

Stathis Gourgouris



# Main Aspects of Delta's literary work

- The perception of Byzantine culture as superior to that of the Bulgarian culture
- Depicting the Byzantine culture as purely Greek
- The Greek idea of the superiority of the Greeks in the Balkan area
- The motif of *Bulgarian atrocities* against civilian populations (constant massacre, strong destructive tendency)
- The Bulgarian Other as *savage, cruel and barbarian type of person*
- Negotiating the Greek atrocities in the War
- Basil the 'Bulgar-Slayer': a ruthless act and his depictions in the Greek imaginary



# Main Aspects of Delta's literary work



- **Historical Novels** (accurate historical events)
- The values of **homeland and religion**
- The image of the Bulgarians in Delta's next two novels (*Secrets of the Swamp- O Magkas*)
- Perceiving the Bulgarians as **'the worst enemy of Hellenism', torturers, untrustworthy people**
- Images of *the Turkish Other* as the **predominantly hostile Other** in Greek texts before the Balkan Wars
- **Albanians** are presented rather indifferently (sometimes hostile to the Greeks)
- The **Romanians are judged much more harshly**, as they are perceived as 'the usual traitors allied with the Bulgarians and the Turks'
- The **Serbian Other occupies little** space in Delta's fiction (references to 'Serbian propaganda' in Macedonia).

# Penelope Delta- Passages for discussion

*They were kept in the palace, in the service of the royal family, where, relatively speaking, they did not do too badly. However, having been **educated in Byzantine culture, which was the most gentle at that time, they felt more keenly the barbarity of the conqueror, they resented the cruelty, the brutality of the Bulgar, which manifested itself in every contact, even in the most trivial circumstances of their daily service**".*

*"Here we are **fighting Bulgarians and Romanians, in the territory of a third enemy, the Turk, who, instead of protecting us all, divides us to better impose himself on us and exterminates us wherever he can, both one and the other, each separately and all together.**"*

# Penelope Delta- Passages for discussion

*-And why did you leave Macedonia? Lukas asked.*

*-"Uh... because we don't get along with them there!"*

*-"What? Are you arguing?"*

*-Uh, yes, we are.*

*-With the Turks? Those villains! And you fought, Vasilis?*

*-Sure... I fought.*

*-And did you kill many Turks?*

*-I killed... But we weren't fighting the Turks.*

*-Who then?*

*-The Bulgarians.*

*-The Bulgarians? Why? Anna did.*

*-But tell me, Vasilis, said Luke, confused. And Mitsos is always saying bad things about the Bulgarians, and that they are our enemies. But are they not Christians?*

*-Not that they are. But they had better not be. They' are worse than the Turks.*



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