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### Recommended Citation

Danforth, L.M. 1980. "Comment on McNeill's The Metamorphosis of Greece Since World War II." *American Anthropologist*. 82(3), 570-571. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1980.82.3.02a00200>

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Comment on McNeill's  
*The Metamorphosis of Greece  
 Since World War II*

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In his review (*AA* 81:941-942, 1979) of William McNeill's book, *The Metamorphosis of Greece Since World War II*, James Patterson comments favorably on the comprehensive picture McNeill presents of the process of modernization as it has taken place in Greece. While agreeing completely with the value of broadly interpretive studies transcending disciplinary boundaries, I would like to draw attention to several serious weaknesses in McNeill's book which raise important questions concerning the standards of scholarship and accuracy required in interdisciplinary studies of such broad scope.

McNeill's central thesis is that the modernization of Greece has been distinctive and unique because traditional patterns of behavior which characterize life in rural Greece have persisted in spite of rapid urbanization, and continue to characterize life in Greek cities and towns. The particular features of rural Greek culture which McNeill focuses on are "skills in the marketplace" and "the central institution of the nuclear family" (McNeill 1978:249). However, as should be readily apparent, McNeill's "explanation" of the supposed uniqueness of modern Greek urban life is open to serious criticism because the market skills and the family structure which McNeill describes as uniquely Greek have been observed in peasant societies of the Mediterranean, Latin America, the Near East, and elsewhere. This misinterpretation can only be attributed to a lack of familiarity with the vast anthropological literature on the process of modernization in peasant societies in developing nations throughout the world.

McNeill attempts to emphasize the uniqueness of the modernization of Greece by pointing out how different this process has been from the process of modernization as it has taken place in the United States and western Europe. Thus by "unique" McNeill appears to mean "non-Western." Another historian, in a review of McNeill's book, refers to the "mysterious and non-Western nature of modern Greek society" (Papasosma 1979:164). Such a narrow, ethnocentric perspective, in which the non-Western is equated with the unique and the mysterious, can surely be avoided with a greater familiarity

with anthropology. This limited perspective is tellingly illustrated by McNeill's repeated comparison of Greek cities with cities of the United States and western Europe and his complete neglect of the potentially more useful comparison of Greek cities with cities in the developing nations of the Third World.

I would now like to turn more specifically to a consideration of the accuracy of McNeill's account of modern Greek culture. McNeill's treatment of rural Greece is based on what he refers to as his own "comparatively superficial observation of six Greek villages over a thirty-year period" (p. 11). McNeill's brief "visits" to these communities are no substitute for in-depth anthropological fieldwork. The quality of McNeill's interpretation of rural Greek culture suffers as a result.

While many of his observations are extremely perceptive, others are superficial and inaccurate. An indication of the inadequacies of McNeill's fieldwork is his inability to determine whether an estimate of a particular villager's wealth is approximately accurate or whether it is "deliberately exaggerated, or a wild guess" (p. 166). His discussion of the two opposing poles of Greek life, the heroic ideal and the market spirit, is superficial at best. His concept of heroism is sufficiently vague to include the Homeric heroes (one of whom, Achilles, withdrew from battle because Agamemnon had taken away his concubine), Orthodox monks (whose anomalous position in society is regarded with suspicion by many Greeks), social bandits or klephts (who plundered fellow Greeks as often as they did Turks), and Greek army officers (who are associated with the brutal and repressive policies of the recent dictatorship). References to the "egalitarian freedom of village life" on one hand (p. 121) and to "class war" between rich and poor villagers on the other (pp. 148, 167) are also greatly oversimplified. In addition there are a few errors of a more historical nature, such as the confusion of the important devaluation of the drachma of April 9, 1953, with the meaningless currency reform of May 1, 1954 (*International Financial Statistics* 1958:114), and the dating of the Turkish occupation of a substantial part of Cyprus, which took place on August 14-15, 1974, and not, as McNeill claims, in mid-July of that year (Allen 1979:98).

Finally, McNeill's apparent lack of knowledge of modern Greek, suggested by his reference to his need for a translator (p. 236), raises serious questions about his ability to deal adequately

with complex aspects of Greek culture where linguistic sensitivity is essential. He fails to introduce Greek terms where they would prove useful, such as in the discussion of the association between "revolution," *epanastasi*, and "resurrection," *anastasi* (p. 29). Perhaps more important is the complete absence of references to the vast scholarly literature, written in Greek, in the fields of history and folklore. A familiarity with this literature, the bulk of which is untranslated, would have contributed immensely to the depth and sensitivity of McNeill's insights into modern Greek culture.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that McNeill, a distinguished historian, is to be congratulated for undertaking such an ambitious interdisciplinary study and for giving so much attention to anthropology. However, there is simply no excuse for doing such poor anthropology. If he is going to adopt an anthropological approach in his study of the modernization of Greece, McNeill must become more familiar with anthropological methods and with the relevant ethnographic and theoretical literature. Only then will he be able to do truly interdisciplinary work of highest quality.

*Acknowledgment.* I thank Peter S. Allen and James C. Warren, Jr., for helpful suggestions with regard to this comment.

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Submitted 7 March 1980

Accepted 7 April 1980

## A Problematical Review: Reply to Halperin

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I hesitate to strain the patience of readers with details, but a recent review (*AA* 81:921-922, 1979) of my book, *The Demise of a Rural Economy*, contains so many factual inaccuracies that I feel compelled to correct them for the public record. I do not know why the reviewer, R. Halperin, misrepresents the book, but possibly she was provoked by the fact that I present a neo-Ricardian perspective as well as my own ideas about anthropological economics. I find theoretical differences to be informative and interesting, but apparently Halperin does not, for she suppresses from the reader what I do argue and hints that I have an addled brain.

The book itself is about three economies which succeeded one another in a peasant Panamanian community. In the first, a subsistence economy, rice and maize were grown for home consumption by means of swidden cultivation. This economy of self-sufficiency was supplanted by a market-directed and then a state-controlled form of production. In these latter two economies sugarcane, the cash crop, was raised by nontraditional production techniques. At the outset of the book (p. 9), I state that the economy I originally observed was transitional between subsistence and cash cropping, and that these two economic modes have to be distinguished historically as well as conceptually. Halperin, however, mixes up the two by attributing facts about the later cash crop to the earlier subsistence system. This displays a poor sense of time's arrow.

The specific inaccuracies are the following:

(1) Halperin writes that with respect to the production of rice and maize, I state that my numerical "data omit extra-household labor recruitment." This is not only false but the exact reverse of what I did say! On page 77, I state, "Labour costs include the efforts of all the workers recruited by the household." Every calculation, for both subsistence and cash cropping, is based upon this guideline. Obviously, one cannot lop off part of the labor input and then claim to provide figures on the return to labor.

(2) The reviewer misrepresents my analysis by mixing together two modes of analyzing the data that I keep separate. She states: "He 'uses