

KORAE'S CHAIR CENTENARY EVENT
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ANGLO-HELLENIC LEAGUE

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to have been invited to say a few words on behalf of The Anglo-Hellenic League and to award the prize given annually in honour of Katie Lentakis.

Tonight's event is a sort of bicentenary event: we are here primarily to celebrate 100 years of the Koraes Chair, but also, thanks to the magnificent success of the recent campaign to re-endow the Chair, to look forward to the next 100 years. In these few words, I want to address the past and the future.

For those who may not know us, the Anglo-Hellenic League is a charity, dedicated to *promoting understanding and friendship between Britons and Greeks, through charitable and cultural work*. We began our activities in 1913, with the aims both of promoting the Greek cause in Britain and of raising funds for the relief of Greek refugees from the Balkan Wars. The two main figures in the League's foundation were William Pember Reeves, director of the London School of Economics and Political Science (that distinguished place across the road), and Ronald Burrows, principal of this university.

In the course of time, Burrows became the leading light in the foundation also of the Koraes Chair here at King's.

From the start, the League had had the support and active involvement of the Greek business community in London (Ionides, Mavrogordato, Ralli and Cassavetti), and of Greece's senior diplomat, its highly influential Minister, Ioannes Gennadios. It was inevitable, then, that the League would play its role in supporting the endowment of the proposed chair. The League raised in excess of £11,000 - probably around £600,000 today - not least through its contacts with Helena Schilizzi, who would later become Eleftherios Venizelos' second wife.

Through the Koraes Chair, the League and King's have always enjoyed the closest of relationships. Two members of the Centre for Hellenic Studies are current members of our Council: Professor Beaton, the current holder of the Koraes Chair, and Professor Sir Michael Llewellyn Smith, who will address us later.

The League is proud of the role that successive occupants of the Koraes Chair have played in furthering an understanding of Greece: from Byzantium to the present day. It would be natural to view this role in terms of the formidable contributions to scholarship and teaching that successive Koraes professors have made. And of course, no one here would doubt those contributions. But the Koraes Chair itself has always meant more than scholarship and teaching alone. The foundation of the chair was a recognition of the role that education and culture have to play in bringing two nations, two peoples together.

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, and during the Great War itself, the women and men who believed that Greece and Britain shared a common path, a common destiny, looked to education and culture as essential tools for forging that shared understanding and commonality of interest - a sort of 'soft diplomacy' ahead of its time.

A hundred years on, we are right to ask whether that vision is still pertinent, is still correct. I strongly believe it is.

In the next few months, this country, it appears, will leave one of the umbrella alliances that have, for most of my lifetime, shaped and defined relations across Europe and between states within Europe. Although Britain's relations with the European Union will continue to be handled primarily in Brussels, it is arguable that our *bilateral* relations with the 27 Member States of the Union will now become increasingly important - across many different sectors of activity. It is not just our diplomats who will have to re-think their game: our businesses, our outward investors, our students, our citizens will all be operating within a changed environment.

It seems highly likely to me that, in the future, we will need more Brits who have acquired a deep and reliable knowledge of at least one of the European Union member states. More Brits, in other words, who know Greece, not just for its crystalline seas, its perfect beaches and its pulsating nightlife - important and wonderful as they all are - but also through its astonishing language, its rich literature and its very long history: a history with which, for over 200 hundred years and more, Britain has been deeply involved.

And some of us here are hoping that, at some point in the near future, an enlightened British Government might take action to reverse the collapse in the learning of European languages in our education system, modern Greek included. To be successful in Europe in the future, we Brits will have to try harder.

The Koraes Chair, in other words, is no less needed in 2018 than it was in 1918. And the League, as a founding party and friend, will continue to have high expectations of the Chair and to wish its occupants every success.

For the past thirty years, those expectations have been more than abundantly met by the Chair's outgoing holder, Professor Roddy Beaton. Roddy's contributions to scholarship; the excellence of his teaching (on which I have direct and continuing experience); and his dynamic presence as a force for the promotion of Hellenic Studies have proved second to none.

In the events that were held during my time as ambassador in Athens, it was very clear that Roddy has star quality in Greece. It may have been *surprising* to open the morning newspaper and find as a headline Roddy's pronouncement that Lord Byron, if alive today, would have been 'μνημονιακός', i.e. in favour of the memoranda with the international creditors, but it was impossible to doubt how

superbly Roddy had thus captured the attention of the media and, through them, the public - in the brilliant presentation of his deep scholarship.

The Koraes Chair *should* be occupied by a public intellectual and for the past thirty years it certainly has been. I know that I can speak on behalf of the whole League in thanking and congratulating Roddy for all he has achieved, and in welcoming his successor, Gonda van Steen, to the chair.

In closing, I have another very nice task to perform: a task that shows again how closely entwined are the Anglo-Hellenic League and King's College.

Since 2002, the League has given an annual prize in honour of Katie Lentakis, who had played an admirable role during the Greek Resistance, who became a prominent member of the Greek Community in London, and who for many years was Vice-Chair of the League. The prize in her honour is given to a final-year undergraduate in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities here at King's, for an essay on a topic related to any field of Hellenic Studies.

This year, three students have been short-listed for the award. Let me congratulate them all. They are, in alphabetical order:

- Felicity Beech, for an essay entitled "Euripides' 'New Helen' and Homer", supervised by Professor Ismene Lada-Richards
- Nicolaus Christenson, for an essay called "Spartan Educational Ideals in the Prussian Cadet Corps of the 19th Century", supervised by Dr Dan Orrells and
- Harry Tanner, for an essay entitled "The Meaning of τάλαις: A Scientific Approach", supervised by Dr Akrivi Taousiani.

The decisions about the award are made by the Centre for Hellenic Studies, but I have read the winning essay, and it is really impressive.

I am pleased to announce that, for an essay which elegantly and tautly, with science and with flair, examines the meanings of the word 'τάλαις', the winner of the Katie Lentakis Memorial Fund Award 2018 is Harry Tanner. Harry - ὁ τάλαις - can't be here today, so let me invite his step-father, to collect the award on his behalf.

Let me now invite Felicity Beech and Nicolaus Christenson to come and collect their commendations.

Thank you.

JOHN KITTMER
18 JUNE 2018