



BOTH PEACE AND STIMULATION
PIETRO BORTONE

Pietro Bortone graduated in Classical, Medieval, and Modern Greek from King's College London. He then went to Oxford, where he obtained a Master's degree in Linguistic Theory, a Master's degree in Comparative Philology, and a doctorate in Historical Linguistics. He also studied Scandinavian Studies at University College London. While completing his doctorate, at Oxford, he taught for the Faculty of Classics and for the Sub-Faculty of Byzantine and Modern Greek and worked for the *Oxford English Dictionary*. He won scholarships from the Wingate Foundation and from the Onassis Foundation. He was then awarded a post-doctoral Fellowship in Hellenic Studies at Princeton and a Summer Fellowship in Byzantine Studies at the Dumbarton Oaks Institute of Harvard. He subsequently taught Modern Greek literature, culture, and language at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he also held a Fellowship at the Institute for the Humanities. He received also a LeMay Research Fellowship at Rhodes University before being elected Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg. He has now been elected a Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study at Uppsala. He is the author of various articles in Greek linguistics and of the book *Greek prepositions from antiquity to the present* (Oxford University Press, 2010). – Address: Wolfson College, Oxford OX2 6UD, England.
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My central aim during my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg was to further my current research project. The project had started a few years ago as a study of an archaic variety of Greek still spoken in a few villages of northeastern Turkey, but the purview of my research later extended far beyond the philological aspects.

Greek has been spoken in northeastern Turkey for well over 2,500 years, evolving into a distinct branch known as Pontic. Pontic is spoken by two separate groups: Christians, who identify themselves as Greek and always had strong cultural ties with Greece, and a much less known minority of Muslims who, having adopted Islam centuries ago, have come to be regarded as Turkish. While the Christians were all exiled from the area in the early 1920s, the Muslims have remained there to this day. Being devout Sunni and not regarding themselves as Greek, until recent years they had no contacts with the people, the culture or the language of Greece proper. Their language has therefore remained far more archaic than Modern Greek, not mutually intelligible with it – and not influenced by it, very much in contrast to the Pontic spoken by the Christian and Greek-identified population that was expelled. From a philological viewpoint, the Muslim variety of Pontic (or “Romayka”, as the speakers call it) is therefore a goldmine for the information it provides about earlier stages of Greek. Romayka contains classical features, may help us to understand medieval texts (perhaps even date them) and casts light on the origins of Modern Greek grammatical forms.

I got interested in Romayka in 2001 – spurred by Peter Mackridge, Professor of Modern Greek at Oxford, a pioneer in the area – and I worked on it intermittently while teaching and completing another, entirely unrelated large project (an analysis of the use of all prepositions in Greek, across the exceptionally long history of the language; my work identified, in the semantic changes that occurred, a systematic logic that partly answers a longstanding question debated in theoretical linguistics, in philosophy and in psychology).

The focus of my work on Romayka, after archival research in Greece and fieldwork in Turkey, broadened to comprise the socio-political and identity issues raised by the very existence of this language and its speakers. Romayka speakers, although retaining their peculiar Greek, have made a fascinating switch from Greek religion, Greek culture and Greek self-identification to their Turkish counterparts – which, in the traditional perceptions, are regarded as the opposite. The story of Muslim Greek-speakers thus brings into relief the historical transformation, the complexities and the contradictions of Modern Greek and Turkish national identities. These are of great interest because some of their features are unique and others highlight with exceptional clarity the unconscious mechanisms and conscious ploys at work also in the construction of the national identities of other countries. It is an area of considerable interdisciplinary relevance – for linguistics, classics, sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies and more fields besides.

I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg having written already more than three hundred pages of the book and carrying two suitcases of additional material: papers, documents, articles, clippings and, above all, masses of notes that I had been making across the last few years. Through the Wiko library I obtained more material on general themes that my work touches upon. During my Fellowship I went through many of the documents I had collected and I endeavoured to weave my thinking into a logically sequenced and accessible narrative – rewording and restructuring what I had already written and adding three hundred more pages. The original plan was for one book made of four chapters, but the manuscript grew in size and in scope to the point that, during my Wiko year, I split it into two.

What is now the first book manuscript, which is practically finished and will be seen by my publisher in the coming weeks, grows out of the first chapter of the single book initially conceived: it concerns various facets of the interrelation between language and ethnic, national and other social categorizations (just as examples: language shifts and their flexible relationship with changes in ethnic/national identification; multilingualism and contested or manifold affirmations or attributions of ethnic/national identity; different roles given to languages in an imperial, national and “globalised” context; multiple and variable criteria used to assign ethnicity; the use of language as a symbol of ethnic membership and ethnic continuity and as the rationale for political claims; metaphors used to describe and to advocate membership in a national/ethnic community; linguistic stereotypes of other nationalities and ethnicities).

The second book manuscript concerns more specifically the changing constructions of Greek and Turkish national and ethnic identities, both inside and outside of Greece and Turkey. It deals with the ways these constructions are reflected in the Greek and Turkish languages and, conversely, the role that languages play in Greek and Turkish identities; and it examines the case of the Romayka speakers, who do not fit with the official discourses of Greek and Turkish identities because they transitioned from one identity to the other but still use their older language (indeed, they use the most archaic form of Greek spoken anywhere, with features not even found in the artificially archaic Greek that in Greece was promoted as evidence of a truer and purer Greek identity).

In my free time I also did smaller things, such as starting on an article I was commissioned on a different topic, peer-reviewing papers and applications, and such like. In part, my routine at the Wiko therefore consisted in a continuous cycle of reading and writing. But working at the Wiko entailed very much more than that: another aspect, very signifi-

cant at all levels (i.e. in chronological extent, intellectual stimulus and sheer enjoyment) was the continual exchanges I had with the people around me. At Wiko I was not just able to find peace and concentration in blissful solitude: I found also, thankfully, the opposite: I was able to have an on-going, thought-provoking, in-depth dialogue with a new set of interlocutors from a variety of fields – and we had very few other commitments, so had time for one another. I approached people, as they approached me, with all sorts of questions and curiosities. I came to think about some issues in my field in novel ways, stimulated by seminars I attended on unrelated subjects and by questions put to me from the viewpoint of a variety of disciplines; the questions did not come only after my own seminar, but also during daily meals, or in e-mails from Fellows who were either wrestling with issues pertinent to my field that had arisen in their own research, or who were just intrigued by my projects or my published work.

At the Wiko, interdisciplinarity was a daily reality and not just a buzzword (the Wiko has been fostering interdisciplinarity since long before it became trendy), and all Fellows agreed that this was having a positive influence on them. We all quickly developed a deep sense of camaraderie and felt free to discuss a vast range of topics. I enjoyed great conversations with a long list of different people; among those I talked to most often or extensively were Hannah Ginsborg, Alexander Verlinsky, Jane Burbank, Ilma Rakusa, Fred Cooper, Sandy Barnes, François Lissarrague, Thomas Pavel, Susan Pinkard, Terry Pinkard, Krzysztof Pomian, Kamran Asdar Ali, Birgit Meyer, Petra Gehring, Karl Schlögel, Bruce Campbell, Tanja Petrović, Daniel Warren, Mary Poss, Curtis Lively, Lynda Delph, Oliver Lepsius, Vikram Sampath, Raghavendra Gadagkar, Paul Schmid-Hempel and Reinhard Strohm. Moreover, the members of the Academic Administration and of the Head Office were also always among us, interested and involved; over lunch or breakfast, I exchanged ideas and views with Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, Joachim Nettelbeck, Eva von Kügelgen, Yehuda Elkana and Luca Giuliani, enjoying their insights and questions.

The Wiko and its Fellows also brought in guests. With some of them, too, I had engaging discussions, for instance with Carlo Ginzburg, Alexander Gavrillov and Diana Mishkova. Some guests put me in touch with other academics outside the Wiko; others invited me to give seminars at their institutions during my time in Berlin. I was thus flown, with the support of the Wiko, to Bulgaria to give a seminar, and to Russia to give two seminars, and I was asked to give more in the near future in other institutes and countries. All the talks I gave so far triggered more interest and dialogue.

Furthermore, the intellectual stimulation and pleasure offered by the Wiko did not come only from personal interactions. The Wiko continually organized seminars and conferences, as well as concerts and performances (both in-house and out), and even language classes. I had had Fellowships at other institutions elsewhere, and I had visited Berlin before – and yet the Wiko surpassed my expectations and my hopes. Welcoming and civilized, organized and professional; the atmosphere was always very friendly and remarkably free of tensions. The Fellows, despite having different training and diverging views (something that the Wiko is not afraid of), were striving towards collective goals and not just pursuing personal lustre. I am therefore thankful to my fellow Fellows and their partners for contributing to creating an environment that was intellectually invigorating and yet free from pretentiousness or rivalries (I know that it could have gone differently – and that this is something that the hosting institution cannot control). And I am grateful to the Wiko for enabling me to have an exciting, productive and hugely enjoyable year. I have nothing but praise for the Staff, from the Fellow Services offices, to the Library, to IT and technical support, to the kitchens. They all always endeavoured to help and accommodate all of us, far beyond the call of duty, demonstrating genuine concern.

And then there was Berlin. Its limitless possibilities – exhibitions, lectures, concerts, films and all manners of festivals, restaurants, markets and shops. I enjoyed the life and convenience of Berlin so much that, on leaving the Wiko at the end of the academic year, I rented a *pied-à-terre* in the centre of the city. I visit often, and many of my Wiko fellow Fellows are already scheduled to come to be my guests. And even the Fellows who live too far to come to see me in Berlin or Oxford still cherish their memory of their Wiko year and keep in touch.