Mythology, Typology, and History in the Fiction of Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851-1911)

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The history of Greek-speaking people spans many over three millennia, and is overlaid by many continuities, discontinuities, transitions, conversions, and turning points. Consequently, the heritages of the Modern Greeks are as varied and diverse as the civilizations and societies that lived, ruled, were ruled, worshipped, and produced art and literature in Greece and the greater Greek world of the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet, with cultural synthesis comes tension and debate, and for much of the modern era Greeks have debated the place of their varied and often conflicting heritages in their modern identity. A major contribution to this conversation was Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos’ *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous*, a multivolume history of the Greek nation published between 1860 and 1877. In this work Paparrigopoulos proposed a synthetic model of Greek history, which emphasized the diachronic unity of Greek culture despite major transitions and transformations. The first literary figure to engage with Paparrigopoulos’ historical model was Alexandros Papadiamantis (1857-1911). Born on the island of Skiathos to a Greek Orthodox priestly family, Papadiamantis is considered one of the most significant prose writers in Modern Greek literature. This paper will examine how Papadiamantis explores the possibilities and limitations of Paparrigopoulos’ model through a syncretistic form of typology that relies as much on Byzantine Greek biblical exegesis as it does on Platonic interpretations of Ancient Greek mythology. By examining the way Papadiamantis interweaves Christian and Pagan threads to form his characters and emplot his short stories, I hope to suggest the general lineaments of Papadiamantis’ own contribution to and critique of the national discourse on continuity and discontinuity of his own time.

Leonidas Pittos holds a PhD from the University of Chicago in history and is Senior Lecturer in Modern Greek Studies in the Department of Classical and Modern Languages at Wayne State University. His research interests include the intellectual history of Late Byzantium and the Post-Byzantine Greek world. More specifically, his work examines the function of post-classical rhetorical theory in late- and post-Byzantine theological and historical discourse.

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