

KLEOVOULOS TSOURKAS
1898-1972

On the evening of the 23rd of March 1972, Kleovoulos Tsourkas died suddenly of a heart attack while returning home from the building of the Society for Macedonian Studies in Thessaloniki.

Kleovoulos Tsourkas was born in 1898 in the village of Vogatsiko, in Western Macedonia, a distinctively Greek local centre. It was there, in his birthplace, that he received his first schooling, which was of a high standard, thanks to the relatively high calibre of the inhabitants, including the Dragoumis family, which provided Greece with a Prime Minister and several ministers. The proximity of Kastoria was also of importance, because this town was the cultural centre of the time, owing to the commercial expertise of its people, and its being a Metropolitan See, equipped with a *gymnasium* (high school). Tsourkas was born and brought up at a time when this area was the scene of the renowned Macedonian Struggle, whereby Greek Macedonia was fighting for its survival.

This situation could not fail to affect the development of the young Tsourkas' feelings and personality in general, living as he did in close proximity to some of the Struggle's worst episodes and recognizing the indisputable rights of Hellenism, which the inhabitants of Macedonia were protecting with so much vigour and heroism.

After completing his elementary education, he went to Constantinople in 1910, when he was twelve, and was enrolled in the "Megale tou Ghenous Schole" (Great School of the Nation), where the Greek Nation carefully fostered those whom it had selected in those days. In this school Tsourkas definitely developed his character and sketched the outlines of his future career: a noble personality, a lover of education, a Christian of the Great Church and a Greek.

After completing his studies at this school, he went in 1916, now aged eighteen, to Bucharest, where unknown he struggled among unknown foreigners for his survival. At the end of the First World War, he was enrolled in the Philosophical Faculty of Bucharest University, where he graduated and took his doctorate.

Still a young man, a student, he began work as Editor-in-Chief of the Greek daily newspaper of Bucharest, *To Ethnos* and, as a correspondent of various Athens newspapers, and at the same time was permanent correspondent on Balkan questions of the Athens newspapers *Eleftheros Typos* and *Eleftheron Bima*. Later, in 1944, he edited himself the weekly newspaper *Nea Hellas*, for the Greek communities of Rumania that had been cut off as a result of the war. The editing of this paper, which took place during crucial times for Greeks in Rumania and under difficult conditions for Tsourkas, could never have had a fortunate outcome. In short it was banned by the Russian forces then occupying Rumania.

In 1925 Kleouvoulos Tsourkas was appointed, Press Attaché of the Greek Embassy in Bucharest, and after its suppression he continued to serve at the Embassy in the consular department, occupied in particular with questions dealing with the Greek communities in Rumania. When he was expelled by the Rumanian authorities in 1948, he was appointed Greek vice-consul in Suez and Minieh in Egypt. In 1954 he was put in charge of the Office of Foreign Affairs of the Ministry of Northern Greece in Thessaloniki where he remained for twelve years, until 1966, when, having reached the age limit, he retired.

Kleouvoulos Tsourkas, worked in the Greek Diplomatic Service both at home and abroad for forty one years, always in the area dealing with the Greek Diaspora, and became an expert in its problems.

He was in particular to remain long in Rumania,—about thirty two years— a land he was to love, and where he was to form close ties with its prominent academic representatives that were to last until his death. In fact it must not be overlooked among other things that he was a founding member of the Balkan Institute of Bucharest, which was set up in 1934, and that he was on the staff of that Institute's periodical *Balcania*. In Rumania he pursued his energies in every field.

He remained abroad for a total of forty four years, and from time to time tasted the bitter cup of great disappointment. He saw in turn the Hellenism of Rumania and of Egypt in their prime, spreading, and then fleeing to Greece, where the nation was already established. He who knew his compatriots abroad was destined to attend to their welfare in the Mother Country. Luck was not on his side: he was to see the dissolution of the Greek communities which he had served during his official career.

In Thessaloniki where he settled in 1954 onwards, he resumed official activity in the academic field. He became a member of the Governing Board of the newly-established Institute for Balkan Studies of the Society of Macedonian Studies, and a member of the editorial committee of its periodical

Balkan Studies until his death. Alongside this activity he produced substantial writings.

After retiring from active service in 1966, he edited the magazine *Makedoniki Zoi*, devoting much of his time to its success. Through this magazine, which succeeded, among other in establishing a connecting cultural link between the Mother Country and the Greeks abroad, he presented the contemporary life of Macedonia so that it might always be present in the hearts of the emigrants. On the other hand, he devoted much space to the history, folklore and art of Macedonia through well-documented and reliable articles by himself and other scholars. In this direction he worked with outstanding zeal to bring among other things, through *Makedoniki Zoi*, the Macedonian uprising of 1878 to the historical awareness of the general public, for this was an uprising which along with many others demonstrated and justified the Greek character of the land of Macedonia and the devotion to Greece of its inhabitants. His final contribution was a series of papers written by outstanding foreign authorities on the Philhellenism of Europe and America, which was so actively displayed in the Revolution of 1821.

Kleouvoulos Tsourkas was a fervent upholder of academic collaboration between the Balkan States, and for this reason he worked at the old Balkan Institute in Bucharest, just as he later did in the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki. This inspired him to direct the organization of the Symposium on the "Phanariotes" of August 1971, in which Rumanian and Greek scholars took part. In this symposium there predominated a moving atmosphere of Rumanian-Greek academic co-operation, and the man who inspired this symposium, Kleouvoulos Tsourkas, was deeply moved when he referred to the Rumanian scholars with whom he had been bound by such close links for so many years.

With the death of Kleouvoulos Tsourkas, Greeks abroad lost a distinguished defender, Greece a fervent patriot and scholar, the Balkans an ardent upholder of co-operation between its peoples. More directly the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki lost a unique expert in Balkan affairs, and a member proficient in academic and national questions. The scholarly work of Kleouvoulos Tsourkas was perhaps not so voluminous as profound. It is of vital importance for the cultural history of the Balkans and its cultural relations with the West, with particular emphasis on the Greek contribution during the so-called dark age of the first centuries of the Ottoman domination. His works are well-known and have been duly appreciated by Greek and foreign scholars, for us to dwell on them longer. We should only like to mention that he was one of few who contributed to demonstrate the cultural and intellectual vitality and continuity of Greek thought during Ottoman rule and to give evidence

that this period was not so "dark" culturally as it seemed to a large number of pre-war and 19th century scholars. As André Mirambel pointed out in reviewing Tsourkas' book, *Les débuts de l'enseignement philosophique et de la libre pensée dans les Balkans. La Vie et l'Oeuvre de Théophile Corydalée*, Thessaloniki, 1967, Kleovoulos Tsourkas may be considered as the historian par excellence of Greek culture during Ottoman rule.

Kleovoulos Tsourkas contributed the following to the literature of this field:

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- B. Ἐκδοσις τῶν ἡμερησίων τοῦ Βουκουρεστίου Ἑλλάς, 1932-1934, καὶ Νέα Ἑλλάς, 1944-1946. Ἄρθρα καὶ ἀνταποκρίσεις εἰς τὴν ἡφημ. τῶν Ἀθηνῶν Ἐλεύθε-

ρον Βήμα, Ἐλεύθερος Τύπος, Καθημερινή. Ἐκδοσις περιοδικοῦ Μακεδονικῆ Ζωῆ, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1966-1972. Πρόλογοι καὶ εἰσαγωγὰ εἰς διάφορα βιβλία.

The Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki takes its leave with grief of an unforgettable colleague, friend and pioneer.

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Member of the Board of the Institute