

Obituary

APOSTOLOS E. VACALOPOULOS
(1909-2000)

Apostolos Vacalopoulos departed this transient life full of years, acknowledged and acclaimed by the international scholarly community. He honoured Thessaloniki University and its lecture rooms with his presence for thirty years: from 1943 as an unsalaried reader in modern Greek history; from 1944 to 1951 as a regular reader; from 1951 to 1956 as an extraordinary professor; and from 1956 to his retirement in 1974 as an ordinary Professor of Modern Greek History. Before he joined the University faculty, throughout his career there, and during his twenty-five years in “retirement”, Vacalopoulos was a model of industry, well-regulated living, and scholarly and moral rectitude.

One of the few university professors of his time who would smile at you kindly, understandingly, with an almost childlike artlessness; and one of the few who would dependably follow the syllabus and devote the requisite amount of personal time to teaching, research, and writing. He was a man of rare dignity, discretion, composure, tolerance, and courtesy, and always true to his word.

He devoted so much of his time to writing and publishing his huge *œuvre* that it would be difficult for any other of his colleagues to compete. One only has to consider the eight thick volumes (6,200 printed pages) of his *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού*: it is impressive in its quantity, and the experts were extremely favourable in their opinions as to its quality (see the bibliographical data in P. I. Chondrogiannis, *Εργογραφία, ήτοι δείκτης των εργασιών του καθηγητού Αποστόλου Ε. Βακαλοπούλου*, 2nd ed., Thessaloniki 1997).

The *History* covers the period from 1204 (with numerous references to earlier centuries) to September 1831, or in other words from the time when — conventionally at least — modern Greek national consciousness began to take shape to the assassination of Greece’s first president, Ioannis Kapodistrias. It is a magnificent, thoroughly documented work, the like of which is not, I think, to be found in twentieth-century Greek literature. This solo endeavour is not to be compared with collective works, which, as we know, often leave much to be desired in terms of seamless uniformity of style, intertextual equilibrium, and coherent inspiration.

Vacalopoulos struggled for more than half a century, in the teeth of

difficult and sometimes insuperable circumstances, to enrich his authorial arsenal, to bestow upon it the fruits of what are known as the auxiliary sciences of History, such as public and political economy, the psychology of individuals and masses, sociology, anthropogeography, and constitutional law (see “Ο επίλογος ή το τέλος του ταξιδιού μου στο παρελθόν”, in vol. 8 of his *Ιστορία*, pp. 727-734).

Vacalopoulos turned his attention early on to the study of theoretical and methodological writings on the interpretation of historical phenomena. His theoretical training (unknown or woefully inadequate in younger historians) helped him to combine a factual approach with a consideration of institutions, socio-economic developments, demographic changes, and mentalities. He was never led astray by the various theories that were (and still are) in vogue, he never applied any of them *a priori*, and he systematically avoided abstract or abstruse generalizations, cold lists of statistics, and sensational conclusions. He eschewed social and political prejudices. He never served transient ulterior purposes. Nor did he ever sink to intellectual sterility and isolationism. Contemporary issues, such as the refugee question, the fabrication and dissemination of rumours, guerrilla warfare, or the treatment of captives, often spurred him to penetrate the past and reconstruct human activity. He never lost sight of the principal subject of history: human beings (see his autobiographical article in *Σύγχρονα Θέματα*, Nos. 35-37, December 1988, pp. 72-79).

The foregoing, I believe, are the fundamental hallmarks of Vacalopoulos's historical profile, while his eight-volume *History* already constitutes one of the pivotal chapters in twentieth-century Greek historiography. One might imagine that Vacalopoulos's other writings were of somewhat secondary importance; but in fact the opposite is true, because his three monographs have lost none of their original merit and importance: *Πρόσφυγες και προσφυγικό Ζήτημα κατά την Επανάσταση του 1821* (doctoral thesis 1939; photogr. repr. Herodotos, Thessaloniki 2001); *Αιχμάλωτοι Ελλήνων κατά την Επανάσταση του 1821* (readership dissertation 1941; photogr. repr. Herodotos, Thessaloniki 2000); *Τα ελληνικά στρατεύματα του 1821. Οργάνωση, ηγεσία, τακτική, ήθη, ψυχολογία* (1948; photogr. repr. Karayannis, Thessaloniki 1970; Vanias Publications, 1991).

Both in terms of finding new unpublished sources and as regards their comprehensive scope, Vacalopoulos's books and studies on Thessaloniki and Macedonia more generally occupy a prodigious place in his bibliography. Let us recall his ground-breaking book (co-written with M. Maravelakis), *Οι προσφυγικές εγκαταστάσεις στην περιοχή της Θεσσαλονίκης* (IMXA 1955;

photogr. repr. Vantias 1993) and his comprehensive *Ιστορία της Θεσσαλονίκης (315 π.Χ. - 1912)* (1947, Association of Friends of Byzantine Macedonia; in English translation: IMXA 1972; and revised to cover the period 316 B.C. - 1983, Thessaloniki 1983). In 1980, the Society for Macedonian Studies brought out *Παγκαρπία Μακεδονικής Γης*, a fine 687 - page re-issue of 42 studies by Vacalopoulos relating to Thessaloniki and the Greeks of the wider region of Macedonia. A further 24 studies published between 1981 and 1990 on the same general subject were included in *Θεσσαλονίκη και άλλα Μακεδονικά μελετήματα* (Vantias, 1991).

Methodical and indefatigable, Vacalopoulos made a diverse and long-lasting contribution to a more precise and more correct understanding of Macedonia's historical fortunes. His *Ιστορία της Θάσου (1453-1912)* remains a classic (in French, Paris 1953, and in Greek, in a slightly different form: Thessaloniki 1984, Society for Macedonian Studies); and his endeavours were crowned with the comprehensive *Ιστορία της Μακεδονίας 1354-1833*, Thessaloniki 1969 (and in English: 1973, IMXA), which was accompanied shortly afterwards by a compilation of, and commentary on, published sources (Thessaloniki 1989, Society for Macedonian Studies).

His vigilant search for unknown source material was manifested once more in his monograph devoted to Emmanouil Papas and his family archive (1981, IMXA).

Among his vast published *œuvre*, allow me to pick out the valuable reference work *Πηγές της ιστορίας του Νέου Ελληνισμού* (vol. 1: 1204-1669, vol. 2: 1669-1812, Thessaloniki 1965, 1977) and the very useful *Νέα ελληνική ιστορία, 1204-1975* (or -1985), which went through a number of editions (1979, 1987: Vantias) and reprints. Concise and eminently readable, the latter was also published abroad in French (Paris 1975), German (Cologne 1985), and Spanish (Chile 1995) translation.

Owing to its distinctive features and its importance, I have left *Ο Χαρακτήρας των Ελλήνων* (Thessaloniki 1983) until last. Here, Vacalopoulos the historian abandons his usual narrative discourse and, supported, as always, by documents past and present, presents us with a rare socio-psychological essay. He persuasively outlines and explains the traits of the modern Greeks, with all their virtues and vices. This seasoned writer is harsh about the latter. His well-substantiated views lead to a merciless castigation of self-importance, conceit, arrogance, guile, sycophancy, selfishness, self-promotion, vanity, envy, dissension, and ingratitude. Some pages take on an autobiographical flavour, as they recount bitter experiences of the university scene.

I was fortunate enough to be able to work with this wise and learned

professor in the early (and most difficult) years of my career, from 1965 to 1972, as an assistant in what was then the Mediaeval and Modern History and Modern Greek History Reading-room. I learnt a great deal from our association: a missionary dedication to historical science, a tenacious drive to establish the truth, the inspired leap from pedantic detail to fruitful intuition, a positive predisposition and forbearance, tolerance and understanding of difference, the patience to wait for situations and ideas to mature. What did I assimilate of all this? It is hard to say. And it is also beside the point here.

Obituaries sometimes use the *cliché* "his death leaves an aching void". I do not think that Vacalopoulos has left a void. He gave what he planned to give. His vast laborious *œuvre* in fact filled many voids, efficiently cultivated fallow fields of history, and gave historical research perspective and vision. Which is no small achievement.

University of Thessaloniki

ZACHARIAS N. TSIRPANLIS