

Interview with Mr. Harold Leich and Mrs. Rhea Karabelas Lesage to Mrs.

Eva Semertzaki, editor of *Synergasia*

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1. E.S. Mr. Leich and Mrs. Lesage, as members of the Consortium of Hellenic Studies Librarians, would you tell us a brief history of it?

R.K. This initiative began in 1999 with a conference that took place at the Library of Congress entitled "*Strengthening Modern Greek Collections*". At this conference, American librarians of Modern Greek Collections in American universities expressed their desire to work with Greek librarians. It was in 2003 when Karen Green, a librarian from Columbia University, who was given additional responsibility for Modern Greek, requested assistance for handling Greek acquisitions, approached Rebecka Lindau from Princeton University. Ms. Lindau invited librarians from her geographic area—New York and Yale Universities- to visit Princeton and discuss the challenges of collecting materials published in Greece. This meeting was very useful and they decided to expand the group to include the Library of Congress, Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard, and California State University at Sacramento and planned a meeting. In 2004 at Harvard's Center of Hellenic Studies in Washington, DC., among the topics discussed in that meeting were vendor and transliteration issues. Together we drafted a letter to LC to protest their for making a decision to change the Romanization rules, without allowing an opportunity for the library community to discuss the implications of such a change.

Rebecka Lindau organized a panel discussion during the Biennial Conference of Modern Greek Studies Association (MGSA) in November 2005 in Chicago, and planned a business meeting of the members of the MGSA Library Committee. Most members of the MGSA Library Committee are also members of the Consortium of Hellenic Studies Librarians (as a point of clarification, the American universities define as "Modern Greek" the period after the Fall of Constantinople, from the year 1453 to the present day).

Since the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) is based in Chicago, we invited James Simon to attend our MGSA Library Committee business meeting to present their institution and examples of their established international cooperative programs in order

to give our group ideas for collaboration. CRL can be described as the “library for libraries” - The major American universities belong to CRL and pay membership fees. After the meeting, the group decided to continue the discussion the following year at the Gennadius Library in Athens, to be hosted by Maria Georgopoulou.

In February 2006 Georgopoulou, James Simon, Harold Leich, and Tony Oddo (from Yale) came to Harvard for the first planning meeting for the Modern Greek Resources Project and to organize the Athens meeting. The rest of the planning was done by e-mail. In September 2006 Harold Leich gave a lecture at the National Library of Greece in Athens and announced the meeting in December 2006. It was going to be an informal meeting, envisioned as a series of roundtable discussions. The list of participants was compiled from the 1999 Library of Congress conference, but after Harold's successful talk, many others were interested in attending. Finally, it was an open meeting to all those interested in the idea of cooperation.

There is a website for the Consortium <http://www.cohsl.net> and a listserv where everyone interested in the purposes of the Consortium may subscribe. It is an open group that tries to keep abreast with new developments.

2. E.S. Which is the entity of the Consortium?

H.L. The CoHSL is an informal group without a legal entity. Princeton University is hosting the website, Harvard hosts its listserv and it is based entirely on volunteer work. We intend to apply for formal recognition as a Committee of the Modern Greek Studies Association.

3. E.S. Do you get any resources and funding?

H.L. No, we do not. However, we are individually members of the MGSA, and in addition each one of us will apply to our home institution for funding for any fees or charges the Modern Greek Resources Project may involve.

4. E.S. Which are the goals of the Committee so far?

H.L. The goals are: to facilitate communication between member libraries; to work realistically through cooperative projects; to enhance the scope of the collections; to facilitate access to them and to exchange information.

R.K. We intend to pursue a formalization of the project under the CRL as a formal group; to go to the proper administrators and get legal decisions on the group; to pay a fee with a sliding scale for Greek partners. Those issues will be worked out.

5. *E.S.* Which are your Greek partners?

R.K. At this time we have not established any formal Greek partners. The Gennadius Library, University of Crete, the Greek Parliament and the Benaki Museum have all expressed a strong interest in the Project, as well as the other universities and institutions who were represented at the meeting.

6. *E.S.* After the 3-days meeting at Gennadius Library, which are the conclusions you came across and which are your next steps for fulfilling your goals?

R.K. One of the next steps is indexing of journals. Access to Modern Greek scholarship is a priority. We will try to work on ways to facilitate access for users. The Gennadius Library will start a basic project, i.e. the table of contents (TOC) of 1-5 journals in a digitized format. Similarly, the CRL in its Latin American project started with digitizing TOC of journals with short title records. There is difficulty for researchers to find out what happens in Greece. Modern Greek studies scholars should have access to the Greek bibliography. I would suggest that Greek libraries would work together for a TOC project. But also an individual Greek library could make a proposal to the Project, e.g. for digitization. We are planning our next meeting 18-21 October, 2007 during the MGSA conference in Yale. MGSA meets every other year. We also would like to plan a meeting in Crete in 2008. An important means of communication though is the listserv—
<http://lists.fas.harvard.edu/mailman/listinfo/cohsl-list> We encourage everyone to join this list to receive information regarding the Modern Greek Resources Project.

7. E.S. Which will be the benefits for the Greek libraries if they decide to collaborate in your Committee?

H.L. Benefits could be the bibliographic exchange of records, using the protocol Z39.50. Greeks can see English language records. If it is a rich collection, funding or technological expertise will be necessary. We can put some money and help with technological expertise and give advice. Any kind of cooperation is welcome. There is a push in globalization and cooperation with other countries, in order to promote Modern Greek Studies abroad and to offer resources and invite scholars to pursue in this area. There is flexibility of individual projects under the auspices of CRL. For LC, collection development is an issue: to acquire missing issues of newspapers and journals mostly from the 19th century, to buy for the Global Resources Project or the LC and members to borrow in microfilm or microfiche format.

RK. It is important to have resources in other places other than the source, to act as a back up in case of a disaster, or even for preservation purposes. It makes sense to maintain materials in other locations as a means of securing their long-term accessibility.

8. E.S. Do you have any intentions to ask for cooperation at the ministerial level (e.g. Ministries of Education or Culture), because we listened to the challenges set forth for the Greek libraries by the Special Secretary of the Ministry of Education?

H.L. We are in contact with Mrs. Eugenia Kefallineou. She visited Library of Congress in February 2006 and in September 2006 I visited her. She is a potential and eager partner to help and coordinate, which is important. She is in contact with Vassilis Tsiboukis and Gloria Berbena from the US Embassy, she is an active and rigorous person, the ideal person to work with. However, there is not a corresponding department in the US to cooperate with her. The US Embassy and Mrs. Kefallineou will act as contacts between Greece and the US project. They are interested in attending the meeting and set up

priorities first. From the USA side it will not be a group at the official level but rather librarians talking to librarians.

9. E.S. The Center for Research Libraries has established cooperative activities with big geographical entities. What would you suggest in the case of Greece, given the difficulties in cooperation and allocation of funds?

R.K. The CRL works with other area studies librarians to help these groups cooperate and pursue collective purchasing. They support microfilming projects in Latin America, Middle East, Slavic & East European countries. Under the auspices of CRL is the Global Research Network (GRN). James Simon is the Director of International Resources at the CRL and the Director of the GRN as well. He will offer administrative support for the Modern Greek Resources Project.

10. E.S. You obviously have the knowledge and expertise to start cooperation activities. Would you like to be the leader for a cooperative initiative and a guide for research libraries in Greece in showing them how to proceed with creating digital content, sharing resources etc.

R.K. Greeks have several impressive projects in process right now, and we have seen only a small representation of what is happening in Greece. We have to investigate a Central Clearing House for these projects. For example the University of Crete's project ANEMI has the infrastructure to become a clearing house.

H.L. The Information Society by the EU might be a place for cooperation in order to avoid duplication of resources and time. It might also be Maria Georgopoulou to act as the 'leader' and a bridge. She is the ideal person to take the leadership informally; she is an academic and has lived in the USA as well.

R.K. We hope to publicize or to create a page of resources or a link in the Consortium website to all those Greek resources, or to compile the links to the projects and people can send more.

11. E.S. The idea of a Greek JSTOR sounds interesting since there is a wealth of Greek journals, mostly old, that could be indexed and digitized. What would you suggest on it?

R.K. The pilot project GSERJ, the Greek JSTOR can start with little money, but as a strong planning project. It is advisable to start with TOC-digitizing journals would likely need to be done as a commercial venture.

12. E.S. How useful for the users could be the creation of a Greek JSTOR?

R.K. It will be very useful for faculty and scholars both within and outside of Greece. Unfortunately, the percentage of potential users outside of Greece is small, and in all likelihood will not interest a non-Greek commercial vendor.

13. E.S. Thank you both for your time and I wish next time you come to Athens the cooperation among Greek librarians will be much stronger than today.

H.L & R.K. Thank you, too!