

Modern Greek Collection of the Harvard College Library

Rhea Karabelas Lesage,

Head and Bibliographer for Modern Greek

Widener Library of the Harvard College Library

karabel@fas.harvard.edu

The Modern Greek collection of the Harvard College Library dates back to the early 19th century and is one of the largest and richest collections of its kind outside of Greece. It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the number of volumes that comprise the Modern Greek collection since they are integrated within the enormous holdings of the Harvard College Library, which is comprised of nine major libraries and together hold in excess of ten million volumes. Evro Layton (d. 2005), former Harvard librarian, published two important works on the history and description of the Modern Greek collection at Harvard and offers the scholar much in terms of the research potential of the collection. The article entitled "The Modern Greek Collection in the Harvard College Library," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 19(3) (1971), 221-243, provides a thorough analysis of the history and strengths of the collection. Additionally, her exhibition catalog: *Five Centuries of Books and Manuscripts in Modern Greek: A Catalog of an Exhibition at the Houghton Library December 4, 1987 through February 17, 1988*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1990 (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog/LAYFIV.html>), offers a representative sampling of the many treasures which are housed in Harvard's renowned rare books and manuscripts library, the Houghton Library.

Although the name "Modern Greek" is used to describe the collection it should be noted that historians have placed the year 1453, the Fall of Constantinople, as the beginning of modern Greece. This date, however does not limit the span of the Modern Greek collection. The collection offers an array of resources needed to support research and teaching at Harvard and to the greater scholarly community. Harvard's holdings in the major areas of Greek bibliography are impressive. They include manuscripts and rare printed editions of liturgical and vernacular texts of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries from Rome, Venice, Constantinople, Bucharest, and Jerusalem. Materials covering the history and dogma of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek Enlightenment, western travelers to Greece and the Levant, and source materials relating to the Philike Hetaireia and the Greek War of Independence are numerous. The collection includes early twentieth century Greek imprints from Alexandria and rare nineteenth-century periodicals from Asia Minor, such as *Ho Philokalos Smyrnaios*, *Ephemeris Konstantinopoleos*, and *Ho Mentor*. The Houghton Library boasts first editions of major poets and prose writers of the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries including Laskaratos, Palamas, Cavafy, Sikelianos, Kazantzakis, Seferis, Ritsos, and Elytis.

The Greek section of the Harvard College Library Woodberry Poetry Room's Tape Archive contains tapes of modern Greek poetry read by their authors, including recordings by Nobel laureates Seferis and Elytis. The section also includes readings of Constantine Cavafy, Takis Papatsonis, Nikephoros Vrettakos, Miltos Sachtoures, Nikos Engonopoulos, Eleni Vakalo, Yannis Ritsos and many other modern Greek poets. Funding to preserve and digitize these recordings and make them internet accessible is currently underway.

Folklore is strongly represented in the collection with virtually complete set of first editions of folksong and folklore publications (including periodicals) in Greek, French, Italian, German and English.¹ The unique Whitman/Rinvolutri recordings of the Karaghiozes (Greek Shadow Theater) and the Notopoulos archives of folk music and folk poetry, and the Milman Parry Collection have drawn the attention of scholars worldwide. The Milman Parry Collection has been the fortunate recipient of funding by Harvard University's Library Digital Initiative and the Center for Hellenic Studies, to preserve, digitize and make available to the world through its web site *The Singer Continues the Song: Text and Music from the Milman Parry Collection*: <http://www.chs.harvard.edu/mpc/index.html>. The Whitman/Rinvolutri recordings and the Notopoulos archives have not yet received funding for preservation and digitization. Unfortunately, portions of these collections are not accessible due to their fragile condition. As in the case of the poetry recordings, efforts are also being made to secure funding for the preservation and reformatting of these rare and valuable materials.

The growth of the Modern Greek collection over the past thirty years has been steady. The establishment of a Modern Greek Section in Widener Library in the late 1970's, with a small staff dedicated to the acquisition, cataloging and processing of Greek materials, has ensured its continued growth. The bibliographer's goal is to capture Greek civilization in all its aspects, including current political, social, and cultural issues, and strives to be as complete as possible. The Library collects maintains research library level collecting in the following subject areas:

- archaeology
- architecture, especially local
- bibliography (printing, publishing, book arts)
- biography; autobiography, memoirs
- business, of Greek interest, and as it affects its international and EU relations
- classics (modern renditions of ancient Greek texts, interpretation and analysis)
- children's books, of proven and/or honored Greek authors or artists

¹ http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/programs_of_study/the_classics.php (accessed 6 March, 2007)

- economics, as related to Greece and its financial and political relations with other countries, especially those of the European community
- education, all levels; emphasis on higher education
- environmental studies
- fine arts
- geography and geology
- folklore
- history, emphasis on local history
- literature (literary history, theory, criticism, belles-lettres)
- linguistics; emphasis on dialects of various ethnic populations within Greece
- medicine, the history of, and of Greek sources
- music of ethnic content or provenance
- performing arts
- philosophy
- psychology of ethnic interest
- politics (political theory; political systems; government; international relations)
- public health
- religion (in Greek Orthodox literature, as well as all Western and non-Western religions as they relate to Greek Orthodox dogma and ritual)
- social studies
- sociology

The Library subscribes to a wide range of scholarly journals in the above described subject areas of the collection. Serial subscriptions also include small press periodicals and newspapers, rich in local history, folklore, literature and linguistics. Our goal as a research library is to collect for current scholarly needs, but more importantly, we acquire what we believe will be of interest to scholars in the future. As such, the collection is never weeded, never defined or limited in any way, by personal or political views.

The above merely highlights the strengths of Harvard's Modern Greek collection. The collection's uniqueness is credited to notable Harvard scholars Cornelius Conway Felton, Evangelinus Apostolides Sophocles, Cedric Whitman, and later to Professor George Savidis, the first incumbent of the George Seferis Chair of Modern Greek Studies. Later bequests of funds for the purchase of modern Greek books such as the Raphael Demos Fund (1964), the Harry Knowles Messenger and Ada Messenger Fund (1968), the President Cornelius Conway Felton Fund (1966), the Anna Maktos Vance Fund (1982), and most recently, the Charles Demakis Fund (2004), have ensured the continued growth of the Modern Greek collection. These funds are

being squeezed by increased publishing costs, currency fluctuations, ever-increasing user demands and expectations (for example, the purchase of CD's, DVD's and electronic resources). As budgets supporting the University's library activities have been flat over the past several years while overall costs have increased dramatically, fundraising to ensure the continued growth of the Modern Greek collection is essential.