

**The Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection:
A Treasure-Trove in the Golden State**

George I. Paganelis

**Curator, Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection
California State University, Sacramento Library
e-mail: paganelis@csus.edu**

Abstract

This essay provides a brief sketch of the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection, an internationally significant resource for research in Hellenic Studies, its origins and development within the former Speros Basil Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism, and its current status as the basis for a developing program in Hellenic Studies at California State University, Sacramento. Some highlights of the Collection, challenges faced in its management, the role of its curator, the Collection's current state and growth, and events related to the Collection are also outlined.

While strong institutional collections and curricula pertaining to Classical Greece abound throughout the United States, the period of post-Classical Hellenism is scarcely represented at more than a handful of institutions, most of which are clustered on the East Coast. This dearth of post-Classical Hellenism represented in institutions in the western United States prompted the founding of the Speros Basil Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism in Los Angeles in 1985. The Center was established as a formal research institute dedicated to all periods of Hellenism, but with particular emphasis on the post-Classical through modern periods and was directed by Prof. Speros Vryonis, Jr. and financed by Angelo K. Tsakopoulos, a developer and philanthropist based in Sacramento, California.

The Center aspired to cultivate a wider awareness and appreciation of the lasting impact of Hellenic culture on the Western world through a set of objectives that would make it a dynamic research institute, including engaging in significant scholarly ventures and broad outreach and the creation of a first-class research library. The Center's library was the cornerstone of the entire process and would require dramatic growth to encompass the breadth and depth of resources necessary to support scholarly inquiry on all periods of Hellenism. The nucleus of the library was Vryonis's personal book and journal collection. Housed initially in Vryonis's home, the library was later moved to offices in west Los Angeles in 1987. In 1989, the Center and its library were moved to Sacramento after Vryonis had accepted an appointment as the Director of the Alexander S. Onassis Center of Hellenic Studies at New York University.

Once in Sacramento, the Center began aggressively building its library collection, known as the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Library, which numbered approximately 15,000 volumes when the Center relocated to Sacramento in 1989 and grew to over 65,000 volumes by 2000, enhanced by a number

of significant donations. In this brief space of years the library became the premier Hellenic collection in the western United States and one of the largest of its kind in the country. These activities were all made possible by Tsakopoulos's ongoing financial support. It was increasingly felt, however, that greater access to the library collection and better long-term care and preservation would be enhanced if it were made part of an academic institution. These sentiments, together with growing internal tensions within the Center, prompted the Center's board to vote for its closure in August 2000 and for the library to be sold to Tsakopoulos, who in late 2002 donated it to the library at California State University, Sacramento, his alma mater, as the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection.

In its new location the Collection was charged with a new mission and faced a distinct set of challenges. The new purpose of the Collection would be to serve as the basis for building an academic program in Hellenic Studies through the creation of an interdisciplinary Hellenic Studies Center. Two new faculty appointments were made in accordance with the terms of the gift agreement governing the donation, the first a curator in the library to manage and enhance the Collection and the second a new position in the Department of History to undertake the creation of the Program and Center. This author was hired as Curator of the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection and Katerina Lagos as Assistant Professor of Modern Greek History and Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies. The planned endowment of a number of positions would put in place a cadre of top scholars in various fields who could pursue their research interests and offer a diverse array of courses. This in turn would further cultivate student interest and create a destination campus for Hellenic Studies. Another, wider goal of the Collection would be to continue to serve as a significant national and international resource for Hellenic Studies in the United States, especially in Byzantine and Modern Greek literature, history, politics, and culture.

The University also faced a number of challenges in implementing an academic program and supporting this high caliber research collection. Foremost among these was the commitment to offer Ancient *and* Modern Greek if the program were expected to grow into a full-fledged academic major and beyond. Another obstacle concerned the apparent mismatch of housing a polyglot research-level collection in a non-research library and the library's ability to process and catalog it. An added concern was the level of financial support it could be expected to receive from a campus with a severely restricted state budget. If the Collection were to continue to thrive and the Program to blossom, outside funding clearly would be necessary. Fortunately, the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Foundation has made generous contributions in the incipient stages of this process and has expressed a commitment to ongoing support to maintain the long-standing vitality of the Collection and growth of the Program.

As received, the Collection required an extensive amount of processing of both a physical and bibliographical nature prior to its opening to the public in September 2003, a task which continues to this day. A substantial amount of material, including numerous journal runs, a variety of mostly foreign-language monographs, copious newspaper holdings, and several thousand volumes in need of binding and/or preservation, came to the library in an unprocessed state. Most of these journals and

many of the monographs have now been processed; newspapers will be replaced with existing microfilm or will be treated to original microfilming; and items needing preservation will be dealt with specially in the near future. The library did a commendable job preparing the Collection for its opening and has since been making great strides in processing both the remaining materials from the original gift and new acquisitions.

The Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection today consists of approximately 70,000 books, journals, electronic resources, non-print media materials, ephemera, rare books, archival materials, art and artifacts. The scope of the Collection includes early through contemporary publications relating to all periods of Greece, including Greek diaspora communities around the world (especially in North America); the Ottoman Empire; Turkey; the Balkans, particularly the former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria; and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East and Southwest Asia. There is a broad array of over fifteen languages represented in the Collection, with a rich assortment of primary source materials.

Some highlights of the Collection include significant Greek and American government documents such as a complete run of *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως* from 1833-1864 and 1885-1989 in combined print and microfilm formats, the complete *Πρακτικά Βουλής* from 1843-1983 in combined print and microfilm formats, and all available U.S. State Department files pertaining to Greece, Crete and Cyprus on microfilm. The Collection also contains an extensive collection of Byzantine and Modern Greek history and literature held by few American universities, including signed editions. Rare books in the Collection number approximately 1,500 and feature an early edition of Eustathius's commentary on Homer published by Froben, 1559-1560; an Erasmus New Testament of 1541 also by Froben; Adamantios Korais's translations of ancient Greek authors into καθαρεύουσα dating between 1800-1820; nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkish chronicles; travel accounts from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries; and other rare materials. The centerpiece of the Collection's archival holdings is the manuscript collection of Dr. Basil Vlavianos, lawyer, academic, and publisher of the Greek-American newspaper *Εθνικός Κήρυξ* from 1940-1947, complemented by the photographic archive of Costas Couvaras documenting the Greek resistance during World War II. In addition, the Collection contains an assortment of over 400 dissertations on microfilm, several hundred pamphlets, many scarce specimens from late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Greece, and a sizable corpus of offprints.

The curator of the Collection is responsible for its overall management and growth, providing reference and instruction services, engaging in outreach, and performing fundraising/development for the Collection. Collection management is of primary importance and involves organizing and prioritizing the cataloging and preservation of the remaining unprocessed materials in the Collection and further developing the Collection by acquiring new and out-of-print materials in all formats, procuring gifts, etc. Ongoing collection development continues to be focused on acquiring new and retrospective publications on Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies as widely as possible, and on classics more selectively given the focus of the Collection. This has included direct purchase of

materials in Greece, a fundamental way at once to learn the landscape of the book market there and acquire materials difficult to find or slow to arrive through ordinary channels. In addition, the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection has also benefited from a number of important gifts, including the aforementioned Greek government documents on microfilm through the generosity of the Greek Parliament.

The Collection has also hosted a number of prominent visitors and played a part in several notable events. Some distinguished visitors include the present and former Greek Ambassadors to the United States; the current Ambassador of Cyprus to the United States; Demetrios, Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; and past and present Consul Generals of Greece in San Francisco; and prominent Greek-American figures. The two most notable special events related to the Collection took place 2005. In February 2005, the university named the lecture room adjacent to the Collection in honor of retired California State Senator Nicholas C. Petris and established an endowed scholarship in his name. Then in October 2005 the university honored Constantine Mitsotakis and established an endowed scholarship in his name as well. Both scholarships are intended for students pursuing Hellenic Studies on campus and will be administered by the Center for Hellenic Studies.

Today, over three years after it opened to the public at California State University, Sacramento in September 2003, the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection is admirably fulfilling its new purpose as a valuable resource supporting various campus curricula and faculty research needs, especially as the anchor of the Hellenic Studies Program. As part of a public academic library, the Collection is widely accessible locally to the campus and the Sacramento regional community and remotely via interlibrary loan, and sees increased use every semester. The library also hopes to offer short-term fellowships in the near future to allow outside scholars to come to Sacramento to avail themselves of the Collection's extensive resources. The Collection has grown substantially thanks to the generous funding of the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Foundation in bridging the gap between the level of support provided by the library and that needed to maintain the Collection at a research level. Meanwhile, the Center for Hellenic Studies offers a growing minor in Hellenic Studies bolstered by scholarship funding and enhanced by a study abroad program to Greece in partnership with the University of Washington. The university has also added instruction in Modern Greek language to its foreign language offerings and the first endowed position, a visiting professorship, is on the horizon. The full development of the Hellenic Studies Program cannot be expected for some years, but in the brief space of time since its creation it has made encouraging progress and has the unique advantage of the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection as its foundation.