

Rodis Roufos: An Author in Trying Times – Occupation, Resistance, Cypriot Struggle
[Ρόδης Ρούφος: Ένας Συγγραφέας σε Καιρούς Δοκιμασίας - Κατοχή, Αντίσταση, Κυπριακός Αγώνας]

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I initially heard of Rodis Roufos when I was a high school student; he was then a consul in Nicosia. At that time, I also learned he was a writer. When the Cyprus struggle ended, he published the *Bronze Age*, his novel about the struggle of 1955-59. I followed closely the discussions and debates related to his publication. In the Cypriot press, critics were perhaps quite cautious or mostly negative because Roufos' novel was considered not to express the reality of the struggle, especially Alexis Balafaras, his central fictional hero. Alexis was a cosmopolitan character who mainly expressed what the writer might have imagined about the struggle rather than the reality of the struggle itself.

At a later stage, I learned that his previous work, the trilogy, *The Chronicle of a Crusade*, consisted more of the narrative of occupation and resistance in Greece from the point of view of the right wing rather than the narrative of the writers of the left wing. Some even saw the *Bronze Age* as a continuation of *The Chronicle of a Crusade*.

As a student in Athens, I made the acquaintance of left wing poet Dimitris Doukakis, who generally had a positive opinion of Roufos' Cypriot novel, and even of his *Chronicle*, although he recognized that his perspective of social classes clashed with his left wing orientation. However, he did recognise his spiritual and intellectual honesty.

He wanted to know why the *Bronze Age* was criticised so much. At the time, the opinion I had about Roufos' novel was not a negative one. It had a good plot and was aesthetically pleasing. However, I had my reservations about the reality the book conveyed, which I found to be largely foreign to the one I had experienced. At this point, I found that those who were critical of him were right. But, on the other hand, I did not agree that a novel should express the easy patriotic rhetoric that many implied at the time.

In an exemplary and exhaustive study, Alexandros D. Bazoukis presents the Greek and Cypriot criticism of Rodis Roufos' trilogy with the general title *The Chronicle of a Crusade* [*The Root of the Myth* (1954), *March in the Dark* (1955), *The Other Shore* (1958), and in a second, improved and consolidated edition in 1972], a reference to the occupation and resistance and for the *Bronze Age* (1960) –in the case of his Cypriot struggle novel.

The author stands with a critical spirit towards the historical and political conditions that shaped the critical discourse towards the work of Roufos, without avoiding, as he mentions, its shortcomings, silences, as well as its anchorings. He discusses its gaps, inconsistencies, ideological and aesthetic regressions, 'all the problematic aspects that were identified from the beginning in the first volume of the trilogy and led the author to a large extent to corrective interventions in the revised and definitive edition of *The Chronicle of a Crusade* during the April's Dictatorship'.

In the *Bronze Age*, the author focused on an attempt to show the continuation of the Dion and Alexis, the autobiographical 'duo' of the trilogy, from Greece in the 1940s to British-occupied Cyprus in the 1950s.

Of course, Bazoukis' research is primarily based on written texts, the criticisms written about Roufos' work and the discussions which followed them. But it is also based on many testimonies of people who knew him, his relatives and others, as well as on information drawn from his archives and especially his correspondence. He also used elements from newspapers and magazines of the time, as well as from recent historical and philological studies. He attempts to clarify the participation and role of Roufos in the Greek resistance movement and the Cypriot struggle, since these experiences formed the material for his novels.

The author of the study also notes:

Given that any 'reality' in works of fiction can only obey the aesthetic necessities imposed by a certain literary genre, the books of Roufos under examination were seen in the light of an idiosyncratic mix of topical (documentary), autobiographical, ideological and adolescent novel.

Between history and literature, ideology and aesthetics, 'reality' and fiction, testimony and apology for (both individual and collective) traumas, the present study -apart from a new approach to his most contested works and a well constructed effort to insert them to their time and the current broader socio-political, ideological and cultural climate prevailing during which these books have been written (but also have been criticised)- has attempted, on the basis

of intra-textual elements and extra-textual synapses and associations offered to 'suspected' (or 'adequate') reader (and researcher), to move with critical orientation and at the same time interpretive in the direction of commenting on various authorial choices of Roufos; the main one of which stood typical characterisation of his works, that is to say that, despite the overtly autobiographical character of *The Chronicle of a Crusade* or the *Bronze Age*, it is not about simple 'testimonies', but about novels.

The book is prefaced by Thanasis Valtinos, the author of *Orthokosta* (1994), who with his novel called into question the left wing orthodoxy on the issues of occupation and resistance. Valtinos' fiction manages to challenge the leftist ideological tone of the period and to highlight, if not steer, the shifting trends in Civil War Greek historiography.¹

The path opened by Valtinos was followed by revisionist historians and political scientists, with Stathis Kalyvas and Nikos Marantzidis being the main representatives. A causative link was established between *Orthokosta* and the so-called 'revisionist' historians who were seen by the Left as justifying the security battalions that cooperated with the Germans.

In 20 March 2004, two Greek political scientists, professors Stathis Kalyvas (Yale University) and Nikos Marantzidis (University of Macedonia, Greece), published an article in the book review supplement of the daily newspaper *Ta Nea* under the title, 'Νέες Τάσεις στη Μελέτη του Εμφυλίου Πολέμου' (New Trends in the Study of the Civil War). What followed was an intense and rigorous debate in the paper's supplement, which lasted for around eight months. The series of articles were published under the general title 'Διάλογος για την Ιστορία' (Dialogue on History).²

It's in this new climate that Bazouki's book about Roufos was written, in an exemplary scientific manner and with respect to the facts. The study offers a new, critical approach to the work of Roufos, by placing it in the sociopolitical, ideological and spiritual climate of the era in which it was created.

It would be interesting if similar studies were written for other authors, too.

Stephanos Constantinides

¹ See the volume of *Études helléniques / Hellenic Studies* 18, No. 1, Spring / Printemps 2010 <https://ejournals.lib.uoc.gr/index.php/hellst/article/view/562/478>.

² See Manos Avgeridis, University of Athens, 'Debating the Greek 1940s: Histories and Memories of a Conflicting Past since the end of the Second World War', in <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/historein/article/view/9400>