

**We Travel in Dangerous Seas:
George Theotokas and Cyprus.
[Ταξιδεύουμε σε Θάλασσες Επικίνδυνες:
Ο Γιώργος Θεοτοκάς και η Κύπρος]**

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The book titled *We Travel in Dangerous Seas: George Theotokas and Cyprus* by Prof. of Modern History Giorgos Georgis is the author's new contribution to the intellectual history of the Cyprus issue, centered on the political interventions and the Cypriot reception of the acclaimed writer of the Greek 'generation of the 1930s' George Theotokas (1905-1966). A noted historian and former ambassador of Cyprus to Greece, Georgis in recent years has published two monographs that shed light on the political output of major literary figures, such as George Seferis and Stratis Tsirkas,¹ revealing aspects of the ideological context in which these writers lived and wrote that extend beyond their mere aesthetic output. Along the same lines, Georgis' new book, as I hope to show in this review, originally presents Theotokas' active participation in the formation of his era as a writer and a political thinker. It further reveals novel aspects of the Cyprus question as viewed by major public intellectuals, such as Theotokas and Seferis, who had a pivotal implication in political debates and had been highly influential on intellectual circles, as well as on political actors and the shaping of public opinion. In this respect, the book offers critical information that brings forth aspects of our literary history that remain unforeseen or require specialised studies with a strong historical and theoretical substrate. It ultimately allows a deeper understanding of the political developments in 20th century Greece and Cyprus.

As is the case with most of his work on important Greek litterateurs, Georgis adopts the lens of a historian and an experienced diplomat, moving beyond the recordings of literary history, thus embracing the larger field of the history of ideas. The author's strength lies precisely in his interdisciplinary perspective, that firmly interlocks histori-

¹ Giorgos Georgis, *Stratis Tsirkas-Giorgos Seferis: A Deliberate Friendship (Η Συνάντηση Στρατή Τσίρκα-Γιώργου Σεφέρη: Μια Φιλία που Βράδυνε)* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2016) (in Greek); *Id., Seferis-Averof: The Rift (Σεφέρης-Αβέρωφ: Η Πήξη)* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2018) (in Greek).

cal, political, and literary frameworks, and which makes his contribution an asset to the Greek intellectual history and the history of the Cyprus issue. In this regard, the book will be particularly useful for scholars, historians and Hellenists, as well as for diplomats and politicians. Georgis' writing style is transparent and engaging, which appeals to a wider audience with a particular interest in contemporary political history.

The book comprises 12 chapters that trace the reception of Theotokas in Cyprus in a chronological order, from his seminal essay *The Free Spirit* (1929), the very manifesto of his generation (Ch. 1), to press reports about his death (Ch. 12). Apart from scholarly and primary sources, Georgis indexes material from Cypriot literary magazines and newspapers, which had been dispersed and not easily accessible. The author rightly offers for this reason extensive quotations which are practically unknown to the reader of today. Also, Georgis is careful enough to provide annotation for critical assessments coming from across the political spectrum. Chapters 5 and 11 focus on Theotokas' welcoming as a playwright, while Chapter 2 offers a detailed documentation of his relationship with important Cypriots at the time, namely his good friend Dominique Laniti, a rare female example of the island's bourgeois intelligentsia; Evangelos Louizos, an aristocrat and *homme des lettres* from Famagusta, patron of poets such as Seferis and Elytis; politician Loukis Akritas, an MP of Nikolaos Plastiras' centrist party EPEK² in the 1950s, then George Papandreou's Centre Union³ in the 1960s; and Melis Nikolaidis, a Cypriot writer who lived in Athens, whose role as an intellectual close to Seferis, Elytis, Theotokas, Tsatsos, and others, accurately presented by Georgis, has been largely downplayed by Modern Greek literature historians. Theotokas' complex relationship with Cypriot director of the National Theatre and critic of national stature Emilios Hourmouzios is explored in a different chapter (Ch. 3).

Chapters 4 to 10 constitute the book's core contribution to major discussions that took place in Cyprus in the crucial years of the 1950s and the 1960s with regard to the island's national independence from Britain and the long-standing ideal of *Enosis* with mainland Greece. Indeed, as Georgis' analysis shows, Theotokas' controversial views about the Cypriot struggle against the British Empire engendered critical turmoil in Cyprus, amid unanimous nationalist sentiment at the time. As 'the most accomplished spiritual personality in the post-civil war state of the Right and the Centre'⁴ (72), Theotokas had a substantial impact on political circles and his views

² EPEK (Greek *Εθνική Προοδευτική Ένωση Κέντρου*; ΕΠΕΚ): National Progressive Centre Union.

³ Centre Union (Greek *Ένωσις Κέντρου*).

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

mattered, both in Greece and Cyprus. A fervent Europeanist, a NATOist, and an essayist who envisioned the future of the Western civilisation in a socialist political union, Theotokas bluntly opposed the perspective of the Cypriot uprising in the 1950s and the Greek State's subsequent clash with Britain (Ch. 9). As Georgis (54) writes, Theotokas fully echoes with George Papandreou and Sophocles Venizelos' political line, in this regard. Due to Greece's full dependency on its Western allies, Theotokas deemed the vigorous agitation of the Cypriot issue to be 'inopportune' (86), before the necessity of 'national' survival —with respect to the sole survival of mainland Greece. He thus championed British proposals for a state of 'autonomy' for Cyprus, presented in formulas of self-government, under imperial domination (86-87).

In his *ex post facto* appreciation, Georgis expressly appears to adhere to Theotokas' views as 'wise' (85), 'sound' (86), 'moderate' (112), 'bold', 'distanced from sentimental enthusiasms' (88), and goes so far as to state that 'Theotokas was justified by the political developments' (64). Georgis is perhaps overly apologetic about Theotokas' 'heretic' (88) statements on the subject matter and the tone of the book testifies to an attempt at rehabilitation. However, Georgis is right to point out that Theotokas' work in Cyprus has been inevitably received through the lens of ideological bias (Ch. 5).

One of the most intriguing parts in Georgis' analysis is his comparison of Theotokas and Seferis with regard to their approach to the Cyprus issue, a political one and an empirical one, respectively (91-3). In fact, the two men, who were very good friends, had an interesting exchange on the subject of Cyprus, which Georgis masterfully illustrates. Unlike Theotokas, Seferis, who wrote some of his best poems for Cyprus, was a strong advocate of the Cypriots' right to self-definition and political union with Greece. Contrary to Theotokas' political realism, Seferis capitalised the island's Hellenic identity and Britain's raw imperialism. During the time of the Cypriot national liberation struggle (1955-59) —and not before 1961— Seferis cut off all contact with Theotokas and would only respond to him through his embittered poem 'The Demon of Fornication' ('Ο Δαίμων της Πορνείας') (105).

In the post-independence period, Theotokas acquired wide recognition in Cyprus as a writer, while 'his political interventions on the Cyprus issue were received with prudence and a sense of understanding' (64-5). In Chapter 10, in particular, Georgis offers a detailed presentation of Theotokas' views on the Zurich Agreement on Cyprus. Despite widespread disappointment, in several statements Theotokas aspires to a cultural spring on the island. Indeed, Cyprus could become, in his view, 'the third most important cultural Hellenic centre, after Athens and Thessaloniki' (113-4). The

success of the Cypriot State was, in fact, for Theotokas, ‘a matter of national interest’ (79). What is more, in the early 1960s, Theotokas expressed the view that Cyprus could eventually become a prestigious link between the Greek Orthodox and the Muslim world (114). However, political developments on the island dispelled any optimism. As Georgis attests, Theotokas, like then Greek Prime Minister Papandreou, was fully supportive of Cypriot President Makarios and, in 1963, advocated the need for amendments to the Constitution, which proved to be dysfunctional, not viable, and, in Theotokas’ wording, ‘absurd’ (119). He actively fought for the rights of the Cypriot people until 1966, the very year of his death (121).

Georgis’ monograph is further enriched by a comprehensive timeline, building on Dimitris Tziovas’ own *George Theotokas 2005. 100 Years Since His Birth* (Athens: Ministry of Culture, 2005) (in Greek), recording important moments in Theotokas’ life and work. This timeline also comprises significant excerpts from Theotokas’ diaries. An index of names and terms would be extremely useful for scholars and readers in eventual reprints.

All in all, Georgis reveals to us a different Theotokas, a mature political thinker with daring realist views that were hard to fathom at the time. Georgis’ writing style, as most of his work attests, succeeds in humanizing history, allowing space to explore new aspects of important personalities that have shaped our past. It ultimately invites to appreciate them in all their charm, their intellect, their flaws, and complexity. Above all, *We Travel in Dangerous Seas* testifies to Theotokas’ striking awareness and relevance in current affairs, as the Eastern Mediterranean remains bound to power politics, tempestuous and turbulent for Greece, Cyprus, and Hellenism as a whole, as well as for the future of the Western civilisation and the very Europeanist ideal Theotokas always fought for. To put it in Theotokas’ own terms,⁵ dating back to 1965, which lent Georgis’ book its compelling title:

‘...with the instability that reigns around us in the Mediterranean, with the unquenchable fire of the Cypriot issue, with the possibility that the balance of power on which we now rely on might well one day be disturbed. We travel in dangerous seas, without any preparation for the great storms that might lie ahead, with captains and pilots who unfortunately inspire little confidence’. (120)

Demetra Demetriou

⁵ Giorgos Theotokas, *Contemplations and Positions: Political Texts* (Στοχασμοί και Θέσεις: Πολιτικά Κείμενα), Vol. 2 1950-1966 (Athens: Estia, 1996) 1207 (in Greek).