

The Public Archives of Greece¹

By PETER TOPPING

University of California:
Santa Barbara College

THE establishment of a national archives system in Greece resulted from the initiative of a gifted amateur historian, Giannes Vlachogiannes (1867-1945), and from the sympathetic support of the brilliant statesman, Eleftherios Venizelos, who, when he was out of office late in life, used his leisure to translate Thucydides. The General State Archives (*Genika Archeia tou Kratous*) began to function in Athens in temporary quarters in 1915, and Vlachogiannes, the first director, remained in charge until 1936. Despite a pitifully small budget and grossly inadequate space and staff, the General Archives has managed to collect and preserve a considerable quantity of historical papers, both public and private.

The revolutionary governments of Greece and the administration of Count Kapodistrias (1821-31) kept their accumulating papers in excellent state. But during the reign of the first "King of the Hellenes," the Bavarian prince Otho (1832-62), while current records were preserved, the older archives were confided to the care of the Audit Department (*Elenktikon Synedrion*), which either neglected or dispersed them. Moreover, the mass of manuscripts and documents which Otho's government obtained from the many monasteries it dissolved suffered a like fate at the Ministry of Public Instruction, to whose care they had been entrusted. The governmental authorities during the long reign of George I (1863-1913) were generally indifferent to the need of preserving past collections or establishing a national archives service. Nor did the learned societies show any greater concern. In 1893 the Audit Department, in need of space, decided to sell the revolutionary archives and other materials as waste paper at public auction. A quantity of paper estimated at between twenty and thirty thousand *okas*

¹ The author's research in Greece in 1950-51, of which this article is a partial result, was made possible by a generous award under the Fulbright Act. He wishes to acknowledge the sponsorship and support of his Fulbright project by the Library of Congress and the Committee on Documentary Reproduction of the American Historical Association (Prof. E. L. Erickson, chairman). Members of archives and library staffs in Greece were unfailingly courteous and helpful to him.

(one oka is about 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ lbs.) was sold. Vlachogiannes, then living in Athens as an impecunious teacher and proofreader, used his meager funds to buy valuable materials antedating Otho's reign. A passionate collector from his student days at the University of Athens, his flair for discovering papers of historical value in family collections, food shops (which used them as wrapping paper), second-hand book shops, and paper factories led to his assembling a fabulous manuscript collection which, after his death, was given by his sister to the General Archives. Today it forms one of the most valuable collections there. Thus, both through his personal collections and through his role in establishing and directing the General Archives, Vlachogiannes' services were inestimable. In addition, he published a notable 10-volume series of documents, journals, and memoirs under the general title *Archives of Modern Greek History*.²

The General State Archives legally and financially depends upon the Office of Letters, the Theater, and the Cinema of the Ministry of National Education and Creeds. The director of the Archives³ is assisted by a consultative committee composed of two professors each from the philosophy and law faculties of the University of Athens, the director of the manuscripts division of the National Library, the director of the Office of Letters of the Education Ministry, and the director of administration of the Interior Ministry. Approval of the Education Ministry is required in connection with questions concerning Archives personnel, acquisition of new collections, publication of blocks of documents, and the like.

The General Archives is the chief depository in Greece of public papers that originate in the various branches of the national government, are worthy of preservation, and are at least 50 years old. The papers date from the revolutionary government of 1822. The chief general classes of materials relate to the Revolution of 1821, the presidency of Kapodistrias (1827-31), and the reigns of Otho and George I. Important special collections include the following: (1) codices of Athenian notaries of the late Turkish and early national periods; (2) the archives of the so-called Mixed Commission, ca. 1830-60, which settled claims relating to the disposal of Turkish

² See the memorial issue of the literary journal, *Nea Estia*, Athens, Christmas, 1948, 188 p. Devoted to Vlachogiannes as man of letters, archivist, and historian, it contains an exhaustive bibliography.

³ Vlachogiannes' successors have been Professors D. A. Zakythinos and N. B. Tomadakis (both now of the University of Athens) and Dr. Emmanuel Protopsaltis, the current director, all professional historians and philologists of the highest competence.

estates in Attica, Boeotia, Euboea, and Phthiotis; (3) *Monasteri-aka*, a collection relating to Greek monasteries both within and without independent Greece, mainly in the years 1830-70, which is well indexed by nomes, eparchies, and individual monasteries; (4) the archives of the *Harmosteia Smyrnes*, which contains extensive materials, largely economic in character, relating to the Greek occupation of western Asia Minor, 1919-22; (5) the archives of the Cretan Committee, concerning the Cretan rebellions of the nineteenth century, especially the great rising of 1866-69; and (6) the archives of Vlachogiannes. The contents of the last fall into three groups: (a) original public and private documents, memoirs, diaries, and the like on the Revolution of 1821 and the period preceding and following it, to the end of Otho's reign; these consist of about 300 bundles with chronological and subject-matter indications on each; (b) public and private manuscripts of the same period referring to matters religious, ecclesiastical, philological, artistic, medical, commercial, and geographic; and (c) copies made by or for Vlachogiannes either from documents or from books, periodicals, and newspapers in Greek and foreign languages. These last are classified under such subjects as religion, church, commerce, industry, naval history, regular armies, irregular troops, the language question before 1821, Mani, Ionian Islands, siege of Missolonghi, Karaiskakis, Rhigas, Greek communities abroad, and press and printing establishments. All the Vlachogiannes collection is contained in 140 large metal boxes. Professional historians in Greece consider that through this unique collection, together with his archival publications, Vlachogiannes laid the basis for the writing of an authoritative history of the background of the revolution, the revolution itself, and the reign of Otho.

The General Archives is located in seven rooms in the basement of the building of the Academy of Athens, on Venizelos (formerly University) Street in downtown Athens, near the University of Athens and the National Library. It is open every morning and two afternoons a week and has a small reading room. Its professional staff consists of the director and four other historians or philologists. The government's extreme financial difficulties of recent years has made it impossible to rehire several prewar archives employees, just as it rules out for the time being any solution of the critical problems of additional space, better control of humidity, dust, and insects, and more filing cases and other equipment.

The present staff is too small to work on badly needed finding aids and catalogs or even to arrange on the shelves and roughly

classify a large mass of material deriving from the ministerial archives of the reigns of Otho and George I. The General Accessions Book, which lists by consecutive numbers all the accessions since the opening of the Archives, is of little use to the researcher. The first entry, for example, notes that on March 13, 1915, the archives of the Ministry of Religion, covering the years 1822-59, were received from that Ministry. Obviously such an entry is too general to help the researcher. Entries concerning smaller bodies of material or individual documents or manuscripts accessioned are more useful, however. An incomplete author-subject card index of the General Accessions Book was made by a student employee of the Archives some years ago. Compensating to some extent for the lack of manuscript or published finding aids is, of course, the extensive knowledge of their collections possessed by the archivists themselves, who are most willing to help the native or visiting scholar. This is true especially for any inquiry concerning the revolution. But the archivists are the first to admit the need for scientific finding aids covering all the holdings.

The General Archives and the provincial archives are open to the public and documents can be freely consulted upon authorization of the director. Documents not classified as confidential can be copied, on stamped paper, at the reader's request. Photographic reproduction is permitted, but the General Archives does not as yet have its own reproduction facilities, except for a Leica camera. Arrangements can be made to have microfilming done commercially in Athens or in the manuscripts division of the National Library, which has a Recordak Micro-File machine, Model E. If a researcher takes materials outside of the Archives to be microfilmed he must be accompanied by an archivist.

By statutory requirement private individuals in Greece may not keep collections of manuscripts and historical documents unless they have declared them to the General Archives and the Education Ministry. Indeed, every movement of documents or manuscripts within Greece as the result of sale, gift, or inheritance must be declared within 1 month to the Archives and the Ministry. More than a decade ago the ecclesiastical authorities were required by law to declare all of the collections of the monasteries within 6 months. Upon the death of high civil servants the General Archives may request officials of justice to seize documents of an archival character known to have been in the possession of the deceased. The exportation of manuscripts and public documents of any period is strictly prohibited. Although enforcement of these laws has some-

times proved difficult, especially in the case of some private possessors who have been loath to declare their collections, there has on the whole been satisfactory progress in realizing the aims of the legislation. Gradually the recognition is spreading that the state-wide system of archives is the proper repository of the written memorials of the nation's past.

Although the General Archives at Athens has concentrated on national history in the nineteenth century, above all on the Revolution of 1821, it has acquired by gift or purchase a variety of papers pertaining to the Turkish and Venetian domination of Greece. Larger collections in the latter fields, however, as well as much provincial or local material of the nineteenth century, are in the provincial archives. The oldest of all archives in Greece, and in some respects the richest, is the Record Office of Corfu (*Archeiophylakeion Kerkyras*), which can be traced back to 1558. This archives, located in the Palace of SS. Michael and George in the city of Corfu, a historic building which was the seat of the British administration of the Ionian Islands, has much manuscript and documentary material of the Venetian (1386-1797) and British (1815-64) periods. It has the most valuable notarial archives in Greece, consisting of the records of almost 800 notaries from about 1470 to 1866, those "of the country" using Greek, and those "of the city" (of Corfu) using Greek and Italian. A new catalog of this collection, chronologically arranged, with an alphabetical index of the notaries, is being prepared by the director of the archives, Nikolaos Leftheriotis, possibly the last of a superior line of Hephatesian record keepers who were also savants and who not only performed their administrative duties but also promoted letters. Much cataloging of the main collection has been done, but more detailed and methodical subject-matter indexes are needed to promote more effective use of the archives. Some of the prewar catalogs were lost during the German occupation in World War II.

Another important archives in Corfu is that of the Ionian Senate, also housed in the Palace of SS. Michael and George, and dating from 1886. The term Senate as used here refers to the British government of the Ionian Islands; hence this archives contains materials relating to the other Ionian Islands besides Corfu; but it also includes important materials relating to the Russian, Turkish, and French regimes during the Napoleonic era. Some cataloging of these records was accomplished by the early archivists, but modern finding aids are much to be desired. The arrangement of these archives was somewhat disturbed during the occupation in the re-

cent war, so that some parts are difficult of access today. The pre-war director, a learned archivist who is a member of the famous Kapodistrias family, served as *nomarch* of Corfu during the occupation and was dismissed from the archives at the end of the war. In 1950 an elementary school teacher on leave of absence from her position was in charge.

The disruption of normal service and the delay in cataloging which these facts suggest are unfortunately duplicated in the case of other archives and of many libraries in war-damaged Greece. Still more unfortunately, irreplaceable archives and libraries have been completely destroyed. Corfu was injured most severely. After the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, in the fighting between the former Axis allies on Corfu, the Public Library of the capital city, containing 70,000 volumes, manuscripts, and works of art, was reduced to ashes. Among the archives burned were those of the Corfu customs, the high court, the Latin archbishopric (whose archives went back to 1537), the Jewish community, the *mont-de-piété*, and the Kapodistrias family.⁴

The Record Office of Corfu depends upon the Ministry of the Interior, while the Archives of the Ionian Senate is attached to the Ministry of National Education. The General Archives has recommended the unification of the two as the Historical Archives of Corfu (Kerkyra), which would be administratively subject to the Interior Ministry and would be under the supervision of the General Archives in regard to such problems as classification, cataloging, and the training of personnel. The record offices of the other Ionian Islands are also subject to the Interior Ministry, as are the archives of Crete and Samos. The other provincial archives — those of Aigion, Chios, the Cyclades (at Syra), the Dodecanese (at Rhodes), Epirus (at Ioannina), Hydra, Kozane, Naxos, Sparta, Spetsai, and Veroia — depend upon the Ministry of National Education but are subject to the periodic inspection and recommendations of the General Archives on matters of archival science. In process of formation are the provincial archives of Macedonia (at Thessaloniki) and Patmos (at the famed monastery of Saint

⁴ The archives of the Greek Orthodox community of Ioannina under the long Turkish rule and various manuscripts collected from monasteries of the Ioannina area were destroyed by a direct bomb hit on the private building to which they had been removed for safekeeping when Italy invaded Greece in 1940. The archives of the Russian consulate (1850-1916) of Ioannina were sold as paper by the *oka* when the proprietor of the house in which they were located was ordered by the occupation authorities to vacate the building. Wartime damage to archives in Crete and Cephalonia must also be noted.

John), both of which have similar relations to the Education Ministry and the General Archives. It is beyond the scope of this sketch to indicate the contents of the provincial archives except for the general statement already made about those at Corfu.

The present system of centralized supervision of the provincial archives from Athens works fairly satisfactorily in view of the small size of Greece and affords a continuous opportunity to introduce more uniform and advanced methods of archival science in the provinces. It would work better if there were enough funds to permit the director of the General Archives or his associates to make longer and more frequent trips of inspection.⁵ That the quality of the personnel in the local archives is not uniformly high is not surprising in view of the low salaries. Better salaries would attract highly-trained historians and philologists, of whom there is no dearth in Greece. As it is, paid or unpaid amateurs form the staffs of several provincial libraries and archives. Greece has no school of library and archival science. The need for such a school has long been appreciated by the enlightened Office of Letters of the Education Ministry, but again lack of funds has prevented the execution of excellent plans.⁶ A very pressing need is for Turcolo-
gists to classify and translate documents written in Ottoman Turkish. Most regrettably, much Turkish material was destroyed by the Greeks as they regained such areas as Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace, which had long been under Ottoman domination — material that would illustrate all aspects of Turkish rule in Greece; but enough has been preserved to constitute important collections at several places, notably Iraklion (Herakleion) and Khania (Canea) in Crete, Thessalonike, and Veroia.

Several historical archives in Athens, public or semipublic in character but outside of the General Archives and its dependencies, may be noted briefly. There is first the historical archives in the manuscripts division of the National Library, which was organized toward the end of the nineteenth century. It is an archives in a broad sense; it has much material in the form of letters and family papers, sources for literary history, and institutional and business archives. In general, it is important for the political and intellectual history

⁵ The director in 1948 set out to inspect the archives of all seven of the Ionian Islands, an assignment which required 2 months, but his allowance was used up in 2 weeks in inspecting the Corfu archives alone.

⁶ In September 1949, in Athens, a kind of "short course" in library science and problems was held for the first time, under the sponsorship of the Education Ministry, the General Council of Libraries, and the United States Information Service. Seventy-five librarians from various parts of the country were able to attend.

of Greece in the nineteenth century; but also important are the notarial documents from the Cyclades of the sixteenth and later centuries and the collection of letters of the Constantinopolitan patriarchs, of interest for the history of the Greek monasteries under Turkish rule.⁷ These archives are well arranged and easily consulted, thanks to a carefully prepared manuscript catalog. A number of large groupings of the documents have been made and are indicated in the catalog by letters or letter combinations. Under each letter the documents are numbered consecutively and their subject matter is briefly indicated. Thus "A 10674-10679" is described as six letters of Kapodistrias and Pozzo di Borgo. Card indexes have been made of some of the large subgroups within group "A." The symbol "AA" designates the collection of tens of thousands of pieces relating to combatants in the Greek Revolution. The historian must consult these papers with caution, however, since they originated as claims for compensation for patriotic services rendered and were presented to an official commission by the surviving combatants or their heirs in the 1860's; but their value for genealogical and place-name research is considerable. They can be readily consulted as to surnames. The symbol "K" designates the archives of the London Greek Committee, bound in 11 volumes, a gift in 1931 of a grandson of the Committee's secretary, Sir John Bowring. Five letters of Byron addressed to Bowring are designated "M21."

The library of the Benaki Museum has a well-arranged collection of documents (about 20,000 pages) which derive from the dispersed archives of the revolutionary and earliest national period, 1822-1832. A considerable part of these archives remains unpublished. They are classified mainly according to year and government department. There is a good manuscript catalog. The archives and collections of the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, which contain much valuable material pertaining to the Turkish and national periods, remain inaccessible in the wooden boxes in which they were packed at the start of the past war. At present these boxes are taking up precious space in one of the rooms of the General Archives.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs alone among the departments of the central government maintains its own historical archives along with current papers. Its collections, dating from 1821, can be consulted on permission of the director of the archival section. An archivist from the General Archives has for some time been at

⁷ Many of the patriarchal letters have been published.

work classifying ministerial documents of the nineteenth century. Some of the papers of the Foreign Ministry were tampered with by German occupation authorities and certain documents were removed to Germany; they were found there by American forces and eventually, in part at least, were returned to Athens via Washington, D. C.

The public archives of Greece are not the most modern in Europe, but that they exist at all in view of the great poverty of Greece and the nation's terrible vicissitudes in this century is one more testimonial to the vitality of the Greek people and their devotion to things of the spirit and the intellect. The foreign scholar wishing to consult the Greek archives is assured of the warmest welcome and of every possible assistance from their staffs.