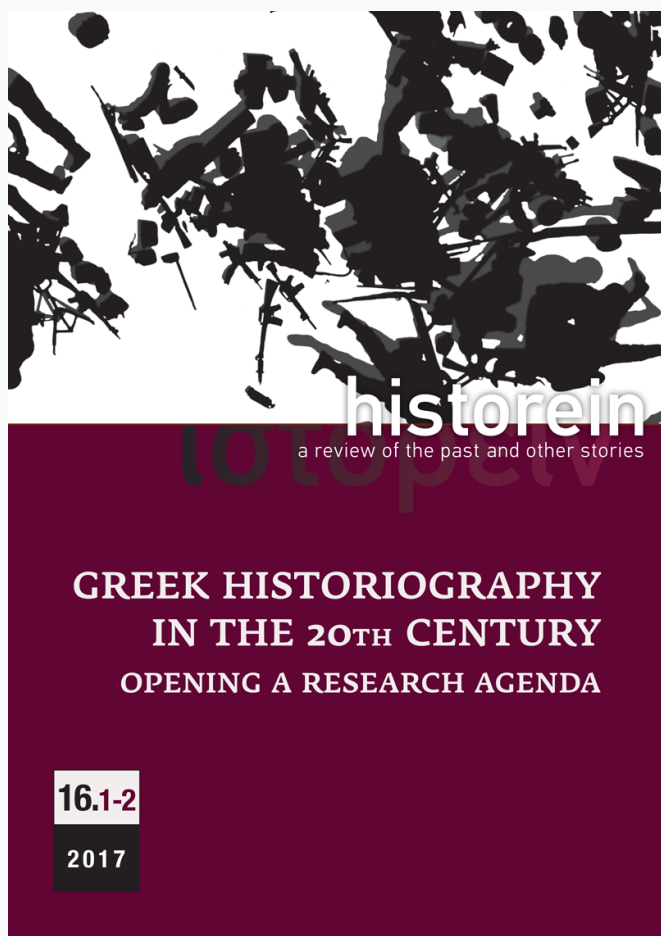


## Historein

Vol 16, No 1-2 (2017)

Greek Historiography in the 20th Century: Opening a Research Agenda



Review of Harris Athanasiades', Τα αποσυρθέντα βιβλία: Έθνος και σχολική Ιστορία στην Ελλάδα, 1858-2008 [The withdrawn textbooks: nation and school history in Greece, 1858–2008]

Vassiliki Sakka

doi: [10.12681/historein.9164](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.9164)

Copyright © 2017, Vassiliki Sakka



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Sakka, V. (2017). Review of Harris Athanasiades', Τα αποσυρθέντα βιβλία: Έθνος και σχολική Ιστορία στην Ελλάδα, 1858-2008 [The withdrawn textbooks: nation and school history in Greece, 1858–2008]. *Historein*, 16(1-2), 215–221. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.9164>

## NOTES

- 1 Hayden White, "The value of narrativity in the representation of reality," in *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 21.
- 2 Hayden White, "Literary theory and historical writing," in *Figural realism: studies in the mimesis effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999), 1–26, here 7.
- 3 Ibid., 12.
- 4 Hayden White, "Narrative, description, and tropology in Proust," in *Figural realism: studies in the mimesis effect* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1999), 126–46, here 142.
- 5 Hayden White, "Northrop Frye's place in contemporary cultural studies," in *The fiction of narrative: essays on history, literature, and theory, 1957–2007* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 263–72, here 271.
- 6 Michael Oakeshott, "Present, future, and past," in *On history and other essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 38–48.
- 7 Frank Ankersmit, "Hayden White's appeal to historians," *History and Theory* 37/2 (1998): 182–93.
- 8 Hayden White, "The politics of historical interpretation: discipline and de-sublimation," in *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 72.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern history as political thought," in *Colonialism and its legacies*, ed. Jacob T. Levy and Iris Marion Young, 205–17 (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 207.
- 11 Ibid., 207–208.
- 12 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and the historical imperative* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007).
- 13 Ankersmit, "Hayden White's appeal to historians."

## Harris Athanasiades

**Τα αποσυρθέντα βιβλία: Έθνος και σχολική Ιστορία στην Ελλάδα, 1858-2008**

**[The withdrawn textbooks: nation and school history in Greece, 1858–2008]**

**Athens: Alexandria, 2015. 295 pp.**

## Vassiliki Sakka

School consultant

Harris Athanasiades' research makes a valuable contribution to the history of education and, more interestingly, to the history of history teaching. Although a considerable body of articles and papers exist on history teaching in Greek schools, as well as of books on history wars,<sup>1</sup> there was no detailed work on the major "wars" over history textbooks in twentieth-century Greece that fuelled public debates and caused political turmoil.

Athanasiades' work consists of very careful, precise and exhausting research on official documents, decrees, reactions, media coverage, articles, events and reflection in the sphere of public pedagogy on the subject of school history teaching and textbooks. Moreover, he offers a crystal-clear image of the era in each case, providing historical context and perspective and seizing the zeitgeist in a fascinating way.

This book comprises six chapters, entitled as follows: "The nation-killing textbook"; "Irreconcilable Memories"; "A trap-textbook"; "They discarded God and the Nation"; "The Greek nation is the oldest of the European nations"; "The autonomy of Greece was buried alive at

the battle of Chaeronea". The provocative titles are based on the reactions the books generated upon their introduction in schools.

His rich introductory chapter, entitled "Difficult relations: academic, school and public history", an exemplary note on basic theoretical issues on the subject, deals with the relation of academic with public history. He defines the latter thoroughly and underlines the shift in historical research in Greece over the last four decades (under the influence of French historians) to the ideological use of history, its political misuse and its selective and instrumental mobilisation in order to justify contemporary political needs and practices. The "ideological" reinforcement of contemporary political battles through history signifies the justification of historical continuity and a type of "ancestral heritage" which ought to be preserved by young generations. The ideological mission of history was never practically questioned in twentieth-century in Greece. As Konstantinos Dimaras notes, "history formed the basic and main piece of artillery for national claims" (29). Here, Athanasiades notes that the most influential personality in nineteenth-century Greece in the field of history, Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, produced his magnum opus, *History of the Greek Nation*, "on behalf of the majority", as stated in the subtitle, in an early example of the political use of the power of history. In recent decades, this use has reached sophisticated heights, as the debates among historians proved a very popular product. These debates proved ideal for public consumption,<sup>2</sup> signalling a kind of osmosis between academic and public history, as in the digital era these debates "have been democratised" (31). Taking into consideration that in every country and era school history usually combines elements both from academic and public history, the different and very often conflicting views must find a way to coexist and interact. This is not

always easy, or successful. Efi Avdela notes that "school is par excellence the field for public history, indicating the ideal space where an instrumental and functional approach of history is cultivated" (34).

In his coherent and appealing narrative, Athanasiades examines the common ground, the pattern which, regardless of the political conjuncture of the time, led to the conflicts provoked by "heretical" textbooks that resulted in their withdrawal. Paparrigopoulos' view on the continuity of the Greek nation, first presented in 1853, only two decades after the formation of the Greek state, has been the indisputable model guarding the framework of the Greek grand narrative since the late nineteenth century. Moreover, it is "the structural element of Greek national identity" (35). The model is based on the racial affinity and cultural continuity of the Greek nation in space and time, with an uninterrupted, 3,000-year presence, useful and convenient for the aspirations of emerging nationalism of the Greek bourgeoisie in the late nineteenth century. The surprising endurance during the twentieth century of the canon founded by Paparrigopoulos is discussed thoroughly. As Athanasiades puts it, "school history continues to narrate a heroic and mournful biography of an ancient and brotherless nation, from ancient times up to today, because it never stopped to be used, firstly, as an instrument for the instillation of national consciousness – a certain national consciousness" (36). Textbooks which question this pattern, even suggestively, question the nationalising role of history, which is the ultimate content of Greek national identity.

Athanasiades follows the influence of the Enlightenment and Romanticism – in the latter's expression of "aggressive nationalism" of the early twentieth century in the history of Greek education, and especially in historical educa-

tion up to the present. Embarking in the opposite direction, from the latest textbook *Στα νεότερα και σύγχρονα χρόνια* (In modern and contemporary years, 2006) for the sixth grade of primary school, edited by Maria Repoussi and others, the author goes back in time, ending with Leon Melas' *Ο Γεροστάθης* (Old Stathis, first published in 1858; more a reader than a textbook, it would spark controversy were it to be used in schools today as it does not follow the grand narrative, especially as regards Macedonia). In between, he examines a 2002 textbook by George Kokkinos and others entitled *Ιστορία του νέου και σύγχρονου κόσμου* (History of the modern and contemporary world), for the third grade of lyceum (upper high school) and the textbook for the second grade of gymnasium (junior high), *Ιστορία Ρωμαϊκή και Μεσαιωνική* (Roman and medieval history), by schoolteacher and historian Kostas Kalokairinos (1965). In addition, he presents the cases of Zacharias Papantoniou's reader *Τα Ψηλά Βουνά* (The high mountains), for the second grade of primary, while in the second last chapter he follows the policy on history textbooks from 1894 to 1917, an era of "militant nationalism" when the main message transmitted through textbooks of all kinds was irredentism: be always ready to fight and sacrifice body and soul for one's country.

Repoussi's book provoked a fierce, unexpected reaction that lasted more than two years and resulted in making the author's name synonymous with national treason.<sup>3</sup> Athanasiades notes that this conflict produced public history, which, according to Hagen Fleischer, "is able to found or shatter collective identities, since it is not produced *for* a certain public but *with* it".<sup>4</sup> What was at stake here? Basically "the efficiency of the textbook as an instrument to instil national consciousness in students". The book focuses on three pillars: first, how basic moments in the nation's biography (glorious and trau-

matic) were approached; second, the challenging attitude towards the relation between Hellenism and Orthodoxy;<sup>5</sup> and, third, the historical depth of Hellenism, its antiquity and its continuity and endurance over time. The focal point of the reactions was the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the nostalgic collective memory of the biggest trauma of the nation in the twentieth century. Smyrna and Pontus are perceived not only as lost homelands but as mental and institutional structures as well, within the framework of which cultural identities were constructed and became the basis of symbolic aspirations (65). The myth of the secret school, depicted in Nikolaos Gyzis' famous painting, became the symbol of a "banal nationalism".<sup>6</sup> Its absence from the book triggered reactions. Athanasiades provides an in-depth examination of the asymmetrical reactions and attacks from across the political spectrum, focusing on those of the left; these attacks were transformed into a symbol of resistance<sup>7</sup> of the Greek people against globalisation and all those who conspire against the Greek nation.<sup>8</sup> The textbooks became a locus for a convergence of the left and the nation, where the nation was identified with the people.

The textbook by George Kokkinos and his team followed the latest trends in academic history in an effort to reach a fragile balance for school use. Here, the approach to the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) and its activity in the Cypriot struggle triggered reactions in Cyprus, as he characterised the organisation, which has been viewed as part of the growing worldwide anticolonial movement, as conservative and nationalistic. The textbook questions the romantic narrative of the struggle of Cypriot Hellenism, which was viewed as analogous to the Greek Revolution by the majority of those who rejected the book. The counternarrative reveals the conservatism of this struggle, pointing out that EOKA's leader, Georgios Grivas, was a well-known

anticommunist, a member of the Greek fascist Organisation X, who took part, among others, in the bloody conflicts in December 1944 in Athens, triggering the analogy of EOKA and the right in the Greek Civil War. The book provoked tremendous upheaval in Cyprus, resulting in emotional debates and historiographical research. As Athanasiades notes, the textbook was a catalyst for a change in the attitudes of the Cypriot left and the restoration of its stigmatised memory. The book stood against the hegemonic narrative of the right, “shedding light indirectly on the memory of the left, which was kept in the shadows” (129). An interesting aspect discussed by the author is that the Greek left was rather absent from this debate, with a few exceptions, as the interests of the Greek and Cypriot left were in conflict. The differing and irreconcilable memories of the past were used to justify present choices. The timing here was exceptional; the Annan Plan and a possible solution to the Cyprus issue were being discussed. History was instrumentalised to serve foreign policy. I have to underline here the exemplary analysis and references by Athanasiades,<sup>9</sup> who notes that school history is actually formal public history.

The title of Kalokairinos’ textbook on Roman and medieval history, published during the bold educational reforms of Evangelos Papanoutsos in 1965, even proved controversial. The political and educational context was exceptional, too. With government support, Papanoutsos, a liberal educational reformer and philosopher, had introduced demotic Greek as the language of instruction in schools. Reactions escalated against the book on the grounds that it questioned the continuity of Hellenism, presented the eternal enemies of the Greeks in a positive light and undermined national unity by advocating a class interpretation of the historical process. The book’s detractors alleged that the basic aim of school history, that is, the instilla-

tion of a national spirit in the pupils’ consciousness, was missing. Furthermore, the absence of the term “Byzantine” and its replacement by the term “medieval” shocked the Philosophical School of the University of Athens, among others. The book actually suggests or implies a new periodisation that tests Paparrigopoulos’ model. As Athanasiades explains in detail, the major problem was that the book questions Byzantine Hellenism, “undermining the constant coexistence and osmosis between Hellenism and Byzantine Orthodoxy and their successful merger into a single cultural construct/form (Helleno-Christianity)” (166).<sup>10</sup> He also points out that the romantic nation needs enemies to enhance national unity and the textbook does not offer them. Again, the author highlights the political conjuncture: social turmoil and a liberal government endangering the fortress of nationalism. The book was accused of taking a Marxist approach; once more history was meant to serve the present. A few years later, the junta would adopt, more or less, some of the same arguments to abolish Greek democracy.

Papantoniou’s 1919 reader echoes the educational reform that started two years’ previously. It was spearheaded by the new Educational Committee (comprising Dimitris Glinos, Alexandros Delmouzos, Manolis Triantafyllidis), which proposed some revolutionary changes to education, such as the use of demotic Greek in schools. Bypassing the longer established and conservative Educational Council and the Philosophical School of Athens University, the prime minister, Evangelos Venizelos, endorsed the triple reorientation of school knowledge (linguistic, pedagogic and ideological), which was symbolised in *Ta Ψηλά Βουνά*, the first of the so-called “state-produced readers”. Though authority figures praised the book, reaction against it quickly developed. It was criticised as too liberal, as conservative circles

argued that it questioned the model of “Homeland, Religion, Family”. A huge front emerged against the educational reform. Although this movement was ostensibly opposed to the language of the textbook (demotic Greek), its real enemy was the value system it represented.<sup>11</sup> Athanasiades skilfully documents and describes the reactions against the book, such as the accusations that it contained “atheist and antipatriotic tendencies” or that it represented “didactic bolshevism and lacked moral education” (201–4), reactions which emanated from conservative circles but spread to liberal followers of romantic nationalism. As the author points out, in the early twentieth century nineteenth-century romantic nationalism still represented the dominant ideology of most of the people, politicians, influential intellectuals and personalities, even those not necessarily considered conservative. Thus, a revised version of the textbook contained minor but crucial concessions regarding family and religion. The political context was marked by the effort towards the urban modernisation of the country and Papantoniou was a conscious representative of this idea.

Prior to Papantoniou’s textbook, readers served partly as history books, as historical references were actually the main criterion for the approval of textbooks. At the time, there was more than one textbook in use, as remains the case. The fundamental aim of the textbooks was to cultivate “the love for the homeland”, by focusing on stories from ancient Greek history, with selective references to other historical periods such as the fall of Constantinople or the independence struggle. There was a pure irredentist message, presented in the context of militant nationalism. The aim of promoting the seamless continuity of the nation dictated the approach of school history, as the biography of the nation. The Paparrigopoulos canon was constructed at this time and remained

practically unquestioned during the entire twentieth century.

Leon Melas’ 1858 textbook (*Ο Γεωστιάθης*) did not face reaction and rejection; on the contrary, it was praised and well received. In the mid-nineteenth century, the enlightenment influence was still strong. The text presents a completely different attitude and approach, echoing the image of the ideal Greek as a nineteenth-century cosmopolitan, enlightened, educated merchant whose wealth was more intellectual and moral than material and who dedicated his spirit and wealth to his newly formed country.<sup>12</sup> There is no reference to the secret school, as there were no close relations between church and state to reflect, so the myth had not yet been constructed. The old man in the book offers moral and pedagogical guidance to children, using the ancient Greeks as a standard prototype, reflecting the views of one of the representatives of the Greek Enlightenment, Adamantios Korais (257). Teachers and the public praised the book. An interesting element is that the book presents Macedonia as having conquered Greece, focusing on differences related to the cultural aspect: the civilisation of simple life versus the barbarism of obstinate wealth and an arrogant emptiness. The same idea would cause an earthquake were it communicated today. The textbook was in use for almost 40 years. Though Melas resists the rationale of Paparrigopoulos’ model, he would eventually follow the romantic aspect as this narrative offers the historical foundation of the *Megali Idea* (“Great Idea”) and its irredentist aspirations. While Melas moved “on his solid Enlightenment basis”, he detected “(hesitatingly and somehow instrumentally) the new romantic plan” (264). Thus, the contradictions in the book can be easily explained.

Athanasiades’ work does not include the case of Leften Stavrianos’ textbook *Ιστορία του ανθρώ-*

πινου γένους (History of humankind, 1984), intended for the first grade of lyceum. Offering a completely different approach to school history, it provoked fierce reactions from the Orthodox church and the conservative spectrum and was withdrawn four years later. It presented a holistic approach to world history and, of course, was far removed from any canon related to Greek history. Athanasiades possibly excluded it for this reason, but a future edition of his book should remedy this omission.

Athanasiades' book is an engaging read, an exciting narrative of the history of the teaching of history in Greek schools. Coherent and excellently documented, it offers much food for thought. Reflecting on it helps us understand the national political and social past of Greece, with all its contradictions, complexity and irrationality, bringing one to the realisation that "you cannot refer to the past without referring somehow to the present".<sup>13</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Antonis Liakos, "History wars: questioning tolerance," in *Discrimination and tolerance in historical perspective*, ed. Gudmundur Hálfðanarson (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2008), 77–92; Maria Repoussi, "Politics questions history education: debates on Greek history textbooks," *Yearbook of the International Society for History Didactics* 3–4 (2006/07): 99–110; George Kokkinos, *Συμβολικοί πόλεμοι για την ιστορία και την κουλτούρα: Το παράδειγμα της σχολικής ιστορίας στις Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες Αμερικής* [Symbolic wars on history and culture: the paradigm of school history in the USA] (Athens: Metaichmio, 2006). Controversies over history textbooks are not uncommon in countries with rigid textbook approval systems, such as Japan. See Mark Selden and Yoshiko Nozaki, "Japanese textbook controversies, nationalism, and histor-

ical memory: intra-and inter-national conflicts," *The Asia Pacific Journal/Japan Focus* 7/5 (2009), accessed 2 Feb 2016, <http://apjif.org/-Mark-Selden/3173/article.html>.

- 2 Arja Virta, "Historical consciousness at the marketplace? The use of history in the promotion of economic interests," *Yearbook of the International Society for History Didactics* 3–4 (2006/07): 123–139. As Virta comments on the (mis)use of historical references in public discourse, "usually history is the ribbon wrapping the package" (125).
- 3 "We actually live in a transitional era of 'powerful destabilisation', 'ideological tide' and 'neoconservative Gramscianism' trying to avoid the Scylla of violent globalisation and Charybdis of the aggressive restoration of the ancestral dream of regression to the purity of an imagined (national) past," notes George Kokkinos, referring to the context of the issue of the battle over the textbook. "Μεταξύ μελαγχολίας και εξέγερσης: ενδεικτικές όψεις της παθολογίας της σχολικής ιστοριογραφίας στην Ελλάδα, η στάση της διανόησης και η συλλογική ψύχωση για το εγχειρίδιο της Στ' Δημοτικού" [Between melancholy and rebellion: indicative aspects of the pathology of school historiography in Greece; the attitude of intellectuals and the collective psychosis about the sixth-grade history textbook], in *Η διδακτική της Ιστορίας στην Ελλάδα και η έρευνα στα σχολικά εγχειρίδια* [History didactics in Greece and the research in textbooks], ed. Andreas P. Andreou (Athens: Metaichmio, 2008), 23.
- 4 Hagen Fleischer, *Οι πόλεμοι της μνήμης: Ο Β' Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος στη δημόσια ιστορία* [The wars of memory: the second world war in public history] (Athens: Nefeli, 2009). Italics in the original.
- 5 As Vassiliki Georgiadou notes: "The relationship between nationalism and religion is a complex and multifaceted one and the interplay between nationalism and Orthodoxy is associated primarily with the historical circumstances at any given time that specify the form of the relationship. But the relation-

ship itself also has its roots in the continuing if fluctuating potential for the political and functional utilisation of Orthodoxy". "Greek Orthodoxy and the Politics of Nationalism," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 9/2 (1995): 295–315, here 312.

- 6 Michael Billig, *Banal nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995). Banal nationalism refers to "the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the west to be reproduced". These habits "are not removed from everyday life" and nationalism "is the endemic condition" (6). Banal nationalism is, in this way, differentiated from the typical nationalism as expressed by authoritarian or extreme right regimes.
- 7 Resistance here is understood as an analytical category, indicating that the particularity of the Greek nation lies in its resistance character.
- 8 Here we detected two minor mistakes. First, when referring to the attack that the four source books on four topics – not one – of the Joint History Project produced by the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in South-east Europe (CDRSEE) and edited by Christina Koulouri, Athanasiades refers to them as "the common book on Balkan History", unconsciously adopting the main "accusation" of its detractors: that globalisation, through certain historians, was rewriting history by "promoting" a common textbook. Second, the source books were approved – and not rejected – by the education ministry, upon the positive proposal of the Pedagogical Institute. However, they never reached school libraries after the Repoussi case.
- 9 Athanasiades highlights the "masculinity" of the nation, indicating that the modern approach of masculinity is connected to the nineteenth-century national movements, citing George Mosse and his work (139).
- 10 But – to paraphrase Effi Gazi's words – "the relationship bears a prioritization where one of the two poles (Greek education) submits to the other (Christian faith)". Effi Gazi, *Ο δεύ-*

*τερος βίος των Τριών Ιεραρχών: Μια γενεαλογία του ελληνοχριστιανικού πολιτισμού* [The second life of three hierarchs: a genealogy of Helleno-Christian civilization] (Athens: Nefeli, 2004), 216. Kalokairinos' textbook does not represent such an approach.

- 11 One of the stories in the book relates how a group of young pupils spend the summer in a camp in the mountains, where "they never mention their family, nor pray at all". Although they discuss several issues, God and the nation are not among them.
- 12 The story: an old globetrotter, Gerostathis, settles down in his homeland, a small town near the city of Ioannina, where he tells stories and talks with a group of 12-year-old boys, on the eve of the Greek Revolution.
- 13 Machi Margariti, "Σχολικά βιβλία και λογοκρισία – Β' μέρος: Συζήτηση με τον ιστορικό της Εκπαίδευσης Χ. Αθανασιάδη" [School textbooks and censorship – part 2: interview with the educational historian H. Athanasiades], ERT.gr, 22 Dec. 2015, accessed 7 Sept. 2016, <http://www.ert.gr/scholika-vivlia-ke-logokrisia-i-sinechia-tis-sizitisis-me-ton-istoriko-tis-ekpedefsis-chari-athanasiadi/>.