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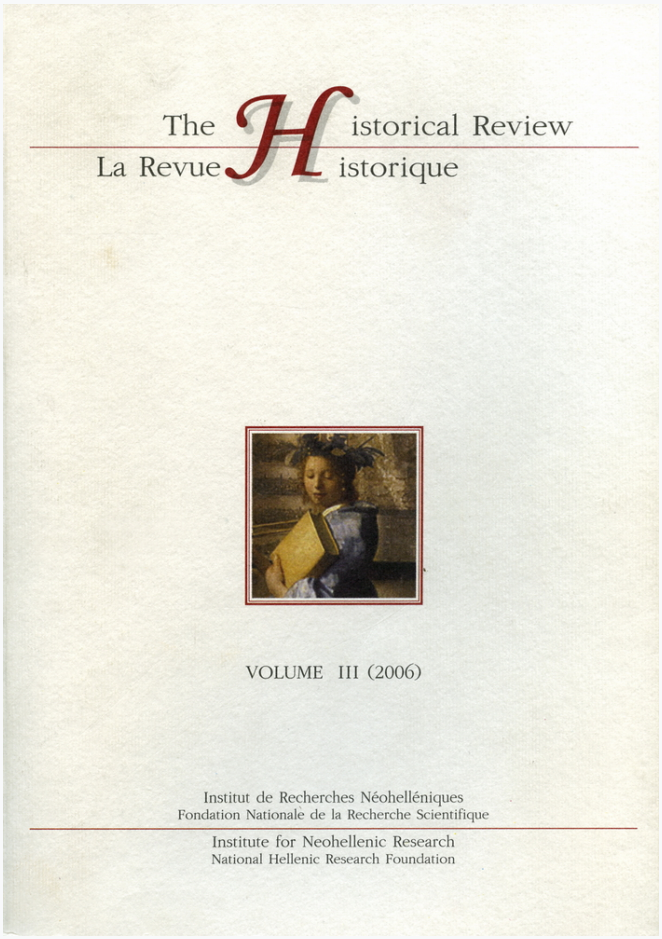

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THE EXEMPLARY LIFE OF DIMITRIOS VIKELAS (1835-1908)

Michael Llewellyn Smith

ABSTRACT: This paper describes the "satisfying curve" of Dimitrios Vikelas' life journey, starting from Syros in 1835, moving via Constantinople, Odessa, and Syros again, to London, Paris and finally Athens. It explores Vikelas' multiple aspects, as merchant, writer, traveller, lecturer and essayist, Olympic founder, educationalist, book collector and philanthropist, all of which were united in the public-spirited man of letters (*logios*). It sets Vikelas in the context of the Greek commercial diaspora, the world of the London expatriate Greek community, and the dynamic society of late nineteenth-century Athens, beginning in the 1870s to act as a magnet to Greek expatriates. The author stresses two qualities of Vikelas: his belief in the idea of a progressive Greek state marked by advances in education, culture, tourism and standards of public life; and the self-awareness and experience which inform his autobiographical writings, not only his memoir *My Life* but also his last such work, *The War of 1897*.

The life of Dimitrios Vikelas describes a satisfying curve. It starts in Syros where he was born, moves to Constantinople, Odessa and back to Constantinople, thence via Syros again to London, then Paris, finally returning to Hellenic soil in Athens, where Vikelas ended his life as a respected member of the literary establishment. Along this curve, from his London years on, Vikelas poured out writings: political, historical and literary essays, journalism, letters, poetry and verse, travel writings, translations, diaries and short stories. Not many of these are still read, apart from his well-known and best-selling novel *Λουκής Λάρας* [Loukis Laras] and the memoir of his early life *Η Ζωή μου* [My Life].[1] This judgement of posterity is a fair one, in that it has picked out two of the works which concerned *himself*. The self, judging, reading, commenting, introspecting, is at the centre of his best work. But over and above the personality, in the curve of his life and career he represented important aspects of nineteenth-century Hellenism: the mobility of the 1830s and 1840s, the life of the commercial diaspora of Constantinople and the Black Sea, the Western Hellenism of the bourgeois Greek communities of London and Paris, the return

[1] Both *Λουκής Λάρας* [Loukis Laras] and *Η Ζωή μου* [My Life] are included in the first volume of Alkis Angelou's excellent edition of Vikelas' complete works: D. Vikelas, *Απαντα* [Complete works], ed. Alkis Angelou, Athens 1997, 8 vols. The edition is published by the Society for the Distribution of Useful Books, which Vikelas himself founded.

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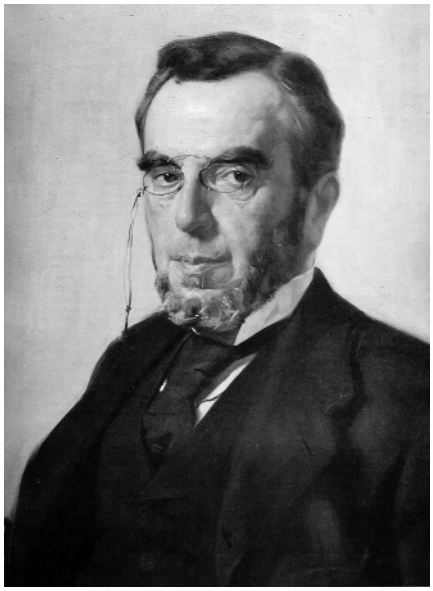

Dimitrios Vikelas by George Roilos (1867-1928). Athens, National Gallery.
Source: P. N. Linardos, *Δημήτριος Βικέλας. Από το όραμα στην πράξη*, Athens 1996, p. 13.

to Greece as Athens developed into the centre of Hellenism. Vikelas' life can be seen, in retrospect, to have an exemplary quality.[2]

Dimitrios Vikelas is much more than the author of one famous book. He set out to be a man of letters – a *logios*.[3] He was a translator, one of those who introduced Shakespeare to the nineteenth-century Greek public (and translation or interpretation was a kind of metaphor for much of his life, spent as it was in interpreting one culture to another). He was also a successful though reluctant businessman. He played a notable role in the founding story of the modern Olympic Games in 1896; and insofar as he is known outside Greece, it is chiefly for this. He was a bibliophile and book collector. Late in his life he turned to philanthropic action in the Athenian community, founding in 1899 the Society for the Distribution of Useful Books [Σύλλογος Διαδόσεως Ωφελίμων Βιβλίων], a worthy institution with a wonderful name. He inspired a school for the blind and served as President of the Greek Red Cross.

Vikelas used an interesting phrase to describe what he would become if he divided himself between trade and letters – και έμπορος ατελής και ατελής

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[2] Angelou, *Άπαντα*, Vol. I, p. 16, calling Vikelas "a representative of modern Greek society who expresses it in multiple ways".

[3] The word λόγιος [logios], not easily translated, has connotations of authorship, scholarship, cultivated interest in public affairs and education, and a mission to inform.

λόγιος – "an incomplete (imperfect) man of business, and an incomplete (imperfect) man of letters".[4] The phrase defines his fear that business would stifle his literary life. But he escaped this fate, broke free from business, and became the quintessential nineteenth-century man of letters.

If Vikelas is relatively unknown today, it is not through lack of evidence. On the contrary, he left a more complete picture of his life than most of his contemporaries, in his memoirs, diaries and notebooks. Besides his published works, he corresponded over a period of 50 years with his mother, Smaragda, in Constantinople, writing to her virtually every week.[5] The biography by his nephew Alexandros Oikonomou, which draws extensively on this correspondence, is an indispensable background to his complete works.[6]

Childhood and Youth

Vikelas was born in 1835 at Ermoupolis on Syros, a Cycladic island community built up by the efforts of Greek refugees who fled the massacre and turmoil of Chios at the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence. In the 1830s Syros was a node of communications and commerce in the Aegean, and a much more important centre than Piraeus. Vikelas' father was a merchant, his career respectable but not brilliant, and subject to periodic setbacks; his mother, Smaragda, was a member of the Melas family, distinguished in trade and the law. Trade, politics and literature were in their blood. His mother taught him at home and encouraged a love of books which stayed with him all his life.

When Vikelas was six years old, his family moved to Constantinople; and then ten years later, briefly, to Odessa. The young Dimitrios showed literary

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[4] The phrase, which is from *Η Ζωή μου,* in *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 103, was taken by Angelou as the title of his edition of Vikelas' early reading notebooks: Alkis Angelou and Maria Valasi (eds), *"Και έμπορος ατελής και ατελής λόγιος". Τα τετράδια αναγνώσεων του Δημητρίου Βικέλα* ["An imperfect man of business and an imperfect man of letters": the reading notebooks of Dimitrios Vikelas], Athens 2001. Angelou and Valasi analyse the content and meaning of *λογιοσύνη* (the quality of the scholar or man of letters) in the Greek context in the prefaces to this edition (*Τετράδια)* and to *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, with illuminating comparisons of Vikelas with his contemporaries.

[5] The correspondence is in the Vikelas archive in the National Library of Greece. Angelou and Valasi in their preface to *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, give an account of the archive which persuades me that Vikelas is a prime candidate for a full biography or monograph based on these papers, of which I have read only the files concerning the Olympic Games.

[6] Alexandros A. Oikonomou, *Τρεις άνθρωποι. Συμβολή εις την ιστορίαν του Ελληνικου λαού, 1780-1935* [Three men: a contribution to the history of the Greek people, 1780-1935], Vol. II, *Dimitrios M. Vikelas, 1835-1908*, Athens 1953.

interests at an early age, his mother encouraging his precocity. When he was 17 he translated Racine's play *Esther* into Greek 15-syllable rhymed verses. It was presented publicly in Syros, where the family returned, and where Dimitrios attended the Lycée Evangelides. One of his fellow pupils there was Emmanuel Roidis, who was to be another prominent literary presence in Athens in the second half of the nineteenth century, famous for his satirical novel *Η Πάπισσα Ιωάννα* [Pope Joan].[7] The two teenagers wrote and published a weekly periodical which they read out at the school meetings every Saturday.

It was assumed that Dimitrios would enter trade, taking advantage of his family connections. He had learnt the rudiments in his father's office. While still a teenager, in 1852, he took the step that was to determine his future life. He crossed Europe to England and started work as a bookkeeper in the office of his uncles Vasileios and Leon Melas. They dealt in the cereals business, importing from Southern Russia. He lived at their house near the British Museum and walked to work every day. Much later[8] he described in his memoir *My Life* his years in London, the life of the Greek trading and shipping community, and how he combined hard work at the office with evening classes at University College London.[9] It is a striking fact that this was his only experience of higher education, and brief at that.

He wrote that his first concern was to learn the history and language of the country – above all the language. He had studied English since he was a boy on

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[7] E. Roidis, *Η Πάπισσα Ιωάννα* [Pope Joan], 1st edn Athens 1866; English version by Lawrence Durrell, New York 1960. Roidis was born at Ermoupolis on Syros in 1836 into a prosperous merchant family from Chios. Like Vikelas he experienced life abroad, e.g. in Genoa where his father was honorary Consul of Greece. In Athens he became a prominent journalist and critic with a sharp pen, temperamentally very different from Vikelas although their starting points were similar. See Roidis, *Άπαντα*, ed. A. Angelou, 5 vols, Athens 1978.

[8] Vikelas, *Άπαντα*, Vol. I, pp. 206-207. Vikelas wrote the first part of the book in 1898; after a three-year interval, in which he was totally taken up by the establishment of the Society for the Distribution of Useful Books, he resumed, with part two, in 1901. He wrote in the first chapter that for years he had known he wanted to write a memoir, but that he was prompted actually to start writing by the thought that the years were slipping by. The memoir was not published in his lifetime, but was found in his papers after his death, prepared for the press by Vikelas himself. It was published in 1908.

[9] For the life of the mid-nineteenth-century London Greek commercial community, see Maria Christina Chatziioannou, "Ο Δημήτριος Βικέλας και ο παροικιακός ελληνισμός στην Αγγλία" [Dimitrios Vikelas and expatriate Hellenism in Britain], in *Η Μελέτη*, second period, I (2004), pp. 143-163. (This issue of *Η Μελέτη* is devoted to Vikelas. The title of the journal harks back to the monthly journal first published by the Society for the Distribution of Useful Books, in 1907).

Syros and thought he knew it. But on his arrival at the railway station the cab driver to whom he gave his things could not understand what he was saying. Nor could Vikelas understand a word the cab driver said. So he devoted himself to further study, copying out chunks of essays by good writers, and translating from Greek into English.

This dedication was characteristic. The picture he gives of himself in *My Life* is of a bookish, reserved young man who found it difficult to mix with his contemporaries. He describes how after dinner and talk with his uncles and their friends he would retire to his unheated bedroom around 10 o'clock:

> My nocturnal studies began at this point by the light of my candle. When the winter came my good bedspread, a present from my mama, was useful. Putting it over my clothes made up in part for the absence of a heater. I would write as long as my fingers could bear the cold, and when it got too cold I would get into bed and confine myself to reading...[Reading in bed] gradually became a necessity for me.[10]

Though the business life never satisfied him, Vikelas soon became a partner in the firm and amassed a comfortable fortune. But money was incidental for him. Here there is a contrast with another Greek born on Syros, who moved to Constantinople, Vienna and eventually to Athens: the banker Andreas Syngros. Both were attracted to Greece at a time when Athens was coming to be seen as the centre of gravity of Hellenism. Both perhaps felt that in Athens they might be big fish in a relatively small pond. But beyond that, their reasons were different. For Syngros money and business were the *point* of life.[11] He saw opportunities to exercise his financier's skills in a new, emerging market. For Vikelas, practical as he was over material things, money was the means with which to free himself from the mundane, and live the life of a gentleman scholar. Greece was a cultural and spiritual idea, not a market.

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[10] *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, pp. 121-122.

[11] Andreas Syngros, *Απομνημονεύματα* [Memoirs], ed. Alkis Angelou and Maria Christina Chatziioannou, 3 vols, Athens 1998, Vol. I, p. 81. It was Vikelas, and Georgios Drosinis, who published Syngros' memoirs. Angelou, who has a soft spot for Syngros, quotes his remark that he "saw books as enemies": nothing could put him in starker opposition to Vikelas. Besides the fruitful comparison and contrast of Vikelas and Syngros in the introductions to this volume, Vol. I, p. 6* and in Angelou's introductions to Vikelas' *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 18* and *Τετράδια,* p. 17 see also Maria Christina Chatziioannou, "The Emergence of a Business Culture in the Modern Greek State", in *Business and Society: Entrepreneurs, Politics and Networks in a Historical Perspective, Proceedings of the Third European Business History Association (EBHA) Conference, 24-26 September 1999, Rotterdam*, pp. 469-476.

Thanks to Vikelas' diaries and memoirs, we can trace the formation of a Greek man of letters. At the suggestion of his uncle Leon, himself the author of the classic *Ο Γεροστάθης* [Gerostathis],[12] he started to keep a note in Greek of all the books he read, with comments. He lists more than 500 books read in the period 1853-1870. The notebooks are illuminating not only for his comments on the books, but also for the revelation of himself, his friendships within the Greek community, and his feelings as a young man:

> I have decided every evening to write down the impressions of the day, or my thoughts or what has happened to me. This is a fine system, if not for its moral results, at least for the pleasure which one gets in reading what one wrote earlier and remembering one's past. There is really nothing finer, nothing sweeter than remembrances of the past...It is good to write about things other than commerce in my own language. I do not have time to write verse regularly. So let me write regularly in prose, whatever comes into my head. No one has to see what I write...And I have so much to write that is worth observing! At this period of my life, when for the first time I am beginning to see the world as it is and not through the medium of books...[13]

Vikelas' descriptions of the social life of the Greek community, and of the girls he met, show him as susceptible but also critical, and something of a prig. A Mrs Cavafy is judged not to be "open-minded or open-hearted" but is nevertheless a "very fine lady". Aglaia is a "nice young girl" though not at all beautiful: agreeable, though "not very intelligent and she does not speak very well". But Rosa is a true rose, "white, red, tender, young, intelligent, with fine eyes, a nice colour and a pleasing voice. So as to see her from close up, and talk to her, I made a great sacrifice: I danced a quadrille. I call this a sacrifice because some time ago I decided not to dance. It does not suit my position."[14]

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[12] Leon Melas, *Ο Γεροστάθης* [Gerostathis], 1st edn Athens 1858. Vikelas' life's journey followed some of the same paths as those of his uncle Leon Melas (1812-79), by whom he was much influenced. Melas was born in Constantinople and moved to Odessa. He practised law in Othonian Athens and was twice Minister of Justice in the early 1840s. Disillusioned with politics, he moved to London to pursue business. The best-selling *Γεροστάθης* is a moralistic work very much in accordance with Vikelas' own beliefs as reflected in the Society for the Distribution of Useful Books. The affectionate portraits of Leon and Vasileios Melas in *Η Ζωή μου* are among the best parts of the memoir.

[13] Vikelas, *Τετράδια,* pp. 59-60.

[14] Vikelas, *Τετράδια,* pp. 61-62.

Marriage and Tragedy

The young lady whom Vikelas married, in 1866, was none of these. She was Kalliope Geralopoulou, the younger sister of his uncle Leon's wife, Ekaterini, and the fifth daughter of a rich family of the London Greek community.

By this time, as his notebooks confirm, Vikelas was formidably well read. He had absorbed many of the great writers of the century, reading them twice and noting his impressions, from Goethe to Gladstone, Macchiavelli and Macaulay to Mill (J. S.), Guizot to Grote, Renan to Ruskin, besides Tocqueville, George Eliot, Charles Kingsley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Foscolo and Zambelios, not to speak of the *Edinburgh* and *Westminster Reviews*. He followed closely everything which concerned the Greek Kingdom, whether by Greek or non-Greek authors, and by his wider readings in European and American literature and history he was able to place Greek affairs in the context of Great Power interests. After a shaky start during the Crimean War, which taught him the ineffectiveness but also the moral necessity of action and propaganda by the London expatriate Greek community, he began to bring some influence to bear on Western public opinion over Greek political issues. The burning issue of the 1860s was the Cretan uprising of 1866, which attracted the sympathy of Victor Hugo and Algernon Charles Swinburne and inspired a revival of philhellenic liberals in Western Europe.

Vikelas was beginning to publish poetry and essays on a variety of literary and political subjects: the history of the Palaiologos dynasty, the cultivation of cotton in Greece, the British press, statistics of the Kingdom of Greece, impressions of travel in England.[15] He had got to know Harilaos Trikoupis,

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[15] His verses were published as *Στίχοι* [Verses], London 1862. They are in *Άπαντα,* Vol. II. The spectrum of essays and lectures is contained in Vikelas, *Άπαντα,* Vols V, VI and VIII. Most of them date from the 1880s and 1890s. An English-language selection, consisting of essays published in *The Scottish Review*, translated from the French, is in Vikelas, *Seven Essays on Christian Greece,* London 1890. A selection of the titles of the essays from *Άπαντα,* Vol. IV, i.e. those collected in his 1893 edition under the title *Διαλέξεις και αναμνήσεις* [Speeches and memories] conveys the range of Vikelas' interests: "Περί βιβλίων και της έξεως του αναγιγνώσκειν" [On books and the habit of reading]; "Τα Παρίσια και η ελαφρή φιλολογία" [Parisian things and "light reading"]; "Περί αγωγής" [On upbringing]; "Το σχολείον του χωριού" [The village school]; "Περί νεοελληνικής φιλολογίας" [On modern Greek literature]; "Το Νεκροταφείο των Αθηνών" [The Athens cemetery]; "Εκ των άκρων της Αγγλίας" [From the far corners of England]; "Οι τελευταίοι των Παλαιολόγων" [The last of the Palaiologos dynasty]; "Εκδρομή εις Σκωτίαν" [Expedition to Scotland]; "Εκ Δελφών" [From Delphi]; and also memoirs of Alexandros Koumoundouros and other public figures, scholars and philhellenes. For his main historical essays, see below.

who served from 1855 as an attaché at the Greek Embassy in London when his father, the great historian of the War of Independence, was Minister (i.e. in today's terms Ambassador) there. Harilaos himself became Chargé d'Affaires at the London Embassy in 1862 after his father left London. He stood on the threshold of a distinguished political career in Greece. Vikelas could not have found a better acquaintance in forming his views on Greek politics and society.

One may see Vikelas at this stage of his career as turning himself into an interpreter of Greece to the British and of Britain to the Greeks. Later he did the same for France.

The Vikelas couple could not have children. Treatment of Kalliope during a visit to Germany in 1869, during which Vikelas called on the former Queen of Greece, Amalia, had failed to find a remedy. In 1894, disaster struck. Vikelas' father-in-law died, after which Kalliope herself began to show symptoms of severe psychological disturbance, with irrational feelings of guilt and inadequacy. She made attempts on her own life. Vikelas took her abroad in search of a cure. They ended up in Paris, where doctors pronounced her insane. Vikelas' mother arrived from Constantinople to help. On the doctors' advice, she and Vikelas kept a day-by-day account of the illness. It is a harrowing story. Kalliope spent seven and a half months in the clinic of the well-known psychiatrist Jules Luys at Ivry-sur-Seine. She was then released from the clinic, but she never fully recovered. From now until her death in 1894 there were alternating phases of melancholia and delusion followed by remission. Sometimes she could not bear the presence of her husband, who had to keep away from her.

In the face of this, Vikelas turned to Shakespeare. In rapid succession he translated *Romeo and Juliet, Othello, King Lear*, and later *The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The translations were published in Athens in 1876, and a successful reading took place at the Parnassos Society. They helped to bring Shakespeare to a new readership in Greece.[16]

Vikelas described his approach to the language of Shakespeare in the preface to a collected edition of his translations. He wanted to use not katharevousa, which would sound artificial, but the spoken language – kathomiloumeni – but the question was *what* spoken language?

> ...Today's spoken language has altered as a result of the new circumstances of our nation, and is not at all the same as that which was

[16] *Τετράδια,* introduction, pp. 51-52, where Angelou and Valasi call Vikelas "one of the four great nineteenth-century translators of Shakespeare". They also suggest that those who wish to understand Vikelas' work in its totality should start from his Shakespeare.

> in use before the revolution. Thus, even though we may accept the undeniable influence of Greek folk song – the basis and starting point of our modern poetry – on the poetry of modern Greece, we cannot without anachronism limit this poetic language to the lexical resources of the anthology of demotic song. Hence I have tried in translating Shakespeare to keep to a *middle course*, writing the spoken language as it is commonly used today. Others will have to judge whether I have succeeded in realising the theory that the rush and passion, in a word the naturalness of the original, can be partly preserved by using such a form of language. Others must also judge how far I have achieved my double aim, of translating the English text as faithfully as possible, while also giving my translation a Greek form...[My hope is] thus to contribute to the wider diffusion of the fame of Shakespeare among us, and to the enrichment of the modern Greek stage.

As Vikelas no doubt expected, this approach to Shakespeare earned him attacks from both extremes, the archaising proponents of katharevousa and the passionate believers in demotic Greek. But he was not deterred. The "middle course" to which he adhered describes his approach more generally.[17] He was a moderate, a conservative (and Royalist) in politics, a believer in reason and common sense, and in a middle way in questions of language. In this he can be seen as a follower of the great scholar Adamantios Korais, the author of the concept of a "middle course" in reforming the Greek language.[18] His attitude is well illustrated by the epigram on the language question which he included in *My Life* as well as in his collected verses:[19]

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[17] D. Tziovas, "Dimitrios Vikelas in the Diaspora: Memory, Character Formation and Language", *Kambos (Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek)* no. 6 (1998), pp. 111-113, and especially pp. 126-128, for an account of Vikelas' pragmatic approach to the language which attributes much to his experience of the English language's different registers. Angelou, *Τετράδια,* p. 51, comments on the curiosity of Vikelas' declaration after meeting the poet Typaldos that he had decided to adopt demotic, given his continuing use in many contexts of a modified form of katharevousa. But it was not consistency which Vikelas sought, but the appropriateness of the form of language to the particular work. Others found consistency hard to achieve, e.g. Roidis, who supported demotic in theory but continued to write in katharevousa. For Vikelas' views on the language question in the 1890s, including comment on Roidis, see his preface to the 1893 edition of his collected essays, *Διαλέξεις και αναμνήσεις,* in *Άπαντα,* Vol. IV, pp. 11-24; and *Η Ζωή μου,* in *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 242.

[18] An address by Vikelas, "On Adamantios Korais' Attempt at a Revival of Hellenism", is preserved in his archive: *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 52.

[19] *Άπαντα* , Vol. II, p. 32.

ΕΠΙΓΡΑΜΜΑ

Που την τραβάτε, ω γραμματισμένοι,
την νέα γλώσσα την Ελληνική;
Εμπρός εκείνη μόνο την πηγαίνει,
αφήστε την να ιδούμε που θα βγει.
Την σέρνετε οπίσω την καϋμένη,
ενώ αυτή εμπρός γερά πατεί.
Θα σπάσει το σκοινί που την τραβάτε
και όλοι σας τανάσκελα θα πάτε!

[EPIGRAM

Where are you dragging it, you "scholars",
The modern Greek language?
It goes forward of its own accord,
Leave it alone for us to see where it comes out.
You are pulling it back, the poor thing,
But it steps forward strongly by itself.
It will break the rope by which you are pulling it,
And all of you will fall flat on your backs!]

Literary Success

In 1872 Vikelas wrote that his burning wish was to establish his household in Athens, but he was waiting until his wallet was full. By the mid-1870s he must have concluded that this condition was satisfied, because during a remission of his wife's illness they decided to make a move. In 1877 they started to build a substantial house on the corner of Voukourestiou and Panepistimiou streets. But then Kalliope suffered a relapse and had to go back to Paris to the clinic. Vikelas went with her. This time he turned not only to Shakespeare but also to imaginative fiction. He started work on a story of the Greek War of Independence. It was published in 1879 in serial form in the Athenian journal *Εστία* [Estia], as *Loukis Laras*. Vikelas based the narrative on the life story of Loukas Ziphos, an elderly Greek from Chios whom he had met in London.[20]

[20] D. Vikelas, *Λουκής Λάρας* [Loukis Laras], ed. Marianna Ditsa, Athens: Estia, 1999. This edition, with an introduction by Ms Ditsa, prints the manuscript of Loukas Ziphos on which Vikelas drew. In his own prefatory note to *Loukis Laras* Vikelas wrote that those [i.e. those Greeks] who had lived in England would easily recognise the Chiot who was hidden under the name Loukis Laras. He aimed to give verisimilitude to the story by pretending that it actually was – rather than was simply based on – the manuscript found among the papers of this Chiot after his death. Michalis Chryssanthopoulos, in his essay "Autobiography, Fiction and the Nation: The Writing Subject in Greek During the Later Nineteenth Century"

Dimitrios Vikelas in his study at the Society for the Distribution of Useful Books.
Source: Linardos, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

The story takes place in Smyrna, Chios, Syros and the islands. The "hero", Loukis, looks back as an old man on the desperate adventures of his youth. The book is a patriotic, moralistic adventure story written in easily accessible language. It lacks the romantic rhetoric and heroism of earlier stories of the struggle for independence. It is very down to earth, and Loukis is something new to Greek literature. Things happen to him. He is carried along by events – something that must have been a common experience in the great flux of the 1820s. He is not a fighter, but a man who through patience, common sense and hard work becomes a successful merchant and prominent member of his community.

Εστία seems to have been reluctant to publish Loukis Laras at first.[21] It was so different from the usual stock of patriotic Greek stories. To begin with it sold slowly. But within a few years it had become an international success, running to successive editions in Greece, and translations into 12 different languages, starting with French. The English version was by Ioannis Gennadios, Minister (i.e. in today's terms Ambassador) at the Greek Embassy in London.

(awaiting publication), suggests that Loukas Ziphos may prove a fake, concocted by Vikelas himself in order to provide a plausible reference point for a work of his own imagination.

[21] M. Ditsa, in *Loukis Laras,* pp. 91-94, shows reasons to question the prevailing account of the publication history, which stems from Georgios Drosinis and Gregorios Xenopoulos. Psycharis and others criticised Vikelas for using his contacts and money to ensure successive European editions of the book. But why not?

In the 1880s Vikelas therefore found himself a successful literary figure and a man of substance. In France he continued to write articles on the state of Greece, Byzantine history and the Eastern Question.[22] He travelled and published accounts of his experiences, designed to show Greece in a positive light and to encourage visitors.[23] He wrote short stories.[24] In 1892 he bought a new plot of land in Athens on the corner of Kriezotou and Valaoritou streets and built the house where finally he was to settle. He was still living in Paris when, in June 1894, his life took another turning.

Improbable Olympic Founding Father

> One evening early last June, the postman brought me a container from which I drew out a diploma filled out in my name, as a member of the Panhellenic Gymnastic Association of Athens. This Association was completely unknown to me. I had not asked to join it, nor did I have the qualifications to do so. The following morning my mystification was dispelled by a further visit of the postman. He brought an enormous envelope, containing a letter from the Association, asking me to represent it at the forthcoming International Athletic Congress. This official document was accompanied by letters from friends of mine, members of the Association, begging me to agree...My first impulse was to say no. I had not even known that there was to be an international athletic congress in Paris. What did I have to do with athletics? But how could I say no to well loved friends? And anyway, I had been at congresses on other occasions without being qualified to take part...So I agreed to take part...[25]

This led directly to Vikelas attending the International Congress held by Baron Pierre de Coubertin at the Sorbonne in Paris in summer 1894. Coubertin, who got on well with Vikelas, invited him to chair the committee of the Congress which dealt with his new proposal that the Olympic Games should be revived on an international basis. And so it fell to Vikelas to propose Athens as the host city for these first revived Games. The Congress approved the proposal, and Vikelas himself was appointed the first President of the International Olympic Committee, which has gone on to control the Olympic Movement.

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[22] Essays published in Vikelas, *Άπαντα*, Vol. VI.

[23] D. Vikelas, *De Nicopolis à Olympie. Lettres à un ami,* Paris 1885.

[24] The stories are in Vikelas, *Άπαντα,* Vol. II. A modern edition is Dimitrios Vikelas, *Διηγήματα* [Stories], Athens: Nefeli, 1990.

[25] Vikelas, "Οι Διεθνείς Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες" [The International Olympic Games], address to Greek students in Paris, in *Άπαντα,* Vol. VIII, p. 126.

Commemorative photograph of some members of the 1st I0C, the International Athletic Congress in Paris. Seated, from left: Pierre de Coubertin (France), D. Vikelas (Greece), A. de Boutovsky (Russia). Standing, from left: W. Gebhardt (Germany), Jiri Guth-Jarkovsky (Bohemia), Ferenc Kemény (Hungary), Victor Balck (Sweden). Taken in the studio of Albert Meyer (June 1896). Source: Photographic Archive, Greek Olympic Committee: K1.2.

As he was the first to admit, Vikelas was no athlete, though as a young man in London he had learned to fence and to ride. But he saw the Games as an irresistible challenge: an opportunity for Greece to make her mark on the international stage, to encourage tourism, to revive athletics in their original cradle, and to promote Greece in the ranks of advanced, progressive European nations. He therefore did all he could to make them happen, in the face of considerable scepticism on the part of the government of his old acquaintance Harilaos Trikoupis. Vikelas used his contacts with Crown Prince Constantine to help secure the support of the Crown for the Olympic idea.

Vikelas was much involved with the Olympics from 1894 until 1896, when they were held, in April, in Athens. His good relations with Coubertin were put under strain after the Games over the issue of whether Greece should become their permanent host. Coubertin took over from Vikelas as President of the IOC after the Athens Games, and Vikelas soon faded out of the Olympic picture. Though his involvement was relatively brief, he was one of the pioneers – albeit an improbable one – of the modern Olympic movement.

Kalliope Vikela died in October 1894, thus freeing him from the necessity to remain in Paris. By the late 1890s, settled permanently in Athens, Vikelas was

living the life of a prominent literary personality, a father figure to poets of the generation of the '80s, including Kostis Palamas and Georgios Drosinis.[26]

Last Years: The "Unfortunate" War of 1897

In 1897 the simmering Cretan question boiled over. The Greek government sent a force under Colonel Vassos to land on Crete, in support of the Cretans' demands for enosis with Greece, and to occupy the island in the name of the King of Greece. Tension between Greece and Ottoman Turkey rose. Greek public opinion called for action, and the government sent Crown Prince Constantine at the head of the Greek army to Thessaly to fight the Turks. Greece's forces were unprepared, ill-equipped and insufficient. They were defeated and retreated in confusion. Crowds in Athens called for the punishment of those responsible. For a moment it seemed that the Crown was in danger. Vikelas responded to this with an absorbing memoir called *Ο Πόλεμος του 1897* [The War of 1897], in which he described his actions and reactions during and after the war.[27]

In the last ten years of his life Vikelas did two things for which he should be remembered with gratitude. Books had always been his passion.[28] He wanted them to be shared not only by those who could afford to buy expensive editions but also by people of modest means. He therefore founded in Athens in 1899 the Association for the Distribution of Useful Books [Σύλλογος Διαδόσεως Ωφελίμων Βιβλίων] to fill the gap. "Useful" is the key word. This was a moral, didactic enterprise and integrally connected with his views on the language question. The books Vikelas had in mind were improving books, full of ideas for honest self-help. He brought to this enterprise something of his experience in Victorian Britain, with its reading societies and working men's clubs. He chose his time well. The venture was a success and was supported by Vikelas throughout the rest of his life and through his will.[29]

Vikelas had always been interested in the discoveries of scientific archaeology in Greek lands and followed closely Arthur Evans' discoveries on Crete. On a

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[26] See their affectionate appreciations of Vikelas in *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, pp. 353-358 (Palamas) and pp. 366-379 (Drosinis). The Palamas piece was first published in *Εστία* in 1892. The Drosinis piece, "The Friendship of Vikelas", is from his *Σκόρπια φύλλα της ζωής μου* [Scattered leaves of my life], Athens 1985.

[27] Vikelas, *Ο Πόλεμος του 1897* [The War of 1897], in *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, pp. 252-346.

[28] See his 1885 essay, "Περί βιβλίων και της έξεως του αναγιγνώσκειν" [On books and the habit of reading] in *Άπαντα,* Vol. V, pp. 25-44, and relevant passages in *Η Ζωή μου, Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 159, quoted below.

[29] The will is in *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, pp. 349-52, alongside appreciations of Vikelas by Palamas, Psycharis and Drosinis.

visit to Crete he discussed with the Heraklion archaeological museum the possibility of leaving to it his great collection of books. In the end, by the terms of his will, he left the books not to the museum but to the city of Heraklion. That is why the public municipal library of Heraklion is called the Vikelaia Library, and the core of it is Vikelas' own collection of more than 5000 books.

Assessment

The case for the prosecution was put with sharp satirical wit by Yannis Psycharis in 1900, in a series of articles in the newspaper *Άστυ* [Asty]:[30] he was commenting on the Rules of the newly established Society for the Distribution of Useful Books, which combined bureaucratic procedure with ideological commitment in the matter of language. A committee of at least three members, elected annually by the Council from its membership, was to "define the subject matter [of the books] to ensure that their language is regular, as far as possible consistent, avoiding equally the archaising and the so-called demotic". Psycharis wrote:

> Vikelas was a businessman for twenty years I guess, perhaps even more. He lived in England. After working, sweating, labouring and earning his shillings, he thought that it was time for him to think about Greece and the language, to play a role, to come out as a second Korais, to legislate, to found societies, to "define the subject matter, to ensure that their language is regular, as far as possible consistent" etc etc.
>
> We know nothing of such like things. Our life took another course from the beginning. From the beginning our guideline was the Idea. We sacrificed ourselves for the Idea. The language question for us was not a side-show but the show itself, the real show. From childhood on, if someone had told us to become businessmen first, we would have shouted no [...] we would have taken the sacks of coins and thrown them into the sea. Vikelas knows all this, and he knows very well that for the Idea I would throw everything out, millions and moneys and Academies. Our vocation is the Idea. Once upon a time, it was the same with Korais. Korais did much harm to Greece, because he did not know what he was doing. He wished to stifle our immortal language. But we must say clearly – Korais strove hard, studied and read, when he was young, and did not set out to make money, so as then later to correct our language and our books, and write rule and regulations.
>
> So what is our good Vikelas doing with things which are not his business? What is he "defining" and what is he "ensuring"?...for so many years, so many centuries, the immortal Olympian gods have protected

[30] The Psycharis articles are reprinted in *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, pp. 359-365.

> and saved Greece and the Greek language – and to what end, may I ask, and why? So that Vikelas should appear, set up a "nine-member Council", recruit members, define the subject matter and ensure "that their language is regular" etc etc.

Forceful and amusing – but also self-regarding and not so well aimed. Not all literary campaigners have to proclaim their lifelong commitment to an Idea, nor need a patient toiler such as Vikelas lack passion in pursuing his moderate ends (a passion which his editor Angelou was prepared to acknowledge in him, as opposed to literary imagination, which he lacked). As to the linguistic "line" of the Society, it is no more than that of any editorial committee, drawn up in formal terms. Avoiding the extremes was a reasonable choice at the time, and justified by the results.

The prosecution case might be better founded on Vikelas' limitations as an artist. With his self-image of the man of letters, or *logios*, he spread his talent over a wide variety of literary forms; but his achievement rests on a narrow body of work, the memoirs, *Loukis Laras*, a few short stories and essays, and one travel book. The narrowness seems willed, as if he were afraid to break out of the bounds of convention and confront the darker aspects of his life, such as the pain of his marriage.

But the best of Vikelas' work offers illuminating insights into the history and society of his times. It has two unifying themes. The first is service to the idea of Greece, a conviction of the superiority of Hellenic civilisation, and an optimistic view of the progress of the young Greek state towards the ideal which Vikelas envisaged. He was a patriot and a nationalist, with all the ardour in his country's cause of the former expatriate who in London and Paris had had to defend Greece before a sceptical public opinion. The second is the ability to reflect fruitfully on his own experience, which illuminates so many aspects of Greek experience in the nineteenth century.

In the first part of his adult life, as an expatriate in the West, in London and Paris, Vikelas was a member of the Greek commercial and intellectual diaspora. The dilemma he identified in *My Life* (imperfect businessman, imperfect man of letters) was real and painful to him. But we can see with hindsight that the combination of commerce and letters suited his future development very well. While serving the primary purpose of assuring him the independence to write, it also gave him the grounding and the material for his best works, which are his own memoirs and his "novel" *Loukis Laras.* His experience of the life of the Greek community in London was essential to the memoir, and London also gave him the story of Loukis Laras/Loukas Ziphos.

It is in these works, not in his essays or his poetry, that Vikelas comes closest to lived experience.[31] Loukis Laras introduces into Greek literature a new conception of the hero as "non-hero" (rather than anti-hero), with his weak body, his unheroic behaviour, and his commitment to commerce and its values of prudence, shrewdness and social stability and peace, rather than those of the conventional revolutionary or military hero.[32] The conception owes as much to Vikelas' own temperament and memories as it does to Ziphos' account. He introduces also a new way of presenting the period of the War of Independence – an unsettled and shifting period of violence, social disruption, and the uprooting and migration of groups and individuals within a porous and fluid Greek world.

The memoir *My Life* also does something new, presenting for the first time not just a thoughtful and truthful account of the life of an expatriate Greek bourgeois community but also the pattern of connection between expatriates and Greece, which eventually brought Vikelas, like Syngros (but for different reasons), back "home" to Athens.[33]

The book is misnamed. It is not an account of Vikelas' life, but of his childhood and youth, extending only as far as the 1860s. Formally it is uneven, since Vikelas does not find a way of ending it satisfactorily. The final chapter of "Philological confessions" brings it to an awkward close. Vikelas may have intended to return to the manuscript and bring it up to date. But this would

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[31] His verses and poems are published in *Άπαντα,* Vol. II, pp. 19-122, and Vol. VIII, pp. 263-291. Vikelas recognised their limitations himself in announcing in the preface to the 1885 edition that their republication was "a farewell to youth and to poetry". See also his poem *Απολογία* [Apologia], in *Άπαντα,* Vol. II, p. 65, which is a defence of "minor" poetry such as his own: "The anonymous stream which flows through the valley has a purpose in nature as well as the great river such as the Danube: it too waters a few fields." This realistic view of his capacity is reflected also in his judgement in 1884 that he was not suited to "works of long breath" and would be content to limit his literary ambitions to the small scale: *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 24.

[32] For the characteristics of the hero (described, of course, by himself, since he, Loukas, is the narrator), see *Loukis Laras* (1999), pp. 48-51. He is "very small...humiliatingly small...until I grew up, my weak character made my body even more useless...small and weak in body...Other people's contempt for me worked on my own sense of myself and did not encourage heroic ideas." Vikelas deliberately emphasises these wimpish characteristics in order to paint an effective contrast, as in the course of the book Loukis shows himself to be a man of resource, common sense, shrewdness and tenacity, and ends as an honoured citizen.

[33] For another example, of great charm, of the expatriate memoir, see A. A. Pallis, *Ξενιτεμένοι Έλληνες* [Greeks abroad], Athens 1953. Pallis, educated at Eton and Balliol College Oxford, worked for the Ralli Brothers. Vikelas himself uses the phrase *"ξενιτεμένοι Έλληνες"* in his memoir.

have confronted him with material which very possibly was too painful for him to deal with, in the story of his marriage and his wife's illness. The loss of these aspects of his life is matched by the absence of the satisfying closure which description of his final, fulfilled years as a respected member and benefactor of Athenian society could have brought. Vikelas' explanation of the gaps in his memoir is that he prefers to dwell on the distant past. He draws on unaccustomed emotion in describing at the start of *My Life* the pleasure of reminiscence, and the way distance in time lends clarity and detail to the view.[34]

These self-imposed limitations excluded some of the most interesting years in his life, covering his decision to settle in Greece, Athenian politics and society in the last two decades of the century, and the Olympic Games. Yet *My Life* has a mysterious charm. It is quietly written and it is difficult at first to put one's finger on what gives it its quality. But gradually it insinuates itself into the imagination, with its mixture of autobiography, anecdote, history and pen portraits. Family features largely, in the descriptions of his mother, the "pole star" of his life; the affectionate pen portraits of his uncles Leon and Vasileios Melas, who represent the two poles of his existence, the literary and the commercial; the tragic end of Vasileios' wife, who was gradually paralysed, from the legs upwards, until she could no longer swallow or speak; the ugly but good-hearted aunt Zoe, who died falling down stairs; and the numerous other aunts, uncles and cousins. Along the way, without making a show of it, Vikelas conveys much social history, in the descriptions of the Greek communities of Constantinople, Odessa and Syros, and in his account of the London community. His journey from Syros to London, in which he stays in Messina, Livorno and Marseilles, with successive relatives all representing the Mavros family business which he was to join, itself encapsulates the Greek commercial family networks of the nineteenth century.

Vikelas brings to his reflections on life and manners the quality of a skilful essayist, as when he comments on the urge to collect books:

> Thanks to the inexpensiveness and the riches of the lending libraries in London I was able to procure books to read easily in my first years there. Later I developed the desire to have my own. I bought many of them, especially those which were useful for my studies and those which

[34] *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 4, where he develops the fine image of a man crossing a wide plain in a railway carriage, with his back to the engine: "the distant houses and trees follow us for a long time, while the closer objects disappear rapidly behind us as soon as we see them". We do not know what lies before us or even whether and how we shall reach the goal of our journey. "And yet we are carried forward with our backs turned towards this uncertain goal."

> referred to Greece, ancient or modern. Their number increased from year to year. The right course would be to limit oneself to obtaining a small number of carefully chosen books, if one is living somewhere where there are public libraries. Most books are useless once they are read – if they are read – and piling them up is finally rather like the piling up of money by a miser who makes no use of his wealth. It is easy to get rid of this burden, all one has to do is decide on the liquidation of those of his books which have no use. But the difficulty is to take such a decision, which is equivalent to the depreciation of a much loved past, or to denying gratitude to old friends, with whom we have lived and by whom we have been served.[35]

How Well He Diagnoses Our Problem!

Loukis Laras and *My Life* bring together patriotism and self-awareness, the two themes outlined above. In presenting a new type of hero and a new way of looking at the period of the struggle for independence, Vikelas illuminates the nature and problems of Hellenism in the nineteenth century more effectively than in his historical and political essays; for he does so without overt propaganda or bombast.

These historical and political essays, about Byzantium and contemporary Greece, are didactic.[36] He was not an original historian – rather a moralist and populariser who drew on wide reading of others' works. He writes in these essays as the Greek abroad, straddling two cultures, consciously defending his country of origin, diffusing knowledge about its progress, projecting a certain idea of Greece as a progressive European country in the making. Progress is the key word. He wrote in one of his essays, "History is like every other science, in this respect, that she moves towards perfection by progressive development."[37] To demonstrate this development, he draws on Paparrigopoulos, Finlay, Sathas, Zambelios, Legrand and others, aiming to incorporate Byzantium into his conception of Greek history as moving progressively forward towards an end. "It is precisely in these Byzantine centuries that has been formed the Hellenic world which exists today, the new, the Christian Hellas."

Vikelas has a problem in incorporating ancient Greece in this progressive scheme, since he sees it as close to a perfect society; but the coming of Christianity can be made to fit the theory of progression. He warms to ancient Greece as he does not to Byzantium, "because the double love of Freedom and of Fatherland does not exalt the mind and quicken the heart, at Byzantium, as

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[35] Vikelas, *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 159.

it does in [ancient] Hellas". In the end Vikelas evades issues of comparison by asserting the progressive march of history like a General haranguing his troops: "Let us take both the epochs which lie behind us as the foundation and the starting-point for the work which lies before us, but let our eyes, and our hopes, and our energies be directed to the future, and let our word of command be not Backward, but FORWARD."[38]

Vikelas' travel writings serve a similar propagandist purpose, but are more effective because they reflect his own experience. Angelou calls his style "absolutely suited" to travel writing, "easy, concise, concrete, clear and balanced".[39] He was an inveterate traveller, in Greek lands, Great Britain and Western Europe. He published *De Nicopolis à Olympie. Lettres à un ami*, in Paris in 1885.[40] The Author's Note states that the letters were written from day to day during a short journey in western Greece. They were "not destined for publication" (this may be disingenuous), but his friend the Marquis de Queux de Ste-Hilaire thought they would be of interest to those who were concerned about "the progressive development of our nation".

Vikelas made this short journey in the period in which Trikoupis' programme of foreign loans and infrastructure works was in full swing. The positive message emerges from the start. Brigandage is no longer a problem. The currant boom, with its excitement and its risks, is under way. Shipping routes have proliferated. The Thessalian railway is to open in a few days' time, and the Athens-Corinth-Patras/Argos line within the year. Gigantic works are

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[36] *Άπαντα*, Vol. VI, contains the following: "Περί Βυζαντινών" [On the Byzantines]; "Η Ελλάς προ του 1821" [Greece before 1821]; "Le rôle et les aspirations de la Grèce dans la Question d'Orient"; "Η σύστασις του Ελληνικού Βασιλείου και τα όρια αυτού" [The formation of the Greek kingdom and its frontiers]; "Vingt-cinq années de regne constitutionnel"; "L'empereur Nicéphore Phocas"; "Le philhellénisme en France"; "La littérature byzantine"; "Un héros de la guerre de l'indépendance grecque"; "Η Κρήτη αυτόνομος" [Crete autonomous]; and "Ηρώον του αγώνος" [A monument to the heroes of the independence struggle].

[37] Vikelas, "Byzantinism and Hellenism", in *Seven Essays on Christian Greece,* London 1890, p. 48.

[38] Vikelas, "The Subjects of the Byzantine Empire", in *Seven Essays on Christian Greece,* p. 123.

[39] *Άπαντα,* Vol. VII, p. 11. As to "inveterate", Angelou quotes Souris: "Ο Βικέλας σοφός με γνώση και με κρίση / απ' το Παρίσι έρχεται και πάει στο Παρίσι." [Vikelas wise in his knowledge and judgement / is always coming from Paris and going to Paris.]

[40] Vikelas, *De Nicopolis à Olympie. Lettres à un ami,* Paris 1885; Greek version translated by Vikelas himself, as *Από Νικοπόλεως εις Ολυμπίαν. Επιστολαί προς φίλον*, Athens 1885.

going on at the Isthmus, in the construction of the Corinth Canal. Bands of Muslim Albanians are paying the Turkish authorities to come into Greece at the Arta frontier for work on the roads. "Il y a de l'argent à gagner, la bas!" Vikelas approves of this, because it makes for good philhellenic propaganda. In ten to fifteen years, he writes, Greece will be like Switzerland or Scotland.

He fits this journey into his scheme of Hellenic history by explaining that he has presented the country from Nicopolis (Greco-Roman) to Olympia (ancient Greek) so as to show the two elements that created the Greece of the Middle Ages, from which the Greece of today emerged. Alongside his reflections on Greek society and the economy he reflects on the progress of the country and its future development. Progress has not been fast, but it has been as fast as circumstances allowed given the curtailment of the original Greek state. Those areas – the Ionian Islands, Thessaly – which have been incorporated into the free state have benefited by this, e.g. in education on the islands. Though never a fan of the Great Idea in the sense of the integral reconstitution of the Byzantine Empire, he therefore sees it as entirely practical and reasonable to look to include within the state the Greek provinces to the north, i.e. Epirus and Macedonia, Crete and the islands of the Aegean. One might have expected him to approve of a conception of the Great Idea resting on his own theory of the continuity of Greek history, derived from Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos's great *Ιστορία του ελληνικού έθνους* [History of the Greek nation]. But a more pragmatic political vision prevailed, influenced by his experience of Western Europe.[41]

He confronts the dilemma of tourism.[42] Early on he advises his friend in Paris to come to Greece now "before the convoys of cockneys carried by Cook vulgarise our classic land, before there are big hotels with waiters in white ties

[41] Paschalis Kitromilides, "On the Intellectual Content of Greek Nationalism: Paparrigopoulos, Byzantium and the Great Idea", in *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity,* ed. David Ricks and Paul Magdalino, Aldershot 1998, pp. 25-33: "As a project for the resurrection of the Byzantine Empire in the shape of an expanded modern Greek state, the Great Idea was a late nineteenth-century development and was ideologically to a large extent the product of political manipulations of Paparrigopoulos' historical theories." For Vikelas' more modest political approach, see also his essay "Le rôle et les aspirations de la Grèce dans la Question d'Orient", in *Άπαντα,* Vol. VI, p. 148: "Ce qu'on appelle la Grande Idée a eu sa raison d'être...Mais le cours des événements a changé la direction des aspirations grecques. L'Idée hellénique s'est dégagée de l'idée de rétablir l'Empire de Constantinople. C'est toujours une grande idée. Elle est d'autant plus forte qu'elle est moins étendue...Ces aspirations n'outrepassent pas les bornes d'une politique pratique et possible..."

[42] Dimitris Tziovas, "Dimitrios Vikelas in the Diaspora", p. 129, rightly identifies Vikelas as "one of the first people who envisaged the development of Greece for tourists".

speaking English at Delphi and Mount Taygetus". By the end of the book, however, when an English friend complains at Corinth about the "profanation" of the classic land Vikelas disagrees with him, adding "Future generations will not be of his opinion, I think."

The latter was Vikelas' lasting view. This comes out most clearly when he turned from writing to action, with his involvement in the Olympics. He had two main motives for this involvement. One was his belief in the importance of physical education for Greek youth. The other was his consistent desire to show Modern Greece to the West as a success story. He believed that the Games could be used to economic and moral advantage by the Greek state. He set out these views in his address to the Greek students of Paris in early 1896, when the preparations for the Games were coming to a climax, arguing that reviving athletics in their original cradle was only one of the benefits to be expected from holding the Games in Athens:

> Once this unique opportunity was presented to us, without our seeking it, the question was whether we should not take advantage of it, for the honour done to Greece, and for the moral and material benefits which it can bring us. In every city of Europe and America they organise festivals and celebrations so as to attract foreigners. We can hold a continuous festival, thanks to our monuments and reminders of the ancient world, thanks to the varied beauty of our country. But as yet we do not exploit this treasure. And yet perhaps in part there lies the solution of our financial problem – the cure for the disease which has unfortunately become so acute over recent years. Here is an opportunity to make it easier for foreigners to come to Greece and to increase their flow – and for us to study seriously the means by which we can attract them. Egypt is more difficult to get to, and yet thousands of foreigners visit it every year. Let us think out how we can get them to Greece as well. We were hoping to achieve this through the railway, which will one day link us with the rest of Europe. But something can be done even before that day arrives. Foreigners do not go to Egypt by rail. Our integration in the European community of nations will come about more quickly and more completely through more frequent contact with foreigners. I am not looking simply to the wallets of the visitors. I expect a *moral* benefit from our increasing connection with civilisation beyond our shores.[43]

It is striking how closely these aims conform with the aims of the 2004 Olympics.[44]

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[43] *Άπαντα,* Vol. V, pp. 138-139.

[44] For an extended account of Vikelas' role in the 1896 Olympics, see Michael Llewellyn

Vikelas' involvement in the Olympics marked a radical change in his life in that for the first time it involved him closely in Greek political and social affairs as an actor rather than a mere commentator. This resulted in a more realistic approach to Greece, but with an equal belief in her future. This comes out in his last extended work, a memoir of the "unfortunate" 1897 War. Like others, Vikelas was shocked by the War.[45] His accounts of his calls on the Ministry for the Navy brilliantly show the frivolity of Ministers' behaviour. His belief in the Glucksberg Dynasty was even briefly qualified.

Unlike the Athenian chatterboxes whose contribution to the War was limited to rumour-mongering in cafés, Vikelas actually did something about it. He chartered a hospital ship and steamed to Volos to pick up war wounded and bring them back to Athens. But though this adds colour and life to his account, the significance of the memoir lies in his analysis of what had gone wrong and what should be done. All of Vikelas' long experience of men and affairs came together in this. He drew on his talks with the Ambassadors of the Great Powers, with the King and the Crown Prince, with politicians, and on his talks and correspondence with friends in Greece and abroad. He described how he was recruited to join the National Society (Εθνική Εταιρεία) and quickly came to regret his decision. (He soon resigned.) He analysed the failings in the Greek political system which led to the war and the defeat. He speculated on how Greece could revive herself after this disaster.

Vikelas called this essay a "chapter in the story of my life" and judged it worthy to be included in his memoirs as a continuation of the main volume, *My Life*. It certainly is worthy, but its inclusion highlights the fragmentary and intermittent nature of Vikelas' autobiographical efforts, and makes one wish that he had pulled them together into a single complete account. The diary of the War is not a great literary work, but it is an acute historical record by an experienced and well-placed observer. His first reactions to Greece's defeat were despairing. He wrote to a critical friend outside Greece (identified only as "M.

Smith, *Olympics in Athens 1896: The Invention of the Modern Olympic Games,* London 2004; Greek language edition, *Οι Ολυμπιακοί του 1896 στην Αθήνα. Η γένεση των σύγχρονων Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων,* transl. Margarita Zachariadou, Athens 2004; also Paschalis Kitromilides, "The Olympics Then and Now: A View from Athens", in *Gaseous Dielectrics X*, ed. L. G. Christophorou *et. al.*, New York 2004, pp. 487-493.

[45] For an account of three different views of the 1897 War, one of them Vikelas', see N. Maronitis, *Στον απόηχο του ελληνοτουρκικού πολέμου. Παράλληλες αφηγήσεις* [The afterecho of the Greek-Turkish war: parallel narrations], in *Ο Πόλεμος του 1897* [The War of 1897], Etaireia Spoudon Neoellinikou Politismou kai Genikis Paideias, Athens 1999, pp. 215-230.

K., my brother-in-law [συγαμπρός]") of his "fear that we shall continue on the same track. I cannot see how the *men* will change with the change of institutions, when the *man* who will impose himself so as to put us to rights is not visible. I do not see such a man. Time may improve matters. But in the meantime what will become of this unfortunate state?"[46]

But Vikelas' natural optimism reasserted itself when it became evident that, through the passage of time, the diplomacy of King George, and the helpful interventions of the Great Powers, the peace settlement was not at all bad for Greece. He concluded his memoir on a naively positive note which can stand as a summary of his life's beliefs:

> Materially the country is making progress, and the material progress makes the need for good government all the more felt. The people has already expressed its will about this. If it can impose it on its representatives, and if the Crown *wants* it, what is wrong can be easily put right through parliament. If we obtain an independent public service, independent of politics, if the courts and the police are raised up, if the army is separated from politics, these things on their own are enough to improve our situation. As to the economy, I do not see reasons for concern. All right, it is not to Greece's credit that after 60 years of independence we are held to deserve foreign control [i.e. through the International Financial Commission (IFC) which Greece was obliged to accept], but given that we have merited this because of our bad administration and our immoral and incompetent bankruptcy, we must admit that the control has proved beneficial. It is thanks to this foreign control that the three Powers have guaranteed the loan, and the guarantee was not only useful as concerns the terms of the loan, but encouraging from a moral point of view, as a sign of confidence in the future of Greece. May the future not falsify the hopes with which I have lived until now and with which I shall die.[47]

The difference between the Vikelas of 1897 and the Vikelas of the 1870s-80s is that he is no longer making propaganda for a largely British and French audience (though he continued to do this orally and through letters) but writing for himself and his own countrymen. He has returned to his "roots" in Greece. He is no longer an expatriate. He is an actor on the Greek stage. He starts to think, and write, like a Greek Greek, about corruption in politics, ρουσφέτι [political favours] and the failings of the Dynasty, subjects which he would not wish to expose to foreigners. But he does so with the added depth

[46] *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 279.
[47] *Άπαντα,* Vol. I, p. 346.

and perspective of an ex-expatriate, who knows how the outside world sees Greece, and retains his contacts with that world. Alongside his acquired maturity, there is a gain in immediacy, focus and historical truth.

The market in literary reputations is unlikely to raise Vikelas to the rank of "great writer". His fame will continue to rest on the one outstanding book, *Loukis Laras*, and on his involvement in the Olympic Games. But to look for a "great writer" is somehow to miss the point about Vikelas. We have seen how he himself progressively modified his literary aims as he came to recognise his own limitations, but in parallel broadened and deepened his involvement in Greek educational, cultural and philanthropic projects. He commands respect for these as well as his writings, and above all for the values he stood for and the exemplary pattern of his life. These deserve attention as part of the story of nineteenth-century Greek culture. Alkis Angelou, his perceptive editor, understood that we should look for Vikelas the whole man: for "there is neither a literary Vikelas, nor a translator, nor a traveller, etc., but one unified spiritual and cultural human being..."[48]

[48] *Άπαντα,* Vol. VI, editor's preface, p. 11.