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**“But Prized Elsewhere”: Local History, Collection Development, and the
Study of Modern Hellenism ***

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A poet's hope: to be,
like some valley cheese,
local, but prized elsewhere.

--W.H. Auden "Shorts II" (1976)

Let me begin by acknowledging and thanking the International Papers Committee for accepting my proposal to speak on this panel and the Provost's Faculty Promotion Development Fund at California State University, Sacramento for providing me partial travel funding to make the trip. Though I am speaking first today, my talk is in essence a counterpoint to the other presentations you will hear and to the usual approach towards conceptualizing, collecting, and providing services around local history in libraries. After all, I am an academic librarian and the local history I collect is for far-off places in Greece, Cyprus, and in diaspora communities around the world in support of a research collection broadly focused on Hellenism, whereas typically libraries—historically public libraries—act as gateways to local history by collecting and preserving resources of their *own* communities.¹ But the emphasis I place on collecting local history materials and the opportunities I have to do such collecting are far from typical, even for a relatively small discipline like Hellenic studies. In fact, while many academic and research libraries maintain specialized collections on various countries and regions of the world, local history within those areas—and hence collecting local resources documenting that history—is a largely neglected topic. Within area studies, however, not only are local history, customs, and institutions worthwhile subjects of study in their own right, but they are also integral components of a broader understanding of national culture, especially at a time of the marginalization of place in favor of the privileging of the transnational (Ball & Lai, 2006). Therefore, I believe it is incumbent on research institutions collecting area studies resources to place a greater emphasis on acquiring local history materials, whether individually or cooperatively, and thus to create the demand to which vendors in various countries will respond by providing a broader array of local studies materials. My talk, then, will explore the intersection of local history and area studies within the context of Modern Greek studies and the ways in which I have attempted to enhance the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection with local history materials, making clear why these materials are for me like Auden's "valley cheese." It is my hope that this presentation will be instructive as a specific example of a larger phenomenon within area studies and at the same time provide an interesting contrast to others' presentations about their libraries as gateways to local history. Before moving on, a note on terminology: I prefer the inclusive term "local studies" to "local history" and shall henceforward use that term unless I am referring specifically to history, since the study of a given place deals with it in all its aspects and encompasses a variety of disciplines in addition to history (Dewe, 2002; Reid & Macafee, 2007).²

Local history has been called the last refuge of the amateur, impugned as the province of antiquarians, and scorned as lacking in rigor or analysis. This generally dismissive view reflects, in

¹ The Centre for (formerly the Department of) English Local History at Leicester University, UK, is notable as an academic entity whose purview is "the study of local history everywhere in England and Wales." See: <http://www.le.ac.uk/elh/about.html> (retrieved June 20, 2010).

² As Dewe also notes, "community history" is a more apt term than local history since it recognizes natural communities rather than administrative boundaries—often subject to change—that make up the confines of "local history." In the context of Greece, Dimen (1976) has urged a reconsideration of the most useful unit of local analysis for regional studies, suggesting ecological region, unit of kinship, and a level above the village but below the region as three points of departure.

part, the predominance of macro-level processes as the vehicle by which to interpret the growing complexity of the modern world, as espoused by social science historians, over the capability of micro-level investigation to render fruitful conclusions of any historical significance. It also betrays “hierarchies of scholarship” (Papailias, 2005, p. 44) which denigrate efforts by non-specialist and non-professional historians, a phenomenon of acute significance in Greece. However, it is precisely this fixation on macrocosm, often coded today with the word “globalization,” that since World War II has led to a reaction against the large-scale, impersonal processes of society without taking account of the people beneath these processes who experienced them (Iggers, 1997). In Greece this downward post-war shift in historiographical scale has been mirrored by a concurrent shift in the scale of locality in contemporary Greek fiction, as Yannis Dallas first observed (Apostolidou, 2004). One by-product of this reaction has been the growth and evolution of local studies as an academic discipline. As W. G. Hoskins, British pioneer of local studies scholarship has noted, “We belong to a particular place and the bigger and more incomprehensible the modern world grows the more will people turn to study something of which they can grasp the scale and in which they can find a personal and individual meaning” (Dewe, 1991, v. 1, 22).

Formerly, approaches to local *history* were limited to describing how a given locality reflected national events, presenting *curiosa*, and merely compiling facts about a place. Today local *studies* encompasses the holistic study of a locale in all its aspects using a multidisciplinary approach and based on fieldwork, cooperative study, and the examination of original records in support of accurate historical representation and sound conclusions (Hobbs, 1973). The primary and secondary sources or “materials of record” used to pursue local studies research include books and pamphlets; periodicals, society and institutional publications; parts of books and periodical articles; photocopies and microforms of otherwise unobtainable items; photographs, films, and other graphic materials; plans and maps; sound recordings; and ephemera (Nichols, 1979). The advent of the World Wide Web over the past 15 years has revolutionized access to research materials from anywhere in the world as well as the dissemination of the fruits of research (Reid & Macafee, 2007). Moreover, local studies has an array of potential educational and civic applications (Ball & Lai, 2006) and can be used as the basis for historically-informed decision-making in areas such as architecture, economics, and politics.

In American higher education the rise of “area studies” came during the Cold War with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 and two complementary pieces of legislation in the first half of the 1960s, including the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961 and the Higher Education Act of 1965, also known as Title VI. The growth of area studies following the creation of Title VI/Fulbright Hays required academic and research libraries to begin building and providing access to multilingual international collections that could support the curricular and research needs of newly founded interdisciplinary centers and institutes focused on diverse areas around the globe. In addition to the task of recruiting qualified librarians to begin building, cataloging, and providing access to these collections,³ libraries’ acquisitions departments were for their part confronted with a host of obstacles arising from the attempted procurement of materials from unfamiliar parts of the world (Downs & Brown, 1982). Acquisition challenges can be attributed broadly to vendor shortcomings, postal or governmental impediments, and/or a poorly organized book trade lacking in bibliographical tools. In the past some libraries have attempted to address these hindrances by sending librarians abroad on book-buying trips to purchase materials directly—including local studies content—or having faculty and/or graduate students traveling abroad make purchases on the library’s behalf (Henige, 1982), although the former approach has become increasingly uncommon

³ For a discussion on issues in area studies recruitment, see Paganelis (2010) pp. 112-124 in Pankl, Theiss-White, and Bushing, eds.

due to the expense involved. Alternatively, exchange programs, gifts, and occasionally the purchase of entire collections can also help infuse local studies holdings with new material.⁴ However, local studies materials clearly have been an afterthought in the broader picture of area studies acquisitions. Difficulties acquiring materials from abroad, coupled with limited (and dwindling) budgets, can in some cases be cited as unavoidable reasons for the neglect of local publications; however, in others there may be a deliberate avoidance of collecting local materials due to negative perceptions of local culture as unsophisticated or insignificant and thereby lacking scholarly research value. The growth and evolution of local studies in recent decades should call into question this presumption that local is tantamount to parochial and therefore insignificant in the context of area studies; it should also serve as an indication of the complementary nature of local studies to those on a regional or national scale. As Rae Else-Mitchell observed in the case of Australia (153-154): “Clearly the history of a country is more than the sum of the histories of its localities; equally clearly, the history of a country is not truly written if the history of its localities is ignored.”

Greece serves as an excellent example of a world area in which place and the concept of the local hold particular importance yet have been changing rapidly. Prior to winning independence, the territories of Greece were governed under Ottoman rule by religious faith according to the *millet* system and administered by Greek Orthodox religious authorities with a wide degree of local autonomy. As such, traditional loyalties of the Greeks have been oriented foremost towards family, native village, and region, not to nation. This is evident also in the fraternal organizations Greek immigrants to the U.S. established in their local communities, such as the Pancretan Association of America, the Panepirotic Federation of America, and others. For Greeks the word *topos*—“place”—connotes spatial uniqueness and differentiation from any other place; and rootedness is a precondition for something or someone being called *topikos*—“local.”⁵ For this reason population displacements have left severe and marked scars on the psyche of the Greek people, most notably from the forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1922 following Greek defeat in the Greco-Turkish War, despite the high degree of ethnic homogeneity that ensued in Greece (Tziovas, 1994). Though Asia Minor Greeks shared the same ethnic and religious affiliation, in many cases they experienced difficulties integrating into local communities following their transfer to Greece (Papagaroufali, 2005). Greece has also experienced significant centripetal internal population shifts since World War II, with the Athenian capital having grown by over 60% during that time while many provincial areas have become depopulated (Clogg, 2002). Over the same period tourism has become one of the two largest industries in Greece along with shipping and in the process has transformed local culture, landscapes, and economies all over the country. Furthermore, since 1991 Greece has witnessed significant immigration from the Balkans, former Soviet republics, and South and Southeast Asia; growing numbers of these immigrants are now filtering out of urban centers and finding their way into Greece’s previously depopulated areas, in some cases helping to revive moribund agricultural and commercial industries with cheap labor, thus changing not only the ethnic composition of these places, but also their class structures and economies (Verinis, 2007). Finally, the sweeping changes to overhaul local government in Greece scheduled to take effect in November 2010 are indicative of the mutability of local government and administrative boundaries, and will have profound effects on local life and identity all over Greece. In January 2010, the ruling PASOK party in Greece announced a radical plan to overhaul local government by redrawing administrative boundaries and in the process reducing the number of existing prefectures from 76 to 13 larger

⁴ The Cavagna Collection at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is a notable example of a local studies collection purchase (Cardman, 2000).

⁵ Cf. the special issue of the *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 2 no. 2 (1992), devoted to the predominance of time and place in Modern Greek literature.

regions and similarly cutting the number of municipalities from 1,034 to less than 370 (*Kathēmerinē*, 2010). This program, known as *Kallikratēs*, named after one of the architects of the Parthenon, continues to encounter fierce opposition from local governments and other groups despite the bill having passed in Parliament in May and is intended to be implemented in time for local elections in mid November 2010. These are but a few examples of broad changes in Modern Greek culture that are indicative of the significance of the localities of Greece and the fundamental changes many of them are undergoing.

In spite of budget limitations and acquisitions challenges, there are numerous reasons why local studies materials should be actively pursued in building Modern Greek studies collections. Collecting local materials enables a fuller understanding and appreciation of Greece's regional character and varied histories of the country's constituent provinces and islands over a long period of time. These materials, provided they are the work of competent researchers, can also help illuminate topics of national or international scope from a unique perspective—that of Greece's geographical and political periphery (Phasoulakēs, 1988). The changes wrought on Greek society by the enlargement and metamorphosis of the European Union, globalization, and the upsurge of immigration to Greece over the past 20 years all have ramifications at the local level which are being documented locally and there is a distinct need to collect and preserve these source materials. The dissemination of local studies materials also guards against irrevocable loss from natural disasters, such as the devastating earthquakes that rocked the Ionian Islands in 1953. Furthermore, as mentioned above, local government changes already in the works will have profound effects on local studies in Greece for years to come. One could also point to local studies materials documenting Greek, Cypriot, and Hellenic diaspora communities as a valuable resource for prosopographical and genealogical research. Finally, collecting local studies materials from Greece is important because so few institutions outside that country are doing it.

Having talked abstractly at some length about local studies and area studies in libraries, let me turn now to the specific case of local studies in the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection. By way of introduction, the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection consists of the holdings of the former Speros Basil Vryonis Center for the Study of Hellenism and currently comprises some 75,000 volumes in over 15 languages, including books, journals, newspapers, ephemera, non-print media, archives, art and artifacts. The collection encompasses all eras of Greek civilization, but its strengths lie in post-Classical Hellenism from the Byzantine Empire through contemporary Greece. The Collection has been supporting scholarly research for over 20 years and was donated after the closure of the Center to the University Library at California State University, Sacramento in December 2002 in order to anchor a new program in Hellenic studies, which currently consists of an academic minor. It is the premier Hellenic collection of its kind in the western United States and one of the largest in the country, a collection of national and international importance.

As a student of ancient history and the Classical world I learned about the importance of place in the psyche of the ancient Greeks, often manifested in the form of fierce independence, divisiveness, and unending regional conflicts. But it was not until I began working as Curator of the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection that I became keenly aware of the significant role of place in modern Greek life as well. As I came to immerse myself in the collection I was amazed to see the variety of materials in numerous formats representing Greece's different towns, cities, and regions, both on the mainland and the islands, as well as locales in Cyprus. I still feel a certain fascination with the idea that in this collection we have published materials on locales 7,500 miles away, in some cases as the only holding institution in North America or possibly even outside Greece. Added to this, we have an excellent collection of materials on Greek diaspora communities on six continents, with particular strengths on Greek Americans. Naturally, some regions of Greece are better represented than others, reflecting both their prominence in Modern Greek history and politics as

well as bibliographical output. At the Vryonis Center collecting local materials had been more of an ad hoc phenomenon than a purposeful, systematic endeavor. This made me question the extent to which other institutions which actively collect in Modern Greek studies make an effort to obtain local studies materials. Based on the fact that these institutions are dependent on Greek vendors, the majority of their collecting derives from Athens-based publishing output and only secondarily from particular localities themselves as that material comes to the notice of Athenian book dealers—or not. For my part I decided that I would make a more concerted effort to amass local studies materials for the collection to the extent that my budget, and, as I will explain below, my travels allowed.

Early on I understood the acquisitions potential of the on-line marketplace of used book sites, in particular eBay, to enhance the collection. Though some dismiss eBay as a giant garage sale, there is no doubting its success over the past 15 years or its potential for finding *almost* anything. For many librarians and archivists, eBay continues to have broad appeal for the ability it provides to search for any number of materials on the people, places, and events that are the building blocks of local studies, or indeed to discover serendipitously publications one did not know existed. Regrettably, many institutional bureaucracies are incapable of coping with this somewhat unorthodox means of acquisitions or are simply unwilling to do so, to the detriment of their collections. Relatively little scholarship exists on eBay's potential in the library arena, though DeLyser, Sheehan and Curtis' article "eBay and Research in Historical Geography" (2004) is a notable contribution. My approach with eBay has been twofold: to seek out relevant new and out-of-print materials in any language at bargain prices, whether of a local studies nature or not, in order to stretch my limited budget; and to seek out Greek-language materials of interest, mostly out of print, that would be difficult to find even in Greece. To date, I have purchased well over 150 titles for the collection via eBay, including numerous local publications.

With a family residence in Athens, I recognized as soon as I began my job the unique opportunity I had to acquire materials for the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection while in Greece. But it was not until the first time I had the opportunity to do book-buying there that I got to see firsthand how prolific local studies is in that country; likewise, I was not aware of the field's subaltern status in the hierarchy of scholarship until doing research for this presentation. Since starting my job I have traveled to Greece five times either for vacation or, in one case, to present a paper at a conference. Each time I have taken advantage of this opportunity to engage in collection development activities and each time have come away with many new local studies materials.

On my first such buying trip in summer 2005, I quickly came to learn how the book trade in Athens was organized. Many publishers have their own bookshops within the epicenter of Athens' publishing quarter between the University of Athens and Lycabettus Hill, while other bookstores effectively act as distributors for various numbers of publishers and organize their stock accordingly. This system has the advantage of allowing me to acquire quantities of books by the same publisher all at once, but poses distinct challenges to finding materials on a given subject, say, the Greek Enlightenment or a given island, without knowing who published them. Near this area is the well-known *Stoa tou Vvliou*, a cultural complex that includes an outlet mall for books of approximately a dozen well-known publishers. Apart from these and other well-known venues for obtaining books in Athens, such as at the National Hellenic Research Foundation and myriad museums located throughout the city, less well known are the smaller foundations, associations, fraternal organizations, academies, and sundry other groups whose publications are often unpublicized and irregular and must be acquired directly, some because they are not offered for sale. Ironically, for many regions more local studies publications are published in Athens than in the locales they treat.

Collection development on the Greek islands has always been more interesting than in Athens because of the excitement of amassing local materials *in situ* of especially short print runs

that might never reach Athens and many that were positively not held by other North American institutions. Every island I have visited on these trips, thus far including the Ionian islands of Corfu and Zakynthos, and the Cycladic islands of Syros, Paros, Tinos, Milos, and Mykonos, has had at least one bookshop in their main town. Invariably (and conveniently), each bookshop has had a separate section on local subjects, which, combined with now-ubiquitous access to the Web on even the smallest islands, has made it simple for me to compare our holdings via our on-line catalog to books available for purchase. Other sources of local publications on the islands include museums, churches, town halls, foundations, and local associations/academies. In the end, the legwork it often takes to collect these local materials is worth the effort because of the inherent interest of subject matter and scarcity of the materials themselves: when books go out of print in Greece, they can be next to impossible to acquire.

That first buying trip in 2005 set the stage both for future purchasing in Athens, as well as the routine to follow on the islands. To this point I have acquired in total over 700 new and out-print books, journals, and CDs, including numerous local studies publications, some as only copies in a North American institution and perhaps even outside Greece. Colleagues who understand basic collection development principles in area studies have all recognized the value of my efforts and the tremendous advantage of my adding substantial numbers of hand-picked materials from Greece to the Collection without the library having to pay either for my transportation to Greece or lodging while there, as virtually all other institutions would have to do in order to send their librarians on book-buying trips abroad. Furthermore, through on-site purchase of materials I not only obtain substantial discounts by buying in quantity and paying in cash, but I also avoid the vendor markup, thus stretching the value of the limited funding available to me. At the same time I am able to establish beneficial relationships with publishers, book dealers, fellow librarians, and others in the trade. Over the years I have also received gift materials either not for sale or as a gesture of goodwill. I have yet to visit other urban centers in Greece such as Thessaloniki, but if and when I do my experience will enable me to know how to approach direct purchase of materials wherever I go. Furthermore, my on-the-ground collection development activities both in Athens and on the islands has proved an excellent way for me to learn the landscape of the book market in Greece and also to obtain materials that may be slower in coming through regular channels or not at all. I should note, however, that by virtue of collecting local studies materials remotely, the scope of my efforts remains limited mainly to *published* materials of record in print and non-print formats. Unlike libraries which collect materials on a single locality or community, my aim is to hold a representative selection of local studies materials for areas around Greece. For this reason, published materials provide the only feasible point of access to local studies across numerous locales.

In addition to my purchasing in Greece, in August 2009 the local studies holdings of the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection got another shot in the arm when I succeeded in procuring the private library of the late Pyrrhus J. Ruches, journalist, scholar, and folklorist, as a gift for the collection. The Ruches Collection contains approximately 3,800 volumes, several hundred audio and video recordings and a handful of maps. Among the material dealing with Hellenic studies is a strong collection on Epirus, Greece's northwestern province that borders Albania to the north, as well as the territory many Greeks call Northern Epirus, an area of southern Albania with a large ethnic Greek population and a source of territorial contention and allegations of human rights abuses at various times during the 20th century. With family roots in Epirus, Ruches had a lifelong interest in the region and its struggles, having authored a book on the ethnic Greek minority in Northern Epirus and second volume, a translation of Albanian historical folksongs into English. With the collection now fully unpacked and sorted, I have found a number of titles not only not listed in WorldCat, but not even listed in the standard bibliography on Epirus in Greek spanning the years 1571-1980. The Ruches Collection has recently been complemented by the purchase of a series

of six visual anthropological films by the French ethnographer Colette Piault produced during the 1970s and 1980s and set in the progressively deserted mountain village of Ano Ravenia in Epirus. These films capture “intimate observations of the isolated villagers’ daily lives—work, family life, marriage—[and] reveal the profound in the ordinary and everyday.” The phenomenon of desertion has been acute in Epirus, which since World War II has seen the largest depopulation and emigration to urban centers of any region in Greece (Clogg, 2002). Thus the local studies materials on Epirus contained in the Ruches Collection become increasingly important documents on the history and culture of a region that continues to undergo dramatic demographic change.

The gift of the Ruches Collection has been a boon enhancing our local studies collection for the region of Epirus, and collecting local studies materials while in Greece has been a fruitful endeavor, but this still lacks the systematic approach I have envisioned for collecting materials from around the country. My intent in the near future is to write solicitation letters to regional and local governments, key foundations, and other organizations throughout Greece requesting donations of local publications. I am hopeful that my requests to local governments will not get lost amid the aftermath of what could end up being a series of chaotic amalgamations. One cannot predict the precise implications of *Kallikratēs*, but such a radical consolidation of local government will undoubtedly have profound implications on the future of local studies in Greece. This makes the awareness, concern, and action to organize and collect local studies materials all the more urgent. A second project is to procure from the Hellenic Parliament gift microfilm of local and regional newspapers. Local history materials are already accessible to our campus community and remotely via interlibrary loan, but I am currently seeking external funding for a Library Research Fellowship Program to enable outside scholars to come to Sacramento to make sustained use of Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection resources such as these while in residence for varying periods of time.

In this brief presentation I have attempted to shed light on the flip-side of how a library can serve as a gateway to local studies by collecting materials on distant locales. Within area studies broadly and Modern Greek studies in particular, local culture is strong, enduring, and a significant factor in understanding broader national contexts. Yet there has been a general neglect of collecting local studies materials due both to practical impediments of acquisitions and also to negative perceptions among those who shape such collections. By exploring how local studies and Modern Greek studies intersect in the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection, along with the rewards and challenges of my collection development efforts in this regard, I hope I have been able to provide some useful insights for others in thinking about the broader scope of local studies in their libraries. Thank you.

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