

**ETUDES HELLENIQUES**

**HELLENIC STUDIES**

**LA NOUVELLE  
IMMIGRATION GRECQUE  
THE NEW WAVE OF  
GREEK MIGRATION**

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**Poètes Chypriotes / Cypriot Poets**

**Livres Reçus / Books Received**

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## **Marios Vaianos, an Ambassador of Greek Letters**

Marios Vaianos was born in 1905, in Cairo, where his father, a Chios cotton merchant, had settled. When Marios was only 3 years old, the Vaianos family left for Chios. Marios completed elementary school and part of his secondary education on the island before moving to Piraeus at age 17. He arrived in the port city in 1922 along with thousands of refugees fleeing the Asia Minor Catastrophe. After finishing high school, Vaianos enrolled in pharmacy at the University of Athens. He soon began his many cultural activities, however, and did not finish a university degree.

Early in 1923, Marios Vaianos started the Acropole, a cultural association. He then began to frequent the Athenian literary crowd of the day. One of the personalities, Tellos Agras, put Vaianos in touch with the Educational Association (Ekpaideutikos Omilos), a progressive group which played a vital role in reforming Greek education. Soon after Vaianos founded the literary magazine, *New Art* (Nea Techni) which also had a progressive and modernizing mission. Along the way, Tellos Agras introduced him to the poetry of Constantin Cavafy, an Alexandrian poet as yet unknown in Greece. Another intellectual, I.M. Panagiotopoulos furthered Marios' appreciation of Cavafy by showing him the poems printed on the single leafs that circulated in those days. At that time, Vaianos also happened to read the important and prophetic article about Cavafy by Grigorios Xenopoulos in the cultural magazine *Panathinaia* (1903).

Vaianos' admiration for Cavafy's poetry incited him to write to the poet at the end of 1923. Cavafy replied and thus began the correspondence between the young Marios Vaianos and the Alexandrian poet. Vaianos did all he could to promote Cavafy's work. He went to meet him for the first and last time in 1932, when the poet came to Athens to be treated for the cancer that was slowly ravaging his body.

Now, Cavafy has become not just a great Greek poet but an internationally well-read and acknowledged poet. Marios Vaianos has been forgotten while others claim to have helped Cavafy earn his status as one of the immortal writers. There are, however, a few authors such as Stratis Tsirkas, a fellow member of the Greek-Egyptian diaspora, who have recognized Vaianos'

efforts to promote not only Cavafy but also other Egyptian writers working in Greek.

Many of Cavafy's letters to Vaianos were printed in a variety of magazines such as the *Philologiki Protochronia* (1964). Others were presented to the public in an exhibition that Vaianos organized in April 1964, at the Cultural Cooperation Agency (*Praktoreio Pneumatikis Synergasias*) which he had founded.

Vaianos' cultural activities are obviously not limited to Cavafy. Once he had created the above-mentioned agency, he undertook to meet and promote writers throughout the diaspora. His agency served as a crossroads between the diaspora and mainland for many artists. Dozens of diaspora authors would pass through the doors of his agency where they found what they needed to promote their work. Cypriot writers also received a warm reception at Vaianos' agency. Among the well-known Cypriots who visited the agency are Kostas Montis, Kypros Chrysanthis, Antis Pernaris, Yiannis Katsouris. During the sixties, Kyriakos Charalambidis, Anthos Lycavgis and Stephanos Constantinides were among the many young Cypriot students in Athens who frequented Vaianos' agency. Other regulars were Loukis Akritas, Melis Nikolaidis, Pavlos Krinaios, and Avgi Shiakalli - all Cypriot authors living in Athens. Also in attendance were Greek authors such as Yiorgos Theotokas, Stratis Myrivilis, Ilias Venezis, Alkis Thrylos, Evangelos Papanoutsos, Photis Kontoglou, Kostas Varnalis, younger ones like Vassilis Vasilikos to name but a few and painters such as Kontoglou, Tsarouchis, Gounaropoulos, Bouzianis and others. The same agency occasionally served also as a gallery.

More than a meeting place for literary types, Vaianos' agency was a hub for actors, reporters, politicians, professors and even ecclesiastics. The most famous man of the cloth was Georges Pirounakis, a progressive priest who was subsequently tried for his ideas by both the official Church and the Junta.

Throughout the years, Vaianos was in touch with several neohellenists around the world. They were able to have books by Greek authors through his agency. In this respect, he created an international network for the promotion of Greek letters around the globe. With his limited means and frugal existence, Marios Vaianos managed to succeed where the Greek state had failed. Indeed, to survive Vaianos worked occasionally as a journalist and turned part of his agency into an art gallery. A few benefactors also helped

him get through particularly hard times.

Although he was a poet himself, Marios Vaianos focused on the work of others rather than on his own. Various texts by Vaianos may be found in newspapers and literary journals in Greece and the diaspora. Some say that he was going to draw upon his rich archives to write a book on Cavafy; however, no such manuscript was found after his death. He did claim to be preparing his own “Literary Memories”, but only a few scattered notes were ever found. Vaianos’ vast, rich archives also scattered after his death in 1976. Perhaps it would be fitting if the dozens of writers in Greece and the diaspora who benefited from his generous spirit could honour his memory with testimonials and the publication of the correspondence that he maintained with them.<sup>1</sup>

**Stephanos Constantinides**

#### NOTES

1. This short piece was prepared by someone who knew Marios Vaianos from 1960-67. In fact, during those years, he was a young student warmly received by the generous man of letters. He has based this text on his memories of that period. Some of the biographical details do come from the book by E.I. Moschos, *K.P. Cavafy Epistoles sto Mario Vaiano* published by Estia, Athens, 1979. The letter from Cavafy to Vaianos put as an appendix, do come also from the same book.

APPENDIX

Letter from Cavafy to Vaianos

4 'Ιουλίου 1925  
Αθήνα  
10 Rue Lepsius

Φίλε κ. Βαϊάνε,

Σας έρωαζώ ούτω άντίλωα  
εύκολοι λών σοι ποιημάτων μου —  
"Τι 25<sup>ον</sup> έτος του βίου σου" και  
"εις 'Ηλυσίαν παραλίαν" — τα  
όσα έβίωσα την περασμένη  
βίτη.

Είδα την έβραση της "Αθήνας"  
(21 και 29 'Ιουλίου)  
\* σοι άδρα του Κορομηλά περὶ  
της λής ποιήσεώς μου.

Σας έρεχα λεχέντων την  
25<sup>ον</sup> 'Ιουλίου.

Με αγάπην ευδύμουα,  
Κ. Π. Καβάφης.