

The Contribution of the Greek Intellectual Elite to Greek-speaking Education in the Soviet Union (1920–1937)

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Abstract: The assessment of contribution of the Greek Intellectual elite from Greek speaking areas of USSR is interesting because it points out the policy of the Soviet socialistic government for the heterogeneity of the population — according to their understanding — and mainly because it reveals the ways and the means that the mediators that applied the educational policy, used in order to reshape the new national education system. An archive of 106 textbooks reveals the role of the Greek speaking elite in USSR after the domination of Bolsheviks on the Greek speaking areas on 1920 until the beginning of Stalin's acts of exile. The aim of this study is to describe this literature and everything around their topics and the role of the local intellectual elite on the ways that they determine this literature and through them their contribution to the local educational policy. Qualitative analysis and the historical interpretive method were used to study the material. As part of this paper, the researcher sought textbooks, recorded them, studied their content, interpreted and processed it. The research material, which was original, was rescued and studied for the first time.

Keywords: Greek minority, USSR, textbooks, intellectual elite

1. Historical Frame

After the Bolsheviks prevailed, in the period 1920–1934, their leaders adopted a policy formulated by Lenin, which advocated absolute equality of all nations and languages within the new State (Marx & Engels, 1848). In this context, the Greek communities managed to develop culturally, to cultivate traditions and customs and to stand out with their cultural presence in all fields.

One of the main forms of Greek intellectual elite's cultural action was their publishing activity. The publishing houses that seem to have operated during this period in the Greek-speaking areas of the USSR were: a) the publishing house *Communist*, established in Rostov-on-Don, for the Greeks of southern Russia and Transcaucasia, which, according to books written to date, published within a decade (1928–1937) 546 Greek books, 259 books in the Pontic Greek dialect and 287 in the modern Greek language (Karpozilos & Karpozilou, 1988-89),

b) the publishing house *Kolektivists*, based in Mariupol for the Greeks of Ukraine, which began its activities in 1930,

c) the publishing house in Krimskagia town, which was the administrative center of the autonomous Greek

region, and

d) the publishing house of the newspaper Kokinos Kapnas at Sukhumi (Agtzidis, 2010).

The Greek intellectual elite was divided regarding the matter of education language. The need for building the language of education in the Soviet Union became imperative, while the first trend concerned the excoriation of *Purifying* (a heavily archaized form of Modern Greek). On May 10th, 1926, during the All-Union Congress of Greek Intellectuals in Moscow, the Central Committee of the New Alphabet proposed the use of *Demotic Greek* (modern vernacular form of the Greek language) as official language of the minority and as education language instead of *Purifying*, and the use of Pontic or Mariupol Greek dialects in schools for adult illiterates or semiliterates (Topcharas, 1928, pp. 4–10), and accepted the proposal of the Central Committee of the New alphabet for replacing the historical phonetic spelling.

2. The Role of Greek Intellectual Elite Through the Archives of Greek Books

2.1 Aims and Objectives of This Research

The objectives and individual research goals include the following:

- a) genre classification of manuals written by representatives of Greek intellectual elite,
- b) their thematic classification,
- c) presentation of the topics selected by the authors,
- d) their classification according to their date of issue, and
- e) drawing conclusions on the contribution of the Greek intellectual elite in the Socialist construction during this period.

2.2 Methodology

The methodology followed is complex because the number of manuals and topics, on which the authors worked, exclude the option of a single method. Specifically, qualitative analysis was used along with the historical interpretive method (Garraghan, 1946).

With respect to the qualitative analysis, the manuals and books published in the Greek-speaking communities in the Soviet Union were used as sampling unit (Krippendorf, 1980), whereas the “subject” was selected as a recording unit, because we considered that it what reflects the value code of Greek-speaking populations of the Soviet Union (Holsti, 1969).

2.3 Description of the Sample

The archived material of the research derives from three archives and amounts to 106 books in total. In the first archive, the one of the Library “Ioannis Sykoutris” of the Academy of Athens, there are 66 of them, 31 are part of the unpublished private archive of Konstantinos Fotiadis, whilst 9 books were found in the personal library of Dimitris Glinos. Everything is written in the phonetic alphabet in Demotic Greek or in the Pontic dialect. The majority of them have been published by the Communist publishing house in Rostov-on-Don between 1931–1933.

The books are originally classified according to: a) the time of publication, b) the place and the publishing house. Indicative of the time of publication of the books is in Figure 1. There we can see that almost 39% of the books available to us was issued in 1932, 26% of them in 1931, whilst 11% of the sample in 1933.

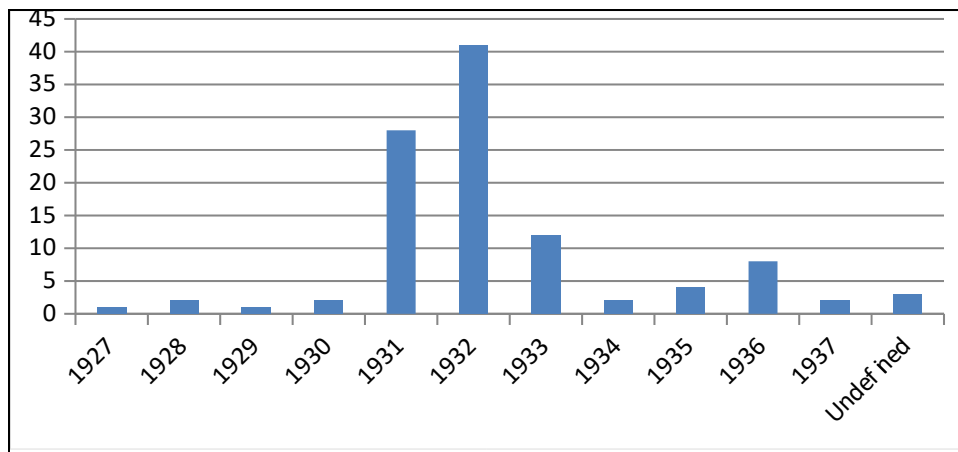


Figure 1 Year of Publication of Books

Based on the place of publishing included in the above records, we reach the conclusion that the vast majority (75%) has been published by the publishing house of Communist in Rostov-on-Don. The rich editorial production of the period 1931–1933 can be mainly attributed to the publishing house the Communist in Rostov-on-Don. This is also indicated in sources of the period, which recorded that in 1931–1932 an independent publication was organized in the publishing house Communist, the runs of which reached 500,000, while the names of the books totaled 174. In 1933 the quality of the books and their contents were improved, and from September 1st, 21 titles of books were issued for the schools of first grade (Fotiadis, 1933).

Another classification form is their breakdown into originals and translations. It is worth noting that a major part of the books were translations of works of Russians adopted for their party orientation, such as Stalin or Lenin, and of others who stood out for the quality of their literary work, such as Tolstoy, Neverof, Gratskov. Books of the Greek authors are found very often, such as K. Topcharas, D. Eristeas, G. Kanonidis, E.Th. Lefkopoulos, and also A. Kokinos, Th. Grigoriadis, G. Fotiadis and A. Erithriadis as translators.

Attempting a thematic classification of the sample we may form the following classes:

1) School textbooks

2) Political books

3) Books for the illiterate (as “books for the illiterate” we characterize those aimed at illiterate people. This is a grammar designated as “Grammar for the elderly” and many books with practical tips for home economics, agricultural works etc.)

4) Literature

As shown in Figure 2, most books are school textbooks (55), followed by the political books (24), the literature books (15), while least are the “books for the illiterate” (12).

The sample included 3 Grammars, 12 primer-reading textbooks, 8 Philology and Literature books, 7 Mathematics, 7 Natural Sciences books, 8 Sociology, 2 books for the “Worth”, 3 Geography books, and 5 guides for teachers.

Regarding the school books the presence of many sociology books can be associated with the absence of the course of history from the curriculum of schools of that period, as well as the adoption of the role of political education or propaganda from the corresponding course. Relating the number of books for language and literature to this of mathematics and science courses, we noticed that there is significant number of practical guide books.

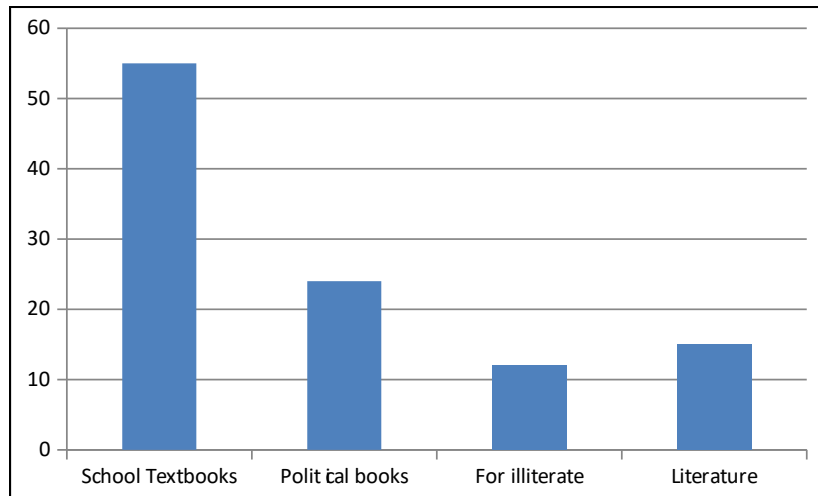


Figure 2 Thematic Classification of Books

2.4 Qualitative Analysis

Then, categories and subcategories were formed based on the qualities of the writers' speech as follows: a) political books, b) "books for the illiterate" and c) literature books.

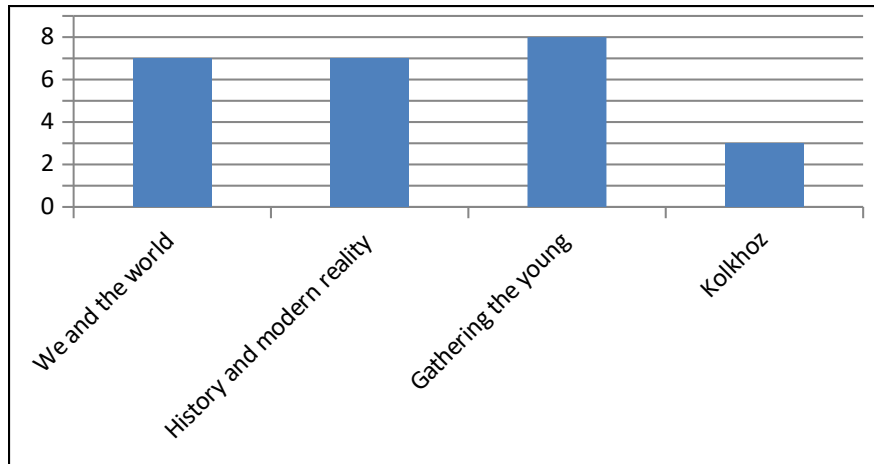


Figure 3 Political Books

2.4.1 Political Books

Regarding the **political books** the main categories are shown in Figure 3.

Specifically, the categories are as follows:

a) "We and the world": This category includes books aimed at comparing the communist regime with political systems of other countries. On this thematic there were extensive references to the disadvantages of the bourgeoisie, the yoke of capitalism, the unconventional behavior of the bourgeoisie that turned against the soviet front. Anyway, the authors went on an apparent comparison of the parts, highlighting the superiority of the Soviet regime.

b) The history of Bolshevism and modern reality: It is about books presenting the phenomenon of Bolshevism in the historical dimension of time. The events chosen to be presented praised its importance and were characterized by objectivity in the description or presentation of their protagonists. The books of the contemporary

period of the authors aimed at political enlightenment, as they included either Stalin's speeches or they were about the attempt on Lenin or the problems of Marxist education.

c) Encouraging the young people-Standards and manipulation: This category includes books appropriate for Komsomolets. Their target group was in some cases perceived clearly even by their title — *For the Komsomol* or *Revolutionary struggle of Komsomolets* — while in other cases it was implied — *Young warriors* — Aiming at association and manipulation of young men, who served the proletariat and excelled in it, such as Yefremovich Voroshilov, while in other cases poetry was engaged for reasons of propaganda- *I sing the five-year* (songs for the Bolsheviks and their struggle).

d) The movement of kolkhoz: The last thematic included books relating to the agricultural policy of collective farms (kolkhoz), working in them, the need for joint work, military service and dedication to the principles of communism to achieve social reform.

The political books emphasized the dimension of incitement-gathering young people to embrace the ideals of socialism. With slight difference the frequencies were distributed equally in two subcategories, regarding the history and reality of Bolshevism, its comparison with other regimes, to note a smaller number of projects concerning the kolkhoz and the movement.

Table 1 Excerpts of Political Books

Category	Cite
“We and the world”	Venizelos, bloodstained, hangman of the workers and employees of Greece, [...] prepares today rabid a new massacre, he sent army and fleet to Russia to strangle the Russian revolution in blood (Alexis, 1931).
The history of Bolshevism and the modern reality	Comrades![...] The Bolsheviks did not separate the theoretical issues of work and marxist-lenin education from the problems of revolutionary practice (Posstisev, Stets, 1931).
Exhortation to the young people-Standards and manipulation	Voroshilov joined the party with Lenin’s guidance (Nikolaev, 1932)
The movement of kolkhoz	The issue of entry of social food in kolkhoz must first be discussed at the meeting (Gromov, 1932).

2.4.2 “Books for the Illiterate”

As for the “books for the illiterate” the basic categories are shown in Figure 4.

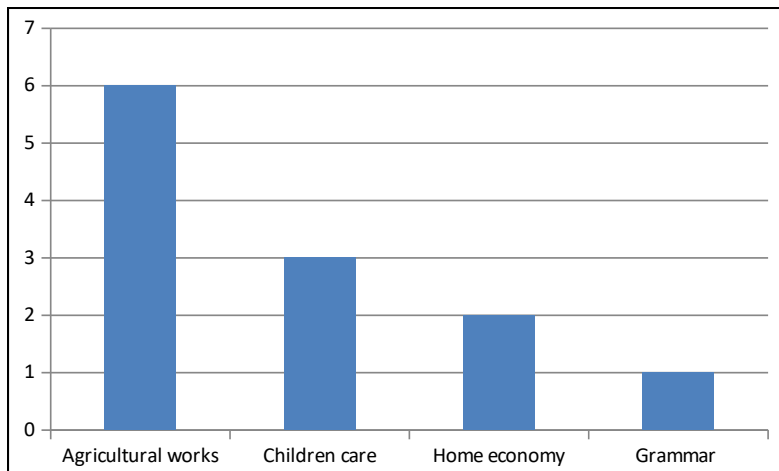


Figure 4 The “Books for the Illiterate”

Specifically, the categories are as follows:

a) Agricultural-rural works: This category includes books that describe effectively the agricultural and farming practices that could increase productivity of the unit and shield the worker from futile effort. The titles of the books made clear to the student the kind of works that took place in these regions; tobacco technique and culture, egg storage etc.

b) Child care: Purpose of this category was to provide practical guidance to parents regarding the hygiene of their children. So, disease symptoms were clearly described, accompanied by pictures, and ways for parents to address them were suggested. Also “good habits” for raising children were proposed.

c) Home economics: These were two books dealing with problems of the household, its taxation, provided practical advice on the organization of the house and the prevention of any kind of waste.

d) Grammar for the elderly: The presence of only one book on this theme could be an indication of the practical orientation of life. The book explained basic rules of grammar and syntax using many examples.

Half of the books for the illiterate preserved in the archives under question aimed at providing practical advice to farm workers for carrying out their daily work. They had an auxiliary role, which was particularly evident from the graphic illustration that identified their pages.

Table 2 Excerpts From The “Books For The Illiterate”

Category	Cite
Agricultural-rural work	Tobacco grows in all soils. The quality and quantity of the crop of tobacco depends, besides the soil, on the climate and the proper observation of the weather and the right time of harvest (Seleskeridis, 1932).
Childcare	The baby’s health condition gradually improved and slowly regained his/her strength after just a week (Soloviov, 1932).
Home economics	The flax, cotton crops and other seeds were taxable [...] in collective households (Anonymous, translation, Kokiny, 1933).
Grammar for the elderly	Whatever we speak, write is written and spoken language (Lefkopoulos, nd).

2.4.3. Literature books

Regarding the literature books the main categories are:

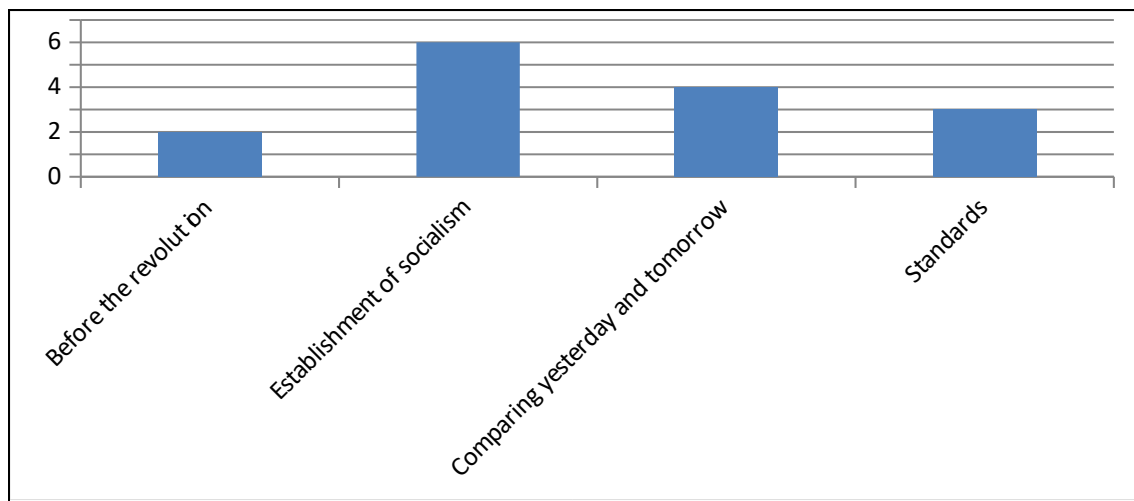


Figure 5 Literature Books

a) The years before the revolution: the era of hunger and destruction. This category included the books, as the publishers mentioned in their preface, that highlighted the years of hunger and destruction. In their descriptions and narratives, the period before the revolution was depicted with the darkest colors. During it, the workers worked all day in appalling conditions and had to face toil and hunger. The civil war and the rural living conditions, along with all the difficulties they carried, were a recurring subject and determined the face — a common face — of those texts' category.

b) The years of establishment of socialism: This category includes the works describing the struggle for the establishment of the new principles of socialism. Some of them presented the materialist theory, while the “big events” were described and analyzed under Marxist, proletarian review. The reader was watching the daily life and struggles of the peasants, stock-farmers, workers, who fought tooth and nail, but always with a sense of overall justice and equality of anyone in the new building. In many cases there was reference to the labour problems faced by modern employees, however everything was done in order to promote the idea of peaceful reconstruction of the Soviet democracy, which could occur with the faith of everyone in it and by accepting its principles.

c) Comparison of yesterday and today: This category could include the texts of both the above categories, as in each there was indirectly a latent comparison between the laid-up and full of disasters Tsarist regime on the one hand and the promising, fair and equitable socialist future on the other hand. However, in one case the comparison was made in a more than direct and clear way.

In the book *Before and after* the writer A. Kokinos, stated in the preface that his intention is to *present life of the poor workers of Greek (romeiki) mass before October*. He described his intention to write a sort of epic, whose first two books would refer to life before and after the revolution, while the third book would refer to the difficulties encountered by their relatives who chose the option of Greece. Emphasis was placed on the proletariat ideals, which were inspired by the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Stalin, and led to the successes of socialism, building a society without classes.

The comparison with life in Greece is the subject of the book *Letters of my aunt Sofia to her nephew*. This is a series of 14 letters sent by a Greek woman, residing then in Greece, to her relatives living in the USSR. The letters described indirectly the economic, social situation of refugees. Reference was made to religion, the existence of churches and faith of the people, to agricultural works, but also the language issue, the 24-letter writing, the people with long hair and the meaningless *daseia* (rough breathing diacritical mark) and diacritics. It is worth stressing that while in her first letters Aunt Sofia encouraged her relatives to come to Greece, where money still had value, the letters that followed rather devalued the settlement in the ancestral hearth and served dedication to the principles of socialism.

d) Standards: This category includes texts or poems about the revolution and its protagonists. So, in the work *Toksareas* it was stressed that the country must be aware of its fighters. Here's a series of poems dedicated to people who took the lead in the fight, *Dedicated to Modoron the fighter*, *Dedicated to Panikas in Novorossiysk*, *To Chapar...* The same spirit of the projection of a proper functioning socialistic behavior had the short story *Psilena*, which describes the activity of an old woman who took the leadership of the local organization of a village famous for its savage inhabitants and managed to defend the women of the area. The story attempted to highlight woman as an equal member in the service of socialist reconstruction also indirectly emphasizing the role dictated to everyone, regardless of their capabilities they believed they had, the historical and especially the political conjuncture.

Almost half of the rescued literature production is devoted to describing the ills of life before the October

revolution, which probably indicates an intention to remind of familiar bads, to provoke disgust for that period, but also to ensure in a roundabout way the participation of readers in an effort to consolidate the socialist society.

Table 3 Excerpts From Literature Books

Category	
The years before the revolution: the era of hunger and destruction.	Voices, bustle, angry dogs, screaming babies, boys cursing, women yammering (in this whole tragedy of Babylonia...) (Serafimovitz, 1932)
The years of consolidation of socialism	To fully present the issues of modern productive life, the issues of the reconstruction period, the rural masses, [...] the fields [...] should take part in the discussion to show signs of production (Solochoy, 1931).
Comparison of yesterday and today — Comparison with life in Greece	You came, he said, Nikolas, to be hungry and on the “holy soil” like a dog on the road, to die (Eristeas, 1930).
Standards	We all have now equal rights (Kamanin, 1932)

3. Conclusion

The contribution of the Greek intellectual elite in shaping the socialist transformation conditions was decisive. At a time when the leaders of the Bolsheviks adopted the policy that was formulated by Lenin on the basis of full equality of all nations and languages, the Greek intellectual elite organized in the local area, issued significant number of newspapers, books and school textbooks, which aimed at integrating the Greek-speaking populations in the Soviet edifice. Despite the fact that the publishing production was militant and propagated the socialist principles or highlighted their importance in relation to the capitalist principles, without hesitating to often engage in direct comparison with the Greek regime, by praising populations who had chosen the USSR for settlement, it indeed articulated its own reason and gave its own critical responses to language, cultural expression and education issues. Finally, the Greek-speaking regional elites were preparing the integration of future generations in a Greek language education, which was according to their visions in line with Soviet society and its objectives. Therefore, in this light, the contribution of the Greek intellectual elite in the socialist edifice is considered essential.

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