

Preface

An increasing number of research studies on neohellenic² architects have been published in recent years with a critical change relating to the previous ones. In the past, scholars depended mainly on the description and survey of the actual buildings, often transformed from their original design by additions and alterations. To a lesser extent, they depended on the investigation of written documents (i.e. press, descriptions by other historians) and, especially in the case of Athens, on oral interviews, narratives and reminiscences, which often contain elements of myth. A characteristic example of such a treatment is the description of the Duchess of Plaisance building in Athens. This widespread attitude towards architectural historiography was explained by the lack of well-organized and easy accessible archives.

However, as the Greek State advanced from the 19th to the 20th century, and the built environment expanded continuously along with the number of graduate architects from local and European universities, this particular type of research proved to be no longer sufficient. The opportunity to access the records of those architects, either through the places they worked (technical departments of ministries, municipalities, bank institutions etc.) or through the architects' own archives, opened new fields in the architectural research. This new type of research in addition to the old ones, of no inconsiderable value, helped in a critical manner the work of recording the history of neohellenic architecture. Another significant contribution was the establishment in the 90's of the Neohellenic Architecture Archives of the Benaki Museum. The Archives of Neohellenic Architecture collects, classifies and makes available for further research a constantly increasing number of architects' personal archives. Hence, the work of many neohellenic architects is now available to historiographers, producing a more accurate documentation and interpretation of the Modern Greek Architecture. Through Archives of Neohellenic Architecture the work of unknown or hardly known native architects gains publicity and appraisal.

In this context, Lila Theodoridou's monograph on Nicholas Zoumboulidis is coming to fill-up a gap. With systematic, conscientious and infinite patience and persistence Lila Theodoridou was able to gather unique data on this architect from Asia Minor, whose work marked the architecture of Greek bank buildings, creating even a trend. Working on organized archives like the ones of the National Bank of Greece and the Archives of Neohellenic Architecture, filing publications, discussing with Zoumboulidis' friends and descendants, she did not neglect any piece of information. On the contrary, every indication, every detail she came across, was an excuse to unlock new doors and to bring new elements to light. Her footnotes alone constitute an invaluable source of information on a series of events, architects and buildings; documented in a way which can lead to further research.

²The term refers to the Greek state, from its establishment in 1828 until today

Next to this purely scientific work, the author manages to describe with sensitivity, avoiding carefully any exaggerations or melodramatic comments, the temperament and distinctive identity of Nicholas Zoumboulidis, a man particularly significant for Greek architecture, who was able to combine the formal academic architecture of the interwar period with elements of the Greek folk tradition, including even memories of his own birthplace (Asia Minor). Although his term in the Technical Department of the National Bank of Greece led him towards conservative solutions of a revived classicism, he often managed to escape and follow more avant-garde choices.

The work of Mrs Theodoridou not only revives the work and life of Nicholas Zoumboulidis but also brings to light a less known part of the interwar architecture in Greece, as most of the existing studies principally deal with eclecticism or the “return to the routes” movement or even the modernism, while they touch slightly, or not at all, the subject of the last phase of the late, maybe decadent, but still existing classicism.

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Introduction

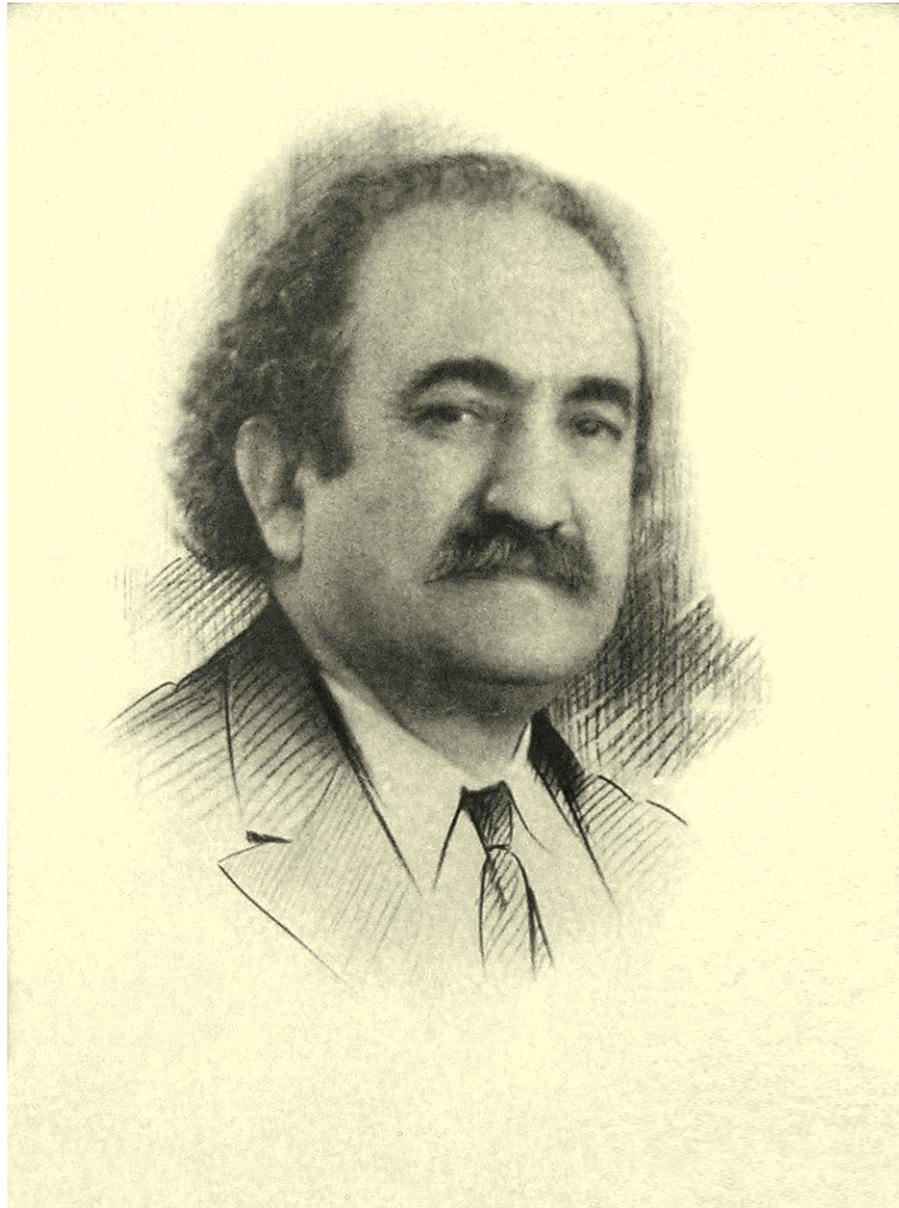
This treatise is not just an honorary volume on the life of a Greek architect. It does not comprise only an outline of his architectural projects or a presentation of his incentives. It is rather a narrative of the professional life of an outstanding architect in line with the cultural trends of his time. An architect who had the possibility to design and built massive institutional buildings, aimed to be impressive and imposing while at the same time, small and sensitive; buildings that although differ from one another remain always clear and straightforward; buildings that were built mainly in the interwar period, a period which has started to attract the last few years a strong interest by the modern Greek architectural historiographers.

With studies in Constantinople and Berlin, influenced by the discoveries of the Aegean prehistory, placed in the environment of the strongest financial institution of Greece and associating with the economic elite of his time, Zoumboulidis remained a practical, effective and imaginative architect. An Asia Minor man with European education and experiences. A skillful manager, a nature lover and, above all, a man with social awareness.

The architect's principal professional activity was the coordination of the great interwar building program of the National Bank of Greece. Zoumboulidis managed to vitalize the National Bank's classicist and neo-byzantine structures with his personal choices: ceramic friezes with archaic and popular motifs and Minoan type columns. On the other hand, in his few, but notable, private works in the suburban Athenian "garden cities" of Ekali and Filothei, he had the opportunity to experiment using local stone and traditional forms in a very personal way. Zoumboulidis' intellectual environment consisted of classism, neo-byzantinism and the "return to the roots" movement along with the idealization of the "pure" countryside and the love of traveling. Actually, it was an elegant, upper middle class environment that referred to a peaceful and happy world, despite the surrounding wars and uncertainties.

The treatise's research methodology goes beyond the interpretation of architectural works as freestanding objects and examines their social value through the personality of their creators-architects. In Zoumboulidis' specific case, this approach was supported not only by bibliographical resources but also by interviews of his daughter Eva; by an extensive field research at National Bank's Historical Archive and at the Archives of Neohellenic Architecture at Benaki Museum. In sum, if something could be stressed by me with certainty, after this long time survey, is that architectural historiography using archival sources, is a valuable tool to document buildings and architects, a methodology – unfortunately- not enough explored in Greece yet.

I would like to warmly thank Mrs. Eva Zoumboulidis - Caragianis, Mr. Gerasimos Notaras, director of the Historical Archives of the National Bank of Greece and Mrs. Maro Kardamitsi-Adami, in Charge of the Archives of Neohellenic Architecture, for the resources they made available to me.



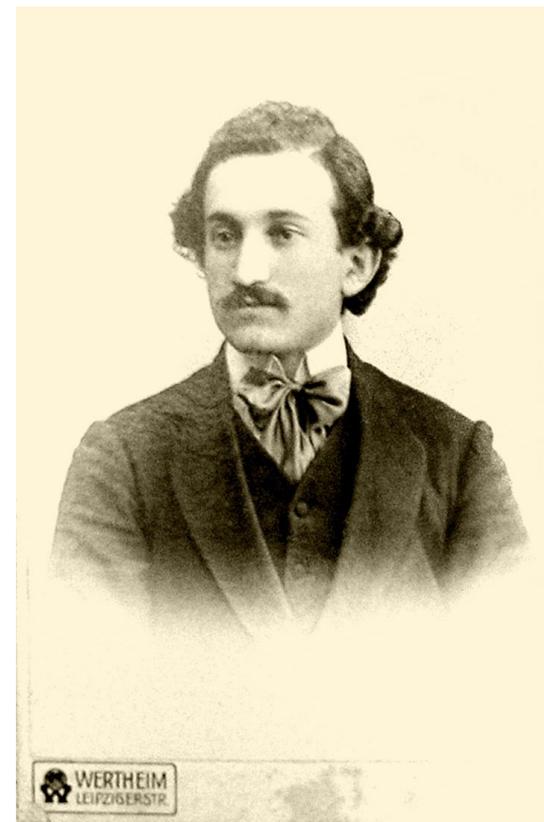
A handwritten signature in black ink, likely reading "Nicholas Zoumboulidis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail.

Portrait of Nicholas Zoumboulidis
(Eva Zoumboulidis collection)

1. Studies and other interests

For Nicholas Zoumboulidis' life (1888 - 1969) as well as for his significant architectural work there are only scattered biographical references. He was born in Sinasos of Cappadocia, Turkey; he graduated from the School of Fine Arts of Constantinople (1908) and after working for two years in the Pious Foundations Directorate, he went to complete his studies at the Berlin Technische Hochschule from 1910 to 1912³. In Berlin he worked in the architectural department of Berlin's Botanical Garden and later he was appointed in the city's Bureau of New Museums, under the supervision of Ludwig Hoffmann⁴. In 1914 he returned to Greece and was appointed engineer to the Municipality of Pagasae (today known as Volos)⁵. From 1917 to 1919 he assumed the position of assistant to Aristidis Sp. Balanos, director of the Technical Department of the National Bank of Greece. In 1920 he becomes assistant director and after Balanos' death, in 1927, Zoumboulidis succeeds him as director of the department and becomes one of the leaders of the bank's great expansion during the interwar period.

Student in Berlin (around 1910)
(Eva Zoumboulidis collection)



- ³ His father, Charalambos Zoumboulidis, had a small grocery business in Constantinople and expected Nikos to succeed him. For this reason, he refused to finance his studies in Berlin. The young Zoumboulidis started to learn German, attending private lessons with the daughter of a professor of the German language at Robert College. She also helped him study in Berlin and later became his wife and mother of his children. He was so very poor during his studies, that he was staying with a Greek family cooking their meals instead of paying rent.
- ⁴ Ludwig Hoffmann (1852-1932), the well-known classicist architect, was responsible since 1896 for the urban planning of the City of Berlin, where he left a number of interesting buildings (i.e. the monumental Museum of Pergamos). In 1910 he submitted a design for the urban redevelopment of the city of Athens. In the Historical Archives of the National Bank of Greece (Historical Archives of the National Bank of Greece) there is a copy of a work contract between Nicholas Zoumboulidis and the Bureau of New Museums, dated 22-7-1914. (Historical Archives of the National Bank of Greece, file A1Σ37Y106N)
- ⁵ The digital archives of the Pagasae Municipality contain a written order giving Nicholas Zoumboulidis the title of chief engineer, along with the request to the mayor to sign the corresponding contract and a grant of 3150 drachmas for the payment of a raise in his salary (Minutes, volume 13/1917, p.347-349, number of decision 38). In the Historical Archives of the National Bank of Greece there is a certificate from the Pagasae Municipality, confirming that he worked as city engineer from 1/2/1915 to 31/3/1917 (Historical Archives of the National Bank of Greece file Zoumboulidis-Balanos, document number 7999/12-11-1928).

His most important public works during this period are the branch office of the National Bank on the Poseidonos coast in Pireaus (1928 – 1934: today the Treasury of the Navy Veterans Pension Fund)⁶, the Athens Stock-Exchange Building (1928-1936) and the building of the Historical Archives of the National Bank on the 3rd of September Street (1923-1928: today known as Mansion Diomede). In charge of a large team of architects, he also coordinated the work on the headquarters building of the Bank of Greece in Athens (1929-1938), the head office of the National Bank of Greece and of the Bank of Greece in Thessaloniki (1928-1933) and a network of National Bank branch offices throughout Greece.

During the same period, he designed the private Sanatorium of his personal friend Dr. Ioannis Papadimitriou in Penteli (today the hospital A of the Social Security Services, known as «Penteli»), the country residence of Loukia Zygomala in Avlonas (1937) (today the Zygomalas Museum), the church of Agios⁷ Nikolaos in Nea Sinasos (1925-1934), the church of Agioi Anargyroi in Athens (1938)⁸, the apartment building on Dioharous Street (1935), the building of «The Benevolent and Educational Society of the ladies of Kallithea and Nea Smyrna» and many others. He, along with the president of the National Bank of Greece – Ioannis Drossopoulos - was the initiator for the creation of the garden city of Filothei (Athens) and amongst the first residents of the suburb.



With his family
(Eva Zoumboulidis collection)

⁶ The building was temporarily occupied by the newly established Agricultural Bank, the National Land Bank and soon later by the Bank of Greece. The announcement of the National Architectural Competition for the design of the National Bank in Pireaus was published in the «Technical Works» (May 15, 1927). The inauguration of the building took place in 1934. (Newspaper New Times, «The inauguration ceremony in our city of the mansion of the National Bank of Greece in Pireaus» year E1, no 672, Jan.2,1934,p.1)

⁷ The word Agios (pl. Agioi) is the Greek word for saint

⁸ A complete set of dated plans (Athens, Nov. 1938) of the church of Agioi Anargyroi is being kept at the Archives of Neohellenic Architecture/ Benaki, file Zoumboulidis. It consists of floor plans, elevations, sections and a perspective of a church with a bell tower centrally placed on the west elevation. Today, the existing church has no similarity whatsoever to the Zoumboulidis drawings except for the central bell tower. In the church's website is stated that the building was built in 1938, inaugurated in 1940, by John Nanos (engineer) and George Katsoulis (architect).