

VOCABULARY OF
MODERN SPOKEN GREEK

Donald C. Stevenson

FOREWORD

This reprint of Donald C. Swanson's *Vocabulary of Modern Spoken Greek* is a response to persistent requests for its republication by colleagues in the field of modern Greek studies. More specifically, it is a response to a request expressed by participants at the First Conference on Modern Greek in the Universities of the English-speaking World, held in Athens in December 1980. During one session at that conference, discussion focused on the need for new teaching tools for Modern Greek and, above all, the need for compiling a practical Greek-English and English-Greek dictionary. As the discussion progressed, it became clear that what the conference participants were envisaging was something like Donald C. Swanson's *Vocabulary of Modern Spoken Greek*, which had been used successfully for two decades in the teaching of Modern Greek at the University of Minnesota and other campuses, and which had acquired a reputation as something of an indispensable companion to students and serious travelers to Greece. When during the discussion I alluded to Swanson's work, several participants responded by describing it as still the best of its kind in the field, but unfortunately out of print.

At first, some colleagues recommended the possibility of a revised and extended version of the *Vocabulary of Modern Spoken Greek*. Soon, however, the opinion of distinguished linguists that the work should be reprinted as it existed at the time of the author's death in 1976 prevailed. The decision to leave the work undisturbed is a tribute to Swanson's accomplishment, that is to say, a recognition of the soundness of his approach to the compilation of the *Vocabulary*. To the trained eye, it is easily discernible that Swanson's dictionary, which he modestly described as a vocabulary, was the apex of a career of hard study in linguistics, philology and lexicography, climaxed by a year of field work in Greece. Swanson adhered to the theory that just as recourse to texts, usually available only in written form, is imperative for a description or understanding of a language, equally imperative is the realization that oral sources give the only legitimate picture of a contemporary language. While in Greece, therefore, he traveled extensively, paying special attention to local dialects because he believed that they had as great a right to be subsumed under a study of Modern Greek as the "Katharevusa" or Puristic form of the language, which until 1976 was the official language of instruction

in Greece. The main characteristic of the Swanson dictionary, then, is its decided emphasis on the demotic or spoken Greek, including those puristic forms or expressions which have established themselves as part of the spoken language. The linguistic reforms enacted in 1976 in Greece, championing the demotic, vindicated Swanson's approach to the study of Modern Greek and will certainly make the dictionary more useful than ever before.

The dictionary's usefulness lies primarily in its practical features. For example, among Modern Greek dictionaries it is the only one that provides the two stems—the present and the aorist—necessary for the formation of the complete verbal system. This device enables the neophyte of Modern Greek to expand appreciably on the creative use of the *Vocabulary*. Similarly, Swanson pays special attention to the irregular verbs and directs the reader accordingly by providing cross-references. Another outstanding feature for a dictionary of this size is the variety of examples of basic usages and idiomatic expressions under many entries. This occurs both in the English-Greek and Greek-English parts of the dictionary. The *Vocabulary* is particularly useful to beginning students in its examples of preposition usage. Finally, an unusual feature of this volume is the author's introduction, in which he provides an insightful commentary on the history, structure, orthography and pronunciation of Modern Greek. This part of the *Vocabulary* constitutes an impressive study in itself, and it reflects the author's scholarship and erudition in history, linguistics and philology. The introduction could, in fact, be published separately as an introduction to teachers as well as students of Modern Greek. Published together with the vocabulary, it transforms the volume into a veritable handbook of Modern Greek.

It is a matter of considerable satisfaction that the republication of this volume is done in collaboration with the Modern Greek Studies Program at the University of Minnesota. Donald C. Swanson introduced the teaching of Modern Greek at the University of Minnesota in 1954. Even though primarily a classicist, he believed in a diachronic approach to the study of Greek culture, and was quite optimistic about the development of modern Greek studies in the United States, where until the 1960s there had not been a strong tradition in the field. As he put it in the introduction of his useful and pioneering bibliography of modern Greek studies, completed in 1960, "A few classicists [in the United States] knew Modern Greek, men like B. I. Wheeler and C. D. Buck. The majority of publications issuing from this country have been by scholars born and trained in Europe." But, he hastened to add, "There are signs, however, that modern Greek studies are developing, and the rising generation shows evidence of interest and ability" (Donald C. Swanson, *Modern Greek Studies in the West: A Critical Bibliography of Studies on Modern Greek Linguistics, Philology and Folklore in Languages other than Greek* [New York: The New York Public Library, 1960], 23). Eight years after he made these comments, the Modern Greek Studies Association in the

United States was founded, evidence of growing interest in the field on a scholarly level.

And it is fair to conclude that the present efforts for the development of modern Greek studies at the University of Minnesota are, in a way, a continuation of the activities of Donald C. Swanson, classicist, neohellenist, bibliographer, and lexicographer.

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Theofanis G. Stavrou

Donald C. Swanson was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on November 18, 1914. He began his training as a classicist at the University of Minnesota, where he received his B.A. (1936) and M.A. (1939) with a major in the classical languages and a minor in the Romance languages. He continued at Princeton University, where he received both an M.A. and a Ph.D. in 1941, under the direction of Professor Harold H. Bender, chairman of the Department of Oriental Languages. Swanson's specialties were Sanskrit and Indo-European comparative philology and his dissertation was "The Greek and Sanskrit Written Accent."

After teaching in the Department of Classics at the University of Colorado in 1942, he worked at the United States Navy Japanese language school in 1942–1943. Soon thereafter, he became a language consultant with the United States Armed Forces for two years (1944–1945), during which period he served as an assistant editor of Swedish-English and Japanese-English common-usage dictionaries. In 1946, he joined the Department of Classics at the University of Minnesota, where he taught until his death on April 12, 1976. At Minnesota, he participated actively in the linguistic and comparative philology programs, distinguishing himself both as a teacher and as a publishing scholar. Swanson was also responsible for introducing the teaching of Modern Greek at the University of Minnesota and for the development of special teaching aids for this course. In addition to the *Vocabulary of Modern Spoken Greek*, for which he received the Triopian Archeological Society Award, he also published *Modern Greek Studies in the West: A Critical Bibliography of Studies on Modern Greek Linguistics, Philology and Folklore in Languages other than Greek* (1960).