article/ An Obituary for George Pagoulatos

author/ Alexandros Tsakos, University of Bergen

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The year 2022 marks a jubilee for Nubian studies. Fifty years ago, the International Society for Nubian Studies (ISNS) was founded during the first International Conference for Nubian Studies (ICNS). Like then, this year's ICNS took place in Warsaw, the headquarters of the study of—at least—medieval, or Christian, Nubia. For the ISNS, the jubilee was also, in many ways, a year of reflection on the deeds of the past and the pioneers who founded and promoted the field of Nubiology—a discipline born in the context of the 1972 ICNS in Warsaw. What could not escape the attention of anyone present at this year's ICNS was the fact that so many of these pioneers were absent. From the group involved in the Aswan High Dam Campaigns, for example, only Stefan Jakobielski was present. Many may have been afraid of the pandemic; some are no longer active; others have left this world. The list of the latter is long. The names of Bill Adams, Hans-Åke Nördström, László Török, and Stefan Wenig perhaps suffice to underline the weight of the moment the ISNS commemorated their departure. Commemorating late colleagues at the ICNS is not a new practice. This year, however, there was a novelty in the necrology. The participants were reminded of the death of a person who, though not a scholar, was the warmest supporter and most efficient facilitator of the fieldwork of foreign missions to Sudan. This person is none other than George Pagoulatos, who passed away in June 2022. He was the pillar of the Acropole Hotel, home away from home for so many of us, researchers and travelers passing through Khartoum or expatriates living there.

I met George on the first day of my very first visit to Khartoum in 1994. I had been invited by one of the thousands of Greek families that have lived in Sudan since the nineteenth century, when the first Greeks appeared in the Middle Nile in modern times, following the armies of Mohamed Ali, the governor of Egypt born in Kavala in modern-day Greece. Two regions of modern-day Greece contributed the most to the diaspora population of Sudan: the eastern Aegean islands, thanks to the boat connection between Istanbul

and Egypt passing by these islands, and the Ionian islands, thanks to their long-standing links with Europe—especially the British Empire, ruler of the islands between 1809 and 1862. The island of Cephalonia played a particular role in these emigrations, as testified by the oldest known textual source produced by a Greek of Sudan, namely the diary of Angelos Kapatos, allegedly the most important merchant of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. And among the Cephalonians of Sudan, the Pagoulatos family stands out.

The Pagoulatos family achieved renown in the second half of the twentieth century. During World War II, Panaghis Pagoulatos left Cephalonia and settled in Egypt, where he met his wife Flora, a member of the Greek diaspora of Alexandria. There, their first son, Thanassis, was born. The family soon settled in Khartoum, where Panaghis was employed by the British government, working as a private accountant in the afternoons to complement the family's income. With his first capital, he opened a night club just opposite the governor's house, and in 1952, he founded the Acropole Hotel on the corner of Zubeir Pasha Street (no. 52) and Babikr Badr Street, right behind Jamhuria Street, Khartoum's central avenue. The first establishment had only ten rooms. Forty more were added in 1954, when a building across the street was annexed to the original premises. Panaghis and Flora ran the hotel until the founder's death in 1967. Flora was subsequently assisted by Thanassis. His younger brothers, George and Gerasimos (Makis), soon followed suit. They were both born in Khartoum—Makis at the Acropole itself.

The hotel's central position defined its clientele. First, it was mainly merchants. Then, with the political and humanitarian calamities befalling the country, its clientele consisted mainly of employees of the United Nations and several nongovernmental organizations. It was perhaps due to these connections that on May 15, 1988, one of the two Acropole Hotel buildings became the target of a terrorist attack that killed seven people and seriously injured another twenty-two. This was not the only time that the fate of the hotel and the Pagoulatos family went hand in hand with the sociopolitical developments in Sudan. In 1983, the Sharia law imposed by Gaafar Nimeiry's regime prohibited alcoholic beverages, leading to the loss of a crucial source of income for many Greeks, including the Pagoulatos family, then distributors of Amstel beer in Sudan.

In the 1990s, however, the hotel gained a new clientele: archaeologists. Thanks to the family's forty years of business experience and his unique talent in socializing, George Pagoulatos became the go-to person for addressing all sorts of administrative and logistic challenges that the foreign missions were facing in a country that was not exactly an easy place to travel, work, and conduct fieldwork. As George stated in 2016, "Some archaeologists have been coming to our hotel for over twenty years. Having solved various problems together, we have developed strong bonds that go beyond business relationships. We are like a family." This feeling of belonging to this family was almost contagious for everyone approaching George and the hearth of the Acropole.

This was also my feeling when I arrived at the hotel's foyer in 1994 and was offered a splendidly refreshing "nous-nous" (a drink consisting of 50% karkadeh and 50% lemon juice)—one of the many reasons to seek shelter from Khartoum's suffocating heat in the Acropole, but surely not the most important one. As soon as we were introduced to each other, George showed an earnest interest in this young archaeologist from his home country—the first to ever set foot in Sudan, as he exclaimed in delight. At that moment, any doubts I had about dedicating my career to studying the past of Sudan and Nubia were dispelled. But George's involvement in the field of Sudanese archaeology was not limited to formalities and kindness. He

introduced me to many archaeologists staying at the Acropole who were willing to share their experiences with a novice in the field. I recall how he managed to relieve my stress with his kind words and mindful observations during a dinner he planned with professors returning from Kerma, the (mythical to me) capital of Bronze Age Sudan; how, when I moved to Sudan, he invited me to the Acropole time and again to meet colleagues who had an interest in or questions about Greco-Roman topics to which I could provide some feedback. It is no little thing that after such a call, I met my mentor in medieval Nubian textual studies, and later friend and long-standing collaborator, Professor Adam [Ł] {.smallcaps}ajtar from the University of Warsaw. I trust that many will smile reading about my memories, having been recipients of George's love for our work themselves.

George's kindness and help extended far beyond the premises of the Acropole. He had deep respect for the efforts of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums to protect and promote the country's archaeological heritage. His material and diplomatic assistance also allowed him to facilitate administrative procedures for all researchers active in Sudanese archaeology. Beyond archaeology and the National Museum, his interest and respect extended to all sister disciplines and museums. For example, he personally introduced me to the director of the Ethno-folkloristic Museum in the early 1990s, hoping for some broadening of the museum's scope to include traditions shared between Greeks and the Sudanese through their coexistence in modern Sudan, as well as during Ottoman times.

George Pagoulatos was a man of culture. He knew and loved to talk about literature and music. I remember how actively he engaged with the events organized at "Ergamenis," the Greek Community of Khartoum Cultural Center. He was especially supportive both before and during the concert of the Samandalyat, a group of eleven Sudanese women playing the violin under the guidance of Professor Leila Pastawi on the keyboard instrument. When the group performed at the premises of "Ergamenis," he also showed his generosity and humbleness by offering and serving drinks himself to more than a hundred people at the concert's intermission, always with a smile for everyone.

The early 2000s, when I was living in Sudan, were perhaps some of the most prosperous years for the country thanks not only to the discovery of oil but also to the constant flow of money that supported the work of the numerous NGOs present in the country due to the humanitarian crises in all the peripheries controlled by Khartoum. The country felt somewhat more open to foreigners and tourists started coming in larger numbers. The Acropole Hotel became a hub for this type of visitors too and George's name was known to all involved in the tourism industry. However, whenever one praised him for his services, efficiency, and warmth, he always replied on behalf of the entire family—brothers, wives, and children—who all contributed to running the hotel and achieving such quality standards in an environment like Khartoum, thus having equal shares in the hotel's success and the family's fame.

It is no surprise that the Acropole Hotel has become the heart of the Greek diaspora in Sudan even officially, since after the closure of the Greek Embassy in Khartoum, Makis Pagoulatos took up the responsibility of running the Consulate of Greece in Khartoum from the Acropole's office. I am sure that he does this with pride and confidence, inspired by the image of his father on the wall and the memory of his brother in every corner of the hotel.

Although George's memory cannot be contained in words, I could not but express my sadness for his departure, my respect for his person, and my love for this exceptional friend in this short text. If people

who knew George Pagoulatos are touched by this text or are inspired to reflect on what makes life in Khartoum meaningful, the presence of researchers in Sudan vital, and the future of the country—hopefully—better, then I trust that we can all see him smiling from his office or from the entrance of the Acropole Hotel, wishing us a good journey ahead.