

# The archive of a handicraftsman-merchant from Asia Minor in Nafplio: written documents and oral testimonies.

Contribution to the creation of the "Town museum".

By  
Maria Velioti-Georgopoulos  
General State Archives, Department of Argolida  
Nafplion, Greece  
mail@gak.arg.sch.gr

Paper presented for the conference "Can Oral History Make Objects Speak?", Nafplion, Greece. October 18-21, 2005.

---

The word "archive" immediately prompts one to think of written testimonies. Since the Archives, i.e. written testimonies as a whole, form the raw material of History, these two notions are almost identical: the Archives produce History, therefore History cannot exist without Archives. Under these premises, notions such as "Oral History" or even "Oral Testimony Archive" seem, at least initially, paradoxal.

However, the turn of History towards the inclusion of oral sources and the establishment of Oral History, led to the creation of Oral Testimony Archive Collections in various archival organizations. This framework explains the existence of Oral Testimony Collections in the local Departments of the General State Archives in Greece. The General State Archives are the national service tasked with supervising, collecting, maintaining, classifying, indexing and offering for study the archived material of the country, material which pertains to the history and the cultural heritage of Greece.

A few years ago, the General State Archives-Department of Argolid received the archive of Tryphon Kouikoglou, donated by his wife and daughters. His archive includes commercial mail, registers with client bills, notes, invoices, bills of

exchange, accounting documents, contracts, photographs etc. from the period ca. 1923-1993. It also includes audio tapes with a recording of an interview he gave to his daughter Sofia in 1987. In this autobiographical interview, Tryphon Kouikoglou talks about life in Asia Minor and his professional activities from his arrival in Greece until 1944. On the other hand, the objects situated in the stockroom of his trading establishment were donated by his wife and daughters to the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation. The collection numbers 269 disparate items, such as various utilitarian objects (e.g. funnels, volume measurement vessels for liquids), tools, domestic appliances (electric and not), electrical materiel and machinery.

This paper examines how the oral testimonies (together with written sources) reveal the unseen history contained in the objects. The objects of the Kouikoglou collection are treated as an exemplary case with the aim of understanding the historical process in the town of Nafplio in the period ca. 1925-1975. The information that the General State Archives-Department of Argolid disposed was enriched with oral testimonies and additional archive material (photographs and bottle labels) offered by other members of the Kouikoglou family. Let us now proceed to their analysis and (partial) interpretation:



**1<sup>st</sup> object: The sign (fig. 01)** - the photograph is taken from the book of G.Antoniou.

**“MANUFACTORY**

**DISTILLERY-SWEETS  
AND PAPER BAGS**

**T. S. KOUIKOGLOU”**

Let's see what information we can initially extract from this object, before moving on to any form of investigation. The above inscription is painted on a framed piece of wood approx. 200 x 80 cm. It is evidently the sign suspended (as corroborated by the rings) at a manufactory active in distillery, sweets and paper bags (!) owned by Tryphon Kouikoglou. The information is already satisfactory, thanks to the inscription. Based on the amount of information extracted from an initial approach, the sign can be classified as a "semi-speaking" object. Conversely, we can classify the

objects from which no or little information can be extracted from an initial approach as "silent" - although, as will be proven, not mute.

We will later initially see how the inscription alters from a semi-speaking to a speaking object, i.e. an object which reveals the information it conceals through investigation (in this case, investigation of written and oral sources). At the same time, we will see how the same object becomes the key object around which the other objects of the collection (silent until then) acquire substance and voice, again thanks to written and oral sources.

Back to the sign:

**1. "T. S. Kouikoglou": his name, his professional identity, his biography.**

Tryphon Kouikoglou was born in 1908 or 1910 in Sparta, Asia Minor. After the Asia Minor catastrophe he arrives in Greece together with his mother, grandmother and sister. His brother Vasilis (who had deserted the Turkish army) had arrived in Athens before them. The family of four settle down at Spetses island in September 1922. They soon run out of money, grandmother starves to death and Tryphon is forced to work, thus learning his first lessons in practical economics. He moves to Athens in 1923, using part of the money he had amassed. In N. Ionia, the quarter where most refugees from Sparta had settled, Tryphon learns the arts of patisserie. In the meantime, his brother Vasilis (working as an electrician for Siemens) is sent to work in Nafplio in 1923. Tryphon and the rest of the family follow in 1924. There, he soon becomes a partner in a distillery-patisserie business, producing alcoholic and fizzy drinks and sweets, where he



stays until 1943 (**fig. 02**: Tryphon Kouikoglou, the person on the right, 5/1/1928.

**Fig. 03**: Tryphon Kouikoglou, 1930-35.

**Fig. 04:** Tryphon Kouikoglou in his company car before the second world war, when he was partner to the fizzy drinks business; lemonade bottles can be seen).



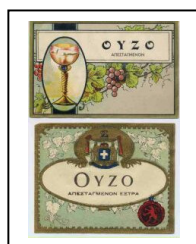
He founds his own distillery and patisserie business in 1943, renting a shop in Agora Sq. His brother Vasilis trades in materiel for electrical installations at the shop next door. The above sign comes from the Agora Sq. shop and we can precisely determine its fabrication date s 1943, since (as we will later see) Tryphon's business expanded into selling other goods as well in 1944. The sign remained in place until the end of the 1960s, whence the business moved to the ground floor of the Kouikoglou family house and a warehouse branch. Tryphon died in Nafplio in 1990.

Back to the sign; its next lines:

## **2. "Manufactory Distillery - Sweets and Paper Bags"**

### **a. "Distillery": First activity**

Tryphon Kouikoglou, in his family distillery tradition (his grandmother made tsipouro in Asia Minor), produces et sells ouzo and other alcoholic drinks (cognac and various liqueurs -mastic, banana, rose, cointreau, peppermint, triple sec- as well as Vermouth and sweet Mavrodafni wines) in his "manufactory"-shop (**fig. 05.1-05.8:** bottle labels;



**fig. 06:** Tryphon Kouikoglou in his shop, 1976).



A fairly large number of objects pertains to this activity:

- various funnels, also used in the wine shop, a complementary activity to the distillery (**fig. 07-11**).



- a series of volume measurement vessels for liquids, also used in the wine shop



(**fig. 12-14**).

- a scoop for transporting sugar during the production of drinks (and possibly sweets too) (**fig. 15**).



- a box with dye for cognac production (**fig. 16**).



- a strainer for filtering dyes for the production of drinks (**fig. 17**).



- **b. "Sweets Manufactory": Second activity**

Even when Tryphon was a partner in the distillery-patisserie, he sold preserves (sour orange, fig, sour cherry, cherry, strawberry grape), made by his mother and sister, to coffee shops. As owner of the "sweets manufactory", he also produced candy (**fig. 18**: candy machine).



- The patisserie pans (**fig. 19-21**) pertain to his patisserie activities.



**c. "Paper Bag Manufactory": Third activity.**

As early as 1943, Tryphon produces paper bags of various sizes thanks to an electric machine, made in Greece. He sells it in 1958, with holding ownership until the settlement of the transaction. The buyer resells it before fully paying him, leading to a long juridical process (1958-1968) which does not vindicate Tryphon.

Complementary to the first object, the sign, is the stamp impression - in particular, the logo preserved on the inside front cover of a writing book containing personal, family and business expenses for the period 1953-1955:

**“MANUFACTORY DISTILLERY  
OF FIZZY DRINKS  
MANUFACTURE OF PAPER BAGS  
CANDY PRODUCTS  
AND ELECTRICAL GOODS  
TRYPHON KOUIKOGLOU  
IN NAFPLIO”**

A comparison with the sign reveals important differences and additions (as well as similarities):

**1<sup>st</sup> addition: “Manufactory ... of Fizzy Drinks”: Fourth activity**

**At least since 1953, Tryphon produces alcoholic as well as fizzy drinks (“lemonade from juice” and a kind of soda water) in his “manufactory” until 1963-1965, although he continues to trade in them even after that. Another series of objects pertain to this activity:**

- A fizzy drink bottling machine (**fig. 23** and **fig. 24**: fizzy drink bottling machine and bottling process, 1950-51).



**2<sup>nd</sup> addition: “Manufacture ... of Electrical Goods”: Fifth activity**

Yet another activity which is incoherent with the previous ones, but does have an explanation: when Tryphon’s brother, Vasilis, died in 1944, Tryphon integrated the electrical materiel Vasilis traded in into his shop.

Later on, in the mid-1950s, Tryphon’s business expanded into trading in electric (and non) home appliances, such as:

- irons (fig. 25)



- petrol stoves (fig. 26-28).



- heaters (fig. 29-30).



- phonographs (fig. 31).

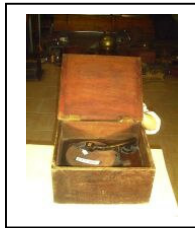




- radios: (**fig. 32**).



- record players (**fig. 33**).



- tape recorders (**fig. 34**).

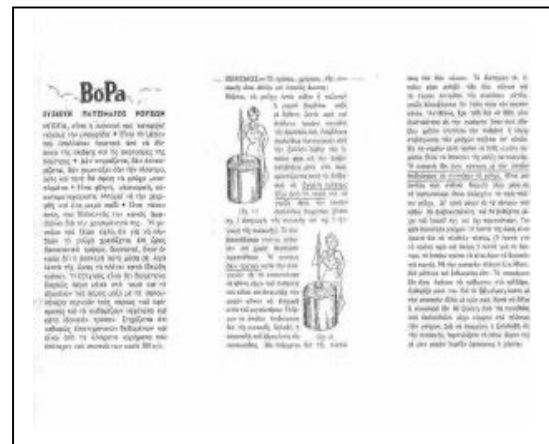


Two objects from this category deserve a comment on the side, since the present investigation was particularly revealing:

- the mysterious item of the **fig. 35**.

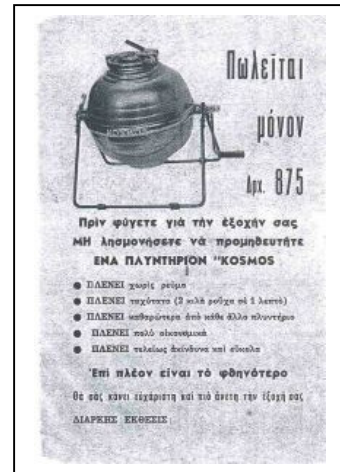


It is a BOPA washing machine, as its operating manual explains (**fig. 36-37**),

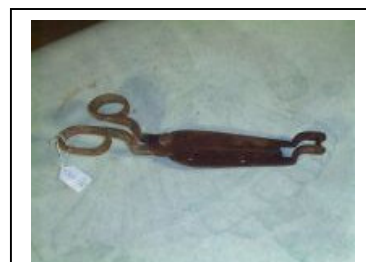


and

- the manual-operated KOSMOS washing machine (**fig. 38**), which housewives of the 1960s should procure before going to the countryside (**fig. 39**: the manual).



As to the choice of the terms “manufacture” and “manufactory” on the stamp and sign, it can be interpreted within the context of a successful business (past and present) and of course reflects the (ambitious) aspirations of the self-made handicraftsman-merchant. Hence, the “manufactory...” corresponds to a small drinks, sweets and paper bags production industry, whereas the “manufacture of electrical goods” actually amounts to trade and repair of electrical materiel and (electric and non) home appliances.



Finally, a group of objects in the collection (**fig.40-42**) is related to the carpet factory Tryphon owned during World War II. These objects, in conjunction with the carpet designs which were also donated to the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation by the Kouikoglou family, deserve further investigation, especially since carpet manufacturing was the primary occupation of the people of Sparta, both while they still were in Asia Minor and when they later settled *en masse* in N. Ionia (Athens).

The objects have therefore spoken thanks to both the oral and written testimonies, the existence of which, in this case, should not be ignored. They spoke of the multiple activities of a man (possessing the commercial genius of Asia Minor Greeks) who settled as a child in Nafplio, together with 900 of his countrymen. Through further study of the Kouikoglou case, as well as of other handicraftsmen-merchants, it would be possible to examine their role in shaping the town's economic life. This is an informal, "from below" approach to a (largely unknown) historical aspect of Nafplio; a town known for its History (with a capital H), i.e. the formal, from "the above" history, corresponding to the history of the revolutionary period and the era when the town is decreed the capital of the Greek state (1821-1834). The material studied in this paper (objects in conjunction with archived sources – written and oral) could be used for the creation of the planned Museum of the town of Nafplio in order to illustrate the historical subject-matter and the aforementioned period.

In conclusion, I would like to thank:

- the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation and especially Ms Aggeliki Roumelioti for putting the archived items at my disposal,
- the Kouikoglou family for donating the archive of Tryphon Kouikoglou (in written, oral and -more recently- electronic form) to the General State Archives – Department of Argolid and
- especially Ms Sophia Kouikoglou for her superb collaboration during the writing of this paper.