

## The 2021 London Hellenic Book Prize

For the first time in its 26-year history, this year's London Hellenic Prize was awarded to two Greek authors for a work first published in the English language by an Anglo-American publisher. This was **The Greek Revolution: A Critical Dictionary** (Harvard University Press) by the eminent historians and social scientists **Paschalis M. Kitromilides** and **Constantinos Tsoukalas**. The Greek edition is expected at the end of the year from the University of Crete. (It should be noted that the LHP is always awarded during the year following publication – ie, books published in 2021 are adjudicated in 2022.)

'Forty-six essays by forty different, specialized authors cover in an inventive way the wide spectrum of the historiography of the Greek Revolution, making it at the same time accessible to scholars and writers worldwide. For the first time, Greece's historical development from the beginning of the 19th century is evaluated as an active part of European history, from the French Revolution to the rise of national parliaments. The book's original approach to several aspects of Greek society, politics, ethics and religion provide a framework of challenging ideas by means of which the nation's modern 200-year history can be re-interpreted.

'A similar historical point of view is expressed by **Mark Mazower's** work, **The Greek Revolution: 1821 and the Making of Modern Europe** (Penguin Books). Also selected for the final vote, this book has already been well received not only by the English-speaking but by the Greek public in its Greek translation (Alexandria Publications). With thorough historical judgment and narrative talent, our well-known author of the wonderful *Thessaloniki, City of Ghosts* (honoured with the LHP in 2004), goes through the turbulent period of two centuries to arrive at the certification of the European Greek identity in contrast to the Ottoman one.

'This year's other shortlist nominees include **Bruce Clark's** excellent overview of the history of the city of Athens, **Athens: City of Wisdom** (Head of Zeus) illuminated with flashes of insight and love from a journalist-historian-afficionado of the city.

'The culturally inexhaustible **Homer: The Very Idea** (University of Chicago Press) by **James I. Porter** moved all the committee members with its timeless analysis of the presence of Homer, his scholars and imitators, his literary and cultural successors from the age of Peisistratos to the modern poetry of Alice Oswald. The values, ideas and feelings expressed in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* remain a living experience thanks to Homer's language and fictional imagination.

'A decade ago the prize committee, which customarily reads between 120 and 150 books each year, began conferring its accolade to works of literature inspired by Hellenic subjects, historical or mythological. Contemporary writers such as Anne Carson's theatrical event *Antigonick* (2011, published as an illustrated book by Bloodaxe in 2012), Kamilla Shamsie's *Home Fire* (Bloomsbury, 2016), Michael Hughes' *Country* (a retelling of the *Iliad* through the Irish troubles – John Murray, 2017) and many other original works based on ancient Greek literature have now emerged as international best sellers to the English-speaking audience with excellent reviews and publications. This year's shortlist includes **Ruth Padel's Daughters of the Labyrinth** (Corsair) and **Elif Shafak's The Island of Missing**

**Trees** (Penguin Books). The first narrates a Cretan family's labyrinth in the current reality of the island, while the second outlines the dilemmas of today's Cyprus through the intertwined lives of two couples that reflect the island's political and social divisions.

'The jury consists of five members and two or three specialized readers. Nominations must be submitted by the end of January for publications of the previous year. The selection begins in February, the committee decides in June. The prize for the winner is £10,000; the prize-giving usually takes place in November, either in London or Athens. Alice Oswald's *Nobody* (Penguin Book, 2019) has had its prizegiving event postponed twice due to Covid restrictions.

The London Hellenic Prize began in 1996 as a cultural activity of the London Hellenic Society, chaired by J.A. Hatzipateras OBE and initially sponsored by John D. Critikos, both prominent members of the London Greek ship owning community. Michael Moschos has been the coordinator of this international award. The Adjudicating Committee comprises Professor Nick Lowe (Chair) of the University of London, Professor P.A. Cartledge (Cambridge), Senior Fellow Robin Lane Fox (Oxford), Dr Jennifer Wallace (Peterhouse, Cambridge) and Professor Emeritus Michael Paschalis (University of Crete).