

# @GreeceInUK

*Cherish the Past, Embrace the Future*

Issue No 19 - 2019

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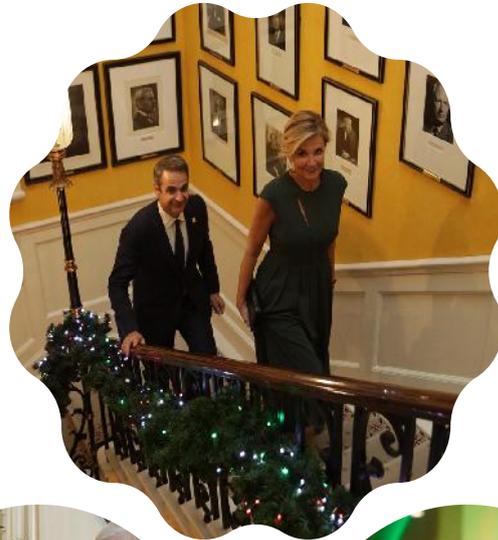
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## NATO leaders gather in London to mark the 70th anniversary of the Alliance

3 - 4 December 2019



In 1949, the United Kingdom was one of NATO's twelve founding members and London was the home of NATO's first headquarters.

Allied Heads of State and Government gathered in London on Tuesday 3 and Wednesday 4 December 2019, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of NATO and discuss on how to further strengthen the Alliance and continue its adaptation.

On Tuesday, December 3rd, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discussed the main themes of the leaders' meeting at a major public diplomacy event in London, "NATO Engages: Innovating the Alliance". On the same afternoon, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II hosted a reception for NATO leaders at Buckingham Palace and later in the evening UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson hosted a dinner at the Downing Street.

On Wednesday, December 4th, leaders met at The Grove Hotel to address current security issues and take decisions to ensure that NATO remains fit for the future. They agreed on a number of measures, including further improvements to the readiness of Allied forces, recognizing space as an operational domain, and updating NATO's action plan against terrorism.

Leaders had also a strategic discussion on Russia, the future of arms control, as well as the rise of China. Allies also assessed the progress being made on burden sharing in the Alliance. This has been the

fifth consecutive year of rising defence investment, with European Allies and Canada due to spend \$130 billion extra by the end of 2020, with that figure rising to \$400 billion by the end of 2024.

Greek Prime Minister Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Nikos Dendias and the Minister of National Defence Mr. Nikos Panagiotopoulos came to London to attend the ceremony for the 70th anniversary of NATO.

On Tuesday, December 3rd, PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis, accompanied by his wife Mareva Grabowski, attended the Buckingham Palace reception hosted by Queen Elizabeth II to mark 70 years of NATO cooperation and collective spirit. Later in the evening, he participated in a dinner hosted by UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, at the Downing Street.

On Wednesday, December 4th, while speaking at the NATO Leaders Meeting, the Greek Prime Minister said that relations among the member states of the NATO alliance must be characterized by unity and solidarity. In this context, he said that alliance members have the responsibility to respect these notions and act upon them, and must also steer away from actions that could give rise to friction and tensions among allies and neighbors.

In the afternoon the Greek Prime Minister attended a lunch organised by the U.S. President Donald Trump and later he met with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II welcomed NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the leaders of the Alliance's 29 member countries to London at a Buckingham Palace reception on Tuesday evening (3 December 2019). The event came ahead of Wednesday's meeting of NATO leaders.



Official handshake ceremony with the NATO Secretary General and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom



Photos 1 & 2 Official handshake

Photos 3,4 & 7 Assembly of the leader's meeting

Photos 5 & 6 PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis attended a lunch organised by the U.S. President Donald Trump

Photo Credit No10 /NATO





Official Ceremony / Family Photo

Photo Credit No10 /NATO

Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis meets with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Photo Credit No10 /NATO



## GREECE UNFOLDS 10-YEAR PLAN AT WTM LONDON 2019



The World Travel Market took place in London Excel, in the first week of November. Greece participated in the global tourism industry exhibition, which brings together international travel professionals, journalists, digital influencers and key industry buyers. The Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) represented Greece in the venue, hosting numerous exhibitors such as businesses, regions and municipalities from all over the country.

Different events were held and organised by the GNTO. Media professionals, were invited to Symposio Greek Gourmet touring, a gastronomic experience inspired from Macedonia and

Thessaloniki, on the first day of the exhibition. Chefs from Aldemar resorts prepared a delicious lunch with a variety of dishes for the guests to taste. During the third day of the exhibition media guests had a tour around stands of various Greek regions tasting traditional products and wines from each area. It was a unique experience not only for business purposes but also for international professionals to get to know more about Greek culture and traditions.

**"Greece is a top, world class tourist destination but it is much more than sun, sea, beach and ancient monuments. It is a multilevel and a multifaceted life experience!"**

On Monday the 4th of November the Minister of Tourism Harry Theoharis, shared the strategic goals of the Tourism of Ministry along with the guidelines and the plan of the government for the years to come.

Speaking at World Travel Market, the Minister of Tourism for Greece, Mr Harry Theoharis provided updates to the development of the Greek Government's 10-year plan for tourism.

"Our vision is that Greece provides all visitors with a full range of holiday experiences.

"The main areas of focus within our 10-year plan are: Quality, Sustainability and Authenticity.

"Quality - because to us tourism means hospitality, with an emphasis on the guest experience.

"Sustainability - because tourism today requires an environmental conscience alongside a balance of supply, demand and infrastructure.

"To us tourism means hospitality, with an emphasis on the guest experience"

"Authenticity - since tourism to us means the holistic visitor experience, we would like to integrate accommodation requirements with interest in local food, original culture, local traditions and history as well as highlighting activities in the natural environment and buying traditional and local products.

"This can be done by enriching Greek tourist products and engaging with current travel trends such as city breaks medical, wellness, sports, educational, religious, gastronomic and MICE tourism.

"Tourism to us means the holistic visitor experience, we would like to integrate accommodation requirements with interest in local food, original culture, local traditions and history as well as highlighting activities in the natural environment and buying traditional and local products"

"As far as destination management is concerned, our goal includes enriching the mix with more sustainable destinations on the map, making Greece one of the top global sustainable destinations as well."

"Tourism today requires an environmental conscience alongside a balance of supply, demand and infrastructure"

In addition, the minister outlined that the country would look to employ active management policies in conjunction with local and regional authorities on tourist flows on islands and destinations where there is undue pressure and stress on local infrastructure in order to deliver much better and richer visitor experiences. He also reported on discussions with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) on planning specific targets for sustainability developments and renewed commitment to widening the tourism season.

Mr Theoharis also predicted that statistics indicate Greece will finish 2019 having welcomed nearly 34 million visitors - three per cent up on 2018.

"Greece will finish 2019 having welcomed nearly 34 million visitors - three per cent up on 2018"

Mr. Harry Theoharis met with executives and CEOs from international companies in order to seal deals that are going to increase tourism's revenue. TUI group, We Love Holidays, EasyJet, jet2.com and EasyJet Holidays were among the companies that met with the minister. Gulf air officials spoke with Mr. Theoharris regarding a new direct route from Bahrain to Mykonos which is planned to be launched in 2020 increasing Middle East tourism in the famous island.

Yachting and cruising is also an industry that brings plenty of tourists in Greece, so the Minister met with the heads of sea fare Cruising and Sailing Holidays and Variety Cruises.

"There are many things that we can do with the current infrastructure that stands idle during the shoulder season... We will



Photo Credit Greek Travel Pages

take two directions: increase the ceiling [on arrivals] but also try to widen the shoulder season and promote new destinations that will allow idle infrastructure to begin to rise," he said, adding that connectivity is key to attract visitors all year round. Greece needs many more direct flights, both winter flights and generally"

"Greece needs many more direct flights, both winter flights and generally"

Thomas Cook collapse affected Greece's market in various ways. The fact that the government reacted immediately helped to mitigate the effects so the long term impact should be minimised. The advertising period is going to start in January, earlier than usual so the destinations which depended on UK arrivals through Thomas Cook can be promoted more in order to reduce the gap and replace the seats.



## WTM 2019 and two chefs bring the taste of Greece to this exhibition's 40th anniversary in London.

04-06 November 2019 was the 40th anniversary of the annual travel trade exhibition held in London's Excel. Every year the Greek National Tourism Organisation stand hosts a number of culinary events inviting travel trade industry companies, travel agents and journalists to sample the finest of Greek cuisine and wines. This year the two chefs on duty were Ioannis Rodokanakis Operations Chef À la Carte Aldemar Resorts and George Chatzopoulos Operations Executive Chef Aldemar Resorts from Aldemar Resorts but also two chefs that have been visiting the UK & Ireland ever March for the past ten years bringing Symposio ([www.symposio.gr](http://www.symposio.gr)), the interactive cooking event to a host of cooking schools from Dublin to Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Cambridge and London.



## Symposio Greek Gourmet Touring celebrated 10 years

This year Symposio celebrated 10 years of its Greek tastes on tour, bringing innovative Greek food and products to 64 cities in 18 countries across Europe over the past decade. A total of 182 food events have taken place with more than 5,270 travel and media people attending.

Aldemar Resorts CEO Alexandros Angelopoulos, the hospitality professional behind the Symposio event said, "A decade is a long time for a private initiative bringing together businesses, operators, regions and producers on Greek gastronomy's journey across the globe. But it is small in terms of synergies and benefits for the economy's frontrunner: hospitality."

## “Contemporary Minoans” in fashion, gastronomy and arts travel from Crete to London

5.11.2019, Museum of London

Distinguished academics and designers from Europe came together in London to showcase the everlasting influence of Minoan culture on the global contemporary creation scene (fashion, gastronomy, music, art). From the innovative dances of Sergei Diaghilev (Ballets Russes) to Ted Shaw, from William Blake's Minotaur to Pablo Picasso's groundbreaking artworks inspired by the Labyrinth's mythical creature and from Mariano Fortuny's celebrated Knossos scarf to Karl Lagerfeld and Sophia Kokosalaki, the Minoans, Europe's earliest advanced civilisation, continue to capture the imagination of archaeologists and artists alike.

This high-level cultural event "Contemporary Minoans: Cretan culture, source of inspiration" was organised at the initiative of Cultural Organisation Branding Heritage (BH) with the support of the Region of Crete and the Greek National Tourism Organisation UK & Ireland, on Tuesday November 5 2019 at the Museum of London (150 London Wall, London EC2Y 5HN map), starting at 12:30 p.m. The event was held under the auspices of the Hellenic Ministries of Culture, Tourism and the Embassy of Greece to the United Kingdom.

The event was dedicated to fashion designer with Cretan origin Sophia Kokosalaki who passed away unexpectedly in October. Journalist Harriet Quick, contributing editor at Vogue UK and Sarah Mower MBA, Chief Critic Vogue runway and British Fashion Council Ambassador for Emerging Talent paid tribute to the designer's creative genius and exceptional personality. Last year, Sophia Kokosalaki was honoured by Branding Heritage and the Region of Crete at the Heraklion Archaeological Museum for her valuable contribution to the promotion of the Greek heritage and the Minoan culture on the international fashion scene. The distinction was given in the frame of the multifaceted cultural event 'Contemporary Minoans' and 'Cooking like Minoans' held in presence of HRH Prince Charles of Wales.

The event was addressed by representative of the Regional Governor of Crete, President Angela Gerekou and Secretary-General Dimitris Fragakis of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, Journalist and Founder of Branding Heritage Katerina Frentzou.

Speakers include at the Panel Session Professor of Aegean Studies, Classics and Ancient History at the

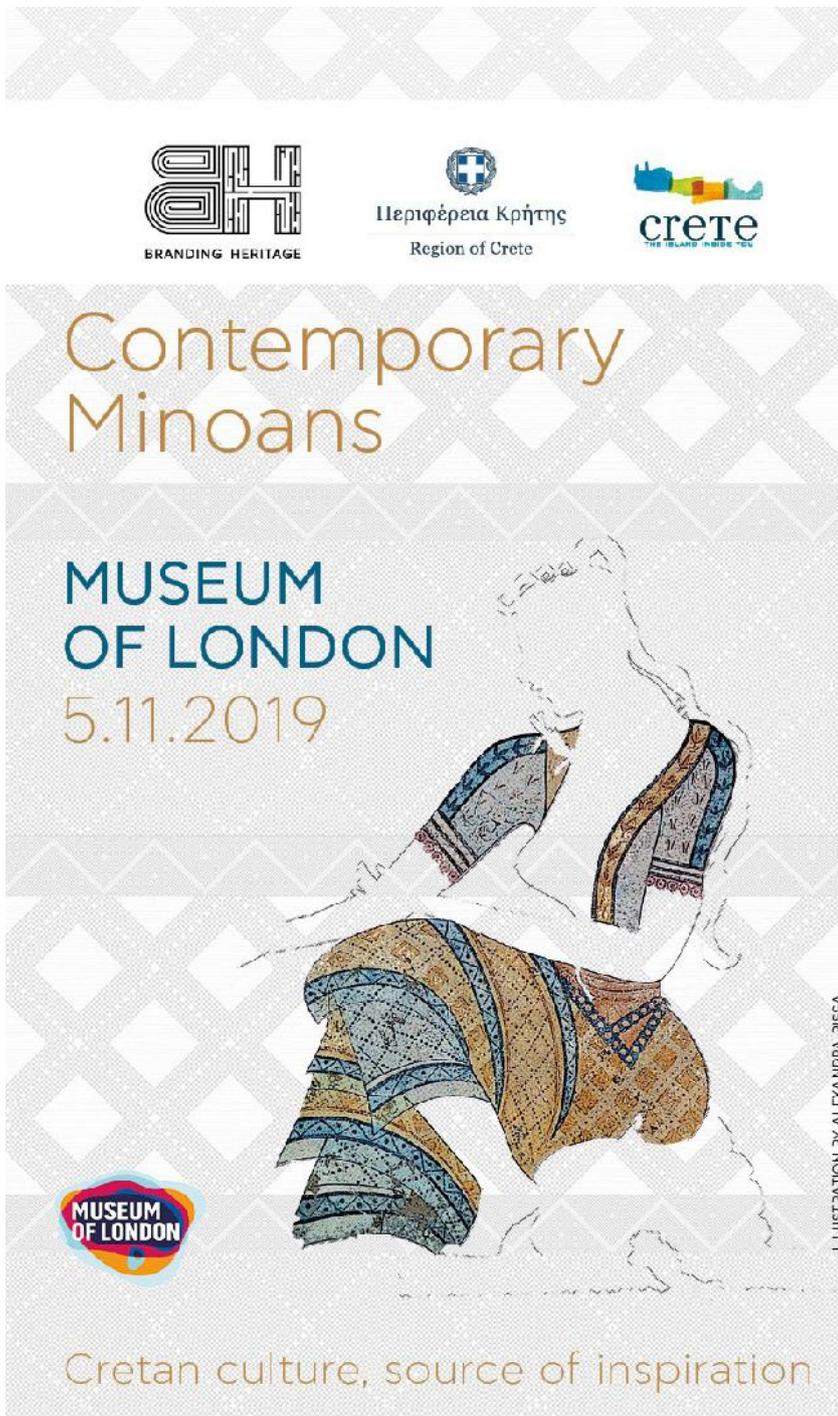
University of Bristol Nicoletta Momigliano, Maze designer Adrian Fisher, Lecturer of Aegean Prehistory at Venice Ca' Foscari University Ilaria Caloi, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham Diana Wardle, Archaeologist & Founder of Minoan Tastes Dr. Jerolyn Morisson, Ceramicist Lilah Clarke, at the Creative Talks Founder of Rainbowwave Maria Lemos, Fashion Designer Marios Schwab, Archaeologist & Designer Dr. Polina Ellis, Members of Balothizer Music Band Stephen J. Payne and Nikos Ziarkas.

### Guest Speaker: Mary Katrantzou

A special message was sent by the Head of Picasso Administration Claude Picasso and the closing address was delivered by the painter of Knossos Palace Yiannis Politis. The event was moderated by Journalist & Fashion Features Director at Vogue Greece Elis Kiss and BH Expert & Managing Partner at Militos S.A. Olga Stavropoulou.

The event was featuring an exhibition of inspired artworks with Minoan references by European artists, part of the Contemporary Minoans collection soon to be hosted at the first Branding Heritage Contemporary Minoans Cultural Center in Crete. Exhibition artists include Artists Alekos Fassianos, Lilah Clarke, Loukia Orfanou and Tereza Valavani, Fashion Designers Mary Katrantzou, Marios Schwab, Faye Chatzi, Fashion Brands Ergon Mykonos and The Artians, Jewel Designer Polina Ellis, Textile Designers Alexandra Bissa and Maria Sigma Textiles, Maze Designer Adrian Fisher while Researcher Archaeologist Diana Wardle will be presenting a reconstruction of ancient clothes. The event was accompanied by live workshops reproducing ancient techniques (weaving / loom).





### About Branding Heritage

Cultural Organisation Branding Heritage was founded by Journalist Katerina Frentzou and is devoted to highlighting ancient Greek culture as an everlasting inspiration of contemporary artists. BH designs multifaceted cultural events promoting cultural heritage and cultural entrepreneurship, supports the revival of ancient techniques and showcases artistic creation that pays tribute to the “global” Greek heritage across borders.

Branding Heritage also embarks on a journey to bring youth closer to their unique cultural roots. Connecting past, present and future, BH Kids revives ancient arts and techniques in collaboration with craftspeople, artisans, weavers and creators, in an effort to pro

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## Professor Nicoletta Momigliano - The Minoan Past in the Present

### Modern Desires for the Minoan Past

#### Biography:

Nicoletta Momigliano is currently Professor in Aegean Studies at the University of Bristol. She is an archaeologist specialising in Minoan Crete and its modern reception. She was born in Milan, Italy, in 1960, where she attended primary and secondary school. She read Classics (Letteratura Classica) at the University of Pisa, where she graduated in 1982. She obtained her MA (1984) from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London (now part of University College London), and her PhD from University College London (1989), under the supervision of John Nicolas Coldstream. From 1990 to 1993 she was a non-stipendiary Junior Research Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford and a Research Assistant to Ann Brown, who was responsible for the Sir Arthur Evans Archive and the Aegean collections at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. From 1993 to 1996 she was the Richard Bradford McConnell Research Fellow in Aegean Archaeology at Balliol College, Oxford (where her duties involved delivering undergraduate lectures for the special module of 'Homeric Archaeology and Early Greece 1550-700 BC'). From 1996 to 1998 she was a Lecturer in Archaeology at the Department of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford. She has been teaching at the University of Bristol since September 1998. In 1991 she received the Michael Ventris Award for Mycenaean Studies, for her research on Duncan Mackenzie. In 2003, she was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London. She has directed and co-directed archaeological projects in Crete (Knossos, Palaikastro) and Turkey (Iasos, Çaltılar). Her publications include many articles and books on the Aegean Bronze Age, especially Minoan archaeology, such as *Archaeology and European Modernity: producing and consuming the 'Minoans'* (2007), *Cretomania: Modern Desires for the Minoan Past* (2017) (co-edited with Yannis Hamilakis and Alexandre Farnoux, respectively), and her forthcoming monograph *In Search of the Labyrinth: the Cultural Legacy of Minoan Crete*.



@GreeceinUK had the pleasure to interview Prof. Nicoletta Momigliano.

*1. Your presentation at the cultural event "Contemporary Minoans: Cretan culture, source of inspiration" revealed your fervent and passionate interest in the Aegean Bronze Age and the Minoan Culture. What has attracted you so powerfully to this period? Did you perceive it as a sort of calling to dedicate your studies, your research and your academic career to it?*

I did not perceive it as a sort of calling, but more like falling in love with the Minoans, the history of Minoan archaeology, and with Crete, even if it was not quite love at first sight! It was something more gradual, and it was also serendipitous. First, my interest in the Aegean Bronze Age more generally started between school and university, in the late 1970s. In the months before I started my BA in Classics at the University of Pisa, I read John Chadwick's book *The Decipherment of Linear B*, and it really captured my imagination: it revealed a period of ancient Greece about which I knew virtually nothing. It was new and exciting, something different and yet at the origin of ancient Greece, and my own European culture, which fascinated me. And I was very lucky because a module on the Aegean Bronze Age was taught at Pisa (I later discovered that, when I was an undergraduate, this subject in Italy was taught only at the universities of Pisa and at Catania). Although I loved other subjects too, such as Greek epigraphy, Greek literature, and Greek archaeology, there was something that attracted me to the origins of Greece, and so I ended up writing a dissertation under the supervision of Professor Mario Benzi, who taught Aegean Bronze Age at Pisa. He suggested a dissertation on the

topic of pottery and metallurgical workshops in the Aegean Bronze Age, and told me to start collecting evidence for Minoan Crete, and to read Sir Arthur Evans's *The Palace of Minos*. Since I found enough material for an undergraduate dissertation that related to Crete, I focused on that Aegean region. So, that module and the work I carried out for my dissertation introduced me to the Minoans and their amazing material culture. I particularly liked the colours and abstract decoration on pre-palatial and proto-palatial pottery: there is something about Kamares pottery that I find aesthetically very pleasing. I also visited Greece and Crete for the first time while studying as an undergraduate in Italy. Although the beauty of Crete and the magnificent archaeological sites, especially Kato Zakro, made a deep impression upon me, I was not hooked ... as yet! After my BA in Pisa, I moved to London for my post-graduate studies. As a matter of fact, I wanted to write a PhD on Bronze Age Isthmia, but my supervisor, J.N. Coldstream, persuaded me to switch to the pre-palatial pottery of Knossos. This was crucial, and so was my very first experience of excavations on Crete just before I started my PhD. This was at Monastiraki Amariou, a fantastic Minoan site, where Athanasia Kanta directed the excavations. I was the only foreigner on the dig. The finds were amazing, and I think I truly fell in love with both Minoan archaeology and the whole of Crete then: the people, the landscape, and the food. I remember waking up every morning at sunrise, and watching the rosy light of dawn slowly enveloping the top of Psiloriti; and this was followed by the excitement of the excavations, the beautiful finds. So, my specific love for Minoan Crete developed when I worked on my first Cretan excavation at Monastiraki, with a Greek team, and during the many months I spent at Knossos during my PhD studies. After that, I never looked back. Even if I took part in fascinating archaeological work in Sicily, Jordan, and Turkey, my first and enduring love remains Crete – past and present.

*2. It seems that you can spot traces of the Minoan culture, less or more obvious, in almost every aspect of contemporary life, from spectacles and shows to furniture, architecture, science, music and visual arts. How can ancient culture be so relevant nowadays? How can it appeal so strongly to contemporary people? Isn't this an extraordinary observation?*



The rich material culture of Minoan Crete was largely rediscovered at the beginning of the 20th century, and since then has been a source of inspiration for artists, craftsmen, poets, writers, fashion designers, and many others. As you say, Minoan elements sometimes are obvious and sometimes they are not, and it requires a Minoan specialist to detect them. I explored this theme in some of my publications, such as the volumes *Archaeology and European Modernity: producing and consuming the 'Minoans'* and *Cretomania: Modern Desires for the Minoan Past*, which I co-edited with Yannis Hamilakis and Alexandre Farnoux, respectively, and especially in my forthcoming volume *In Search of the Labyrinth: the Cultural Legacy of Minoan Crete*, which provides an overview of modern responses Minoan Crete in a wide variety of cultural practices. I think the continuing appeal of the Minoans is related to the idea that every new generation finds in them something that strikes a chord in the preoccupations, aspirations and desires of the present. Every generation rewrites history, and provides new meanings and responses to the Minoan past, and finds new inspiration in Minoan material culture. For example, feminist writers and artists at the beginning of the 20th century, who were interested in the Woman Question and the suffragette movement, were enthused by the striking and powerful female imagery that appears in the material culture of the Minoans, and this imagery has continued to appeal to this day (the late Sophia Kokosalaki, to whom the event *Contemporary Minoans* was dedicated, spoke eloquently on how the famous snake goddess from Knossos made an impression on her). In more recent times, because of growing concerns with our environment, some artists have drawn inspiration from the Minoans' attention to nature (including the marine environment) and from the effects on Minoan society of the Bronze Age eruption of Santorini, with its volcanic ash and tidal waves. For example, in 2014 the rock band Giant Squid produced an album called *Minoan*, which is a kind of love letter to the Aegean Bronze Age and uses the Minoan past to reflect on topical issues such as global warming, rising sea levels, and environmental disasters.

*3. We Greeks often take pride in our cultural past and glorify it as something superior and sacred, guarded in a museum, without connecting with the real essence, the lively essence it carries. What changes in our perception should be made to allow ourselves to relish and genuinely tap into this admittedly great and so rich past?*

I feel that pride in the Greek cultural past is something to be celebrated and encouraged, but I agree with you that the notions of sacredness and superiority can be less than helpful at times. Sometimes I also feel that some people in Greece show a narrow and essentialist concept of what is the 'Greek' past and what is 'Greek-ness'. Perhaps Greek people could relish and tap more the Greek past if they showed more appreciation for its complex hybridity, for all the complex layers of history that have made this past so rich and fascinating, from the Palaeolithic to the present. And many Greek artists and writers have already shown the way in this respect: a name that spring immediately to my mind in a Minoan-Cretan context is that of Rhea Galanaki, but there are many more I could mention.

*4. Why do you think it is only through its transfusion into some form of art that archaeology can become 'really delightful' or 'beautiful', according to Oscar Wilde's famous quote you used in your presentation?*

Actually, as an archaeologist, I agree with Oscar Wilde only in part! For me archaeology (especially Minoan!) can be delightful and beautiful even without some form of art. But I also believe that artists, novelists, fashion designers, and others help to make archaeology even more beautiful, delightful, and interesting. Their works give the past a new vitality and relevance to the present. Some of their insightful, quirky, and original responses to the material culture past cultures can stimulate everybody (archaeologists included) to think differently about their subjects, to look at archaeological objects or archaeological displays in new ways.

*5. Could you briefly describe the transition of the Minoan woman into the woman of contemporary society? Could one argue that the Minoan society was one of the first feminist societies in the Ancient world?*

I think I ought to tackle your second question first. From the early 1900s to the present, many people have argued that Minoan Crete was a 'feminist' society. Some people have suggested that it was a matriarchy, others that it was a matrilineal society, others still that it was a 'gylany', i.e. a gender egalitarian society. Speaking as a woman working on Minoan Crete, I would love to believe that women in Minoan society were very important. I feel fairly confident that at least some women must have been held in high regard in Bronze Age Crete. But I am not entirely convinced that the evidence currently available provides unequivocal, definite support for Minoan Crete as a 'feminist' society, in the sense that it was a matriarchy or gylany. So, because I am not entirely convinced that a Minoan 'feminist' society is an undisputable historical fact, I cannot really describe the transition of the Minoan woman into the woman of contemporary society. But I can say that for me the fact that generations of archaeologist and laypeople have believed in some form of Minoan 'feminism' is fascinating, and as interesting as whether or not this form or social organisation actually existed in Bronze Age Crete.

*6. In your presentation, a striking and most fascinating observation that might have not even crossed a lay person's mind was the correlation between the Minoan culture and the art (or the science) of psychoanalysis. Could you elaborate to bring some clarity on this?*

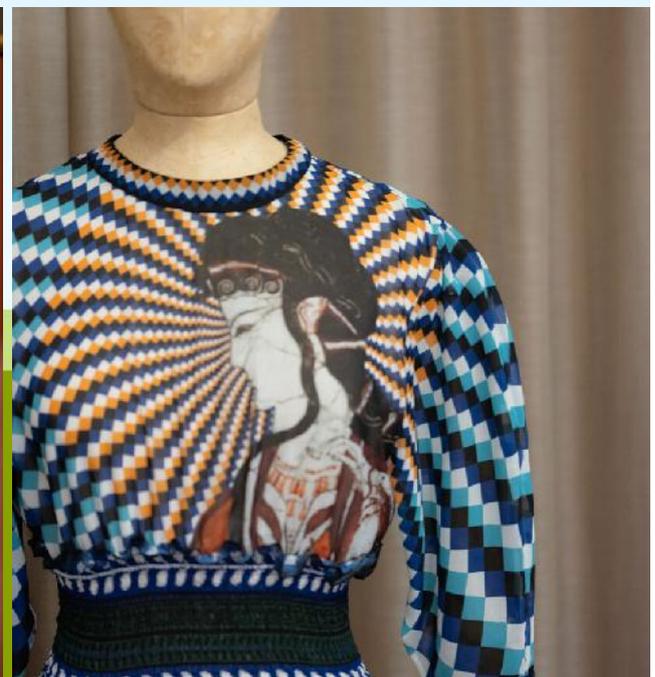
As my friend and colleague Cathy Gere has shown in some of publications, there is an interesting connexion between Minoan archaeology and Sigmund Freud. Freud was fascinated by archaeology in general, and followed quite closely the discoveries made by Schliemann at Troy and Mycenae and, later, by Evans at Knossos. He was a collector of antiquities and often compared the work of the psychologist with that of the archaeologist, i.e. used archaeology as a metaphor for the psychoanalytic practice of excavating personal history. According to Freud's controversial theory of inherited memory, important developments and events in the history of humankind left traces or actual psychic layers in later generations, similar to the deposition of geological and archaeological strata. Freud perceived Minoan Crete as a woman-centred, pre-patriarchal historical stage that had

deposited a pre-Oedipal, mother-fixated layer in the European psyche. So, for example, when Freud treated the poet Hilda Doolittle (a.k.a. H.D.), he considered her 'hysteria' as a regression to the Minoan, pre-Oedipal layer in her psyche. Some of the symptoms that led him to this diagnosis were her interest in Minoan Crete and her bisexuality.

*7. The Parthenon Marbles exhibited in the British Museum have been the subject of heated debate over the years. The issue of the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles keeps recurring every so often triggering considerable controversies. What is your point of view on this subject?*

I feel very torn by this complex issue, pulled in opposite directions. On the one hand, as an archaeologist, I can see a case for their return, since it is usually best for any archaeological finds to be kept as close as possible to the archaeological context where they were found originally; I also appreciate why the Parthenon Marbles mean so much for the Greeks, more than other monuments, and why they make a special plea for them (and not, for example, for the columns from a famous Mycenaean tomb, the 'Treasury of Atreus' or for other Greek monuments, which are also in the British Museum). On the other hand, there are other concerns beyond archaeology that need to be taken into account, and I find some of the reasons usually presented to argue that the Parthenon Marbles are a unique case rather debatable and even objectionable. Also, the Parthenon Marbles have become part of British culture too, and I wonder whether their very presence in the British Museum adds to their aura, and makes them more useful for Greece – they are like ambassadors for Greece. Curiously, when I first visited the wonderful New Acropolis Museum I did not miss the Parthenon Marbles: what I really missed is a section documenting the post-classical history of the Acropolis, the centuries during which the Parthenon was a Christian and Muslim place of worship, the Frankish tower, and all the other structures that have disappeared in the course of the 19th century. I find the history of the Acropolis and the Parthenon after the Classical period utterly fascinating.

*Photos courtesy Branding Heritage*



## 14th Annual Greek Roadshow - Finance Minister Christos Staikouras: "We invite you to invest in Greece"

The 14th Annual Greek Roadshow took place in London on the 19th of September, 2019. Greek public companies presented their business plans and prospects. 30 Companies participated in the Roadshow, during which more than 600 private meetings were conducted, with 100 investment funds and 140 analysts and portfolio managers.

The central event of the Roadshow was undoubtedly the speech by the Greek Finance Minister, Christos Staikouras, along with speeches by the Chairman of the Hellenic Capital Market Commission, Dr Vassiliki Lazarakou, the Chairman of the Athens Exchange Group, George Chatzinikolaou and the CEO of the Athens Exchange Group, Sokrates Lazaridis.

In his speech, Mr. Staikouras gave a detailed description of the Greek government's policies and achievements during its first two months in power, outlined its economic priorities and called on the participants to invest in Greece.

In greater detail, Mr. Staikouras pointed out that the European and global environment is entering a period of uncertainty, namely due to trade tensions, geopolitical changes, the refugee problem and Brexit. In this ever more fragile environment, Mr. Staikouras expressed his confidence in Europe's ability to find common, holistic and inclusive solutions. At the same time, the Greek government, by implementing a cohesive economic program, will restore the country's economy and lead it back to a period of normality.

The Finance Minister listed a number of such measures already being implemented by the Greek government, which include the improvement of the debt repayment plan, the lifting of capital controls, the labor market reforms, the Public Power Corporation's restructuring, the promotion of privatizations and the launching of the process for an early repayment of IMF's loans.

Mr. Staikouras particularly stressed the positive indications for the future of the Greek economy, specifically, the fact that Greek bonds have reached historic-low yields, the improvement of the economic climate index, the surpassing of the budget income goals and the effective budget execution. He underlined the adoption of a holistic economic plan by the Greek government, whose fundamental tenets include a prudent fiscal policy, adherence to agreed fiscal goals, boosts to economic development, job creation, tax cuts, privatization, structural reforms for enhancing competitiveness, more efficient public

administration, guarding the stability of the banking sector and combating income inequality and social exclusion. The Greek government will honestly pursue this ambitious agenda, with the goals of increasing GDP and improving its composition and quality and reinforcing productivity, structural competitiveness and economic extroversion.

The Finance Minister then outlined the government's nine core priorities for 2019, namely:

- Attainment of agreed fiscal goals. It is estimated that Greece will surpass the 3,5%-of-GDP primary surplus for 2019, as well as for 2020, allowing the government to achieve its tax cut goals. Mr. Staikouras was confident that, by implementing suitable policies, the government will gain the room for fiscal manoeuvre necessary for further tax cuts in 2020.

- Enhancing the banking sector's stability. The Finance Minister mentioned initiatives for the formation of new asset protection mechanisms and stressed the upward trends in the deposits.

- Creation of a new tax framework, oriented towards development, with measures aimed at legal reforms for the simplification of Greece's tax code and personal and corporate tax cuts, which will reduce the financial burden on Greek individuals, families and businesses, as well as make Greece more investment-friendly.

- Increase of liquidity, by making effective use of European financial instruments and the execution of the public investments budget.

- Promotion of privatizations. Mr. Staikouras made reference to the ongoing bidding process for the International Athens Airport, which is due to be completed at the end of October, and emphasized that the Helleniko investment progresses fast. All related ministerial decisions have been signed and the bidding competition for the project's casino part is ongoing.

- Implementation of structural reforms, by simplifying the investment licensing process, promoting the creation of business parks, better informing and incentivising potential investors, reforming and restructuring the labor and energy market, upgrading the digital economic sector and investing in education, research and development.

- Fulfilment of obligations included in the EU's 3rd Enhanced Surveillance Report, which will lead to

the rapid improvement of Greece's international credibility and relations with European partners.

- Management of private debt, by policies such as plans for primary-household protection and reforming the legal framework for insolvency.

- Repayment of the most expensive portion of Greece's debt to the IMF, a goal for the attainment of which the Greek government has already taken important steps, in consultation with the Fund's administrators, as well as the EU.

The Finance Minister expressed his confidence that the implementation of this economic plan will boost development and improve the sustainability of the Greek sovereign debt. Mr. Staikouras concluded his speech by pointing that Greece has come a long way forward during the last decade, and is now back to normality, having achieved political stability and gained trust and credibility, which will be further enhanced by the government's pursuit of development-oriented structural reforms and combating of hurdles, weaknesses and uncertainties, and made a motivational call on the Roadshow's participants: "There are excellent opportunities, competitive advantages and the geopolitical location of the country is of vital importance. We thus invite you to invest in Greece".

**Finance Minister Christos Staikouras: "There are excellent opportunities, competitive advantages and the geopolitical location of the country is of vital importance. We thus invite you to invest in Greece".**



Photos (courtesy of the Athens Exchange Group)

1. Finance Minister, Christos Staikouras, 2. Chairman of the Athens Exchange Group, George Chatziniolaou, 3. Chairman of the Hellenic Capital Market Commission, Vassiliki Lazarakou, 4. CEO of the Athens Stock Exchange, Sokrates Lazaridis

## Dep. Fin Min Skylakakis at the EastMed London Investment Summit: “Greece offers unique opportunities for investment and growth”

The Economist’s Second Eastmed-London Investment Summit entitled “Cyprus-Greece-Israel: Propelling a partnership for growth” took place on the 3rd of December 2019 at the London Stock Exchange. Policy-makers, experts and journalists had the opportunity to discuss the economic prospects of the Eastern Mediterranean and the geopolitical challenges posed by energy discoveries and explore ways that the region could capitalize on investment opportunities.

Addressing the Summit Greece’s Deputy Minister of Finance, Mr Theodoros Skylakakis, admitted that after 9 years of crisis and underinvestment, Greece has failed to produce the necessary investment surge for an investment led recovery and attributed this mainly to an over restrictive fiscal policy (from 2016 to 2018 the primary surpluses achieved were on average two percent over the agreed high fiscal targets set by the European institutions) and to over taxation of businesses.

However, the new government elected in the summer has put an end to irrational fiscal restriction and is slashing tax rates for businesses and investment, Mr Skylakakis said. “By 2020 we shall have one of the most competitive tax regimes for businesses among OECD member countries. We are also promoting structural economic reforms and speeding up privatization in all possible fronts. This creates a unique opportunity for investment and growth since Greece has numerous investment opportunities.”

“The crisis has now turned into an opportunity”, Mr Skylakakis said, drawing attention to the following points:

- Greece has a strong pro business government with a four year period ahead of it and no elections in between.

- The risks due to the Greek debt have decreased dramatically. The interest-rate for the 10 year bond has dropped from 3.9 to 1.5 from March this year to today. Debt sustainability analysis by the European institutions between June and November show Greece achieving the hundred percent debt to GDP ratio five years earlier. The brave New World predicted by the markets, driven by long term low

inflation due to innovation and low or negative interest rates, decisively diminishes the importance of the Greek debt as a restrictive parameter for long term growth.

- Greece has ahead of it a fiscal and investment stimulus. The agreement for primary surpluses of 3.5% will end at the latest by 2022 and the Greek government aims to do it a lot earlier by convincing its European partners that the Debt Sustainability Analysis makes more sense with lower primary surpluses. “Also we aim to convince our partners that it also makes sense to use the ANFAs and SMP profits for investment rather than debt service”.

Finally, Mr Skylakakis highlighted that Greece is still an advanced economy, a member of the Eurozone with modern infrastructure and a well educated and diligent labor force and called on potential investors to become partners and take advantage of the unique opportunities available in Greece today.



*Photo: Deputy Finance Minister Theodoros Skylakakis taking part in the panel “The East-Med Economy: Creating a favourable economic and financial environment”*

## Reload Greece Connect19 – Greece Open for Business



. Ambassador of Greece in UK Dimitris Caramitsos-Tziras interviewed by Livemedia

RG Connect19 was held on the 5th of October in association with the London Business School, the London School of Economics and the SEESOX program of Oxford University. The conference brought together a community of policy makers, entrepreneurs and academics from the UK, Greece and other countries, in an effort to mobilise the Greek Diaspora to invest in Greece, forge connections, facilitate the exchange of views and promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

### Greece is becoming more business friendly

Policy makers and Greek government representatives attended the conference and had the opportunity to discuss the changes that Greece is implementing in order to become more open for business and investment.

Christos Dimas, Greece's Deputy Minister for Development and Investments — in charge of Research and Technology — spoke of the positive economic climate in recent months in Greece, as shown by the record low interest rates in 10-year

bonds and the improvement in consumer sentiment. Mr Dimas stressed that one of the primary objectives of Greece's new government is to raise competitiveness, remove bureaucratic obstacles (i.e. by accelerating the licensing procedures for opening a new business), improve infrastructure (i.e. by facilitating higher speed connections) and to provide incentives for investment (i.e. through lower taxation). "We are accelerating the privatization process", Mr Dimas said, while also referring to the government's plans to create two new innovation districts, in Athens and Thessaloniki.

Ioannis Tsakiris, Greece's Deputy Minister for Development and Investments — in charge of Public Investments and European Structural Funds — focused on the access to funding and finance, which is vital for connecting research with the market. "We are creating favourable legislation, so that companies can provide stock options to attract highly qualified employees", Mr Tsakiris said, while also stressing the need for the establishment of dedicated technology transfer funds, which



should usually be located within universities so that they could immediately finance an idea that can potentially be commercialized.

“Continuous effort and consistency are needed” for reforms to be successful, said Alexandros Dimitriadis, Greece’s Secretary General for International Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighting the role that economic diplomacy can play in promoting investment in Greece. We are trying to create a new type of economic diplomacy for Greece which will be more extrovert and open to the world, Mr Dimitriadis said.

### Greece as a medical destination

One of the key sectors that can benefit Greece’s economy is medical tourism. Greece is becoming a key player in the medical tourism industry, thanks to its temperate climate, highly-trained medical staff and cutting-edge medical innovations. A panel of experts operating in Greece discussed developments in the fields of IVF & plastic surgery, addressing some milestones and key challenges.

Alexia Chatziparasidou, Founder and Lab Director of Embryolab Fertility Clinic, noted that Greece offers advanced technology in medical operations at a low cost. In order to make the most of the potential in medical tourism, Greece should develop its own strategy, involve all stakeholders (politicians, business people, the tourist industry and clinics), identify threats and explore business opportunities.

There are couples from all over the world who come to Greece for IVF treatment, said Konstantinos Pantos — Founder of GENESIS ATHENS clinic & Member of the Board of the Greek Medical Tourism Council — drawing from his personal experience. Greece has good weather, beautiful landscapes, and cheap medical services; however, there is uncertainty. “We need to create trust”, said Mr Pantos, urging the Greek government

to seize the opportunity of medical tourism and to create an adequate administrative framework. He also suggested that the promotion of Greece as a medical tourism destination should not be done only through advertising but also through partnerships with other countries and medical institutions; for example, Mr Pantos referred to the MoU which has been signed with China for the creation of a Chinese medical centre in Athens and a master on Hippocrates’s medicine at a Chinese university.

Finally, Dimitris Drakotos — Founder of Art Surgery — addressed problems that need to be tackled, such as high taxation and problems with issuing visas in the case of patients from the Middle East.

### Funding and Growth

EquiFund, an initiative created by the Hellenic Republic in cooperation with the European Investment Fund (EIF), was launched in Greece in 2018, aiming to strengthen the venture capital market in Greece, to support business growth and to give talented human capital in Greece and its Diaspora a chance to thrive. Speaking at the conference a year after its launch, venture capitalists and entrepreneurs shared their experiences and perspectives on venture capital sourcing channels and on how start-ups can meet the criteria and pursue a top-notch venture capital.

“We see a positive wind in Greece”, said Bruno Bolsens — partner at Big Pi Ventures — and urged technologists to develop their business side, stressing that students need to think about ways of bringing their products to the market.

Tony Kypreos, Serial tech entrepreneur and UK Government Global Entrepreneur Program dealmaker, suggested that Greece needs to focus on three major sectors: tourism, agricultural technology and renewable energy. He also spoke about the need to connect Greek universities to the market and to promote early stage investment, i.e. through tax reforms.

Andreas Stavropoulos, partner at Threshold Ventures, noted that the changing demographics and changes in demand create opportunities for developing modern infrastructure of software and use of AI i.e. in areas such as medical diagnosis and autonomous driving.

### Evolution of technology and growth

Finally, the evolution of technology and its role in

future growth were widely discussed at the conference. Some of the issues raised were the potential of 5G networks and smart cities and how these can be applied to Greece. According to experts, investment, development of the network and new devices will be needed in the case of 5G additional frequencies. To make cities “smart”, challenges such as lack of funding, bureaucracy and reluctance to take risks need to be overcome.



Photos courtesy of Reload Greece

### About Reload Greece

Reload Greece is a UK-based organization founded in 2012, which focuses on educating and supporting a new generation of entrepreneurs to create ventures with a positive impact. Its vision is to define the model of entrepreneurship which successfully harnesses the power of the diaspora to make a social or economic impact in their home countries. It not only provides young people with an initial idea, with mentoring and guidance, but also helps businesses grow through programmes which bring investors and entrepreneurs together.

## Strong presence of Greece at IMO



Greece participated in the 31st Assembly of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which took place at the IMO Headquarters in London from 25 November to 4 December 2019.

Greece's Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Giannis Plakiotakis, addressed the 31st IMO Assembly Opening Session and outlined Greece's priorities in international shipping. "I am proud to represent a country with a great tradition in shipping", Mr Plakiotakis said. "Our top priority and goal should be foremost the safety of life at sea and the safety of the environment". The Greek Minister commended the work of people with a mission to save human life at sea. He stressed the need to prevent unsafe maritime migration and the need for concerted action against piracy. Moreover he said that the successful implementation of the global sulphur cap in marine fuels and the decarbonisation of shipping are of high importance, in order to ensure the sustainability of shipping in the future. Finally, Mr Plakiotakis highlighted the need for digitalization and automation of ships and for the continuous appropriate training of the human capital of shipping.

In the margin of the 31st IMO Assembly Mr Plakiotakis participated in a series of important bilateral meetings. At a meeting with the Japanese State Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Nobuhide Minorikawa, a Memorandum on Cooperation on maritime technology and industry was signed. Moreover, Mr Plakiotakis met with the IMO General Secretary, Kitack Lim, the Chinese Vice Minister of Transport, responsible for maritime issues, Li Jiaxiang, the Georgian Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Natela Turnava, the

Vice Admiral of the Brazilian Navy, Roberto da Cunha, and the director of IOPC Funds, Jose Maura.

In the elections held during the 31st IMO Assembly on 29 November 2019 Greece was re-elected to the IMO Council, in category A, receiving 151 votes. Category A includes 10 states with the largest interest in providing international shipping services. Greece's re-election to Category A of the IMO Council is a very positive development that reaffirms the country's pivotal role in global shipping issues, its active presence in the global shipping sector and is important for the promotion of the interests of Greek shipping internationally.

*Photos:*

1. Ambassador of Greece in the UK, Dimitris Caramitsos-Tziras, and Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Giannis Plakiotakis,
2. Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Giannis Plakiotakis, addressing the 31st IMO Assembly Opening Session
3. Greece and Japan sign Memorandum on Cooperation on maritime technology and industry
4. Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, Giannis Plakiotakis, meets IMO General Secretary, Kitack Lim.
5. IMO Assembly 6. IMO Logo



## Greek Diaspora in the UK and beyond – Political engagement and collaboration with Greece

On 10 October 2019, the team of the Greek Diaspora Project at SEESOX (South East European Studies), of the University of Oxford, presented its rich research output on the impact of the contemporary Greek Diasporas in the UK and elsewhere. This was a well-attended event at the Hellenic Centre, in London. The presentation was followed by a panel discussion on various topics related to the Greek Diaspora, such as the participation of Greeks abroad in Greece's general elections, the brain drain during the Greek crisis and the prospect for strengthening the relation between the Greek Diaspora and the motherland.

### Ambassador Caramitsos-Tziras: Greek Diaspora and Greece – a bidirectional relationship

In his opening remarks, Dimitris Caramitsos-Tziras, Ambassador of Greece in the UK, congratulated the SEESOX team for completing the first phase of the Greek Diaspora Project – a project which is crucial, but also sensitive and complicated. He noted that throughout its history the Hellenic Diaspora has engaged in a two-way interaction with the motherland - both as a recipient and as an instigator. This type of constant flow between the Motherland and the Diaspora centers around the world has proven to be a worthy flow of inspiration and a real lifeline for both.

Today, during a period of drastic and, occasionally, dramatic changes in the international scene and as Greece is reshaping itself emerging from the recent economic and social crisis, the Motherland needs all of its resources to face the future. At this juncture, Greece relies on the support of individuals and groups outside Greece, but at the same time Greeks abroad expect that they will have the opportunity to remain actively involved in the Motherland's affairs and receive their homeland's support, especially in times of uncertainty, which we currently face in the UK.

Thus, Ambassador Tziras highlighted that in all respects the Greek Diaspora project is timely as it deals with an issue of great significance. Once it is completed, it will provide a holistic, scientific data base which will offer both to policy makers and to Diaspora institutions a comprehensive data foundation to build on. Ambassador Tziras emphasised that Greece's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs supported this effort from the start, having acknowledged the necessity to have an accurate quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Diaspora. Ambassador Tziras also congratulated the other supporters of the project.

### Nikos Karamouzis: Post crisis Greece should offer opportunities to Diaspora Greeks

Addressing the event, Nikos Karamouzis, First Chair of the SEESOX Hellenic Advisory Board, expressed his gratitude for being given the opportunity to support the Greek Diaspora Project in a fruitful collaboration between academics and the private sector. He also expressed his hope that the new Greek government will implement significant reforms and create a business-friendly environment and a new growth strategy, based on meritocracy, digitization and modernization of procedures, so that talented Greeks from abroad can be attracted to Greece. Finally, Mr Karamouzis spoke in favor of offering the opportunity to Greeks abroad to vote in Greece's general elections.

### The Greek Diaspora Project: Diaspora map, diasporic vote and Greeks in the UK

During the panel discussion that followed, chaired by Kalypso Nicolaidis, Professor of International Relations in Oxford and founder of SEESOX, members of the team at SEESOX presented some of the main findings of the project. Othon Anastasakis, director of SEESOX, stressed that the idea of the Greek Diaspora Project was born during the Greek crisis with the aim to understand the transformation of the Greek Diaspora and to explore how it could contribute to the country's exit from the crisis. The project focuses on the political, economic and philanthropic aspects of the Diaspora. It has already produced substantial research and will expand its activity in the coming years.

An impressive, as well as accessible and user-friendly, result of this research is the digital map that SEESOX created, a dynamic tool that records and depicts the presence of Greek diasporic organisations worldwide. As Foteini Kalantzzi, A. G. Leventis Research Officer at SEESOX, explained in presenting the map, this tool gives the user the opportunity to identify the Greek organisations

through filters (criteria) such as country, activity and origin and aims to become a digital bridge between the homeland and Greeks abroad.

Having done extensive research in the position of Greek political elites on the political engagement of the Diaspora, Othon Anastasakis spoke about the issue of the diasporic vote. Who will vote? How and for whom? Should only those that are already registered in the electoral roll vote, or could the electoral roll be expanded - and based on different criteria? Although there is constitutional provision for the diasporic vote, so far, there is no application of this provision. According to Mr Anastasakis, in dealing with the issue, political parties appear to have taken into account the political cost as well as the fact that the Diaspora Greeks are an unknown electorate. In any case, offering the right to vote is considered an instrument to make the Diaspora more engaged politically.

Commenting on the issue of diasporic vote, Ambassador Tzirias highlighted its complexity and noted that it is better to have a longer process in order to end up in a system: in a method of diasporic vote that would be widely acceptable and will not have to be revisited.

Presenting some findings from his research on Greeks in the UK, Manolis Pratsinakis, Onassis Research Fellow of the Greek Diaspora Project, said that about 55.000 Greeks migrated to the UK in 2010-2018. However, this new Diaspora does not comprise only of young, highly educated Greeks, Mr Pratsinakis said, noting that brain drain is a phenomenon which preceded the Greek debt crisis, but was, admittedly, intensified by it.

Analysing the characteristics of the new Diaspora based on research conducted by the Athens International Airport, Yannis Paraschis, CEO of the Athens International Airport, noted that the



Photos courtesy of SEESOX: 1. Ambassador of Greece in the UK Dimitrios Caramitsos-Tzirias, 2. Manolis Pratsinakis, Onassis Research Fellow of the Greek Diaspora Project, 3. Kalypto Nicolaidis, Professor of International Relations in Oxford and founder of SEESOX

majority of Greeks who left the country during the crisis are young, mostly single women. Most of them do not intend to return to Greece unless new career opportunities emerge.

Drawing from his personal experience, Alexandros Sarrigeorgiou, CEO of Eurolife and new Chair of the SEESOX Hellenic Advisory Board, said that in order to attract educated Greeks from abroad, Greece needs to create opportunities, i.e. to establish practice programmes at universities or technology hubs. Moreover, the establishment of an extrovert and business-friendly environment by the Greek government is indispensable.

Greeks abroad can contribute to Greece's development, even if they do not return to Greece, Mr Pratsinakis noted, adding that Greeks abroad can act as a bridge between Greece and the country where they live, by transmitting social remittances to their motherland in the form of ideas and best practices.



Photos: 1. Ambassador of Greece in the UK Dimitrios Caramitsos-Tziras, 2. Audience, 3. Dr. Othon Anastasakis, Senior Research Fellow in South European Studies, Director St Antony's South East European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX) 4. Panel discussion, 5. Logo, 6. Nikos Karamouzis, First Chair of the SEESOX Hellenic Advisory Board

## Elena Akrita in London: I want to be the voice of the underdog



Live Conversations

Έλενα Ακρίτα  
«Τα τάπερ της Αλίκης»

Κυριακή 17 Νοεμβρίου 2019  
στις 18:30-20:00 στο  
Flocafe Espresso Room

It was a full house in the evening of the 17th of November at Flocafe Espresso Room on Shaftesbury Avenue, London, when Greek author and journalist Elena Akrita presented her new novel «Τα τάπερ της Αλίκης» («Alikí's Tupperware»). Elena talked about her personal experiences in journalism and writing, and expressed her views on past events as well as topical issues. The event was coordinated by lecturer and journalist Michael Kosmides. A lively and thought provoking conversation ensued with the audience, consisted mostly of Greek students and expats. The event was organised by Greek Library of London - Ελληνικός Κύκλος Βιβλιόφιλων Λονδίνου.

Thanks to her distinctive and sharp sense of humour and her discerning style in writing, she became quite popular since her early twenties. The daughter of two politicians with active careers, she was brought up in a posh northern suburb of Athens, where she lives until now. She has been in the public eye for ages, working as a reporter and investigative journalist, writing books, writing TV and stage scripts, presenting TV shows, being invited to TV talk shows to express her views as a pundit, acting in TV series, and writing columns for newspapers.

She takes pride in her active public presence and her ability to energise people and she thinks of herself as a voice for the underdog, «the invisible ones», as she says. Her passionate involvement in the social media has earned her numerous fervent fans and a bunch of 'haters' as well. Her interventions in the public discourse on issues of topical interest often trigger heated debates and controversies in the social media.

A few hours before the presentation of her new book in London, Elena Akrita spoke to @GreeceInUK.

1. *Mrs Akrita in London. Are you familiar with London?*

I would say that I am as familiar with London as I am with Athens. As a matter of fact, I used to come here as a child. I was a student at high school and my mother used to send me to Oxford to take English language classes. I spent all my summers there, but London is a place I love greatly, I come five to six times a year, mainly because I am a fan of the Royal Opera House, and whenever there are new productions, I come to see them. I also love theatre. In one month's time I will be back with my girl friends, a trip dedicated to theatre and ballet performances.

2. *It seems that the pale London sun did you a favour and appeared in the sky a little bit...*

So pale as a rule, indeed! But yesterday it was great, a dream! But I don't mind the weather; I am not affected by a gloomy sky. I am only influenced by people's misery. I don't mind the weather conditions; they don't have an impact on me.

3. *You were invited by the Greek Library of London. How was this proposal addressed to you? You only heard about the Greek Library of London now I guess?*

I just heard about it. Firstly, let me stress that the event tonight is sold out. I am sure that even in a larger space, the event would be equally successful; I had no idea that there was such an initiative, as far as I have understood it's a new thing. I think that Yiota Nakou and the whole team deserve great congratulations. It is just impressive what they have done! We Greeks were outside the book-buying, the readership map here in London. This is a strong start, after all, it's not only me, it's writers that will come after me, and they are great writers. This is a laudable initiative. I think it is something embraced by the Greek community. Bravo, bravo, bravo. To answer your question, they contacted my publisher and through the publishing house I was notified and I responded with great joy!

**«Yiota Nakou and the whole team of the Greek Library in London deserve great congratulations. We Greeks were outside the book-buying, the readership map here in London. This is a laudable initiative»**

4. *Your presence in London coincides with a significant day for Greece's modern political and social history, the 17th of November. On the occasion of this coincidence, I would like to ask you: what is the meaning of the 17th of November to you?*

I was born in 1955. So I was 18 at the time.

- Very young!

- Very young indeed! I was in there with many other high school students. I was shut in the Polytechnic that night, the 'night of the tanks'. They opened the gates – I will never forget it, I have described the whole thing in one of my articles – and we started running along Stournari street and, all of a sudden, I am getting grabbed by the people with the billy clubs and I am rushed into the police van, and it was that moment I felt two very strong hands grabbing me literally from the van's ladder and as I turn my head, I see Panos Giannaropoulos, my tutor in Physics, he was a university student, I was a failure in Physics and I used to take private lessons, so he grabbed me and rescued me. We started running in the middle of the night, we were all completely lost, we had no clue, and all of a sudden a door is open on Stournari Street and a voice says «Come in». It was a couple. They sheltered as many students as possible on that day. I remember us queuing up to make phone calls to our families to let them know that we were alive. The following morning, the lady who owned the house, gave us a comb and a lipstick that was passed around and shared by girls. There were morning police patrols to make arrests. So we woke up, freshened up ourselves and finally went home.

5. *While asking this question, I expected that you would come up with a general answer concerning the significance and relevance of the anniversary. I had no idea that you were there...*

I was there, and, as the tank forced through and knocked down the gate, I remember – no matter how hilarious it may sound – that my last thought - «what's your last thought», as they say - well, at eighteen my 'last thought' was so funny «I am not going to ever again eat spaghetti with minced meat». And when I went back home, I think this was one of the most highly emotional moments I have ever experienced, I will never forget it as long as I am alive, what home means, how much it mattered that my mother would wait for me standing there in apprehension, this was one of my happiest moments in my life, going back to my home's cosiness.

- The harbour.
- The harbour, exactly. So you understand that to me it is a very important day today.

**«I was there, and, as the tank forced through and knocked down the gate, I remember – no matter how hilarious it may sound – that my last thought... well, at eighteen my 'last thought' was so funny 'I am not going to ever again eat spaghetti with minced meat'»**

6. *Mrs Akrita, you are a humorist, a journalist, you have worked as an actor and a scriptwriter, an author, a novelist. What is your element?*

I am a journalist.

7. *What type of journalism?*

I am talking about writing humorous stories, which I did as well as possible, since I was 18 years old until now, and I am also talking about the newspaper

column I write now. I have done reporting and investigative journalism, I used to be a reporter and an investigator but I ended up very quickly as a columnist, which earned me the public credit and recognition. My first book, «From Helena with a smile», I was 23 years at the time, was published thanks to Freddy Germanos, almost behind my back. I mean he had gathered all my writings, he went to the publisher, to Kaktos, he had such a high opinion of me, I was shy; and that's how my career started. On the contrary, writing novels is a new thing to me; I started at a more advanced age.

8. *However, there was a long tradition in humorous writing: Dimitris Psathas, Kostas Pretenteris, Freddy Germanos. Do you feel that you tapped into this tradition; did you get influenced by it?*

Psathas was more of a theatre writer. Pretenteris likewise. For me, the most powerful influence, my icon in writing was Nikos Tsiforos. I believe he was also a great playwright; he illustrated this post civil war wounded Greece, in a unique way. I therefore believe that Tsiforos was my idol. I consider him great as a writer as well as a journalist, a columnist, a humorous writer, everything. And they say he was a moody man with a melancholic temperament. You



know, often.... Just like Oscar Wilde. Me too, I have always been somehow melancholic.

*9. Let me seize a phrase you used to pose another question. You spoke of the «wounded post-war Greece». Is Greece still wounded? What are her current wounds? The civil war trauma has been healed for good? Have we left it behind once and for all?*

What matters is not whether we «left it behind». What matters is the way to leave things behind. There are two ways of leaving things behind. Now we are sort of digging deep into this quest... this introspection. One way is to analyze, to provide an explanation, and move forward with this weapon of knowledge and self awareness in our possession. The alternative way is to patch it up. I am afraid that in Greece the latter is often the case. We patch up, cover up our wounds. My book «Τα τάπερ της Αλίκης» («Alikis's Tupperware»), deals with the fact that we Greeks, although we have glorified our past and our childhood years to a great extent and we think that everything was perfect, this is not the case. I write about the harsh realities of the old times, the 80's and the 70's. You probably remember the old alphabet books, featuring the Greek family, daddy, mommy, granny etc. Well, let's face the truth!

Greece was not this thing at the time! I describe a Greece that has nothing to do with this sense of nostalgia. It was a very tough Greece, don't forget that a girl who lost her virginity might get kicked out of home; it was a homophobic Greece, violently homophobic, a terrifying Greece, with bullying on the rise etc. I describe the life of a kid, a chubby girl pushed to commit suicide. I describe a gay couple of two guys over the course of twenty years, their love and their suffering. I describe the abuse of a woman who is a victim, and who finds her voice, finally – after ages of considering her partner's abusing her as something natural. I describe the life of the girls of Fylis street, the prostitutes. I therefore focus backstage, behind the lights shining in Dalianides's films, I focus on the invisible people, who don't appear in those films. The Greek films are full of joy, of light, Rena Vlachopoulou in a two seater car singing with exuberance. Behind this, there are the so called 'invisible ones'. It's the invisible ones; it's the gay people for instance. As a matter of fact, I think it is the very first time in a Greek novel, that a gay couple, two guys in love with each other, are described so overtly. That's my book. It may be very humorous, It may cause laughter but...



**«I focus on the invisible people, who don't appear in the Greek films of the '60s & '70s. The Greek films are full of joy, of light, Rena Vlachopoulou in a two seater car singing with exuberance. Behind this, there are the so called 'invisible ones'. It's the invisible ones; it's the gay people for instance. As a matter of fact, I think it is the very first time in a Greek novel, that a gay couple, two guys in love with each other, are described so overtly»**

*10. Well, it couldn't have been otherwise. So what's in there, in «Alikis Tupperware»?*

Most people say «oh the tupperware, I remember my mom, taking part in tupperware parties in living rooms», but for me these plastic containers also have a symbolic storage of sentiments. We used to shut in there, in airtight conditions, our fears, our dreams, our secrets, the social lies, that we used to say to each other, so that we are in accordance with society, a society that is rotten, which is spoilt. I describe therefore three women – one of them, the granny was a cleaning woman at FINOS FILM, the mother was a shop assistant at MINION, until it was burnt down, and the young daughter. All of them shut down all their feelings, hiding them in these containers. And there comes a moment when they open the airtight lids and all this stink goes away, and there remains a free soul, a soul breathing deeply and rejoices in this, and that's how, through all this process, new voices emerge.

*11. Speaking of wounds, would you say that the contemporary Greek society hurts you in a way?*

What saves me is the fact that I am able to write. Because people love what I do, they talk to me in the streets, «you are our voice» is what I get often, «you express what we have in our souls and we can't express them».

So, yes, the Greek society is wounded. Over the last years I would say that it is a society of two opposing poles. On the one hand, there are free voices, that sound louder and louder, in favour of human rights, in favour of animals' rights... I am also an animal

rights activist you know.. Recently there were a couple of incidents in Athens, television shows that used a homophobic or sexist language. The fact that so many Greeks mobilize, petition, file complaints, and that all this mobilization has some results is encouraging. What we used to call the couch revolutionary is not exactly the case. People can change things.

On the other hand – in order to address your question – you see a society that is not just homophobic, not just brutal and racist. Speaking of racism, I don't mean only against the foreigner, people of a different race, I also mean against the obese, the exceptionally tall or the exceptionally short people. You can see people filled with hatred. If you are involved in social media, you can encounter this kind of people. They even cast evil curses, like «may your kids suffer cancer!! ». This kind of things is not only traumatic and hurting, as you asked me, they are cannibalistic. So I feel that the one side is the side of freedom, and the other..... let's face it: there is «us» and there is «the others». So how can we say "come on guys, we are all Greeks, let's love each other, it is difficult».

**«Recently there were a couple of incidents in Athens, television shows that used a homophobic or sexist language. The fact that so many Greeks mobilize, petition, file complaints, and that all this mobilization has some results is encouraging. What we used to call the couch revolutionary is not exactly the case. People can change things»**

*12. Political correctness. A notion of Anglo-saxon origin, a controversial mindset, with many ardent proponents and sworn enemies. What is your take on «political correctness», Mrs Akrita?*

Despite all its drawbacks, despite the extremes it might lead to, I prefer the politically correct discourse to its opposite. Making a sexist comment regarding someone's weight, for instance, or someone's age, or choices, or whatever.... I prefer to be very careful when it comes to the use of language rather than say «enough is enough with political correctness». Unfortunately, at this moment it is far better to use

a language that is respectful of the other individual, instead of just brushing off the importance of it. The same applies to satire, too, it also applies to writing lyrics or to the public discourse, and it applies everywhere. We in Greece have a comedian called Seferlis. Actually, he and I are currently having legal disputes. I think he epitomizes what I call the opposite of the political discourse. You can't make fun of social groups, this is not hilarious or funny, this is not Aristophanes, and this is racism. Period. This is trash.

**«You can't make fun of social groups, this is not hilarious or funny, this is not Aristophanes, and this is racism. This is trash. Period»**

13. *However, are you interested in keeping an open line of communication with his audience, those people who follow him and admire him? Do you believe that these people could shift, could they switch over at some point?*

No. These people who have reached this stage, no. Some people in the middle ground, yes! We could drag them towards us, on our side. But, if I can have a public confrontation with someone – not the

individual but –with the speech he uses, I will take it to the end. Take it to court.

That's what activism means. Activism is not only words. Activism is also actions.

14. *You are actively involved in social media. More often than not you are severely critical, could I say scathing? And confrontational.*

Well... (playfully) instead of cooling off with time, like most people do, I get all the more indignant.

15. *I have in mind three deaths of very young people: Vangelis Giakoumakis, Eleni Topaloudi, Zak Kostopoulos. You expressed yourself publicly; you spoke out vehemently through social media. What triggered you to make a public statement?*

In the case of Vangelis Giakoumakis, I did in-depth research, I discovered that there had been a politician involved, namely Markogiannakis from Crete, this is not a secret, and he has also taken me to court. The hearing is due next spring but to me, it was a great moral vindication: firstly, the fact that I went to Giannena, took part in the trial, I was summoned as a witness, I testified. Secondly, the fact that when the research was completed, the chairman of the committee investigating the case thanked me in public for the research findings that suggested Mr Markogiannakis' involvement in the case. Whatever I write, I pay a high price for it.





Now the case of Zak Kostopoulos is an entirely different kettle of fish. I was friends with Zak. What brought us close to each other, and it may sound weird, was our shared love for animals. I adored Snoopy, his pooch. In February, a performance will take place at the Greek National Opera at Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Monteverdi's Orfeo, a queer version of it, and a hologram of me is going to appear representing the voice of Reason. In this queer version, Orpheus is not married to Eurydice. He has a male partner, Yuri. Thereafter, there comes the plot, it will be exciting. And this event is somehow dedicated to Zak by all his friends. And the money I will be paid will go to cover the expenses of the legal dispute regarding the case of his killing.

**«In February, a performance will take place at the Greek National Opera at Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Monteverdi's Orfeo, a queer version of it, and a hologram of me is going to appear representing the voice of Reason. This event is somehow dedicated to Zak Kostopoulos by all his friends. And the money I will be paid will go to cover the expenses of the legal dispute regarding the case of his killing»**

16. *Last year, you were the presenter of an event that took place in Stegi entitled «I am positive». How come subjects like homophobia and HIV attract your interest?*

These subjects should attract the attention of all of us. We should talk about them; we should speak out with a loud voice that can be heard. Do you know what happens with people who are in the public eye? Sometimes they are concerned that their speech might avert people from buying their books, for instance. Yet my books are best sellers, they are always number one. These people will never buy me. But there are other people that embrace me. Those who I care about, with whom I can discuss, that are my beloved friends, without even knowing each other personally. Those are the people I am interested in finding common ground with. I am not accountable to nobody else. This, as you understand, answers your question. And I think I will always be like that. I am too old to change.

17. *What makes you keep a hope about Greece today? Is there something you hold onto, something that makes you optimistic for the present and the future?*

What happens is Greece is a sort of «Krifo Scholio» (Secret School). I don't know what exactly was happening with the Church at the time. It is like a

group of people fighting against racist, homophobic speech, it's the «kyr Pantelis» speech, that's how we call it, although Pantelis is a wonderful name. The speech of the small businessman, the store owner who beats Zak to death. There is a 'secret school' of people. And this is us. And more and more people are joining the ranks and make our voice heard.

**«What happens in Greece is a sort of  
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**It is a group of people fighting against racist,  
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And more and more people are joining the  
ranks and make our voice heard»**

*18. I am impressed to hear you use this expression. Secret School?*

Well, yes, it is still a 'secret school'. The reason why I believe people love me is that I am trying to make this 'secret school' all the more visible out there, by writing what I write. There are people who probably cannot speak out; someone has to speak on their behalf at any cost. This is what I want to do, and this is what I do. I have a column in a mainstream newspaper, TA NEA. The fact that I pass this speech on in this newspaper is a great achievement. Writing an article for the gay magazine *antivirus*, which I absolutely adore, the team of *antivirus* I consider them friends, is not the same. The fact that I fulfill the pattern of a woman that has a family, lives in the northern suburbs, has all this bourgeoisie surface, and despite that, I express myself this way, and I behave this way, and I am outside the norms expected from a 'northern suburbs lady', I believe that this is the reason why people like us should play a role in the 'Secret School'. I cannot make high demands on a gay let's say kiosk guy. What can he do? I am accountable to this guy. I say 'No' to curses and spells, no to hatred. And I think we can wrap it up this way. Thank you for this interview!

**«I am trying to make this  
'secret school'**

**all the more visible out there,  
by writing what I write.**

**There are people who probably  
cannot speak out;**

**someone has to speak on their behalf  
at any cost.**

**This is what I want to do,  
and this is what I do»**



## Prof Roderick Beaton, Emeritus Koraes Professor of Modern Greek & Byzantine History, Language & Literature:

### A life dedicated to Greece, Greek history, literature and culture

#### Biography

Roderick Beaton grew up in Edinburgh where he first studied Latin and ancient Greek before going on to Peterhouse, Cambridge, to graduate with a BA in English Literature and a PhD in Modern Greek. He came to King's in 1981 as Lecturer in Modern Greek Language and Literature, and in 1988 was appointed to the Koraes Chair. For ten years he headed the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies (whose functions since 2015 have been taken over by the Department of Classics), and from 2012 to 2016 was Director of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, part of the Arts & Humanities Research Institute.



From October 2009 to September 2012 he held a Major Leverhulme Fellowship, and during autumn 2010 the Visiting Fellowship of the British School at Athens, on whose Council he also serves. His most recent book, arising out of his Leverhulme-funded research, is *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (2013), which won the Runciman Award and the Elma Dangerfield Prize and was shortlisted for the Duff Cooper Prize. In 2013 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA).

Prof. Beaton published his new book 'Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation', on March 2019. The book sets out to understand modern Greeks on their own terms, revealing how a modern nation was built on the ruins of a vanished ancient civilisation. Beaton chronicles the last 300 years of the Greek nation-state, covering its political conflict, financial crises and vibrant culture, to demonstrate Greece's "evolving process of collective identity."

The Financial Times writes that Beaton "captures the full dimensions of Greece's recent troubles" and his new book "deserves to be the standard general history of modern Greece in English for years to come."

Professor Gonda Van Steen, Koraes Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature at King's College London and Director of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, commended Professor Beaton's latest book as a "bold new look on an ever-evolving topic, modern Greek history, delivered by a scholar eminently qualified to address it."

## Professor Beaton receives Order of Honor for contribution to Greek Literature & Culture

Professor Roderick Beaton, Koraes Professor Emeritus, is the latest recipient of the Medal of the Commander of the Order of Honour (Παράσημο του Ταξιάρχη του Τάγματος της Τιμής), bestowed 9 September 2019, by Mr Prokopis Pavlopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic, in a special award ceremony held at the presidential mansion.

Mr Pavlopoulos singled out Professor Beaton's exceptional contributions to the study of the formation of Greek national consciousness and of Byzantium's role in the creation of the characteristic legacies of the Renaissance. He also praised Professor Beaton's pioneering biography of the poet George Seferis and his seminal book on Byron and the Greek Revolutionary War, which, along with his latest book, *Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation*, will help shape the many ways in which Greece and the Greek diaspora will be celebrating the bicentenary of the Greek Revolution in 2021.



Mr Pavlopoulos also noted Professor Beaton's thirty-year-long commitment to research, teaching, mentoring, and service in the fields of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature and his distinguished and impactful role as Koraes Chair and Director of King's Centre for Hellenic Studies. In turn, Professor Beaton thanked Mr Pavlopoulos and spoke eloquently (in Greek) about his first, youthful encounters with Greek culture, which proved so formative for his later studies and career choices.

He expressed warm gratitude to all those who, over the many years at King's, have supported him in his mission of contributing to the study of Greece, Cyprus, and the Greek world.



@GreeceinUK has had the honour and the pleasure to have an interview with Prof. Roderick Beaton.

*1) What does the award of the Medal of the Commander of the Order of Honour by HE the President of the Hellenic Republic mean to you as a person and as an academic? What does this honorary distinction mean also for the Koraeas Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College, which you presided over for many years? How do you believe this honour may impact modern Greek studies in UK's universities?*

It's the greatest honour of my life! The President was very generous in his citation when he conferred the award, and mentioned several of the books I've published over the years, about Greek literature, culture and history. But it never occurred to me that anything I was writing would merit such a response on behalf of the Greek state from its very head! And of course, everything I've written, all my lectures and my teaching going back 40 years – none of

that I could ever have done on my own. So it's also an honour for the Koraeas Chair at King's College London, for the College itself, as well as for other institutions that have helped me on my way: the universities where I studied (Cambridge) and gained my first experience as an academic (Birmingham) and the British School at Athens, with which I've been associated ever since my student days. As for Modern Greek studies in British universities – well, that's a continuing story. Every support from Greece is welcome. But the future lies with the students (British, Greek, or from whatever country) who will engage with Modern Greek history, language and literature in years to come. And I wish there could be more enthusiastic, or visible, support for studies of this kind in the UK of tomorrow than there seems to be today.

*2) What motivated you to engage with Greece and its history? Has it to do with British scholars' long-standing deep admiration for the Greek antiquity and acclaimed British universities' long tradition with classics or was it the result of a personal discovery*

*from your unmediated contact with the country and its people?*

You're quite right—I did start out as an impressionable adolescent fascinated by the classical tradition. But what fascinated me most, right from the beginning, was the fact that I was starting out to learn a language had been spoken and written for the last 3000 years. I was just 13 years old when a family holiday took me to Greece for the very first time. I was bowled over by the sheer vitality of the place, the rugged lines of the landscape, the loudness of the voices, the brightness of the Greek sun. (You should know that I grew up in Edinburgh, sometimes called the 'Athens of the North' – but a darker, greyer place, I assure you!) And I fell in love with Greek music, right from the start. I think it was on a jukebox on Mykonos that I first songs that I later realised must have been by Theodorakis. From that time, I was 'hooked'. I studied Ancient Greek for 4 years at school, and it was one of my favourite subjects. But I was not cut out to be a classicist. I always wanted to be a writer. I loved books and literature. For my first degree I chose not Classics but English Literature. When I came back to Greece at the end of my undergraduate degree, it was no longer the ancient world I wanted to study, but modern Greece. And I've been doing that ever since!

*3) In your recent book "Biography of a Modern Nation" you suggest that the recent economic crisis, apart from a financial and economic phenomenon, was the result of a number of interconnected factors, including aspects of the nature of Greek identity, the role of the state and the nation's place in the modern world. Are there recurrent patterns in Greek modern history that are likely to emerge again and generate fresh challenges in the future? Are there also cultural characteristics and social mentalities that play a role too?*

I still have a lot to learn about the crisis of the last decade, its immediate causes – and of course it's far too soon to begin to guess what its longer-term effects might prove to be. Talking with Greek friends, and with others who had the opportunity to spend more of the last ten years in Greece than I did, I'm reminded that the distance that enabled me to try to grasp the whole of the country's modern history in a reasonably short book also has its downside. That said, I found plenty of evidence that the roots of the recent 'crisis' can be traced far

back into the events of the past and into mentalities that have developed or have been preserved over at least 200 hundred years. To take just a couple of examples, compare the attitudes to taxation at the end of the 1820s and the 1830s, at the time when Capodistrias was 'Governor' of Greece and then when the Bavarian Otto was king, and during the PASOK years. Or consider the foreign loans made to Greece during the Revolution and while it was ending. The lifeblood of the fledgling state came in the form of loans, not gifts. The Greek state has struggled ever afterwards to repay those debts – while a different sort of debt, a cultural one this time, from modern Europe to ancient Greece, can surely never be repaid either!

*4) A very famous Greek scholar<sup>1</sup> wrote in one of the most read books in Greece "When a Greek talks about Europe, he automatically excludes Greece. When a foreigner talks about Europe, we [Greeks] consider it unthinkable that he may not include Greece.(...) Who are we? Are we the Europeans of the East or the Orientals of Europe?" Do you have an answer to his questions?*

In my book I argue that Greece doesn't belong to only the West or only the East, but actually to both. 'Europe' as a name and as an idea begins with the Greeks, in the pages of Herodotus's Histories of the 5th century BCE. Europe is unthinkable without Greece, where so much that we think of as European started. But Greece, as the modern country was created and sustained after the 1821 Revolution, in turn forms an integral part of Europe, and therefore of 'the West'. On the other hand, Greece is equally the inheritor of the thousand-year-long Byzantine tradition, in which Orthodoxy represents the 'Eastern' form of Christianity, as opposed to the Catholic and (later) Protestant West. So there's no single or simple answer to the question!

*5) Your interest in Greece has been almost exclusively focussed on two main areas: Greece's history/politics and its literature. Byron and Seferis engaged in both, as both were renowned poets with an active involvement in Greece's politics. However they lived and acted in a completely different historic period and context and they have contributed in a completely different way to Greece's modern history. Why have you singled out these historic figures for further study? How is each of them important in Greek history? Do they share common characteristics?*

You're right – I've increasingly been attracted to figures who bridge the gap between what we conventionally think of as 'literature' or 'culture' on the one hand and 'history' or 'politics' on the other. I think it goes back to my own university education and the earlier stages of my professional career, when these branches of study were rigorously separated (as they still are, at least formally, in Greek universities). I was taught to read poems and novels without much reference to the world in which they had been written or subsequently read. I think it was because I spent so much of my time in Greece during the 1970s that I began to rebel against this. You can't teach British students about Solomos without also teaching them about the Greek Revolution of the 1820s. Once they begin to read poems by Seferis, there's so much they also need to know about Greece's history in the twentieth century. And so it goes on. I believe that studying history enriches the way we read literature. And I also believe that many 'traditional' historians have missed out badly, because they're reluctant to step 'over the line' and examine the evidence that works of literature provide for us about the lives and mentalities of people who lived in the past. So yes, Seferis and Byron are completely different from one another – in the time that they lived, in nationality, in temperament. But they have this in common: they were both towering figures in the literature of their respective languages, who also crossed that line and played a part in events that did (even if only a little) changed the world in which they lived, and we do too.

*6) In a recent interview with Kathimerini2 you said, "What I am particularly pleased about is that Greeks aren't straying from the centre of the political spectrum: The previous government was centre-left and this one is centre-right. The pendulum swings both ways, but ends up in the centre, unlike in the UK, in the US and even in Italy, where it swings dangerously close to the extremes". How do you explain this centrism? Has it to do with historical experiences (civil war, junta) or has it to do with a deep rooted in Greek mentality philosophical principle drawn from Aristotle's idea of «μεσότητα»?*

I wouldn't be too confident in attributing modern political attitudes to Aristotle or the ancient maxim about the 'golden mean' (Παν μέτρον ἄριστον)! Greece has suffered from its share of political

extremism in its modern history – and let's not kid ourselves that the ancients were always able to avoid extreme politics either. Aristotle laid down an excellent principle, but historians like Thucydides and Xenophon tell us what actually happened, and it often wasn't pretty! But my point was about the recent elections in Greece and the simultaneous turn in politics in my own country. Greeks have suffered vastly more than most British people as a consequence of the financial crash of 2007-8 and the possibly mistaken policies of austerity pursued by the European Union afterwards. But it seems to me that Greeks have also learnt from their experiences. Whereas in Britain a substantial minority, egged on by a partisan press, believe that they have been victimised by the European Union when they haven't, and seek an extreme remedy in Brexit. British politics are more polarised in the last months of 2019 than they have been at any time since the English Civil War of the 1640s. Maybe, after all, more Brits should read Aristotle!

*7) In your "Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation" you state, "I believe — indeed with a passion — that Greece and the modern history of the Greek nation matter far beyond the bounds of the worldwide Greek community", and in a recent interview with Kathimerini, you said, "Greece to me is the present and the future. It's a work in progress". Could you please elaborate more on these comments? Do you believe that Greece will continue to attract the interest of next generations of historians and –in the affirmative - why?*

I often quote Lord Byron, speaking at Missolonghi in 1824, shortly before he died there in the service of the Greek Revolution. He said: 'those principles which are now in action in Greece will gradually produce their effect, both here and in other countries. ... I cannot ... calculate to what a height Greece may rise. Hitherto it has been a subject for the hymns and elegies of fanatics and enthusiasts; but now it will draw the attention of the politician.' What Byron meant, I think, is that the Greek Revolution was to be a testing ground for a whole new kind of politics. The new country would not merely import a political system from somewhere else: European politicians need to learn from the example of Greece, not the other way round. It hasn't always worked out quite like that. But the potential has always been there. And let's not forget

that Greece, when it was internationally recognised as independent in 1830, became the first of the new nation-states that would transform the European continent from that time to this.

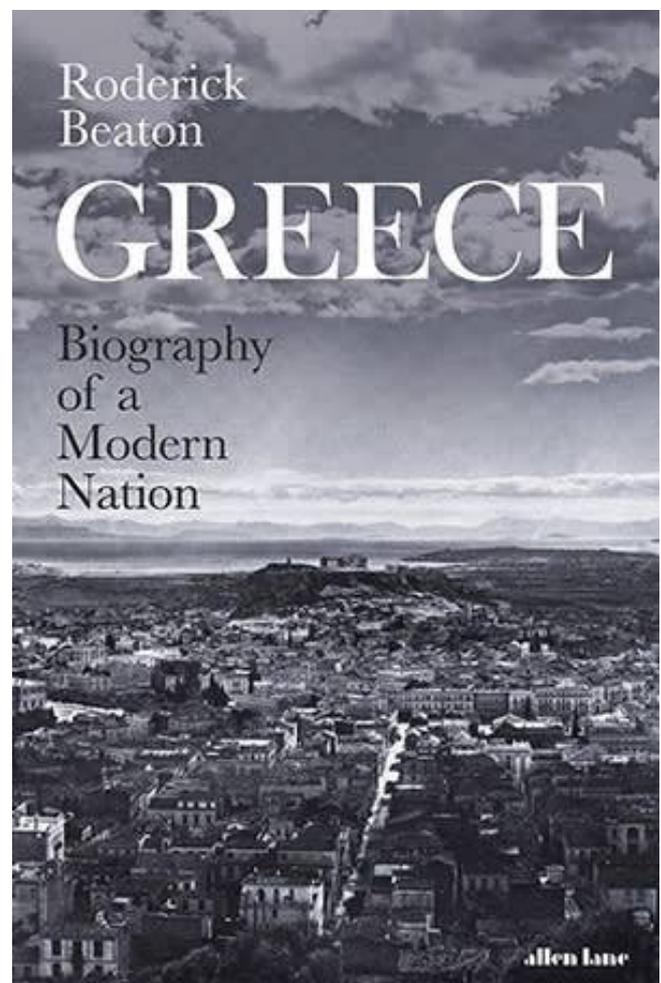
*8) You have argued that Greece represents the 'paradigm nation', the one that, historically speaking, sets the example, because Greece was the first new nation-state to be established anywhere in Europe after the upheavals of the Napoleonic wars, recognised by an international protocol of 1830. All other modern nation-states have followed the example of Greece. Why, in your opinion, this aspect has never been emphasized by European and other historians? How do you believe this could change the perspective of Greece's understanding and its positioning in the contemporary world? How do you believe Greece could capitalize on this?*

To set the record straight, the phrase 'paradigm nation' belongs to my colleague at the University of Athens, Emeritus Professor Paschalis Kitromilides. But I have indeed argued for greater recognition to be given to this simple fact of history. I suppose one of the problems is that when nation-states emerged later, elsewhere in Europe, their leaders were not necessarily thinking about what had happened in Greece in the 1820s and 1830s. It wasn't that Italians, Germans and Poles (say) set out deliberately to do what the Greeks had done before them. But it's a fact that the Greeks had done it before them, and in that sense they set in motion a process that has been going on ever since. Think of the great 'national unifications' in western Europe in the 1860s: of Germany and Italy. Later, after World War I, came the creation of a whole swathe of new nation-states to replace the Austrian and Ottoman empires. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 had a very similar effect – most devastatingly in the Balkans, where the wars in the former Yugoslavia led to the creation of new independent nation-states, most recently Montenegro in 2006 and Kosovo in 2008. The other reason is down to the way Greeks themselves have told their story, from Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos in the 1850s and 1860s until very recently. By emphasising the revival or regeneration (παλιγγενεσία) of Ancient Greece in the achievement of the modern nation, these historians have detached that achievement from its immediate context in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and presented the Greek

case as unique and exceptional. In fact, most nations build and project their modern identity by drawing on aspects from a more-or-less distant past, so the Greek case isn't unique at all. More remarkable than Greece's legacy from antiquity is the achievement of modern Greeks in being the first to build the kind of modern state that is now the norm throughout Europe and much of the rest of the world.

*9) Although classics still attract a considerable number of British and international students wishing to explore the Greek antiquity, modern Greek studies seem to be in decline in the British Universities and elsewhere in Europe. What are, in your opinion, the causes for this decline and how do you think this could be reversed?*

Part of the trouble, at least in Britain, has been the decline of interest in learning foreign languages. This goes back several decades and is the result of a mistaken belief that the rest of the world speaks English. And of course that decline has been made much worse by the rise of 'Euroscepticism' and the aftermath of the 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union. It's not just modern Greek studies that are under threat in the UK – even



German is going the same way, and most European languages, other than Spanish and French, have disappeared completely from the curriculum. Paradoxically, it may be that if Britain really does leave the EU and we find ourselves isolated from our nearest neighbours, we might find it useful to begin once again to learn their languages, if only so that we can buy our food from them!

10) You retired from the position of the Head of the Koraeas Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, Centre for

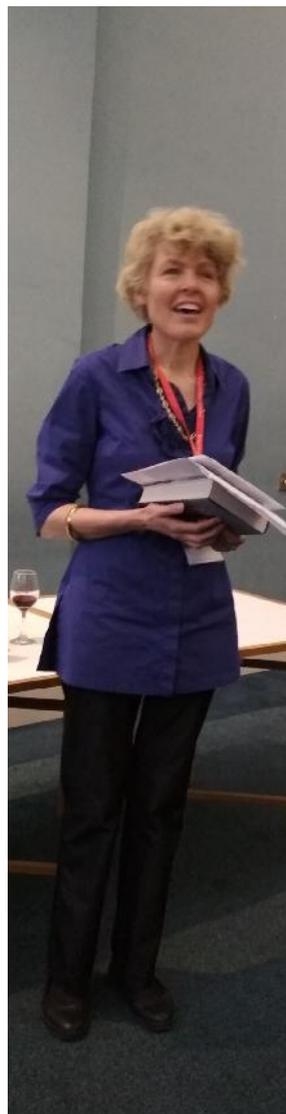
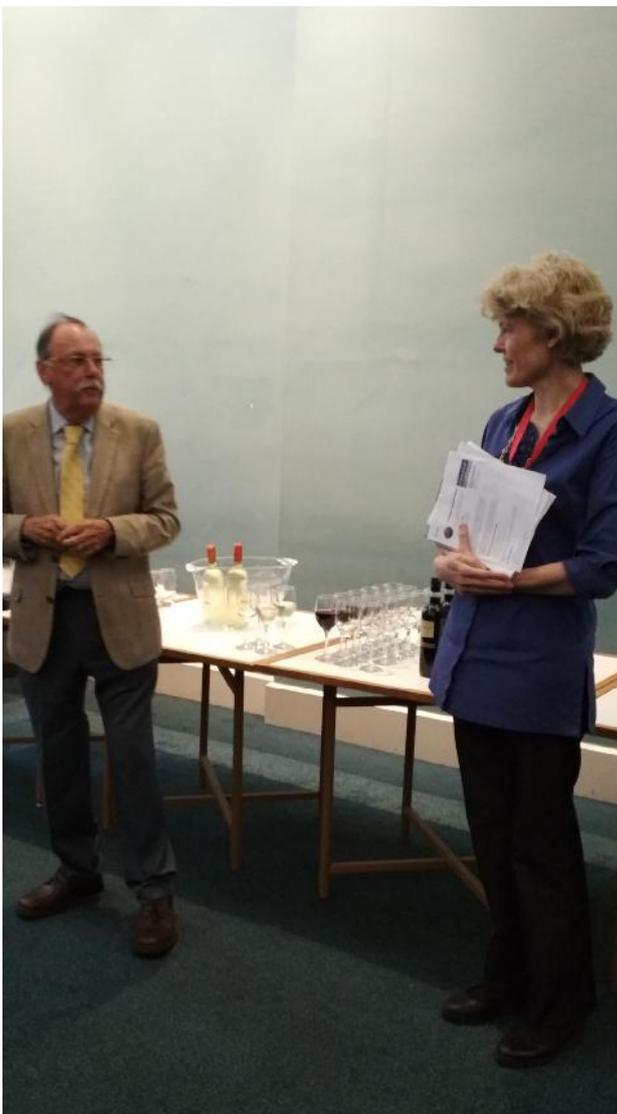
Hellenic Studies, King's College London in 2018, but you are still nourishing a keen interest in Greece. What are you currently involved in and what are your plans for the future?

I've always thought of myself as a writer, and retirement from the university has given me the opportunity to devote myself to writing full-time. I once published a novel, and who knows, I might yet publish more! In the meantime, my next book will be not about Greece but... the Greeks.

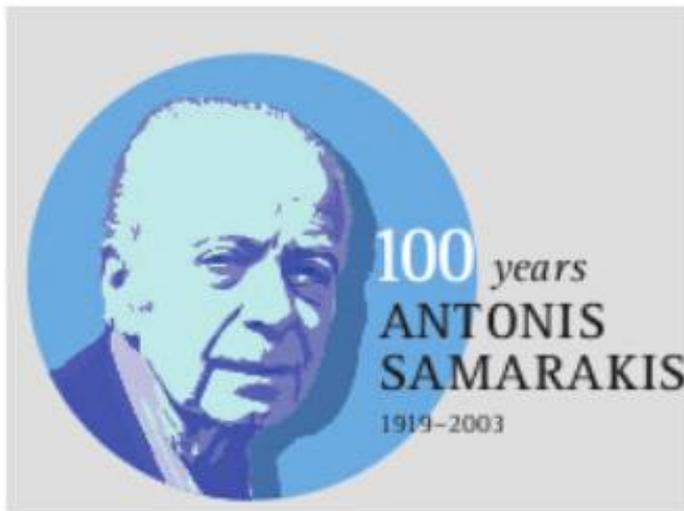
Thank you.

### The Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London hosted a reception to honour Prof Beaton, on September 30 at the King's College, Strand.

Prof. Gonda Van-Steen, Director of the Koraeas Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature in KCL's Centre for Hellenic Studies and Department of Classics, spoke about Prof. Beaton's deep dedication to the Greek history and culture and his significant contribution to a better understanding of Greece. She particularly emphasized the honor of his being awarded the Medal of the Commander of the Order of Honour (Παράσημο του Ταξιάρχη του Τάγματος της Τιμής), by the Greek state, which marks the acknowledgment for his lifelong contribution.



## The Ministry of Culture and Sports designated the 2020 as 'Antonis Samarakis Year', on the occasion of his birth Centenary.



A fighter for ideals  
A champion of Human Rights  
A major world writer  
A powerful voice for Freedom

**THE HELLENIC CENTRE**  
**20 NOVEMBER 2019, 19:00**

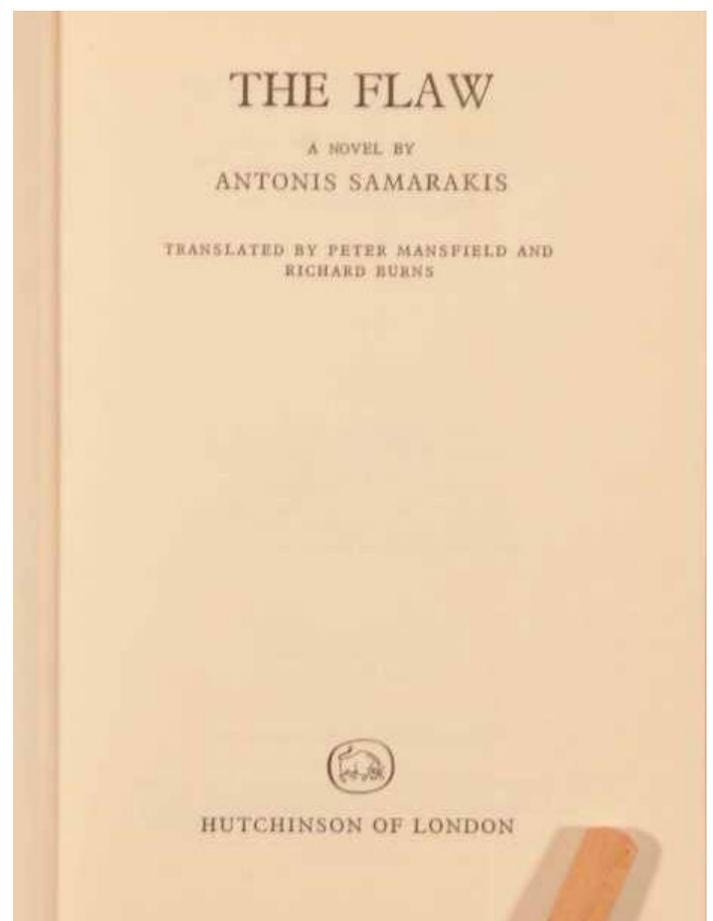
Seeking to highlight the renowned writer's literary work as well as his humanitarian activity, the Ministry organised a tribute on the 20th of November 2019 at the Hellenic Centre in London.

One of the most translated Greek authors in more than 30 languages, Antonis Samarakis explored in his literary work themes related to humanism, the dangers of totalitarianism, the nuclear power, the loss of ideals, the public corruption and the alienation of the individual in an uncaring, consumer society. His novel *To Lathos* ('The Flaw'), published in 1965 and turned into a film in 1975, describes a nightmare state under totalitarian rule and turned out to be prophetic, as a military dictatorship was imposed in Greece in 1967.

Antonis Samarakis represented Greece in conferences of UNESCO and became known as a leading advocate for children's rights, while he instituted the «Youth Parliament», when youngsters from all over the country take over the debating chamber for a day.

The tribute at the Hellenic Centre comprised a presentation of the English edition of Samarakis' work, and talks by Professor Dimitris Tziovas, Professor of Modern Greek Studies in the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Birmingham and Professor Gonda van Steen, the Koraes Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History in the Department of Classics at King's College London.

Addresses were delivered by Mrs Sissy Papatthanassiou, Director of Letters, at the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports and Dr Vassilis Sabatakakis, President of the European Society of Modern Greek Studies. The tribute was held with the support of the Embassy of Greece in London and in collaboration with the European Society of Modern Greek Studies.





## "Americana!": an amazing one-woman show by Maria Vigar (September 2019, Hellenic Centre)

Staged in autumn 2019, at the Hellenic Centre, "Americana!" is a timeless and powerful play set in Greece. It shines a light on a Greek peasant family during the traumas of the civil war, just as Greece is trying to pick herself up after the ravages of WW2. Two women, the 'Americana' and her daughter, Katerina, stand resolute and strong until opposite ideals pull them apart. The play, written and performed by Matria Vigar, is a human story hidden within Greece but resonates with people from all over the world who suffer in much the same way.

### MARIA VIGAR – brief CV

Born in Nicosia Cyprus and grew up in London from the age of 6. Initially studied English Literature and then Theatre Arts at the Rose Bruford College of Drama, where she trained as a professional actress, graduating in 1986.

Has worked in Theatre and for BBC Radio4 - as an actress, writer and director.

Currently writing the libretto for a chamber opera version of her one-woman stage play: Americana! She is also preparing her new full-length play: Name Days, for production in London, June 2020.



Maria Vigar gave @GreeceinUK a very interesting interview on the challenges and messages of the play, and the traumas of the Greek civil war.

*1. How have you chosen to set your play in the context of the post WWII Greek civil war, a historic period rather unknown to the wide foreign public? How did you expect that this historic background would appeal to foreign audiences? What is the feedback you have received?*

When I first started to write the play I didn't realise how little was known about this period of modern European history – because after all that is the context of the Greek Civil War – it didn't just happen in Greece, it was largely a consequence of the division of Europe at the end of WWII. It is generally understood – but left unspoken - that the wounds created by civil war, hit Greece very deeply – particularly as the country was already on its knees from fighting invasion and occupation. Some Greeks who have seen the play have told me that talk about the civil war – families who lived through it – was too painful to relate and that successive governments preferred not to revisit it either. To some extent

then there has been suppression of stories and information about these years even within Greece itself, so I'm not surprised or dismayed when non-Greek audiences invariably say they had no idea about this period of history; some go on to say they want to read more about this period. Of course it is very satisfying if the play has that effect. Over time one of my aims has been to tell this little known story to the Greek Diaspora community in the UK, so that we can share these Greek historical events that had such devastating impact on individuals, communities and their families. Ultimately my hope is that the human story of the Greek family depicted in the play will resonate with families in any part of the world who have experienced struggle for survival within a war-torn country. From the feedback that I have had, I believe the story does resonate beyond its original time and place, which would suggest that there is something of the universal within it.

*2. The play is based on a physical, mental and emotional distance. Living apart mother and daughter (Katerina), each apparently believes that the other one is safe, both express their care for each*



*other, but both ignore each other's fate, with each giving a separate personal struggle. Would you say that this story depicts a reality common during the Greek civil war?*

I would probably say yes, although I cannot know how common a reality it was. But if members of a family are physically forced apart during such times of crisis, I would think that personal struggle for survival, becomes urgent, inevitable and a priority; care or concern for others' fate, a secondary matter of faith and trust. This is Katerina's situation in the play. But we know there were also terrible instances where families were tragically torn apart because members passionately supported opposing sides. Perhaps Brexit is a modern, less severe version of divisive politics. The daughter refers to one such story where, "a father turned on his two sons... because they wouldn't follow his Royalist way... he shot them both dead." This dark reality is also part of any civil war. Katerina's removal from her parental home - for safety reasons - unexpectedly affords her numerous opportunities for personal development and growth. In Klepini village, she is suddenly 'head' of her family being the eldest of three siblings. With this responsibility comes an invitation to participate in the beginnings of local government: she is allowed to vote on local issues; her personal opinion is valued;

she "understands many things differently now." This kind of exposure and independence presents her with a kind of female emancipation that she wouldn't have experienced if she was still in the village following her mother's traditional female role. Though she constantly 'speaks' to her mother and longs to be reunited with her, inevitably her mental and emotional focus is shifting away - and perhaps she is ignoring what might be her mother's fate. If war makes life immensely precarious, people will tend to focus on the pressing demands of the moment. There wouldn't be too much time to think about consequences, I imagine. Not until her final, emotional farewell to her mother does it dawn on Katerina that she may not see her mother again – just for a moment her mother's fate impinges on her – before she decisively marches off to join the freedom fighters. For the mother, separation is all about loss – loss of her children on whom she is continually focused. From her first few words, she is pleading for the fate of her children: "Protect my children, God – my Antonis, my Koulitsa and Katerina – my children, God please!" Her mental and emotional anguish is compounded because she is the architect of their separation and the physical distance between them; she arranged their escape to freedom and safety in another village.

*3. Were, in your opinion, the different attitudes adopted by the old and the young woman typical in the Greek civil war? The old people often didn't understand the stakes of the conflict and were anxious only about the safety of their children ("I'm not a spy, I'm not a traitor, I'm a mother and I want my children", protests the mother), while the young were willing to embrace the new, bold ideas, convinced that they would lead to freedom and to a more just and better world?*

Yes, I believe that the mother and daughter do reflect the different attitudes typically adopted by the old and the young in the Greek civil war. Mothers will instinctively try to keep the family together even if there are deep divisions there – but perhaps this doesn't apply in the same way to fathers – or grandfathers. In a patriarchal society, men are more likely to assert their political allegiance and authority and be less tolerant of dissention - even if it means abandoning the family, as is the case in this play. I believe the young were generally more open to embracing new and bold ideas that promised freedom and a more just world. Going off to fight for these ideals must have given the young a sense of purpose and excitement. This was also about



love of one's country - nationalism and patriotism – and about wanting change for the future which they felt their parents hadn't achieved, or couldn't achieve or tried and failed to achieve. They were optimistic. Many young men and a good many young women joined the 'struggle for freedom', but not necessarily with the blessing of protective parents, I would imagine. Certainly it would have been an absolute anathema to Katerina's mother to hear that her daughter had decided to join the freedom fighters.

*4. Why have you chosen your protagonists to be female figures? In which ways could the mother and the daughter (Katerina) represent female characters typical in our societies today? Is there a particular message you would like to convey through them about the struggle of women –often abandoned by fathers and husbands - during conflicts and civil wars? How do you expect non-Greek female audiences to identify with the heroines?*

I chose two female figures primarily because I wanted to tell my story of the civil war from a female perspective, which I don't believe has been given prominence in theatre. I wanted to tell their story and to show their strength and resilience. A mother and daughter were appealing as characters, because there is an immediate bond and common history between the two figures and I could also feed a lot of my own family stories into both. Their struggle to survive in the heightened circumstances of civil war allowed me to demonstrate their individual mental and emotional strength as they negotiate the

restrictions and opportunities that are presented to them when they become separated from each other and when neither of them can rely on the support or protection of the men in their family, who are absent - abroad, in hiding, or fighting. But this is a patriarchal society where the authority of men is paramount and their influence keenly felt - even if they happen to be thousands of miles away and have been absent for years. When the mother in the play cripples her daughter to prevent her being taken away to join the "freedom fighters in the mountains", her immediate words of comfort to her daughter: "What would your father say if I let them take you to the mountains, make you freedom fighter?" shows that what her - absentee - father would say is her first concern. Her primary duty is to fulfill the father's expectation of protecting the daughter's honour - at any cost. One of the messages I want to convey through the struggle of this mother and daughter abandoned by their men, is that the burden of safeguarding traditional cultural values is invariably heaped upon the shoulders of women. I think this is generally so - across many different cultures – women keep traditions and customs alive on an everyday basis - living life - even in times of crisis. But I also wanted to shine a light on what is irrepressible in these two women – their noble defiance and courage in the face of difficult or even irreparable consequences. In the play the mother defiantly announces to her executioners: "I am ready!" In another village, nineteen year old Katerina, proudly decides to join the "fight for a better Greece": "I'm not going to America," she declares, "beautiful things are happening here in Greece!"

We realise the mother is about to be killed and that the daughter's idealism will be severely compromised by historical events; nonetheless, death does not diminish the mother nor does naïve idealism demean the daughter. When the odds are so heavily stacked against any individual, what moves us, is their courageous, irrepressible spirit, as with these two women.

*5. In my opinion there are many elements in the play that draw from the Greek ancient tragedy: The unjustly suffering heroine (the mother is the innocent victim of her husband's and father's choices), the inability of man to change his fate (despite the mother's hard struggle to keep Katerina out of reach of communists and of the horrors of conflict, by sending her away from the village, even by crippling her, the daughter proudly announces that she will join the communists in the mountains), the tragic irony (each of them thinks the other one is safe, while ironically the mother becomes the victim of those who she tried to protect her daughter from, and the daughter joins the killers of the mother). But what about Catharsis? Would you say that the audience gets at the end the relieving sense of catharsis and of justice restored?*

Overall there is no relieving sense of catharsis or of justice restored at the end of the play, in the manner of ancient Greek tragedy. I wasn't really aiming that high! But I would hope that the mother's suffering and the daughter's struggle with divided loyalty (to her mother's wishes on the one hand, and to the fight for a 'better Greece' with promise of freedom and justice for all – including women, on the other) are relatable to the audience and therefore, some sympathy – even empathy – might accrue. I would be happy with that. Moreover, the play presents two separate and opposed world views. There is the world of the mother – closest to the world view of Greek ancient drama – governed by Fate – and the world of the daughter where she has choices and a right to make decisions - to take charge of her destiny. The mother's world affords her no such power. When the play opens, everything that will determine her fate has already happened: she dared to defy the partisans controlling her village by organising the 'escape' of her children to another village she thought was beyond their control. This act had already sealed her fate before we meet her; she can't change it and we can only watch as she deals with the consequences: her protests of innocence; her rages against her captors; against the injustice of imprisonment; against her

abandonment by father and husband – even her arguments with God – cannot halt the inexorable progression towards her fate, her death. In contrast her daughter Katerina, inhabits a world where a new social order is just emerging: change is possible here in Klepini village and so is empowerment - Katerina is encouraged to participate in the beginnings of local democratic government; her contribution is valued and we observe her growing in independence. She is able to make decisions that will shape her life and that of others in her community. Full of certainty she writes to her mother: "When you get here, we're going to change our life... I promise you, we're going to make every day better!" Her quest for a 'new tomorrow, a better Greece' leads her to join the Communist freedom fighters and of course the Communists lost the war and were severely punished and stigmatised for many years by successive right wing governments. So we know that her enthusiasm and optimism will at best lead only to disillusion and unfulfilled expectations – a paradox; a dreadful irony. As she bids her mother farewell to go off to war, she joyously announces: "I go for you Mana, for Greece and for freedom!" Knowing that her mother is already dead and that she too will learn this in due course, will hopefully prompt some sympathy in the audience for this earnest young woman despite her naivety. But not catharsis – only a sense of pointlessness, in believing that war and conflict are the means of achieving a better, more just world.





The mother – though a peasant woman who can't read or write – knows unequivocally, that war is no more than sheer, repeated 'Brutality!' – it has little to do with freedom or justice. And worst of all is a country at war with its own.

*6. Although I understand that this was not in your intentions when you wrote the play, but would you like the viewers to make parallels to our modern life? That is to say, could the civil war stand also for the "family civil war", and the generation gap, where parents care for the safety of their children, children seek to get emancipated and take their fate in their hands and most often there is little or at all close contact between parents and children, although they may still love each other?*

The idea of a "family civil war", was not specifically in my mind, although I did want to show that antagonisms of a family might be a microcosm of the country divided by civil war. That was inherent in my choice to write about a mother and daughter – who represent one family, which is torn apart by a crisis – and in my decision to play both characters so that the one actor becoming now the mother; now the daughter, comes to represent the country which is one, but which is riddled with division. I would like the audience to draw parallels to our modern life particularly in terms of the generation gap and I am always keen to encourage parents and their young adults to come and see the play together – particularly mothers and daughters - and

to give me feedback on their response. I am aware of instances where "family civil war" unfortunately perfectly describes the divisions within a family and regrettably sometimes the rifts caused are irreparable, because one or either member becomes entrenched in their position. Perhaps Brexit is a modern, less severe version - causing deep division within family and country. I think theatre can open up discussion - within a no-penalty area - where better understanding can sometimes be reached.

*7. What messages do you aim to convey or what warnings would you like to address to the contemporary viewers through your play?*

Primarily that war is overwhelmingly destructive and no lasting good can come from war. Lessons from past wars haven't stopped current conflicts which we are witnessing everyday in various parts of the world. We need to remind ourselves - and our society - about the ills of war. It is important to pass on the message particularly to younger generations – and in the case of this play – to the younger generation within Greek Diaspora communities – it's part of their history and heritage – part of their identity. There is a need for this knowledge, because the past is important to understand the present and inform the future.

*8. How challenging is it for an actor/ress to hold a one-person show playing in turn the roles of two quite different personalities?*

It is very challenging – because the actor is on stage alone and has to maintain complete concentration throughout the duration. There is no prompter – no autocue – and there is a lot to remember. However as a sole performer, there is also freedom to make little adjustments in response to the mood of the audience and to connect with them, which is very exciting. For this reason, every performance is different and I think special for the actor. Playing two characters – different in age and personality – and maintaining each from scene to scene, is very animating for the actor – hopefully for the audience too. But you have to know both characters very well. The play is just over an hour's duration and creates a seamless continuity without disrupting the story or the two different worlds of the play. The clarinet, played live (by Rachel Coe), helps wonderfully with this. In the transitions from scene to scene the music comments on the emotions just witnessed and begin to suggest the mood of the next scene - which is completely different in colour and emotional texture. The performance becomes a duet - music and acting entwined - complimenting each other and enriching the fabric of the story. I always wanted the music to include the flavour of Greek folk songs and to suggest a Greek village location and culture. I believe the composer (Ian Schofield) has achieved that incredibly well - in addition to giving a separate identity or 'voice' to each character. He explained that the clarinet was the nearest to the human voice and could help to establish their individual character and their different emotional register. The clarinet is beautifully evocative and seems to leave haunting trace that lingers after the play has ended.

*9. Would you like to make a comment on performances staged in the UK by Greek playwrights and directors? Do you think that, apart from ancient tragedies, modern Greek plays could appeal to the British audience, given that in the UK theatre has a long tradition?*

Yes – I do believe that modern Greek plays can appeal to a British audience but I'm not really aware of any directors who have staged modern Greek plays in mainstream British theatre. I think we need to encourage writers and theatre practitioners within the British Greek community to tell their experiences and stories – whether based in Greece or here in the UK, they need to be part of the British story.

*10. What are your future plans? Is there another period of the Greek history that you aspire to use as the setting of another play?*

My immediate plans are to start preparing my new full-length play: Name Days for production in London next June. The play is set in 1940s London and features a Greek male protagonist who originates from Smyrna – one of the many Greeks expelled by the Turks in 1922. That part of Greek history is very rich in dramatic content and music and atmosphere. I am also aiming to finish writing the libretto for the Americana which we plan to produce as a chamber opera towards the end of autumn 2020.

*Photos Courtesy of the Hellenic Centre*

### Reviews on "Americana!"

'This inspired piece of theatre owes as much to Maria Vigar's controlled and powerful performance as it does to the sensitive balance and deceptive simplicity of her script.... the Greek civil war provides the context for a disjointed dialogue between mother and daughter separated by a doomed maternal wish on the part of the former to alienate her daughter from the neurotic warring factions. Vigar plays both parts superbly, using the barest of gestures to make smooth, beautifully paced transitions from the mother's acute pessimism to the daughter's blind optimism... This is thoughtful and disturbing material that casts a cold and unflattering eye over the horror of a country at war with its own.' - James Christopher, Time Out London

By making the Americana a woman who seem not to really understand what is going on, Vigar's script can blur details that might otherwise be questioned and deliberately avoid precise political issues. This concentrates on the personal story of a series of unintended betrayals and a moment in Greek history becomes a reflection of the tragedy of civil conflict anywhere and of its effect on innocent lives. Though set 75 years ago, it presents an experience that still tears the modern world to pieces. Maria Vigar plays both roles with feeling. She avoids the melodramatic while delivering a performance that goes deeper than the surface text. Howard Loxton, British Theatre Guide

## A fascinating panel discussion on European travelers to Greece from the 15th to the 19th century

On Friday, 27 September, visitors of the Hellenic Centre had the opportunity to attend a panel discussion organized by the board of directors of the Panayotis & Effie Michelis Foundation about its newly published book 'Greece in European Travelers' Imagery (15th-19th centuries)'. Historian, author and broadcaster, Professor Bettany Hughes, coordinated the discussion with the author of the book and art historian, Dr Aphrodite Kouria, and the curator of the Hellenic Parliament Art Collection, Dr Theodoros Koutsogiannis. During the discussion images of the book were displayed in the background.

As it was noted, for many years travel was considered an important way of learning and a vital cultural experience. Travelers who communicated their first-hand experiences were of high esteem. Europeans who traveled to Greece from the 15th to the 19th centuries mainly visited ports and islands, which were more accessible than the mainland, depicted wars and described ancient monuments and cities. During the War of Independence, with the strong philhellenic movement, a romantic approach prevailed. According to Mrs Kouria, in the earlier centuries the goal of travel books was to offer the

reader a spectacle of the cities visited with clarity. Travelers often presented a combination of realistic and imaginary views to satisfy their readers, while pictures were often based on travelers' sketches and descriptions, with the illustrators improvising to a certain extent. Thus, images are not a realistic representation of Greece at the time, but rather an indication of travelers' and illustrators' views on Greece and on their readers' expectations. In the 19th century the personal involvement of the voyager becomes stronger, the subjective and emotional look dominates, with women travelers showing strong empathy towards the people they encounter.

The travel books on Greece produced during this period had a strong influence on European architecture and art at the time, as neoclassical buildings in Britain and the US were based on architecture books of ancient Greek monuments that were produced. As Mrs Gouria said, the search of ancient ruins captivated many travelers of the time and still does, as ruins trigger dreams, mark a presence and an absence and allow us to travel to other ages with our imagination.

**The Panayotis & Effie Michelis Foundation was founded in 1979 in Athens with the aim to study and promote aesthetics and the philosophy of art. It offers scholarships for studies in aesthetics and art, organizes conferences, seminars, lectures and art exhibitions and supports scholarly publications.**

Photo: (from left to right)  
Dr Aphrodite Kouria,  
Professor Bettany Hughes and  
Dr Theodoros Koutsogiannis



**“Modern Greek is a highly sought-after course among the students despite the fact that it is a challenging option”, Dr Liana Giannakopoulou**



Dr Liana Giannakopoulou teaches Modern Greek Literature in the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages of the University of Cambridge. She is the author of *The Power of Pygmalion. Ancient Greek Sculpture in Modern Greek Poetry* (Peter Lang 2007) and of *The Parthenon in Poetry. An Anthology* (in Greek, ELIA 2009). She has also co-edited *Culture and Society in Crete. From Kornaros to Kazantzakis* (Cambridge Scholars 2017), a selection of papers presented at an international conference held in Cambridge. She is the current Chair of the Society for Modern Greek Studies.

Dr Giannakopoulou was interviewed by @GreeceinUK on the present and the future of Modern Greek Studies in the UK Universities and on the Society for Modern Greek Studies that she chairs.

**1. What does the teaching of Modern Greek in Cambridge entail?**

The students who wish to learn Modern Greek in Cambridge can do so by choosing one of the two papers on offer in the second or final year of their studies as one of the scheduled options of their degree. We have students from the Faculty of MMLL (Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics), from the Faculty of Classics, from the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and from the Faculty of History. This year we are also able to offer a paper at MPhil level.

Modern Greek papers in Cambridge have a broad scope for one-year papers. The curriculum comprises the teaching of literature and cinema as well as ab initio intensive language teaching that is expected to allow students to approach the nation's literature and culture in the original language. The former is carried out by myself and the latter by my colleague, Dr Regina Karousou-Fokas with whom we share the duties of running the Section.

Modern Greek is a highly sought-after course among the students despite the fact that it is a challenging option. On the one hand, it is about coping with the intense pace of language learning and literature study: students need to acquire a good reading knowledge of Greek in the short time of Cambridge's three teaching terms (20 weeks in all). In the first two terms, they attend two hours per week of language classes which concentrate on the essentials of grammar and the development of basic vocabulary. In the last term, students are required to attend workshops on translation from Greek to English. They also become acquainted for the first time with the work of important authors such as Cavafy, Seferis, Doukas, Koumantareas, Gourogianis, Markaris and Dimitriou as well as Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Zoe Karelli, Ritsos, Engonopoulos etc. They are also exposed to Greek cinema, from Angelopoulos to Koutras, Boulmetis and others. They need to familiarize themselves with the historical frame in which the work appears and understand the socio-cultural context to which they belong. In examination, they are required to tackle a compulsory unseen translation, taken from a literary text of authors like Margarita Karapanou, Vasilis Alexakis, Dimitris Chatzis, Vasilis Vasilikos. They also write two essay questions based on their literature and culture choices.

The learning curve is steep indeed, but this is a challenge they all embrace with great results!

*2. Could you give us some details on the profile of students enrolled in the Modern Greek Section of the University of Cambridge? How challenging is it to teach Modern Greek Studies to foreign students who lack common cultural background and know almost nothing about the Greek history and culture?*

The students who take our papers usually have no connections with Greece and, with the exception of students from Classics, the Greek language and this is why they are considered challenging options. With no cognate language offered in the Faculty of MMLL, they attract students that are highly motivated, determined and have a high aptitude for language learning. Good progress on the subject necessitates independent work and self-motivation.

The greatest challenge here is to try and make modern Greek literature and culture relevant to them and to show that Modern Greek is not a niche, esoteric subject that one studies in isolation but one that is intrinsically connected with the world in which they live. Issues of multiculturalism, identity, otherness, immigration as well as women's writing, ideology and politics and many others are at the forefront of the topics they engage with through the papers offered. Many of our students emphasize how studying Modern Greek gave them a fresh outlook on to the world today.

*3. What would motivate a foreign student to study Modern Greek literature and culture?*

For most students, there is no eminently 'useful' reason for learning Modern Greek. No obvious practical gain. Few are the ones that see this as an opportunity to engage with their heritage. For most, it is the wish to explore a cultural landscape and a language that lies outside what could be considered the 'canon' of mainstream European literature. To engage with literature that they would otherwise never have been exposed to and, in the case of students from the Classics Faculty, to gain a broader perspective of Greece than just the classical.

Students are attracted for different reasons. Some are initially interested mostly in the language itself, finding it refreshing or challenging to take up the opportunity to learn a modern language or to start afresh with a new language, a language with a different alphabet, different structure, a case system (as one of our students noted). A language that can also be examined through its many heritages, and

whose continuity can be seen in terms of change and development.

Others find themselves immersed in modern Greece, learning about its complex relationship with the ancient Greek civilization. This is where the study of the poetry of Cavafy and Seferis, who use ancient Greek myth and history as a major component of their subject matter, is of great appeal.

Some students are attracted to the subject because they wish to gain an understanding of the country's cultural history relative to the political and economic crises faced by Greece today, as well as how Greeks themselves consider their own identity both as a nation and within Europe.

Last, but not least, in the process of engaging with the above, what students have found fascinating is the insight they gain with respect to the nation's history. Almost no one begins their modern Greek studies with the intention to deepen their understanding of the history of the place, but many are those who, having completed their studies, lament their previous ignorance of the rich and multi-layered recent history of Greece, and comment on the connections they discover of modern Greek history with its European neighbours.

*4. What are the prospects and what are the benefits one gets from such studies?*

With the students reaching, as reported by one external examiner, 'an impressive standard', it is no surprise that various students over the years have received scholarships from the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports for the International Summer School for Greek Language, Culture and History organized by IMXA in Thessaloniki. Others have self-organised and attended summer schools in Athens or other places in order to improve their language skills.

Upon graduation, as is the case for all graduates from the Modern Languages and Classics Faculties, our students find employment in a wide range of professions including language teaching (school and university level), translation/interpreting, journalism, the diplomatic service, publishing, marketing, public service, banking and investment, accountancy, law, logistics and distribution, teaching English as a foreign language, arts and recreation, speech and language therapy, and information technology among many others. Notably, former

students of Greek have gone on to work for the European Union or gained experience in Greece that has allowed them to specialize in refugee studies. Others have become volunteers in refugee camps in Athens.

However, even among those whose career destination after university is not related specifically to Greek affairs, many continue their close relationship with the Greek language and culture.

*5. Do you believe that there are more advantages for a Greek graduate to continue his post-graduate studies on Modern Greek literature, history and culture in the UK than in Greece?*

I do not think that there are more advantages, but rather different ones. One thing a post-graduate degree outside Greece would offer to a Greek graduate would be a different perspective on their studies: an opening up to a wider, multicultural community, an encounter and more active engagement with other cultures and literatures, perhaps a greater realization of the need to place and justify what they do in a broader context. Their work becomes informed by a broader intercultural outlook and becomes, therefore, relevant to a wider audience.

*6. Modern Greek Studies in the UK don't attract a great number of students anymore and many chairs have been abolished. What are the causes for the decline of interest in such studies and how could this be reversed?*

Modern Greek, just like other languages and the Humanities more generally, has been the victim of a change of priorities in Higher Education in Britain but also in modern societies more widely. Universities are now increasingly managed as businesses, and courses are evaluated in terms of their profitability. Therefore, the number of students registering for them is of crucial importance. With the increase in tuition fees, students understandably prioritize subjects that offer clearly identifiable job prospects and greater security. Universities in turn tend to support such subjects at the expense of smaller, more 'niche' ones. The campaign for the support of STEM subjects at school is also affecting the number of students who take on Modern Languages at A Level – and not just Modern Greek.

This can be reversed, but in order to do so a very focused and orchestrated effort is necessary. A

good precedent is the US where Greek Studies have successfully been funded by institutions and individuals willing to support the promotion of all aspects of Modern Greek culture, history and society. For this to happen in Britain, a conscious and targeted coordination between members of the academic community, the managements of the universities and the various donor institutions and individuals would be required. Already such an initiative and concerted effort led to the preservation of the Koraes Chair at King's College London: the academic community in Britain is very fortunate indeed to count Professor Gonda Van Steen as one of its members.

I am also very proud to be part of another initiative myself at the University of Cambridge, where the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics and the Faculty of Classics have joined forces to launch in the summer of 2019 the Cambridge Centre for Greek Studies.

This is a Centre that aims to become an international hub for the very best pioneering research in cross-disciplinary Greek studies, covering the entirety of the Greek speaking world from the Bronze Age to the present day. In this aspiring, large-scale frame scholars engaged in the study of Greek culture will be encouraged to think ambitiously about issues of identity, religion, gender, imperialism, regionalism, Europe and the East, populism, technology, sexuality and the environment to name but a few. It will also encourage imaginative collaborations and the addressing of big, bold questions that take our discipline outside its comfort zones.

I hope that such an initiative will impress and inspire cultural institutions and foundations to approach and support the Centre's efforts and aims, grasping in this way another opportunity to bring Modern Greek Studies forward.

*7. Apart from some outstanding, world-known representatives of Modern Greek Literature, active mainly during the late 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century, would you say that today's Greek literature and poetry can showcase equally outstanding authors and poets? Or do we mainly imply the giants of the previous century, when we talk about Modern Greek prose and poetry?*

We cannot ignore the giants of the previous century. One cannot teach modern Greek literature and leave



out Cavafy or Seferis for example. And I concede that it is very difficult to achieve the impact that authors such as Nikos Kazantzakis or again Cavafy have had abroad. But there is great admiration and respect for Seferis and Ritsos too. There are, however, also other writers who are well-known and loved in the English and French speaking world for instance, such as Petros Markaris and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke. A well-known hurdle here is the number of translations published in English – the percentage of foreign titles in relation to the total number is very small. Big, commercial publishers do not take on translations of modern Greek literature easily. But we are fortunate that gifted translators such as Karen Emmerich for example, work hard to make modern Greek literature available to non-Greek speakers and various small publishers such as the Birmingham Modern Greek Translations, Denise Harvey, Colenso Books or Aiora Press support such efforts.

In our teaching programme in Cambridge we make a point of including more recent voices too, authors whose work reflects contemporary issues that put the students in contact with Greece in the 21st

century. This is how they get to know all the writers I have mentioned in question 1 above. No writer becomes a 'giant' in a vacuum and this is why we also try to promote contemporary and younger poets and prose writers through events that we organize in collaboration with the Society for Modern Greek Studies, the Cambridge Hellenic Learned Society and the Hellenic Centre.

*8. Many of your research projects focus on the close relation between Modern Greek poetry and ancient sculpture. What do you believe Greek poets today draw inspiration from? Is the antiquity today an exhausted source of inspiration?*

It is certainly not exhausted, but it does not take center stage either. Greek poets today draw inspiration from a wide variety of topics as recent anthologies testify. Antiquity is one of them and it is approached in an original and often subversive manner. Although modern Greek literature was in the past a 'national institution' it was also the space in which a subversive discourse against antiquity's powerful hold of Greek identity was developed. As I have shown in my research, in both my books,

from early on poets engage rather critically with the glorious classical past. Today this past is perhaps not as dominant a source of inspiration as it was in previous decades, but younger voices such as Phoebe Giannisi or Harris Psarras offer new, original perspectives on it. Antiquity has the power of transformation and adaptation and as such it can never be completely ignored.

*9. Most academic and scientific fields especially humanities are being currently involved in an interdisciplinary/inter-scientific dialogue in order to develop interfaces, expand, and survive. Is this the case with the Modern Greek studies? Which scientific fields would Modern Greek studies develop a dialogue with?*

I have seen many fascinating dialogues developing between modern Greek studies and other fields: in the domain of literature, with which I am more familiar, I have seen comparative studies involving theatre, medicine, the visual arts and material culture, adoption studies, gender studies, film studies, (post-) colonialism, classical reception, translation, linguistics and heritage studies, cultural studies. I am sure there are many others.

*10. You are the Chair of the Society for Modern Greek Studies. Could you please tell us more about the activities and the aims of the Society?*

The main purpose of the Society for Modern Greek Studies is to provide free cultural and educational events related to Greece and Cyprus and to support the teaching, learning and research that relate to any aspect of Modern Greek and Cypriot culture. It is the UK national body representing the subject and is affiliated to the European Society of Modern Greek Studies.

The Society is open to students, academics and the general public – to everyone who shares our passion for and commitment to the promotion of Greece and Cyprus through their literature, history, cinema and any other aspect of their culture from the 19th century to today. We have two annual flagship events: a public lecture on the occasion of our AGM and a graduate research colloquium. The public lecture is given by an invited speaker, a distinguished member of the academic community, and is open to all. The SMGS Graduate Colloquium offers postgraduate

students an opportunity to present their research to their academic peers and seniors, and to receive constructive feedback. We believe that this plays an extremely valuable part in our students' academic development.

The Society also has, since 2015, its own online peer-reviewed journal, MGSO which published original work by new researchers and established academics alike and which is available free of charge on the Society's website.

On our website readers can find a list of the events we have organised in the past and the ones we are planning for the coming months; it is also a useful source of information for events organized by other bodies which are related to the Society's interests and aims, as well as training and job opportunities. Our only income comes from our membership fee, so we always hope that more and more people will consider joining us in order to support us in our aim of maintaining the relevance and impact of modern Greek and Cypriot culture in the wider community.

*11. What are you currently involved in as an academic and what are your plans for the future?*

I am involved in the teaching of our papers in Cambridge both at undergraduate and postgraduate level and in the planning of an MPhil course that will contribute to the newly established MPhil in Greek Studies that will be offered in Cambridge from the academic year 2020-21.

My future research plans involve the developing of a digital edition of the work of one of our most prominent poets – this is still in the early stages of planning. And I will of course continue to publish in the areas of my research interests.

In terms of public engagement, I will participate at the annual event held in the University of East Anglia, 'Voices from Greece', on the topic of Myth. My presentation is 'Myth in Greek women's poetry'. I will also continue to support the Cambridge Centre for Greek Studies in its activities to promote Greek culture and look forward to the planning and implementation of future events of the Society for Modern Greek Studies.

*Photos Courtesy Liana Giannopoulou*

## THE HELLENIC CENTRE: Celebrating its 25th Anniversary

The Centre is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation but has established close working relationships from the start with its three patrons, the Archbishop of Thyateira, the Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic and the High Commissioner for Cyprus.

The Centre's missions are to bring together the Hellenes of the diaspora and provide a home for the Hellenic community in London; to promote awareness of Hellenic culture in the UK; and to nurture the relationship between Britain and the Hellenic world through cultural cooperation and exchange.

### Key facts about the Hellenic Centre

- 25 years of continuous work for the promotion of Hellenic Culture
- A cultural hub for the diaspora and anyone interested in Hellenism
- A self-funded, independent, non-governmental charity
- 2011 the year it received the Athens Academy Award for its work in cultural diplomacy and in promoting Hellenism
- Every year over 150 events, 350 students of Modern Greek, 700 members, 12,000 visitors

For a quarter of a century, the Hellenic Centre has provided a home-from-home for London's Greek and Cypriot communities, and has opened its door to the people of the UK interested in Greek culture, history and language.

Housed in an elegant 20th Century building on Paddington Street that was previously the Swedish Academy of Gymnastics, then a teacher-training school, the Hellenic Centre is an emblem of London's vibrant multiculturalism. The Centre is self-funded – although money to buy the building and open the Centre in 1994 came from generous contributions from leading individuals and organisations – and its main income comes from hiring out its magnificent venue to individuals and businesses for conferences,



meetings, events and parties. The funds from these rentals along with donations and HC Membership support the cultural programme.

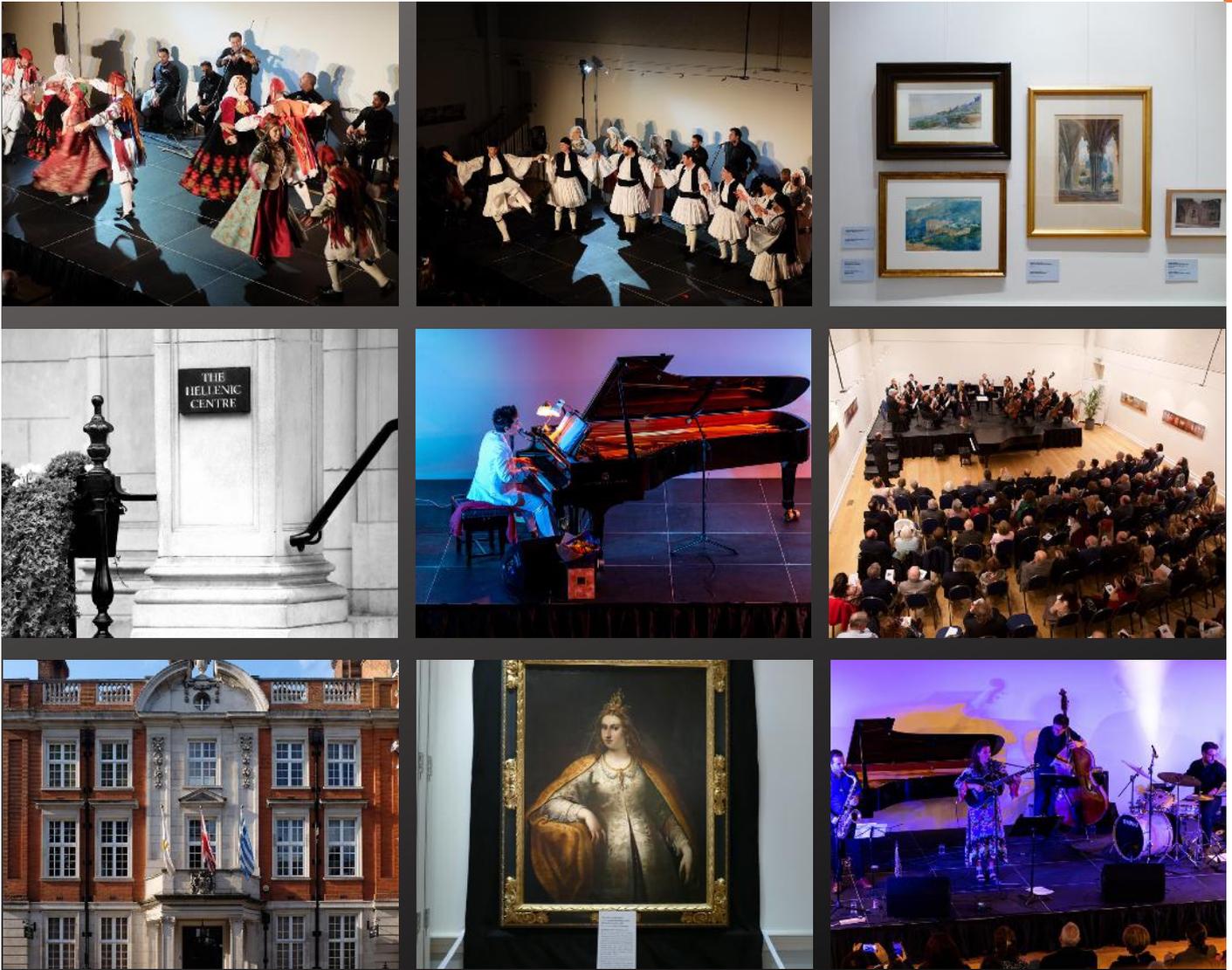
The Centre has an increasingly rich cultural programme of lectures, exhibitions, concerts, plays, films, Greek language courses, social evenings and many more. Every week, hundreds of people gather to experience all things Greek: art, music, drama and language lessons. The Centre's programme unites past and present, classic and folk, old and contemporary. Most of its cultural events are free. Speakers, artists and students come from around the globe. There are two significant ways through which the Hellenic Centre engages with London's multi ethnic community. The first: the majority of its events are in English. The second: its Greek language courses for adults that attract over 350 adults spanning 40 nationalities and every age from 18 to 80.

As a cultural hub the Hellenic Centre helps also the Greeks of diaspora keep their sense of heritage alive. Because of this, children become an important part of the Centre's life and the Centre an important part of theirs. Through workshops that pass on recipes of traditional Christmas biscuits, painting Easter eggs, enjoying a Carnival party or an interactive play in Greek children connect with their homeland's

traditions. And some, as they get older, find in the Hellenic Centre a potential platform for aspiring artists and enrich with their work and talent the Centre's cultural programme.

The Hellenic Centre celebrated this year its 25th Anniversary with a series of special events. In January it hosted #TextMe\_PaperFashion, an extraordinary display of one of the largest collections of disposable paper dresses from the 60s alongside paper garments made by recycled pages from books or created by distinguished designers; the exhibition was organised in collaboration with the Greek Cultural Organisation ATOPOS. In April there was the Oxford Philharmonic Concert for the Hellenic Centre's 25th Anniversary and an exhibition from the Nicolas Collection that traced the journey of the Woman of Cyprus from the mythological era up to the present day. In June in collaboration with the A G Leventis Gallery, Cyprus the Centre brought to London GENIUS LOCI - Ioannis Kissonergis and British Landscape Painters Exhibition, which shed light to the first steps of Cypriot Art in the early 20th Century. In October the visitors had the opportunity of A Festive Journey around Greece (Ταξιδεύοντας στα Πανηγύρια της Ελλάδας), an evening of Greek Folk dancing organised by Lykion ton Hellinidon London and the Centre to mark their 40th and 25th anniversary respectively.





A two day event, at the end of November, full of film screenings and music marked the culmination of the Centre's Anniversary Year Celebrations. Its members and friends watched the films *Rosemarie*, 1968 and *Notias*, enjoyed a phenomenal music performance with Iro-The Artist and a unique recital of Brazilian rhythms, New Orleans jazzy swings, Chicago blues and Greek melodies with Katerina Poleni & Her Band. Last but not least there was a party with the music of DJ Avgoustinos and lots of dancing.

In the 25 years of its operation the Centre has proved that it is a live organisation which constantly evolves. Although created by the old diaspora is fully aware of the new Greek diaspora of today. It is a part of a constantly redefined city and always seeks new means and ways to approach its audience. Its vision for the future is to further expand its network of partnerships and continue being a cultural platform for all. With the support of Members and Friends the Hellenic Centre hopes to continue for many more years to come.

The Hellenic Centre, 16-18 Paddington Street, Marylebone, London W1U 5AS

tel: +44 (0)20 7487 5060, email: [info@helleniccentre.org](mailto:info@helleniccentre.org)

[www.helleniccentre.org](http://www.helleniccentre.org)

| @TheHellenicCentreLondon | @helleniccentre | Helleniccentre\_w1



*Merry Christmas  
and a  
Happy New Year  
2020*

*Embassy of Greece in London*

@GreeceInUK is a newsletter with a regular roundup of news related to Greece, Greek Politics, Economy, Culture, Civil Society, the Arts as well as Greece's distinctive vibrant presence in the UK. Our ambition is to offer an accurate and rich source of information to those interested in Greece and her people.

Embassy of Greece in London

Public Diplomacy Office

1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP

Tel. 0207- 727 3071 / Fax. 0207- 792 9054

E-mail: pdo.lon@mfa.gr

<http://www.mfa.gr/uk>

Facebook: [@GreeceInUK](#) / Twitter: [@GreeceInUK](#) / Instagram: [Greek Embassy in London](#)

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