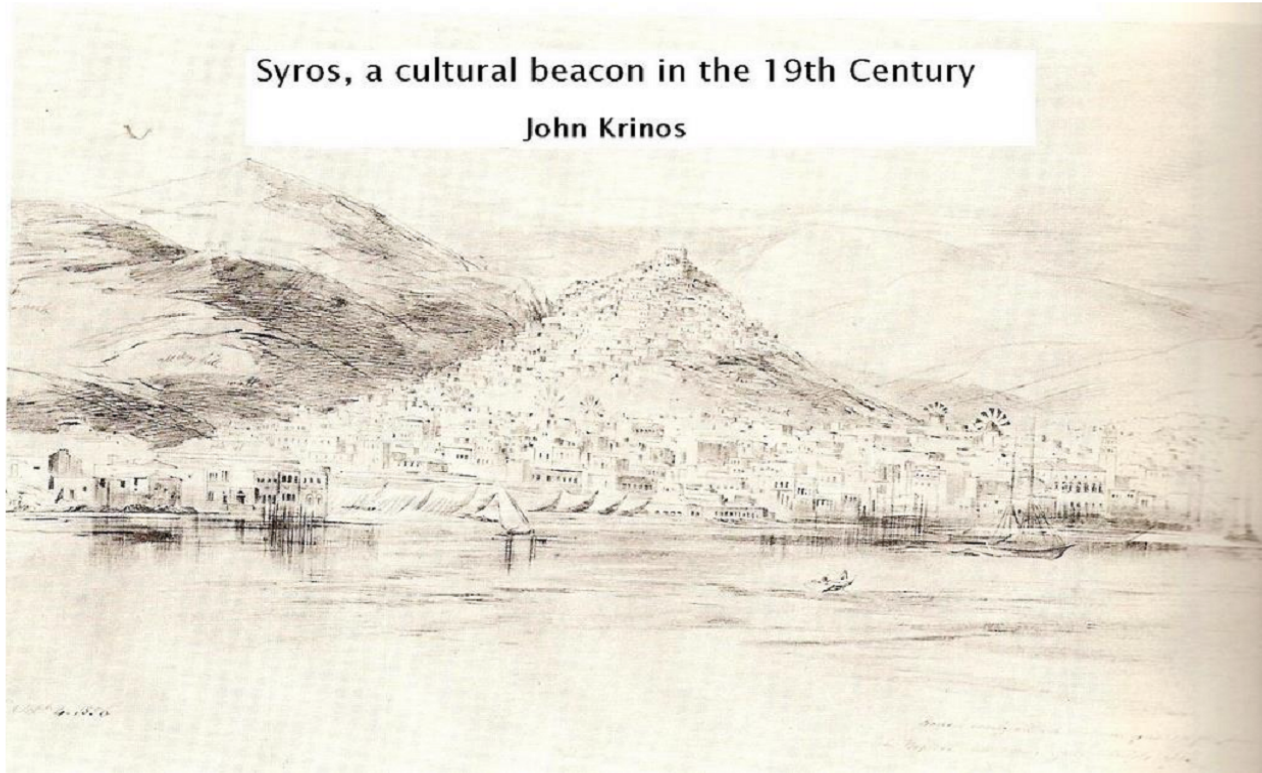

Syros, a cultural beacon in the 19th Century

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Presented at the
Thirteenth Annual Educational Forum/Conference of the

AFGLC
American Foundation for
Greek Language and Culture

“The Hellenic Legacy Through The Ages”

University of South Florida / Tampa, Florida
March 7 - 8, 2008

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 19th century, the principal centers of Hellenism in the Eastern Mediterranean were Constantinople, Ionia (primarily Smyrna), Chios, Alexandria, Livorno and Trieste. Hellenic culture, “Paideia”, literature and the arts flourished there, together with commerce and shipping that provided the economic foundation for the intellectual endeavors. After the Greek state was born, Athens and Piraeus gradually took over these roles, becoming predominant by the end of the century. In the interim period, however, the small island of Syros became a commercial and cultural center for Hellenism. During the struggles for independence, Syros, with its Roman Catholic agrarian population, was under the protection of France, enjoying considerable autonomy within the Ottoman empire. So it became a refuge for Greeks escaping the Turkish massacres from Chios and Psara, and other devastated lands. Within very few years, miraculously, the refugees who settled in Syros created new institutions, harbor facilities and factories, developed extensive trade, shipping and commerce. They also established cultural centers, theatres, concert halls, clubs, charitable institutions, printing shops and a diverse press. Ermoupolis, the city of Hermes, beautiful, industrious, cosmopolitan and prosperous, with close ties to European centers of learning, became the focal point for educational, social and literary activities. Its name was known and respected throughout Europe and the Hellenic world.

Hellenism at the dawn of the 19th century

With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans essentially replaced the Byzantines as successors to the Eastern half of the old Roman Empire. The Ottoman Empire, that was to last more than four centuries, soon stretched across Southern Europe and Asia Minor. The capital continued to be Constantinople (later renamed Istanbul).



In the Ottoman Empire, different tribes, nationalities, creeds and races — Greeks, Turks, Jews, Arabs, Slavs, Armenians, Latins, Italians, Franks, etc. usually lived in separate communities side by side, interacted frequently and extensively, but seldom intermarried and were not **integrated** in the modern sense of the word.

In the ancient world, the concepts of *Nation* and *Nationalism* had existed only vaguely. National identity gradually evolved from the notion of family, kinship, co-religionist and sharing a common birthplace or language. Greeks were recognizable as a “people” primarily

because of: (1) a common language and (2) a common and visible form of religious practice, which was their badge of culture as well as faith.

In the Ottoman Empire, Islam was the state religion but Christianity and Judaism were tolerated. Because Christ was a prophet recognized by Islam, the Ottomans allowed all Christians — Catholic and Orthodox —to practice their faith, and officially recognized the Greek Patriarch as spiritual head of all Orthodox Christians. The common people lived mostly in peace among themselves, were locally self-governed but had to conform to and obey laws and taxing demands by the Ottoman rulers. These were often arbitrary and harsh, backed by the awesome military power of the “empire”. Periods of unrest and rebellion were frequent; they were put down ruthlessly, often with extreme, inhuman savagery. Otherwise, a “live and let live” attitude prevailed, facilitating travel and favoring commerce.



Greeks, in particular, lived and prospered in the entire empire, but especially in the coastal regions of mainland Greece, Southern Italy and Sicily, Constantinople and the Bosphorus, the Black Sea coast, Ionia and the rest of Asia Minor. They were particularly successful in banking, commerce, shipping and trade, often making enormous fortunes. They knew the value of education and used their acquired wealth to seek and buy the best.

They studied medicine, pharmacology, mathematics and astronomy at Italian universities such as Padua or Pisa. Greek graduates and doctors with their scientific knowledge, their ability to treat the sick and good contacts in foreign parts became an “elite” indispensable to the Sultan and all levels of the Ottoman administration, often achieving high office.

Another factor contributed to the rise and influence of the Greek “elite”: Muslims were forbidden by their religion to speak “infidel”— i.e. non-Muslim—languages. This meant Turks were dependent on Greeks to communicate with their non-Islamic subjects. So, during the 17th and 18th centuries, Phanariot Greeks gradually came to occupy and monopolize some of the most powerful positions in the Ottoman Empire as ministers and diplomats.

Meanwhile, the outside world changed. Following the fall of Constantinople, there was an exodus of Greek scholars to Italy. They brought with them texts and knowledge of the classical Greek civilization, lost for centuries in the West. Greek and Arabic learning and knowledge of philosophy, religion, literature, mathematics and science also reached Western Europe via Muslim Spain and was assimilated, contributing to the Renaissance. Humanism was born, leading to the Enlightenment, to Liberalism and to demands for human rights. These intellectual movements resulted in major political and social upheavals, most significantly the American and French Revolutions of the 18th century.



The greatest Greek humanist scholar, Adamantios Korais (Smyrna 1748 – Paris 1833), was a graduate of the University of Montpellier, school of medicine. He personally witnessed the French Revolution in Paris, admired Thomas Jefferson and exchanged political and philosophical thoughts with him. He translated ancient Greek authors and encouraged wealthy Greeks to open new libraries and schools throughout Greece. Korais believed

passionately in education, advocated the revived classicism of the *Katharevousa* form of the Greek language, purifying the vernacular (*Demotic*) of foreign elements, and composed the first Modern Greek dictionary. As a man of the Enlightenment, he planted the seed of freedom and laid the intellectual foundations for the Greek War of Independence.

Chios and Psara massacres, devastation and diaspora

In 1821, Chios with its sophisticated population was probably the richest shipping and trading center in the eastern Mediterranean. Its merchants and ship-owners dominated trade and diplomacy throughout the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Under the Ottomans, Chios was allowed unique and almost complete control of its affairs. Chian trade and the fact that the immensely valuable mastic plant was harvested only in Chios, were of great value. The cosmopolitan Chians were also very prominent in Constantinople. So, when the national Revolution against the Turks started in mainland Greece, Chios was encouraged to join the rebellion, but the Chians wavered. Why antagonize Constantinople? Would they be any better off as part of a New Greek state?* Revolutionaries on mainland Greece began to regard Chios as a traitor to their cause.

A Greek fleet from Hydra, already well-experienced from tackling Barbary pirates and from the Napoleonic wars, successfully thwarted Ottoman attempts to re-supply the mainland garrisons in Greece. The Sultan responded by hanging the Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregorius V, on Easter Sunday, together with three bishops, several eminent clerics and Greek aristocrats in the Ottoman government.

When the Greek fleet approached Chios, in 1822, the governor, a Turkish Pasha, called in Turkish troops from the mainland. He also demanded hostages from the leading families. He obtained 75 heads of household from 30 of the principal families, including Archbishop Plato Franghiadi (Πλάτων Φραγκιάδης), and held them in a dungeon in the Kastro. In Constantinople, the Sultan also ordered preventive detention of prominent citizens of Chian extraction.

On the island of Samos, a revolutionary leader, Lykurgos Logothetis, who once served under Napoleon, assembled a horde of about five hundred Samians, and invaded Chios.

The invaders, who were at first welcomed by the villagers, proceeded to rob, loot and terrorize the Chians. In the city, anarchic groups of Samians set about looting and killing Turks, destroying mosques and Turkish coffee houses. The presence of the Samians on Chios enraged Sultan Mahmoud II. On his orders, 47 of the hostages held in the Chios Kastro, including Archbishop Franghiadi, were led out of their dungeon and hanged in the main square on 8 May 1822. Next, a large Turkish fleet arrived and Logothetis' Samian fleet sailed away...

The Turks then unleashed one of the most appalling massacres in modern history up to that time... Twenty-five thousand men, women and children were butchered wholesale. Scores



were hanged from the spars of the Turkish admiral's flagship. Corpses rotted in piles all over the island and eventually blocked the harbor. Towns and villages were destroyed. Women and children clustering for shelter in the monastery at Nea Moni were slaughtered. Others deliberately jumped to their deaths from the cliffs at Anavatos to avoid capture.

The Chios massacre, or “katastrophe” as it is known in Greece, was reported in contemporary accounts and diplomatic transmissions. It also drew the horrified attention of Western Europe through the works of Lord Byron and Eugène Delacroix’s famous painting. Altogether about three quarters of the population of Chios were either killed, taken as slaves or forced into flight. Children were separated from their parents in the dark and confusion. Thousands of women and children were taken to the brothels and slave markets of Asia Minor. Some were subsequently ransomed and returned to their families.



I have a copy of a handwritten diary extract from one of my ancestors who escaped the massacre but whose wife and daughter were enslaved, subsequently ransomed and reunited with him in Trieste. Another daughter, born after these events, became one of my great-grandmothers.

Two years after the Chios massacre, the Sultan ordered Ibrahim Pasha and his Egyptian forces to invade and destroy the neighboring island of Psara as a reprisal for the assistance it had given to Chios. A large fleet carrying thousands of Janissaries and other troops invaded the tiny island. Over 15,000 inhabitants, together with refugees from Smyrna and other places were butchered; women and children were captured and sold as slaves.

But most of the Chians who had taken refuge on Psara had already moved on to Syros, Tinos, other islands in the Cyclades, or newly liberated Athens. The richer and better connected had gone to Trieste, Livorno and Alexandria, while others had settled in Marseilles, London, Liverpool and Manchester. Some emigrated to the United States.

Rise of Syros — founding of Ermoupolis

Syros is a small island (84 square kilometers) at the center of the Cyclades but has the largest population, now about 30,000 inhabitants. The island has a long history, varied geography, and natural havens.

Vestiges of an early Cycladic civilization from about 2700 to 2200 BC, known as “Civilization of Syros – Keros” have been found at Chalandriani and Kastri. The island was settled successively by Phoenicians, Minoans, and Mycenaeans. In the classical period, the pre-Socratic philosopher Pherekydes (Φερεκύδης), the teacher of Pythagoras, lived on the island.



In the Byzantine years, Syros was a part of the Aegean Dominion. It then came under Venetian domination and was included in the Ducat of the Aegean. The islanders accepted

the Catholic Dogma, but maintained the use of the Greek language. In the 16th century, the Ottomans occupied Syros. Following an agreement with France, the Catholic inhabitants



came under French protection, which led to Syros' neutrality at the beginning of the Greek Revolution in 1821. The population consisted then of about 4,000 peasants, almost exclusively Catholic. The people lived close together in a medieval fortified city (castle) called Chora built on the top of a rugged hill overlooking a marshy bay. Chora (now called Ano Syros) was the seat of a Latin bishop and monastic orders of Jesuits and Capuchins. After the massacres of 1822, orthodox refugees from Chios and Psara came to Syros.

The Chian refugees were unlike any others in modern history. They came from a small island community with a strong sense of identity; many were related by blood or marriage. They knew each other well and were accustomed to cooperating. They had substantial assets — some were extremely rich. They were highly educated and multi-lingual. They had a sophisticated understanding of the world and of the events they were living through. Owing to their trading activities they were usually well traveled, with good connections and business partners in European capitals and in the ports of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

The Syros natives at first welcomed small numbers of refugees and hosted them in the castle. Soon, however, the welcome was replaced by fear that a multitude of rootless refugees might provoke a Turkish attack. Relations deteriorated and the men of Syros tried to throw out the refugees. When a direct assault from the castle failed, the natives passed a law forbidding the sale of land to immigrants, hoping that they would be forced to leave. The refugees were undaunted. Instead of buying land, they filled and reclaimed the vacant marshland at the foot of the hill and began building the first urban center of modern Greece.



Large numbers of Greek and foreign ships came in and out of the harbor bringing more people and goods. As the refugee settlement grew, shops and warehouses were erected along the seafront, temporary buildings were replaced, a customs house, quarantine station and sanitary installations were built in record time. Soon, the first schools and churches opened; a hospital was founded in 1823, moved into its own building in 1825 and began receiving the sick and wounded from all over Greece.

In 1826 the inhabitants decided that their community needed a name. The city's "baptism" took place in the newly built church of the *Metamorphosis*. Of the many names that had been proposed, Loukas Rallis from Chios offered the winner: *Ermoupolis*, dedicated to the god Hermes (Ερμής), patron of communications and gainful commerce (*kerdoos*--κερδῶος), as well as of culture and learning (*logios*--λόγιος).

By the time Kapodistrias arrived in Greece, in 1828, Ermoupolis was a fully established city with 14,000 inhabitants, more than Athens, which in 1837 had only 12,700. Syros acted as a staging post and redistribution center for consignments from Constantinople and the Black Sea; it was the main coaling station and the premier port and warehouse of the Eastern Mediterranean; in the new Greek state, it was designated the capital of the Cyclades.

On a personal note, my great-grandfather Athanasios D. Krinos (1802-1879), who was among the founders of Ermoupolis, came from Constantinople, but his family had originated from Chios. At the start of the war of independence he was completing his studies of pharmacology at the University of Pisa in Italy. In 1822 he was preparing to return home when he learned that the Ottoman authorities had detained several Greeks of Chios extraction, and that his father, his uncle and his maternal grandfather were among those imprisoned. To avoid facing the same fate in Constantinople, he sailed to Syros instead; he settled there, opened the first pharmacy in Ermoupolis and practiced his profession until his death. One of his sons married a granddaughter of the ancestor I mentioned earlier whose wife had been enslaved in Chios and subsequently ransomed.

Economic and cultural heyday

During King Otto's reign (1833-1862), Ermoupolis enjoyed great economic and cultural growth, and prosperity. The elected office of *dimarchos* (mayor) was instituted. Successive mayors made huge contributions to the city's progress and public works. The mayors were successful merchants whose concern was the advancement of the city, without regard for personal economic rewards.



Town planning and architecture

At first, the Syros settlement that became Ermoupolis, was built willy-nilly on the reclaimed marshland on the water-front. Public buildings and churches followed. The orthodox church of the *Metamorphosis* (Transfiguration) was built in 1824, followed by the *Koimesis* (Dormition) and the catholic cathedral of *Evangelistria* (Annunciation). Work on the Hospital started in 1825; harbor buildings were constructed and so was the High School (*Gymnasion*) inside the city. As the population increased, a comprehensive town plan was drawn up. Its first version was completed in 1842; it contained 124 streets and eleven squares.



The plan was gradually extended to the entire city. Streets were systematically paved, many with marble, trees were planted, public buildings, private houses and elegant, neo-classical mansions were built. Aqueducts were constructed to channel well water from the countryside; cisterns were included in every house to collect rain water, because water was always in short supply. Although modern desalination plants have now been built, securing adequate water supplies continues to be a pressing problem even today.

All the churches in Ermoupolis have distinctive architecture, but Ayios Nikolaos takes pride of place. It was inaugurated in 1870, standing in a dominating position in the well-to-do district of Vapororia, facing the sea. The impressive Town Hall, overlooking central Miaouli Square, designed by the German Architect Ernst Ziller was erected between 1876 and 1898. The square itself, one of the largest and finest in Greece, was paved with Tenian marble.



Education and learning

In Ermoupolis, the first schools were private. By the 1830s, public schools had also been founded, for both boys and girls. The emphasis given to the education of girls as well as boys was a mark of the progressive spirit of Ermoupolis. The city hired the best teachers. Neofytos Vamvas (Νεόφυτος Βάμβας) was offered the direction and supervision of the school system, including a proposed High School, *Gymnasion*. This was inaugurated in 1834, with Vamvas as headmaster. His personality and reputation made the Ermoupolis *Gymnasion* famous. Students came from all parts of Greece to attend. Eleytherios Venizelos was one of them.



Art, literature, printing and the press

All cultural activities flourished in Syros. Scholars, men of letters and artists came to live on the island which soon had an important library, exhibition halls, a museum, literary clubs, a theatre and a municipal band. Some of the better known Greek authors in 19th century Syros were: Emmanuel Roidis, whose famous novel Pope Joan (*Papissa Ioanna*), a scathing attack on official corruption and religious bigotry, earned him excommunication by the Holy Synod, George Souris, the well-known satirist, Timoleon Ambelas who wrote the history of Syros, and Dimitrios Vikelas, the first President of the International Olympic Committee.



Portraits and other paintings were commissioned to adorn the interiors of public buildings and private mansions. Busts and statues of famous people were erected in public places; elaborate funerary monuments and statues were placed at the orthodox cemetery. Wall and ceiling paintings were another form of decorative art that was practiced extensively in Syros that can be seen today.



A large number of printing houses, many established before 1850, published books and periodicals in Greek and in French, as well as large numbers of newspapers and pamphlets. Their coverage was not only local, but included national and international affairs of political, economic or cultural interest.

Theatres, museums and art galleries

The Apollo Theatre, designed by the Italian Architect Pietro Sampò as a small-scale replica of the famous Scala di Milano, was considered “the best theatre in the East”. It presented opera, concerts and stage plays with Greek and international performers from its inauguration in 1864 until 1953 when it was shut down because of the building’s deterioration. After many wrong



moves and false starts, the theatre was entirely renovated and reopened in 2000.



The most interesting and original museum in Syros is the Industrial Museum of Ermoupolis, housed in three restored old factory buildings: a tannery, a paint factory and a gun pellet factory. The museum exhibits 19th century industrial machinery and beautiful collections of old photographs and drawings of the period. There is also an Archaeological Museum, housed in the Town Hall, which contains some of the Cycladic civilization findings from the Chalandriani and Kastri sites. The rest are found in Athens.

The Art Gallery has both permanent and rotating exhibits; it is housed in the customs house and depots of the old harbor, fine restored old buildings of the 1830s.

Shipping, trade and industry

The growth of Syros as a maritime center was mainly due to the *Greek Steamship Company* «Ελληνική Ατμοπλοΐα» which operated steamships first within Greece and soon in the entire Mediterranean. By 1861, the company had expanded to steam-operated ironworks, establishing shipyards carrying out repairs and even building ships in Syros. Today’s shipyard *Neorion* is the descendent of that activity. Other industries were also established on the island. Ironworks, tanneries for the processing of hides, shoe factories, cotton processing, knitting mills and looms, flour milling, a macaroni factory and a brewery were among the industrial activities of Syros in the second half of the 19th century. Ermoupolis was then referred to as “the Manchester of Greece!”

Social life

The citizens of Ermoupolis played an active role in public affairs. Economic growth, trade and travel led to the creation of a highly cultured society, a wealthy ruling class of merchants and professionals (lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc.) The varied origins of the population, from Chios (a majority), other islands, Asia Minor, Peloponnesos, Northern Greece, and the catholic



Syros natives contributed to the formation of a “society apart”, quite distinct from others in Greece.

“The club, as an institution, was of fundamental importance in the social structure of Syros.”** Its purpose was “to secure to civilized men a daily, pleasant and instructive way of passing their time...” Originally there were two clubs, for men only, one for Chiots and one for non-Chiots. By 1864 these were amalgamated into a single club “Hellas”, housed in a magnificent building designed by Pietro Sampò, as was the Apollo Theatre. It now serves the Municipality for lectures, concerts, exhibitions and other cultural activities.

Discussions at the club encompassed all topics of interest, which were not limited to the affairs of the island. Citizens followed national and international events closely. For example, when the news of Korais death was announced in 1833, the people of Syros were the first to hold a memorial service to honor the great scholar and national teacher.

Social activities also included parties and dances held in private houses or at the Club, that became proverbial for their lavishness. Descriptions can be found in the local newspapers of the period.

Public institutions and philanthropy

Citizens always showed concern for their less fortunate compatriots, aiding the victims of cholera, smallpox and other epidemics, and protecting public health. Over the years, a Boys Orphanage, a Girls Orphanage, the Poor House, a Mental Asylum and many other charitable institutions were founded. Generous assistance was also given to external disasters, such as earthquakes, and to national causes, e.g., the Cretan revolt of 1866.



Decline and revival

By the 1920s, Syros resembled a fading dowager, full of memories but little action. Commerce, shipping and industry had declined and moved away. Opulent town houses and country estates became vacant and started falling into disrepair. Their owners lived in Athens or abroad and seldom visited.

During World War II Syros was occupied by the Italians and suffered a terrible famine that killed 6,000 people, twenty percent of the population!

In recent years, the island has been rejuvenated and is flourishing once again, benefiting from continued employment of workers at the shipyard

Neorion, from increased tourism due to modern facilities and fast ferry boats, and from renewed interest in the neoclassical architecture and culture.



Concluding remarks

Syros offers an interesting and upbeat paradigm for the modern world. When the catholic native inhabitants felt overwhelmed by the orthodox Chian refugees they resorted mainly to legalisms (outlawing sales of property) rather than violence. The immigrants too respected the laws and worked around them (filling and building on the marshland.) Both communities then lived together with very little friction in spite of their economic and religious differences. Historically, Chios had good orthodox-catholic relations; it was the only place in Greece where congregations had shared churches, and the monastery of Nea Moni allowed catholic masses. In Syros, the same situation applied; with time, intermarriages became very common and the communities integrated to a large extent. At present, the religious distribution in Syros is 60% Orthodox and 40% Catholic, very unusual in a country that is



overall 98% Orthodox. In order that families celebrate Easter together, the Catholics requested from the Pope and obtained a dispensation, some years ago, allowing them to follow the orthodox calendar in Syros. I consider this a very welcome, pragmatic solution that augurs well for the future.

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John D. Krinos

John Krinos was born in Athens, Greece, in 1930. After attending Athens College in Greece, he studied Electrical Engineering at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, graduating in 1952 with First Class Honours (Summa cum laude), obtaining a Post-Graduate Diploma in Electronics and Radio, becoming a Ph.D. candidate and joining the teaching staff. Returning to Greece, he did his military service and was commissioned as a reserve officer. In 1958 he joined the International Staff at the SHAPE¹ Technical Centre of NATO² in The Hague, Netherlands, performing classified military operations research and technical studies of nuclear detection, and command, control and communication systems.

In 1966 he emigrated to the US to work on interactive information management systems at United Technologies Corp. in Hartford, Connecticut. Continuing his education, he obtained a M.S. degree in Computer Science at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Hartford Graduate Center, in 1970.

In 1973 he joined The MITRE Corporation in McLean, Virginia, supporting US Government civilian and military information systems projects³. In 1980 he moved to Tampa, Florida to establish and manage a MITRE staff site at MacDill Air Force Base, providing technical assistance to the major military command headquarters in the design of command and control testing for deployment operations. In 1985 he returned to the Washington, DC area; he retired from MITRE in 1990 and became a consultant for SEMA⁴ in Falls Church, Virginia until 1995.

During his career, John published and presented numerous professional papers. He is a Senior & Life Member of IEEE⁵ and of TEE⁶. He traveled extensively in Europe and North America, and found time to visit Greece every year. He is a Member of the Executive Committee of AFGLC; he is married, has three children and five grandchildren. His interests also include history, languages, travel and music. He and his wife Sue moved back to the Tampa area in 1997 where they spend half the year. The other half is spent in Syros, Greece and traveling.

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March 2008

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