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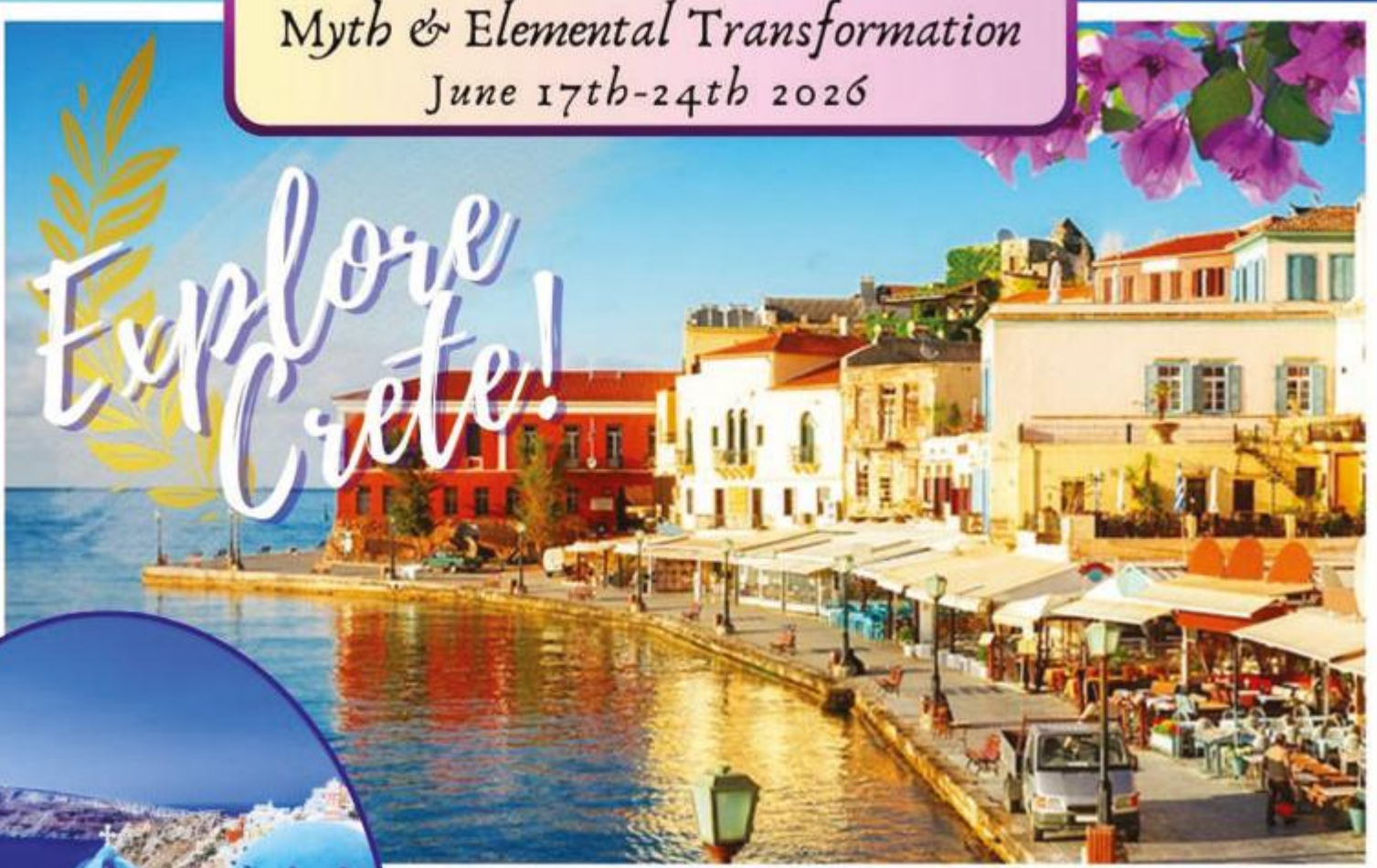
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FOUNDED IN 2005 BY

Demetrios Rhompotis
Dimitri Michalakis
Kyprianos Bazenikis

Publishing Committee Chairman
Demetrios Rhompotis
(718) 554-0308
dondemetrio@neomagazine.com

Director of Operations
Kyprianos Bazenikis
info@neomagazine.com

Marketing & Advertising
Director
Tommy Harmanzlis
(347) 613-4163
th@radioneous

ATHENS - GREECE
Public Relations &
Marketing Director
Rita Despotidis
rdespotis@gmail.com

NEO Magazine
is published monthly by
Neocorp Media Inc.
P.O. Box 560105
College Point, NY 11356
Phone: (718) 554-0308
e-Fax: (718) 878-4448
info@neomagazine.com

Check our website
neomagazine.com

FROM THE EDITOR



The spring of Easter

The faith I brought to America came from my childhood in Greece, but worshipping in America was a lot different than back on Chios, where I grew up.

First of all, back in Greece, faith and religion were always a part of your life.

When you built something, when there was an important event in your life, the local priest would come to bless your new house, addition to the house, abutment to the house, and the recovery of one of the kids from sickness, or one of the older members of the family approaching their end. The man who you saw most days, wearing his little bun, and his blue work smock and boots, was suddenly the man of God in black, the bun still in place, but now with his kalimavchi on, clutching his gold cross with the Byzantine points, and with a bowl or pan you provided where he could bless the water in it, douse a sprig of basil, and then flick it at you in prayer—and it always smelled fragrant.

I remember going to church on Sundays, of course, to the little church with the courtyard done in tile, and then running around the courtyard with the other kids after the service, while the adults traded conversation and news. That was during the day.

But Easter I remember as a nighttime worship, when the sky was lit above, and the world was dark below, except for the glow of

the little church like a campfire, and where the chant of the service filled the air. The whole world seemed concentrated in that little church that night, while the rest of the world lay shrouded, and you couldn't help but imagine and envision the dark and dramatic tableau of Easter, to its inevitable and tragic climax, but then relieved by the resurrection, like a cleansing rain that brought out the sunshine again.

In those little towns, in those little villages, Easter, coinciding with Spring, was literally a rebirth. The evening services, so solemn and intimidating for a kid, were replaced by the daytime celebration of the Resurrection, the family celebration, the pageantry of Easter meals and new clothes for the holiday and the delicious food with family: I still remember the whole troop of kids in my neighborhood carrying the tray with the lamb and potatoes to the brick oven of the neighborhood, and then lining up again to carry the trays back with the cooked meal and smelling it the whole way.

To me Easter has always been a favorite holiday: it has all the drama of Holy Week, but it has the Resurrection that brings hope to the world, and Spring in the air.

Kali Hronia to all of us.

DIMITRI C. MICHALAKIS

PUBLISHED MONTHLY
IN NEW YORK

Editor in Chief:
Dimitri C. Michalakis
info@neomagazine.com

Western Region Desk
- Los Angeles
Alexander Mizan
director@americanhellenic.org

Florida Desk,
Laura Neroulias Bisiotis
laura@lorapr.com

Baltimore Desk
Georgia Vavas
gvavas@comcast.net

Photo/Fashion
New York: ETA Press
fpapagermanos@yahoo.com
Los Angeles: Nick Dimitroklis
(951) 764-5737
photobynikos@hotmail.com

Graphic Design
NEOgraphixus
Adrian Salescu

Athens Desk
Konstantinos Rhompotis
(01130) 210 51 42 446
(01130) 6937 02 39 94
krhompotis@neomagazine.com



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George Likourezos, Esq.



CARTER, DELUCA & FARRELL LLP

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KEEPING THE FAITH

How early Greek immigrants practiced their religion in America

When the first significant waves of Greek immigrants arrived in the United States between the 1880s and the 1920s, they carried little with them—often a small suitcase, a baptismal cross, and a fierce determination to survive. What they lacked in material wealth, they compensated for with a deep, almost instinctive attachment to Orthodox Christianity, which served as their anchor in a foreign land. For these early arrivals—mostly young men from rural villages—faith was not merely a set of rituals. It was a portable homeland, a way to preserve identity, language, and dignity in a country that often viewed them as outsiders. Before there were churches, priests, or community centers, there was the stubborn insistence that “We must keep our faith alive.” And they practiced their religion in America—creatively, communally,



and with remarkable resilience.

Before the churches: Faith in boarding houses, cafés, and tenements

In the 1880s and 1890s, Greek immigrants were scattered across mining towns, textile mills, railroad camps, and urban ethnic enclaves. There were no Greek Orthodox churches yet in most places. So worship began wherever Greeks gathered:

- cramped boarding houses
- coffeehouses (καφενεία)
- rented halls
- back rooms of candy shops or shoeshine parlors
- makeshift shrines in tenement apartments

A typical Sunday gathering might include:

- reading the Orthros prayers from memory
- chanting familiar hymns without a chanter
- lighting candles stuck into saucers of sand
- venerating a small icon brought from the homeland
- reciting the Trisagion for the dead

These improvised services were not full liturgies—there was no priest—but they kept the rhythm of Orthodox life intact.

Icons as portable churches

Many immigrants carried a single icon from their village—often the Panagia, St. George, or their family’s patron saint. These icons became:

- the center of household prayer
- the “altar” for name day celebrations
- the object kissed before leaving for dangerous work in mines or railroads

In a world of uncertainty, the icon was a piece of home.



The First Priests: missionaries, wanderers, and community saviors

Priests arrived because communities begged for them.

By the 1890s, Greek communities began writing letters to bishops in Athens and Constantinople:

“Send us a priest. We are like sheep without a shepherd.”

Priests who came to America were often:

- young and adventurous
- widowed (and therefore permitted to serve)
- politically exiled
- or simply willing to endure hardship

They traveled constantly, performing sacraments for scattered Greek laborers across vast distances.

The “Circuit Riding” Greek Priest

Before parishes were established, priests functioned like Orthodox cowboys:

- traveling by train or horse

- carrying a portable antimension (the cloth needed for liturgy)
- performing baptisms in rivers or bathtubs
- blessing homes, shops, and even railroad camps
- hearing confessions in kitchens or fields

A priest might serve five or six communities across several states. His arrival was a major event—people took days off work, cooked feasts, and lined up for sacraments.

Sacraments as Community Glue

The sacraments were not just religious rites—they were acts of cultural survival:

- Baptisms ensured children remained Greek Orthodox despite pressure to assimilate.
- Weddings preserved Greek customs and prevented intermarriage in communities anxious about losing identity.
- Funerals offered dignity in a society where immigrant deaths were often ignored or mishandled.

Through these rituals, the priest became the moral and cultural center of the community.

Building the First Greek Orthodox Churches

Before they built restaurants, societies, or even permanent homes, Greek immigrants built churches. The first official Greek Orthodox church in the U.S. was founded in New Orleans in 1864, but the major wave of parish building occurred between 1890 and 1920.

Communities pooled money in remarkable ways:

- miners donated a day’s wages
- café owners held fundraisers
- women baked pastries to sell
- children collected coins

Even the poorest laborers insisted on contributing. The church was not optional—it was essential.

Churches as Multifunctional Community Centers

A Greek church in early America was never just a church. It was:

- a school for Greek language
- a social hall
- a job finding network
- a place to store community records
- a meeting place for village compatriots

- a refuge for new arrivals

The parish became the heart of Greek America.



Architecture: A Blend of Old and New

Early churches often looked nothing like Byzantine temples. Many were:

- converted Protestant churches
- rented halls
- simple wooden structures

But inside, Greeks recreated the familiar world:

- icons shipped from Mount Athos
- hand painted iconostases
- incense burners from the homeland
- embroidered altar cloths made by immigrant women

Over time, as communities prospered, they built more traditional domed churches.

Worship in a New Land: Services Were Entirely in Greek

For the first generations, the liturgy remained 100% Greek. This was not only a religious choice but a cultural one:

- Greek was the language of identity
- English was associated with assimilation
- parents feared losing their children to American culture

Even when children understood little, they absorbed the rhythms of Orthodoxy through sound and repetition.

Chanting Without Trained Cantors

Most communities lacked trained chanters (ψάλτες). Instead:

- older men who remembered hymns from the village stepped forward
- chanting was often off key but heartfelt
- Byzantine melodies mixed with local folk styles

This created a uniquely Greek American chant tradition, raw but deeply sincere.

Holy Week as the Emotional Center of the Year

Holy Week was the most important religious event for early immigrants. Even those who worked seven days a week tried to attend:

- the mournful hymns of Holy Thursday
- the procession of the Epitaphios through immigrant neighborhoods
- the midnight cry of “Χριστός Ανέστη!”

For many, these moments were the only times they felt truly at home in America.

Home Rituals: The Icon Corner (το εικονοστάσι)

Every Greek home, no matter how small, had an icon corner:

- a few icons
- a vigil lamp
- a small cross
- holy water from the last Theophany
- a sprig of basil from the previous year’s feast

This corner was the spiritual heart of the household.



Fasting as a Marker of Identity

Immigrants kept the traditional fasts:

- Great Lent
- Wednesdays and Fridays
- the Dormition Fast
- the Nativity Fast

Fasting was a way to maintain discipline and continuity. Even those who worked brutal industrial jobs tried to keep at least part of the fast.

Name Days Over Birthdays

Birthdays were not widely celebrated in early Greek America. Instead, name days were the major personal feast:

- friends visited without invitation
- coffee and sweets were served
- the house filled with greetings of “Χρόνια Πολλά!”

This tradition reinforced the connection

between personal identity and the saints.

Death, Mourning, and Memory: Funerals as Acts of Communal Solidarity

When a Greek immigrant died—often young, often far from family—the community stepped in:

- raising money for burial
- organizing the funeral
- ensuring Orthodox rites were followed

No one was allowed to be buried without dignity.

Memorial Services (Μνημόσυνα)

Memorials were essential for maintaining bonds with the dead. Women baked κόλλυβα, and the community gathered to chant:

- “Αιώνια η μνήμη”
- “Memory eternal”

These rituals softened the loneliness of exile.

Faith and Ethnic Identity: Orthodoxy as the Guardian of “Greekness”

For early immigrants, Orthodoxy was not just a religion—it was the last line of defense against losing their Greek identity. The church preserved:

- language
- customs
- food traditions
- village networks
- moral codes

To be Greek was to be Orthodox; the two were inseparable.

The Church as Mediator with American Society

Priests often acted as:

- translators
- legal advisors
- mediators with employers
- advocates in court
- protectors against discrimination

The church helped Greeks navigate a society that often viewed them as “undesirable” immigrants.

The Rise of Greek Schools and Youth Organizations

By the 1910s, many parishes established Greek afternoon schools:

- children attended after public school
- they learned reading, writing, and church hymns
- teachers were often recent immigrants or priests

These schools were crucial for maintaining Greek literacy.

Sunday Schools in English

As American born children grew, parishes introduced Sunday schools in English to teach:

- basic Orthodox theology
- Bible stories
- moral lessons

This was the first major adaptation to American life.

The First Greek Festivals

Early Greek festivals were modest:

- a small procession
- homemade food
- music from a violin or clarinet

But they served as public declarations of identity.

Epiphany Blessing of the Waters

In cities near water—Tarpon Springs, Chicago, New York—Greeks introduced the dramatic Blessing of the Waters:

- priests threw the cross into rivers or harbors
- young men dove in to retrieve it
- crowds gathered to watch this exotic ritual

These events helped Greeks claim public space in America.



The Transition to a Greek American Orthodoxy

By the 1920s and 1930s, the children of immigrants were growing up American. This forced the church to adapt:

- sermons began to include English
- choirs replaced traditional chanters
- parishes adopted American organizational models
- youth groups formed
- intermarriage increased

Orthodoxy remained the anchor, but it slowly became Greek American rather than purely Greek.

So the story of early Greek immigrants in America is, in many ways, the story of how a people used faith to survive displacement. Orthodoxy gave them:

- structure
- dignity

- continuity
- community
- a sense of home

From makeshift altars in boarding houses to the grand domed cathedrals of today, the Greek Orthodox Church in America stands as a monument to the resilience of those first immigrants who refused to let their faith fade in the New World.

Their story is not only religious—it is profoundly human. It is the story of people who, despite hardship and prejudice, built a spiritual homeland that allowed future generations to thrive.

These families typically included:

- Railroad workers (Chicago & Northwestern, Illinois Central)
- Café and candy store owners
- Cigar makers and shoemakers
- Small grocers and fruit peddlers
- Women working as seamstresses or in family shops

They pooled money to rent a hall, then to build the first wooden church.

The “First Circle” likely included families with surnames such as:

The First Greek Orthodox Parishes in America

These are the foundation communities from which Greek Orthodoxy spread:

Year	Parish	City & State	Notes
1864	Holy Trinity	New Orleans, LA	First officially organized Greek Orthodox parish in the U.S.
1885–1890	Small lay communities	New York, NY	Worship in rented halls before formal parish formation.
1892	Evangelismos (Annunciation)	New York, NY	First major parish in the Northeast.
1895	Holy Trinity	Chicago, IL	First parish in the Midwest; major immigrant hub.
1898	Holy Trinity	Lowell, MA	One of the earliest New England parishes, tied to mill workers.
1900	Holy Trinity	San Francisco, CA	First parish on the West Coast.
1905	St. George	Manchester, NH	Early industrial-town parish.
1906	St. Sophia	Washington, DC	Early capital-region parish.

The History of One Representative Parish

The Assumption Greek Orthodox Church (Chicago, Illinois) (Panagia – Dormition of the Theotokos)

The Assumption parish began in 1925, founded to serve the growing Greek immigrant population in Chicago’s Austin neighborhood and the nearby western suburbs of Oak Park and Cicero. Early Greek families in this area—many working in small businesses, railroads, and trades—needed a spiritual home close to where they lived.

The Greek population of Chicago’s Austin, Oak Park, and Cicero districts was still small but tightly knit. These were not wealthy merchants like those who founded Holy Trinity downtown in 1895. They were working class families, many from the Peloponnese, Epirus, and the Aegean islands.

Pappas / Papadopoulos

- Kostas / Costas
- Kouvelis / Kouvelas
- Karras / Karas
- Gianopoulos / Giannopoulos
- Vlahos / Vlahakis
- Economou / Oikonomos
- Kanelos / Kanellos
- Stathopoulos / Stathos
- Manolis / Manolopoulos

These names appear repeatedly in 1920s West Side Greek directories, early parish bulletins, and local Greek language newspapers.

When the community decided to replace the wooden structure with a permanent stone church, it required enormous sacrifice. The Great Depression had hit Chicago hard, yet

the parishioners insisted on building something worthy of the Panagia.

These families were known for:

- donating a week's wages
- mortgaging their homes
- hosting fundraisers in their shops
- volunteering as masons, carpenters, and painters



Prominent surnames associated with the building campaign:

- Camburas — the architect P.E. Camburas was central to the project.
- Koulogeorge — early benefactors and community organizers.
- Lianos / Lianides — involved in fundraising committees.
- Katsaros — known for supporting iconography and interior decoration.
- Kokinis / Kokkinos — active in the parish council.
- Demos / Demopoulos — donors to the altar and sanctuary furnishings.

These families appear in 1930s parish minutes, Greek-American newspapers, and Chicago Tribune society notes describing the church's consecration.

Greek immigrant women were the backbone of Assumption's early life. They organized the Philoptochos Society, cooked for fundraisers, taught children Greek, and kept the parish solvent during the Depression.

Typical women's surnames in early records:

- Mrs. Kanelos — led early charity drives.
- Mrs. Gianakopoulos — organized Greek school events.
- Mrs. Vlahos — known for embroidery of altar cloths.
- Mrs. Karahalios — coordinated Holy Week preparations.
- Mrs. Manolis — ran the parish's first youth choir.

These women preserved traditions like:

- making prosphora
- preparing kollyva
- decorating the Epitaphios
- teaching children hymns and prayers

Their work kept the parish culturally Greek even as the children became American-born.

These were the children who:

- attended the first Greek school
- served as altar boys
- joined the first choir
- marched in the first Greek Independence Day parades

Common second generation surnames in school rosters and youth groups include:

- Pappas
- Karras
- Stathos
- Economou
- Kanelos
- Demos

They became the bridge between immigrant Orthodoxy and American life.

When it came time to build a permanent church, even during the Depression, the community insisted on:

- real stone
- hand painted icons
- a proper dome
- imported ecclesiastical items

Beauty was a form of dignity.

The first church was a small wooden structure, modest but deeply meaningful to the community. As the community grew, the parish replaced the original wooden building with a new stone church, completed in 1938.

- Designed by P.E. Camburas, a prominent Greek American architect.
- Built in the Byzantine cross in square style, crowned with a dome.
- Exterior constructed of Wisconsin Lannon stone, giving it a monumental presence.

This building became one of the most recognizable Orthodox churches on Chicago's West Side.

After World War II, the parish commissioned the renowned ecclesiastical artist John A. Mallin to decorate the interior.

- Mallin received major commissions in 1946 and 1948, indicating a significant investment by the parish.
- The church was consecrated in 1947, marking its full liturgical completion.
- By the late 1940s, the parish had grown to over 5,000 families, making it one of

the largest Greek Orthodox communities in the Midwest.

Newspaper accounts from the era describe the church's Easter services as filled with "brilliance of gold and blue," with elaborate icons, candelabra, and chalices.

Architectural highlights include:

Narthex

- Wall paintings of Christ with the children and St. Paul at the Areopagus.

Nave

- A dome featuring a Renaissance style depiction of God, surrounded by prophets and evangelists.

- A blend of Byzantine and Western artistic influences—unusual but characteristic of Greek American churches of the mid 20th century.

Sanctuary

- The Platytera ("Wider than the Heavens") icon of the Virgin Mary above the altar.

- A detailed iconostasis (some icons later replaced).

Most of Mallin's original work remains intact today.

In October 2025, the parish celebrated its 100th anniversary, a major milestone for Chicago's Greek community.

Highlights of the Centennial Weekend

- Archbishop Elpidophoros of America presided over the Divine Liturgy.
- Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago and other clergy concelebrated.
- The parish honored the "heroes of the community"—the early immigrants whose sacrifices built the church.
- A Centennial Gala was held at the Westin O'Hare with hundreds in attendance.
- The parish announced support for the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Foundation.

The celebration emphasized continuity with the faith and traditions of the early Greek immigrants who founded the parish.

Today the Assumption remains a vibrant parish, known for:

- Its Byzantine Romanesque architecture
- Its historic iconography
- Its active ministries and community outreach
- Its role as a spiritual home for generations of Greek Americans in Chicago

The church's copper patina dome, visible from the Eisenhower Expressway, continues to be a landmark for the city's Orthodox faithful.



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The name Victoria Kyriakides has become synonymous around the world for eclectic and renowned bridal wear. The Greek designer's work has graced the international pages of Vogue, Elle, Harper's Bazaar, and WWD to name a few. From her atelier in Athens, Kyriakides has expanded her presence to showrooms in New York, Los Angeles and Seoul, as well as collaborations with upscale retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom. Her clients include high-profilers in the worlds of entertainment, politics, culture, and business. From her beginnings in the early 2000s, Kyriakides has grown, over two decades, into one of the leading figures in the Greek fashion world. But, her stature has brought her worldwide acclaim. Not one to rest on her laurels, Kyriakides has collaborated with many international brands, creating bespoke fashion creations and expanding her talents to evening wear and luxury shoes. NEO sat down with Kyriakides to talk about her incredible career and what holds for the future.



VICTORIA KYRIAKIDES

AT THE VANGUARD OF FASHION, IN GREECE AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Take us to the beginning. Did you always want to go into fashion design? Did you study it formally? Did you work with other houses before you started your own?

From an early age, I was drawn to the language of form, proportion, and the female silhouette. Beauty, balance, and the way clothing can shape how a woman feels about herself always fascinated me. Fashion felt like a natural extension of my artistic sensibility; it felt almost inevitable.

I studied music academically, while immersing myself in the language of all forms of art—a process that gave me discipline, structure, and a strong aesthetic foundation.

Very early on, I felt a strong need to express my own vision through luxury evening and red-carpet designs. Many of these pieces quickly gained attention from the press, artists, and celebrities, with entire collections selling out.

Interestingly, it was my clientele who naturally led me toward couture bridal, as an increasing number of requests came to design their custom wedding gowns according to my aesthetic, at a time when bridal fashion felt rather conventional and predictable.

Founding my couture house in the early 2000s was a natural progression. It was about building a brand by creating a distinct world that reflected my aesthetic, values, and desire to bring a more contemporary, fashion-driven sensibility to bridal couture.



What was it about bridal design that made you decide it was the area you wanted to focus on?

Bridal design combines emotion, craftsmanship, and timelessness in a very pure way. A wedding dress is not just a gown—it becomes part of a woman's story and a cherished memory.

moments in fashion where simplicity carried great power. Growing up in Greece, surrounded by classical art, proportion, and harmony, inevitably shaped my sense of balance and restraint.

You first gained recognition throughout Europe and now you have a big presence in the USA. Do you see differences amongst clients—in terms of their aesthetic preferences—in different parts of the world?

There are subtle differences in how women approach style across the world. European clients often gravitate toward quiet luxury and refinement, while American clients embrace a more expressive, adventurous approach—which I adore, as both expressions define the core aesthetic and the signature style of my work.

What connects them, however, is the desire for authenticity. Women everywhere seek pieces that feel personal, beautifully constructed, and true to their identity—and that shared desire is what couture is truly about.

You also design evening wear and a bespoke shoe collection. Are you planning to branch out into other areas of fashion?

The house already works across several categories—custom bridal, evening and red carpet gowns, and a bespoke haute couture luxury shoe collection. Each pair is personally designed by me and meticulously handcrafted in Italy from silk by the finest artisans. Every design is created to complement the aesthetic of each couture gown, forming a complete and harmonious look.

For me, expansion is about deepening the experience and building a refined, cohesive world around the woman who wears the



AUF DEN SCHÖNSTEN TAG IHRES LEBENS!

I was drawn to the intimacy of that process—the idea of creating something entirely personal for a woman, designed around her body and unique personality. Couture bridal allows for that level of precision and emotional connection, which is very close to my philosophy as a designer.

What inspires your work? Do you draw from specific eras or artistic movements? Does Greece's own classical and cultural tradition influence your work?

My work is deeply inspired by the female form—its lines, movement, and natural elegance. I'm drawn to the idea of revealing that beauty in a refined, understated way, where the personality and the silhouette are in the spotlight.

I don't follow specific eras in a literal sense, but I'm influenced by timeless aesthetics—classical sculpture, modernist architecture, and certain



brand. Every new piece must feel authentic, purposeful, and true to the house's identity. We are also exploring the idea of developing a capsule collection in fine jewelry.

Is there a particular moment in your career that you're most proud of?

Some of the most meaningful moments have been deeply personal. Vogue USA recognized my work, citing me as an "Unconventional Designer," one of nine emerging bridal designers worldwide, while Daily Front Row highlighted the house as one of six new European designers shaping the U.S. bridal scene. I also cherish beautiful partnerships and special moments, like Saks Fifth Avenue selecting my crystal gown, Leto, for their campaign shoot, and Saks Beverly Hills displaying it in their luxury Christmas window.

Designing the wedding gown for Erin Williams, including her fittings in Beverly Hills with her mother and father, AC/DC legend Cliff Williams, are sweet moments I keep in my heart, alongside creating Akemi's gown for her wedding to Matthew Murphy, lead singer of the British band The Wombats, in Marbella, Spain.

Designing Devorah Rose's wedding gown, a memorable bridal journey featured in Hamptons Social Life Magazine, introduced my work to a discerning American audience.

On the red carpet, designing for iconic Greek performers such as Helena Paparizou, Foteini Dara, and Anna Vissi, as well as high-profile figures from fashion, cinema, politics, and shipping, always brings together craftsmanship, emotion, and personal storytelling.

What designers inspired you when you embarked on your career?

I have always admired designers who create a clear, distinctive identity and remain true to it. Halston, for example, embodied modern elegance and purity of line, shaping American minimalism and in influencing generations of designers worldwide. I also respect the visionary work of Jean Paul Gaultier, as well as the legendary houses of Dior and Yves Saint Laurent.

My signature style is defined by a balance of innovation and timelessness, combining precise craftsmanship with the vision to create pieces that feel modern, sophisticated, and elegant. I strive to honor that sense of clarity

and restraint, while allowing the personality of each woman and the emotion of the moment to shape the final creation.

What are the future plans for your brand? Will you be expanding stores around the world?

Looking ahead, the focus is on thoughtful, curated growth. I envision developing a bespoke atelier in Manhattan, where luxury brides can experience a truly personalized couture journey, reflecting the brand's dedication to precision, sophistication, and elegance. To bring this vision to life, the house is exploring partnerships with discerning investors and fashion enthusiasts who share a passion for exceptional craftsmanship and refined couture.

The house also aspires to collaborate with legendary fashion houses, including icons such as Halston, and is drawn to creative partnerships with visionary filmmakers, bringing couture sensibility into cinematic storytelling—a vision inspired by auteurs such as George Lanthimos.

Can you tell us a bit about your philanthropic efforts such as with The Hellenic Initiative and Creaid?

Alongside its couture work, the house supports philanthropic initiatives, reflecting a belief that creativity and craftsmanship can contribute meaningfully to the world. It collaborates with The Hellenic Initiative and Creaid, combining artistry with purpose. Giving back through design feels entirely natural to the house and is an essential part of its ethos.

What advice would you give to young designers first starting out, especially those in Greece?

My advice is to remain true to your vision and cultivate patience—a strong identity and mastery take time to develop. Technical skill and creativity must go hand in hand; discipline is just as important as inspiration.

I would also encourage young designers to think globally from the very beginning. Fashion is an art form that transcends borders, and the ability to position your work within that wider world, opens doors to

growth, collaboration, and meaningful recognition. Above all, believe in the uniqueness of your perspective and let it guide your creative journey.

Explore more:

Website: www.victoriakyriakides.com

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From Athens to the world: The artist who draws logic

By Kelly Fanarioti



Alecos Papadatos

Alecos Papadatos, the illustrator of the internationally acclaimed *Logicomix*, speaks to NEO about philosophy, storytelling, and the limits of AI.

He studied economics, driven by the kind of youthful naïveté that often comes with believing one can change the world. As he grew older, he came to realize that this ambition was in many ways, utopian. Through a series of chance events, he eventually found himself at the Sorbonne, where he pursued a postgraduate degree in the aesthetics of philosophy. At the same time, he trained at an animation production company before returning to Greece.

"I had been drawing since childhood, as had everyone in my family. For many years, I worked in animation alongside my partner and later my wife, Annie Di Donna," Alecos Papadatos says to NEO.

After some time, he realized that animation had begun to exhaust him and he turned instead to comics, a medium he had loved since he was young. Around that time, he also received a phone call. On the other end of the line was the acclaimed Greek writer and mathematician Apostolos Doxiadis, who invited him to join as an illustrator in what was, for its time, a highly unconventional project.

"Together with Christos Papadimitriou, a professor of computer science at UC Berkeley, they came up with the idea of creating a graphic novel with Bertrand Russell as its central narrator - a figure who devoted much of his life to mathematics and mathematical logic. As a young mathematician, he discovered a paradox at the heart of set theory, now known as 'Russell's paradox.' I was then asked to take on the illustration, and we spent four full years working on the project," Papadatos says.

He adds, visibly moved, that Russell's books had been among his father's favorite readings during the years of the dictatorship. "Although he was an officer in the army, my father held strong democratic beliefs. He was often posted to remote border areas, where he would spend his time reading in secret, mostly philosophy, including Russell. So when Apostolos Doxiadis suggested, years later, that we work on Russell, I was deeply struck by the coincidence."

The book *Logicomix*, which also features prominent 20th-century mathematicians and philosophers such as Georg Cantor, Alfred North Whitehead, Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Kurt Gödel and Alan Turing, achieved widespread international recognition. It has been translated into 27 languages and received critical acclaim from major international outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Independent*. As Alecos Papadatos recounts, however, this success did not come easily, but followed a long series of rejections and uncertainty over how the work should be classified.



In his graphic novel "Aristotle", Papadatos brings ancient Athens to life through everyday scenes of movement, dialogue, and public gathering



A panel from *Logicomix*, illustrating the process of reasoning and discovery in mathematics

"Many publishing houses in both the United States and Europe turned us down. They didn't know how to classify the book, whether it was fiction, non-fiction, epistemological, or simply entertainment-- nor whether it was meant for children or adults. Some found it too abstract,

or outside their editorial scope. In the end, it was Bloomsbury--the publisher behind Harry Potter - that took it on."

What gave them the strength to keep knocking on doors, despite repeated rejections, I ask him. "We had put in an enormous amount of work--in writing, production, and visual development. We knew we had created something exceptionally well-crafted, without flaws. With that confidence, we simply didn't give up," he states.



The bustling agora of ancient Athens, the heart of public life, as illustrated by Alecos Papadatos in "Democracy"

Comics on Aristotle and Democracy

Alecos Papadatos approaches drawing in his own distinctive way. As he explains, he wants to admire his characters, to feel connected to them, and to be challenged by them: one of the reasons he has never been drawn to political cartooning. "It was never my goal to draw Mitsotakis, Tsipras, Khomeini, or Trump," he says emphatically.

This also explains why, after Bertrand Russell, he turned to the work of the great ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, as well as to the story of the birth of democracy in ancient Athens. He is currently working on a new project exploring the history of Western philosophy.

"In these graphic novels, the stories convey a certain kind of knowledge to the reader, not necessarily academic, but enough to offer a clear sense of how Western philosophy has evolved. This is a subject that deeply interests me. It involves fascinating characters, with compelling lives, set within uniquely rich contexts."

"More broadly, I have a strong interest in philosophy and history; I read extensively and watch related films. Both *Logicomix* and *Democracy* are, essentially, historical works. Even Aristotle is about history rather than philosophy; it doesn't attempt to analyze philosophical ideas, but rather to tell the story of a man who lived in a specific time and articulated certain ideas within that context."

More broadly, he believes that comics can function as a powerful tool for public understanding. "Many things can be made accessible through comics and animation," he notes.

At the same time, he draws a clear distinction between what comics are and what they are not.

“Comics are about actions and relationships, not abstract ideas. They show rather than describe. They show people speaking, acting, interacting. Simply taking Einstein’s theory and placing it into speech bubbles is not a comic. What’s missing there is sequentiality, action, and the relationships between characters”.

Artificial Intelligence

At a time when artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the way images are produced, how secure can an illustrator feel?

He approaches the idea that AI could pose a real threat to illustrators with a degree of skepticism. As he explains, creating a comic is a complex and demanding process, one that in many ways resembles film production.

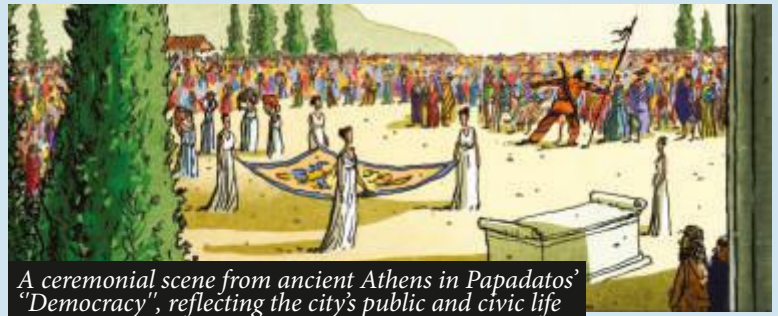
“First comes the script, then the character design, followed by research: for example, what buildings of a certain period actually looked like. You need to consult encyclopedias, study

references—say, the architecture of 18th-century buildings. It’s a lot of work.”

Although there have already been attempts to use artificial intelligence tools to generate images incorporated into comic panels, he believes the results remain limited. As he explains, these systems rely on pre-existing data and, in essence, “produce an average” of images, without being able to replicate the unique visual identity of each artist.

“Today’s AI tools are still very primitive compared to the complexity of human creativity, and they cannot produce work with real artistic or commercial value. There’s no way a machine can create what a human does. I think there’s a lot of unnecessary panic around this.”

However, he acknowledges that artificial intelligence can serve as a useful support tool. For instance, it can significantly speed up the research process, providing



A ceremonial scene from ancient Athens in Papadatos’ “Democracy”, reflecting the city’s public and civic life



A glimpse into Bertrand Russell’s childhood in “Logicomix”, where discipline and control defined everyday life

structured information and references that would previously have required months of searching.

“You can have a full bibliography in record time, something that would otherwise take months, including trips to libraries abroad to track down specific books,” he notes.

In his free time, Alekos Papadatos plays and sings rebetiko music, a passion he has had since his student years, when he and his friends would perform at gatherings and celebrations, before eventually playing in small Athenian tavernas. For him, rebetiko holds something unique. As he explains, it is the only musical genre in Europe—with the exception of flamenco—where musicians sit around a table, playing bouzouki and guitar, singing along to songs everyone knows, often accompanied by wine. “It’s a communal experience that naturally draws everyone in.”



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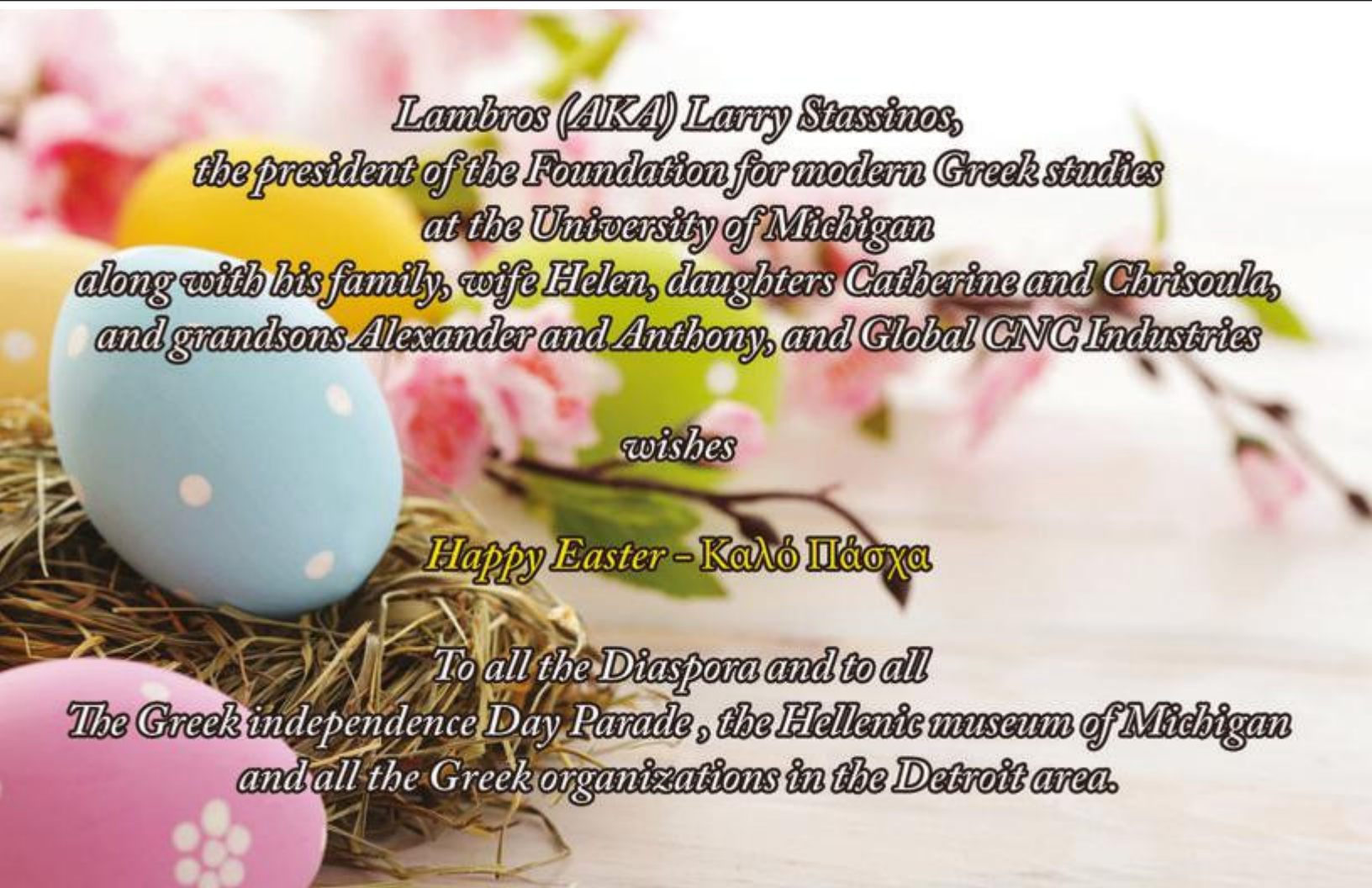
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*Lambros (AKA) Larry Stassinos,
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at the University of Michigan
along with his family, wife Helen, daughters Catherine and Chrisoula,
and grandsons Alexander and Anthony, and Global CNC Industries*

wishes

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*To all the Diaspora and to all
The Greek independence Day Parade, the Hellenic museum of Michigan
and all the Greek organizations in the Detroit area.*



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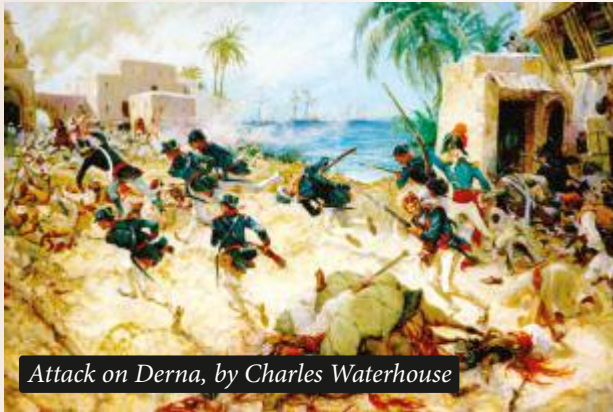
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IN SERVICE OF THE STATES: GREEKS AT THE BATTLE OF DERNA

by Dean Kalimniou*

The painting *Attack on Derna* by Charles Waterhouse, is unremarkable, with the eye drawn to the advancing American force, to the Marines pressing forward under command, to the flag that will soon be raised and fixed in the historical imagination. Yet to the right of that movement, slightly removed from its compositional centre, there appears a figure clad in the foustanella, advancing within the same field of fire. His presence is neither explained nor incidental. It invites a question. Who was he, and how did he come to be there?



Attack on Derna, by Charles Waterhouse

There are episodes in the long and fractured history of Hellenism that appear only as marginal annotations in the archives of others, acknowledged in passing, seldom examined. One such episode is the participation of Greek fighters in the Battle of Derna, an engagement that occupies a modest place in American military memory and an even smaller one in Greek historical consciousness. Yet within that encounter, fought on the littoral edge of North Africa in 1805, there exists a fragment of Greek experience that speaks to a wider condition: displacement, endurance, and the persistent translation of martial skill into foreign causes.

The expedition itself, led by William Eaton and accompanied by a small detachment of United States Marines under Presley O'Bannon, has often been framed as an early expression of American expeditionary warfare. Such a framing obscures the composition of the force that made the campaign possible. Eaton's army was an assemblage. Arabs, Berbers, Turks, Europeans, and, crucially, Greeks were drawn together under conditions of necessity, promise, and coercion. Among them, approximately forty Greek mercenaries, led by Captain Luco Ulovix and a lieutenant known only as Constantine, formed a disciplined contingent that would come to bear a disproportionate share of the fighting.

The expedition formed part of the wider conflict between the United States and the

Barbary regencies of North Africa, in which tribute, piracy, and sovereignty intersected in unstable fashion. Tripoli, under the rule of Yusuf Karamanli, declared war on the United States in 1801 following disputes over payments and recognition. Eaton's mission emerged from an alternative strategy. Rather than relying solely on naval pressure, he sought to intervene in Tripoli's internal politics by restoring the exiled claimant Hamet Karamanli to power. The march on Derna took shape as a landward thrust designed to destabilise the regime from within, combining military force with dynastic substitution. In this, the campaign assumed a significance beyond its immediate objective. It marked the first instance in which the United States projected force inland on foreign soil, confronting both geography and political fragmentation in equal measure.

The archive preserves them imperfectly. Luco Ulovix appears under shifting orthographies, his name refracted through foreign ears. Constantine is rendered without surname, as though individuality itself had been pared away in translation. Around them stand the unnamed, their identities dissolved into number. This partial visibility is instructive. It reveals how easily Greek actors, when operating beyond the framework of an emerging national narrative, pass into abstraction.

Their presence requires explanation. These were men of the Ottoman world, drawn from Greek-speaking communities extending across the Eastern Mediterranean. Many would have belonged, directly or by inheritance, to the kleptotic milieu of the late eighteenth century, a world in which mountain warfare, ambush, and negotiated authority constituted both livelihood and resistance. Survival depended upon mobility, improvisation, and endurance. These were precisely the qualities demanded by Eaton's expedition. Others may have emerged from maritime or mercantile environments where arms and trade intersected. What united them was neither ideology nor programme, but readiness. In a landscape marked by imperial constraint and local instability, martial capacity became a transferable resource.

It is also necessary to consider the figure through whom many of these men were drawn into the enterprise. Hamet Karamanli, the exiled claimant whose restoration Eaton sought to effect, was widely understood to be of partial Greek descent. In the fluid social

world of the Ottoman Mediterranean, such affinities retained meaning. They facilitated trust, opened channels of recruitment, and rendered service under his banner intelligible to Greek fighters accustomed to navigating overlapping identities. His presence supplied a political objective for the expedition and a point of cultural orientation through which Greek mercenaries could be gathered and organised.

Eaton encountered these men in Egypt, in the cosmopolitan environment of Alexandria, where displaced populations and opportunists converged. Recruitment proceeded along pragmatic lines. Karamanli's reputed lineage, circulating within Levantine networks, functioned as an inducement, lending the enterprise a familiarity that eased enlistment among men otherwise wary of purely foreign command. For the Greeks, such inducements aligned with an existing pattern of service under foreign banners. Venetian, Russian, and Ottoman forces had all, at various times, incorporated Greek fighters. The transition into an American-led expedition represented continuity rather than departure.

From the outset, the Greeks distinguished themselves as the most reliable element within a force marked by instability. Cultural and religious divisions were pronounced, and Arab auxiliaries mutinied repeatedly over pay and provisions. The march across the Libyan desert, extending over five hundred miles, imposed its own test. Water failed. Animals collapsed. Provisions were reduced to rationed handfuls. Under such conditions, parts of the expedition faltered. The Greek contingent did not. They remained intact and, at critical moments, assisted in restoring order when the expedition threatened to fragment.

This reliability reflected an internal structure forged under pressure. Greek communities within the Ottoman Empire had long cultivated forms of cohesion grounded in language, religion, and local leadership. Within Eaton's expedition, these translated into military effectiveness. The Greeks operated as a company, under recognised officers, with a clear chain of command. When disorder emerged, their readiness to enforce discipline transformed authority into something tangible.

By the time the expedition reached Derna in April 1805, it had been reduced, strained, and tested. The final assault on the city's defences would determine the outcome of the campaign. Eaton divided his forces. The attack on the harbour battery, a fortified position commanding the town, was entrusted to a composite unit under O'Bannon: six Marines, approximately twenty-four artillerymen, and around twenty-six Greeks, including their officers.

The Greeks formed nearly half of the assaulting force. Their role was central. As the attack commenced on 27 April, naval

bombardment provided cover. The assaulting column advanced across exposed ground, broken by rock and scrub, offering little concealment. Fire from the defenders was direct and sustained. The Greeks advanced within this exposure, returning fire, closing distance, and maintaining formation under conditions that favoured disorder. Their movement retained cohesion, sustained by discipline rather than impulse.

At this point, their contribution becomes unmistakable. They engaged enemy riflemen, pressed towards the battery, and formed a substantial portion of the force that overran the position. Casualties among them were significant. Eaton's report records that of the fourteen killed or wounded in the assault, the majority were Greeks.

The capture of the battery proved decisive. With its guns silenced, the defensive capacity of Derna collapsed. The American flag was raised, an image that would later acquire symbolic resonance within U.S. military tradition. Beneath that symbol lay the reality of a composite force in which Greek fighters had borne a substantial share of the burden. Eaton acknowledged this directly, stating that the city could not have been taken or held without them.

The relative obscurity of their contribution lies in the structure of historical narrative itself. National histories consolidate

coherence by privileging their own actors and symbols, while the presence of foreign auxiliaries introduces elements that resist easy incorporation. Within Greek historiography, Derna occupies an uncertain position. It precedes the War of Independence and sits outside its ideological frame, an episode in which Greek fighters appear without an explicitly Greek cause.

Yet the significance of their participation becomes clearer when placed within a broader continuum. These men emerged from a milieu in which armed experience was already deeply embedded, shaped by klephtic practice and sustained by long familiarity with irregular warfare. At the decisive moment of the Derna assault, the Greek contingent advanced under concentrated fire, maintained cohesion, and forced the collapse of the defensive position. Their casualties correspond to that role with unmistakable clarity.

Such conduct does not belong solely to the circumstances of this engagement. It reflects a capacity that would soon find a different object. Within two decades, similar men, formed within the same conditions and carrying the same discipline, would act in a struggle directed towards liberation. What appears here as service within a foreign expedition may therefore be read as an early expression of a disposition that had not yet found its proper political form.

After Derna, the Greeks dispersed once more into the Mediterranean world. There was no formal recognition, no enduring incorporation into the narrative that followed and they passed from the record as they entered it, briefly visible, then absorbed into obscurity. Their disappearance reflects a broader pattern in which transnational actors resist incorporation into narratives structured by the later logic of the nation-state. Within such frameworks, mobility, service, and contingency remain difficult to accommodate, yielding instead to accounts organised around coherence and continuity. Yet within these marginal presences, an alternative historical texture becomes discernible, one in which endurance precedes recognition and participation exceeds the categories through which it is later interpreted. The Greeks at Derna occupy precisely this space, situated at the intersection between action and its subsequent erasure.

The archive records the raising of a flag. It also preserves, in less conspicuous form, the presence of those who made that moment possible. In the conduct of the Greek contingent one may discern, rather than an anomaly, but an early indication of a people already prepared, when the moment came, to direct that same force towards their own freedom.

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This year's visit was especially historic for our school community. For the first time in our history, students from both campuses traveled together, bringing nearly 60 students, educators, and chaperones to Greece. As our Staten Island campus continues to grow, we proudly welcomed its first 7th grade class this year, making it possible for both schools to participate in this remarkable journey side by side.

One of the most meaningful moments of the trip was standing together at the Acropolis of Athens, where our students experienced the birthplace of democracy, philosophy, and theatre. For our community—dedicated to the study of classical Greek civilization—this was truly a historic and emotional moment. Sharing this experience together during Park Slope's 20th anniversary year made it even more special for our HCCS family.

During their time in Greece, students explored some of the most important landmarks of ancient Hellenic civilization, including the Acropolis and Parthenon, the Theatre of Dionysus, Ancient Mycenae, the Isthmus of Corinth, and the ancient theatre of Epidauros. Walking the same paths as the ancient Greeks allowed our students to deepen their appreciation for the history, philosophy, and dramatic traditions they study throughout the year.

This experience is part of our schools' Ancient Greek Theatre program, where students study and perform classical tragedies as a living connection to the legacy of Greek drama.

This spring our students will present:

- Euripides' Bacchae – HCCS Staten Island on May 20, 2026
- Sophocles' Elektra – HCCS Park Slope on May 21, 2026

We are incredibly proud of our students and look forward with great excitement to these performances, which celebrate the timeless power of ancient Greek theatre and its enduring influence on education and culture.

It is always a great honor to share these moments with the Greek-American community, whose heritage and traditions continue to inspire the mission of Hellenic Classical Charter Schools.



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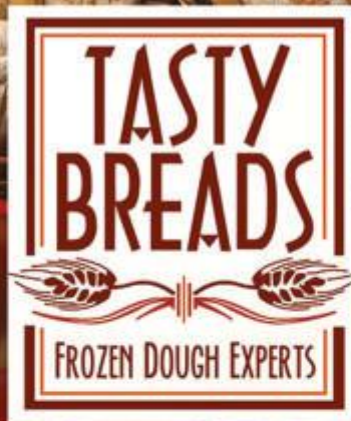
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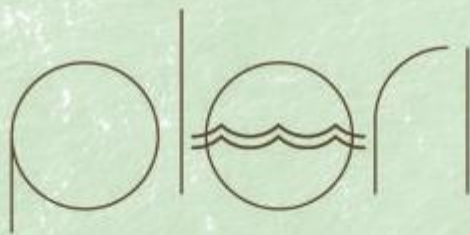
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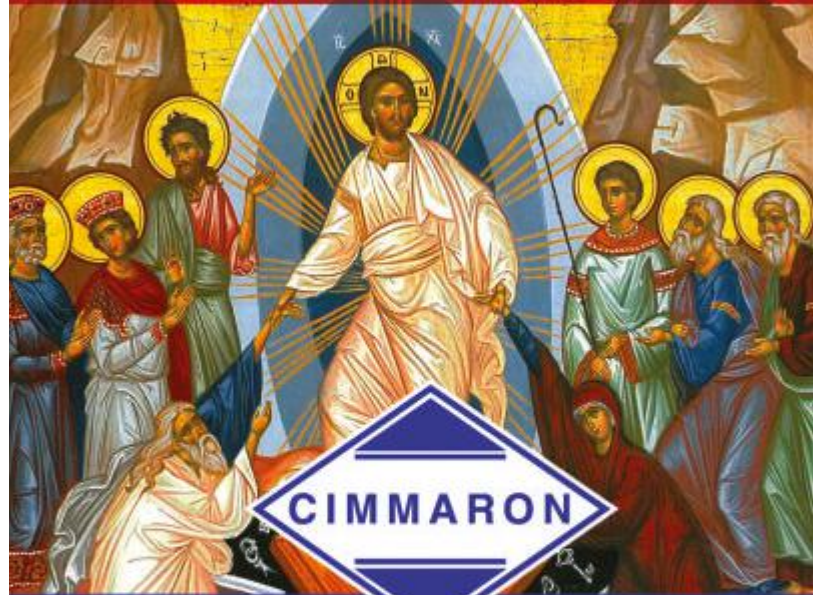


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Easter is here, spring is here, although it's still cold especially after sunset. But something has changed in the air, well, flowers and trees are blossoming and along with the allergies the urge to live and do things comes and it seems unstoppable. Maybe that's the best part of the season, the huge potential and appetite to create, albeit we do not do much in the end, but who cares! Already, many of us are contemplating our summer trip to Greece and Cyprus. And even if the credit cards are full since Christmas, we always find space for a couple of tickets. Good thing that our Easter is always later than the "heretical" Easter. It gives us the chance to save some money, because we buy our Easter chocolate eggs and bunnies at half price! Ancient wisdom and an old, decrepit calendar work in our favor. Happy Easter to all and Kali Anastasi! Enjoy and be happy with the people you love and remember that in the US Easter lasts only a day. So, easy with the drinks...

by *Demetrios Rhompotis*
dondemetrio@neomagazine.com

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Greek-American Cassandra Kulukundis on her 2026 Oscar win for ‘Best Casting’

by Markos Papadatos



Cassandra Kulukundis spoke with members of the media in the Oscars Press Room after her Academy Award win, where she became the first person to ever win the Oscar for “Best Casting” for “One Battle After Another.” She is of Greek-American descent. The 2026 Academy Awards took place on March 15th at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California.

On the importance to her and Paul Thomas Anderson on seeking fresh new faces to cast on that film (in addition to A-listers), she said, “Authenticity. In a lot of ways, it keeps everyone on their toes. We don’t really know what’s going to come out of the real people’s mouths. I mean yes, he wrote an idea, but at the same time, we use them as consultants. I mean a lot of the times it’s what you do. If you’re in the military, you’re playing military. If you’re a jail nurse, you’re playing a jail nurse. If you skateboard, you’re going to hang off a car in a Paul Thomas Anderson movie, and that’s kind of the fun of it,” she noted.

“We love real actors as well,” she said. “You know, the ones who have trained, so we try to just keep it mixed because that’s what life is, isn’t it? I looked out in that sea of people there. There’s actors, there’s behind the scenes people, and everyone has a story to tell and we want to tell that story.”

On the evolution of her remarkable partnership with Paul Thomas Anderson over

the past two decades, she remarked, “I mean, we were children, I think. Me younger, of course. We grew up watching movies and then we grew up making movies together. That’s why this night is insane.

This is our 10th movie, and the collaboration changes on every movie because it depends on what we’re doing. ‘Phantom Thread’ cannot be remotely compared to ‘Magnolia’ or ‘Boogie Nights.’ It’s just wild, and I feel like ‘One Battle’ in a lot of ways combined all of that,

Everything that we’ve ever thought, said, seen together. It’s number 10, and it kind of all makes sense I guess, we’re full circle here,” she elaborated.

When asked what she saw in Teyana Taylor and Chase Infiti when they were doing their auditions, Kulukundis responded, “well, I mean Teyana is a fighter. I read so, so many people — women — for that role. And Teyana just, I mean, she wanted it and she fought and she fought and then she got it and then she kept fighting when she had it. There’s just no end in sight. Chase, was the exact opposite. She was so demure, so

polite, so fresh, so new and so innocent. So, for her it was like, ‘Girl, you got to be a fighter,’ and she did it. She found it. She worked within herself. She found things that she didn’t even know she had and now she’s a shooting star,” Kulukundis elaborated. “Both of them are like planets actually. They’re amazing and you’re drawn to them. I’m worried that this might be the end. I might not see them for a long time, but I’ll see them on screen. So, yay,” she exclaimed.

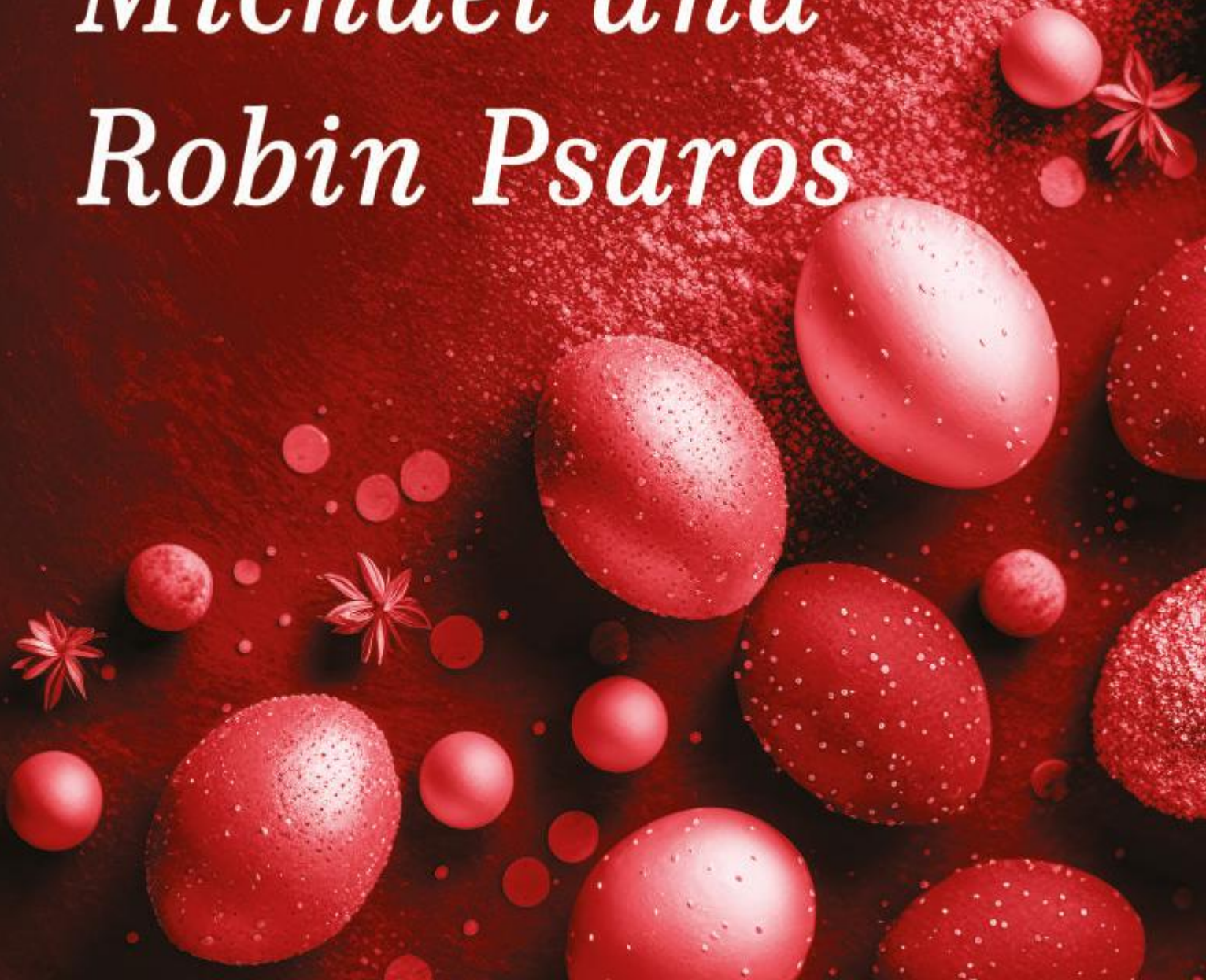
Regarding the particular performances that moved her in this movie (and reminded her why she believed in those actors that were cast for the role), she stated, “Oh God, there were so many. Almost in every 10 minutes there’s something that makes me go, ‘I’m so glad I worked on this movie.’ I watched it 30 days in a row with a paying audience in New York City. I love every bit of it,” she admitted. “In general, I just love the fact that we got so many different types of people in there. A member from every military service in every way. I love my El Paso gang, my jail nurses to my skateboarders, and in general, the letter! The letter we were never 100% sure on it. Some people in the crew were talking. Then, Teyana’s voice cracks and she just brings me to tears. That and Leo talking about how he can’t do his daughter’s hair. It’s all just so, so good. It’s iconic, funny, and heartfelt. The whole movie is so good,” Kulukundis concluded.



Cassandra accepting the Oscar

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