Hellenic Research Studies and Scholarly Sources in Australia

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Research in Hellenic Studies in Australia has a history of over one hundred years, dating from the establishment of the Departments of Ancient Greek Studies in the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne. However, no interest was officially displayed in Modern Greek language, civilisation or culture until 1968, when the Department of Classical Studies in the University of New England recognised the need to accommodate Modern Greek studies, incorporating literature and folklore. 1968 was ironically the tragic year when most European countries, as well as Australia, reassessed the importance of classical languages, undervaluing their priority in education curriculum planning and vocational enhancement.

Until 1973 the teaching of Modern Greek in Australia was confined within the community network and its scope did not extend beyond the practical and sentimental value of intra-group needs. Since then the general objectives in the teaching of Modern Greek have changed. In early years students select Modern Greek because of educational and intellectual values; at secondary level Modern Greek is offered as a second and/or foreign language and therefore the objectives being pursued are confined within the limitations of intercultural understanding and the development of certain cognitive capacities. Adult students express utilitarian reasons for learning Modern Greek, claiming that the acquisition of the language is important for its practical application, that is to fulfill vocational and pragmatic objectives.

Since 1968, Hellenic Studies have been introduced in 11 tertiary institutions around Terra Australis (Charles Sturt, Flinders, La Trobe, Macquarie, Melbourne, Monash, New England, NSW, RMIT, Sydney, Victoria University) attracting a total of 1200 students, including a hundred postgraduate students. In addition, there are five tertiary Institutions which offer non-accredited courses in Modern Greek. In 1997, Modern Greek was among the seven languages most widely offered at Australian Universities. The University clientele is emerging from a robust Hellenophone base of approximately 50,000 primary and post-primary students, 38 percent of whom are from a non-Greek-speaking background.

The significance of Modern Greek in Australia derives principally from the established presence here of a vast number of Greek-speaking residents (currently estimated at 320,000), from the presence of an additional strong base of Australians (estimated at 300,000), who maintain ancestral, sentimental and intellectual ties with Greece. Modern Greek is also significant because it represents that ancient ingredient of the Indo-European family of languages, in
which fundamental texts of Western civilisation and Christian Scripture were formulated and disseminated through the centuries. In consequence Modern Greek is rated as a major world-language in spite of the comparatively modest number of its current native speakers, estimated at 13-14 million around the world. The significance of Modern Greek for Australia's external trade resides both in the actual and potential links with the EC via Greece and via connections between Greece and the Greek-Australian community (Tamis et al, 1993).

Yet, Modern Greek is under-represented in higher education in Australia. In at least four higher institutions the language was introduced with the partial or total financial support of the Greek community, while in another three the establishment of academic posts requires the continuous financial support of the Greek community. Modern Greek is offered comprehensively only in three states (NSW, VIC, SA), while it was declared a priority language in Western Australia as well.

Most Departments of Hellenic Studies research and offer courses on language, literary theory, literature and culture, linguistics and sociolinguistics, and since 1994 courses on Greek migration and settlement, modern and contemporary Greek history and social anthropology. Although the most widely taught area is still literature, current trends indicate that course patterns are changing towards courses which aim to build a better understanding of Greek history and society and to reinforce the communicative skills of the students.

Despite the fact that Modern Greek courses are not available in all States and Territories, the honours and postgraduate enrolments in Modern Greek are proportionally the highest in the country (almost 25 percent of the total), if compared with any other modern language, including French. Furthermore, La Trobe University Council has recently decided to establish the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, following the generous bequest by Zissis Dardalis and the expressed support of both the Greek and the Cypriot Governments. The Centre aspires to become the focal point in Australia and the world for Hellenic studies and research. It will seek to promote Hellenic studies and research, to develop an international profile consonant with that of the major centres in the USA and Europe, and to develop scholarship schemes. It also aims to encourage interchange of staff and students with Greece and Cyprus, to promote projects, seminars and conferences highlighting significant Hellenic themes, to foster local and international Greek literature, to assist in the maintenance of and loyalty to the Greek language, and to enhance a productive interaction between the University and the community.

In parallel, the establishment of the Papasavvas Centre for migration and teaching in Melbourne by RMIT is expected to create a sound basis for the enhancement of research in Hellenic studies. In addition, the systematic accumulation of resource material and the establishment of archival data collections relevant to the Greek presence in Oceania (Dardalis Archives at La Trobe, Records of Oral History at RMIT), is expected to encourage research and attract scholars from overseas.

The main areas of study and research include the nineteenth and twentieth century Greek, Cypriot and Australian Greek poets and prose writers, society, gender studies and folklore, Greek sociolinguistics, Greek migration studies and Greek history. Departments of Hellenic Studies in Australia managed, via their postgraduate courses, to establish programs of research which demonstrate internationally a uniqueness in character and context. Notwithstanding the emphasis still placed by many departments of Hellenic Studies in Australia on Greek literature and historiography, the three main and unique streams of research in this country focus on:

(a) Australian Greek poets, prose writers and artists disseminating the culture of the Hellenic Diaspora,
(b) the history of Greek migration, settlement and presence, Australian-Greek relations and comparative migration studies with Canada, USA and Central and Latin America, which has no parallel in any other country around the globe and
(c) studies on Greek sociolinguistics, bilingualism, language contact and comparative linguistics.

Australian Greek poets and prose writers have been examined in depth, establishing a literary tradition in this country since the publication of the pioneering work by Dr George Kanarakis. Since then, the scope of research and study has been widened to include Australian Greek women writers, with an emphasis on postgraduate research. The aforementioned areas of study, although duly consolidated in Australia, are falsely considered as lacking prestige by certain university scholars in Greece, who claim rather incorrectly that the Australian literary figures under examination have not yet matured enough to become subjects of scholarly research. On the contrary, this field, namely the study of Australian Greek writers, has been further expanded to incorporate comparative studies with the active collaboration of English and Australian literature scholars from Athens, Salonica, Birmingham, Barcelona, Toronto and Montreal.

According to archival and bibliographical sources there are over sixty Australian Greek poets and prose writers involved in creative writing in Australia, some of whom have received national and international accreditation and awards. In addition, there are over four hundred Australian Greek artists (painters, actors, composers, musicians, sculptors, singers). Their work constitutes a fruitful basis for research, as indeed it demonstrates a cross-cultural attitude of inter-ethnic substance. Yet, our research profile does not include a bibliographical atlas of Greek Australian literary matters, nor have we as yet
utilised the electronic or software technology incorporating scanning and internet procedures to maximise our potential in research.

The history of Greek migration, settlement and presence, in Oceania, Central and South America and South Africa as well as the comparative migration studies with Canada, USA and Central and Latin America, absorbs a substantial portion of Australian Greek scholarly activities. With the exception perhaps of Sydney University, all Departments of Hellenic Studies in Australia do offer expertise and knowledge in the field, while at postgraduate level there are currently three PhDs and eight MAs under progress at Flinders, La Trobe, New England, RMIT and Melbourne Universities including students even from WA, Brisbane and the ACT. These studies are further reinforced with the building of research library facilities and the establishment of the Dardalis Archives of the Greek Community in Diaspora, where over two million original documents from Oceania, Central and Latin American Greek communities and well over 20,000 photographs are being kept. These documents include the original correspondence of Aristotle Onassis from his sojourn in Argentina and Uruguay (1924-1934), the entire original files of Metropolitan Theophylactos Papathanasopoulos (1934-1958), the entire publishing collection and original correspondence of Metropolitan Christoforos Knitis (1924-1928) and Ezekiel Tsoukalas (1959-1974), of Consuls General Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos (1926-1934) and Aemilios Vryzakis (1937-1952), and the files of Theo Marmaras, Ierotheos Kourtessis and many others.

The primary written sources for the historical past of Hellenism in Oceania are held at the National Archives of the countries most relevant for Greek migration, namely Australia, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, United Kingdom, Egypt and Romania. However, there are archival series and items relevant to Greek migration and history in countries of lesser importance, such as Japan, China, Pakistan, India, USA, Brazil and other Latin American countries.

In the National Archives of Australia in Canberra the scholar can trace records and documentation about the formation and ideology of the organised community, trade unionism, communist interaction and ideological dynamics, as well as the personal files of approximately 2,000 Greek community leaders since 1905, whose lives and activities were recorded and filed initially by the Special Branch of the Ministry for Justice and later on by ASIO and the police. In the Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs an investigator can trace the contribution of the honorary Consuls, the role of the Church leaders and the organised communities since 1890, while useful information could be elicited about legal matters concerning migration and foreign policy issues from the National Archives of Italy, UK, Egypt, Turkey and Romania.

Prospective postgraduate Hellenic Studies students could be directed by their supervisors in Australia to investigate issues relevant to the creative presence and constructive contribution of Hellenism in Diaspora. The coverage of these themes will make Australia the focal point of international research, will broaden the visionary scope and the parameters of research in the Hellenic Diaspora and will attract scholars from all over the world. For example, amongst the areas that could be examined by prospective postgraduate students are:

(a) The role of the Australian Press in reporting the Balkan Wars, the Second World War, or the Civil War;
(b) comparative Australian attitudes during the two World Wars;
(c) the changing role of the Australian Press towards the pre- and post-War Australian Greek Community;
(d) the case of the Australian Greeks: from immigrants to citizens;
(e) the converging policies of multiculturalism vis a vis the pre-War divisive unionism;
(f) Greek women's associations and their contribution to the consolidation of the Greek community.

Any possible bibliographical statement produced in the field of Greek Australian migration will stress the progress made in the historiography of Greek settlement in Australia. Since 1963, when Charles Price produced his monumental book on Southern Europeans, over 35 scholars have published their work (chapters, papers, contributions in edited volumes and monographs) mainly in English, some of them attracting international prizes and awards. These publications concentrate on the socio-economic, political, educational and cultural contribution of approximately 600,000 Australians of Greek ancestry who have lived and perished in the Antipodes since 1829.

Studies on Greek sociolinguistics, language contact and comparative linguistics were pioneered in Australia as early as 1981, with the production of research studies in the University of Melbourne. These studies were further consolidated at La Trobe and Flinders with the introduction of courses on bilingualism, language maintenance, language attrition and language contact attracting a high number of postgraduate students from all over Australia as well as from overseas.

Yet, there are certain areas, especially in methodology and structure, that require improvement. Prospects of continued growth in the area of research, particularly in the area of research that we teach as course-work, depend on expansion of the base of academic staff eligible to operate at this level. At present the Modern Greek staff profile has an inadequate number of senior appointments, and the multiple demands of teaching and departmental and supra departmental administration plus involvement in Greek community cultural affairs leave junior staff little opportunity for research activity which might secure their promotion or tenure.
In addition, the economic constraints applied by the Commonwealth Government severely limit postgraduate research prospects. Lack of scholarships and fellowships and lack of constructive co-ordination of community resources deprive our postgraduate students of the opportunity to embark on research activities. The Greek community in association with the Greek and Cypriot Governments have been exceedingly generous in their support of Hellenic studies at tertiary level, endowing all three existing chairs and giving financial support to establish the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research.

During the last five years, prospects for greater exchange of resources have improved, however as yet no substantial progress has been achieved. We need to concentrate on internet programs while electronic scanning systems must interconnect Departments for the more effective utilisation of bibliographical and archival resources both nationally and internationally. This is the only way to upgrade our facilities and maximise our potential for the survival of Hellenic studies in a competitive market.

Joint publication by the Departments of Hellenic Studies of the Annual Research Profile both in printed form and in electronic format is also necessary to face the approaching challenges of a new millennium nationally and to act as the academic register of our ponemata internationally.