

Alexander Papageorgiou–Venetas

LIFE RETROSPECTIVE

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE

Pass then through this little space of time
conformably to nature, and end your journey in content...

Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations*, Bk. 4, 48¹

and it's time to say our few words
because tomorrow the soul sets sail.

George Seferis, *Logbook II*, "An Old Man on the River Bank"²

I was born in Athens on March 19, 1933. My father Nikolaus descended from a family of clergymen and teachers. My great-grandfather, Father Giorgis Venetas (a priest, the so-called Papagiorgis), lived in Istiaia, Euboea. My grandfather Dimitrios, a Hellenist and a high school principal, has been living in Athens since 1875. My mother Clio, the daughter of George Kozadinos, belonged to a family of grain merchants and shipowners from the island of Kea, based in Piraeus.

In an old biographical note, which is the only written record of my mother's family that has come into my hands, I read: "The Kozadinos family originated from the island of Kea, where the ancestors of the family lived and enjoyed exceptional esteem and love thanks to their devotion to their hereditary traditional customs and traditions and to their charitable works. Around the year 1855, the young son of the family, Vassilios, inspired by the desire for progress, left his peaceful hometown and emigrated to Piraeus.

At that time Piraeus was a town of a few thousand inhabitants; but its proximity to the capital and the advantageous position of its excellent natural harbor presaged a brilliant development. The astute Vassilios Kozadinos foresaw this development right from his settlement there, believed in it, threw himself into action and became the most serious of the silent protagonists of the Piraeus greatness. His extreme honesty and activity secured for him the valuable representation of the Valliani, the Sevastopouli and other great merchant houses, both Greek and foreign, and in time made him the top of the grain merchants of the free kingdom. His son Georgios V. Kozadinos was eager to continue his father's profession, the circle of which he expanded during the first years of his activity. During the Greek-Turkish war of 1897 he carried out more than half of the Greek grain trade. Moreover, he once

1 *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, transl. George Long. Vol. II, Part 3. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909, p. 174.

2 *Collected poems, 1924-55* by George Seferis, transl. Philip Sherrard and Edmund Keeley. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 285.

managed to have four cargo steamships unloaded simultaneously in Piraeus on his behalf, that is, a unique achievement...”

The person referred to in the note as Georgios Kozadinou – my grandfather – lost his considerable fortune during the First World War. Nevertheless, he managed to provide his children with a solid education and broad perspectives. It was these broad perspectives that were inherited to me from the upper-class environment of my mother's family, whereas my intellectual background was endowed to me from my father's middle-class family. In my family environment, and especially among the elderly, besides my father, I found many worthy supporters who became my senior friends: my stepfather Sotirios Soliotis, President of the Council of State, my uncle Angelos Spachis, painter and stage designer, my uncle, the archaeologist professor Doro Levi, the excavator of Phaistos, my mother's sister Maria Kozadinou-Spachi, an amable figure and one of the first emancipated Greek women with profound humanity, my father's brother, Admiral Georgios Papageorgiou, a charming polymath whose influence upon me as a youth was significant.

I spent my childhood in my father's privately-owned house in the Athenian suburb of Kato Kiphissia. I am looking closely at a photograph: Among large bushes and lavenders here am I, at the age of three or four, "a child with a playful smile", as the poet Andreas Embiricos would say. I have no actual memories of my early years, but I have photos instead, that is, a powerful and very telling evidence.... At that time, I surely had no notion that I would never find myself surrounded by lavenders again, sheltered in a private garden; I had no idea of how provoking a wander life would be: the unknown that awaits us, the great gift.

Athens was the city in which I played, studied and grew up. Vivid are still my memories from the years of war and German occupation. Among my first experiences were the endless hours of boys' games in the “Garden” – i.e., the National Garden – a real refuge for the youth when school classes were suspended for six months in 1942. Times were hard but hope was great. Athens was traumatized by the hardships and the civil war of December 1944. Our familiar and beloved cityscape was stricken with poverty. Profitis Ilias’ heights in the Pangrati neighborhood and the Zappeion terrace had always fascinated me with their open views. Kite flying was my favorite pastime. The green wrecked trams and the crowds of my devastated fellow citizens depressed me.

My father – an economist, director of the Ionian Bank, a genuinely cultivated man with a broad education – had a decisive influence on the formation of both my character and my intellectual interests. From a tender age he had imparted to me the love of learning, of music and of the visual arts. On top of that, he was my most devoted friend who guided my first steps into the intellectual arena.

My parents divorced when I was four years old. The relations between them remained no less than perfect. I did not miss my Mother as I used to see her every day. However, it was my father who took full charge of my rearing with a devotion and a skill seldom seen in a man. He was kind, fair and strict; also, very demanding with regards to my school performance and learning. He both supported and inspired me in every way. I owe him not only my fighting spirit in life but also the many joys of it that he made me receptive to.

From the very young age of eighteen, I already had a perfect understanding of my father’s world outlook. I knew that he – then at sixty-five – had lived a richly experienced life, that he had lost his entire fortune in the war, that he was an ideological socialist and an

uncompromising humanist. I admired the stoicism with which he endured the adversities he encountered late in life: his professional isolation, his ailing health, his limited finances. But most of all I admired his spiritual blossoming, which allowed him to maintain an unbroken contact – i.e., a ‘communion’ – with the world at large. By his example, my father showed me a way of life that I have consistently followed ever since: my constant concern was to become “neither a tyrant nor a slave to anyone”, as the ancient thinker advises us.

For my schooling I switched from private to public schools. Until 1948 I attended the ‘Hellenikon Ekpedeftetirion Panagiotopoulos–Eleftheriades’ (i.e., the former ‘Makri’), that is, a school considerably costly and barely affordable for a person of limited income, like my father, who then lived only on a pension. For him though the high caliber of the school was worth the financial sacrifice. Among my school’s wonderful teachers, I only need to mention here I.M. Panagiotopoulos – the renowned writer and educator – and Michalis Sakellariou – the historian and later academician – both of whom were endowed with dignity and commanding personalities. Some of my teachers even seized our adolescent curiosity with their quaintness. The first and supreme authority was the director, Mr. Ioannidis, a brilliant personality and a passionate Hellenist, a Cypriot who prematurely turned grey after his son’s death. He taught ancient tragedy and acted it out simultaneously in the classroom. Unforgettable are the examples of the alliterations he delivered: Tiresias, the blind soothsayer, stuns Oedipus with his prophetic saying: “For you are the blind one in hearing, in understanding and in sight....” The staccato reiteration fell like a catapult from our teacher’s lips.

Following 1848 I entered the practical division of the Varvakeion Model Lycaum after having passed rigorous admission exams. In the last three years of high school there was no more kidding. The preparation stage to enter the Polytechnic was tough and there was no better school for that than the Varvakeion. Twenty-five of us passed in our first try out of the thirty in class. That was in 1951.

Our first years in college coincided with the early post-war period. That was the time when we hiked up all the mountains of Attica. At the mount cottage of Parnitha, we were received by that unforgettable old man, the publisher Kostas Eleftheroudakis, one of the first mountaineers and skiers of Greece. In the third group of the Athenian Sea Scouts, we spent memorable days together in rowing and sailing at the boathouse of Palaio Phaliro.

As students of Architecture in the 1950s, we practically lived like boarders in the ‘National Metsovion Polytechnic’, spending endless hours in intensive and substantial study, alongside technical training. I am delighted to have studied in Athens. I was fortunate enough to have been taught by unique teachers: the mystic Dimitris Pikionis, the cosmopolitan Kostas Kitsikis, the introvert and demanding Nikolis Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas, the erudite Anastasios Orlandos, the meditative aesthician Panagiotis Michelis.

What my father had sown in me, those teachers brought to bloom. From his own personal point of view, each one of them conveyed to us such creeds as: “The hidden harmony is better than the visible”; “one should put out hubris more than fire”; and “the eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears”. We came to understand that in order to open up to the world at large, we first had to get to know our roots.

Apart from that, I also benefited from my fellow students, especially from those who shared the same spiritual motivations with me: Panagis Psomopoulos, Alexandros Kalligas, Euphemia Kanonidou, Savvas Kontaratos. All in company we got to know Athens and experienced her in full consciousness. We sketched in the garden of the Epigraphic Museum, we developed measured drawings of the Acropolis monuments, we spent endless evenings in chatting and wondering in the tavern of the Old University in Plaka, we strolled around the historical sites, the chapels, the monasteries, and all the hills lining the Acropolis. We were keen to spread our wings, to go out into the world. We built faith in a united Europe, in a better world.

But far and beyond my studies, it was my childhood friends who shaped my life through their enduring presence. A dozen or so of us, united from our school desks, enjoyed the rare privilege of staying in touch for decades. A lifetime. We parted ways early, of course, in our thirties, by following different life options, different professions, different prospects. However, we all shared in a common language, which created for us an ambience of unadulterated intimacy and which remained unbroken. This has been our common heritage based on a similar aesthetic approach to life. It is a great thing not to be offended by someone else's way of being.... I want to name them here – both living and dead: Alexandros Lykourezos, Alexandros Kalligas, Eustratios Stratigis, Antonios Masourides, Panagiotis Tazedakis, Dimitrios Serbos, Dimitrios Petrounakos, Ioannis Koutsis, Michael Dountas, Miltos Lidorikis.

I owe my way of visual expression, my both technique and meaning of design, as well as my sense of color use, to painter Nikolis Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas. I fully embraced the method of free line drawing that he taught us and I continue to adhere faithfully to this mode in my design. Ghikas as a teacher did not allow the so-called “unconstrained creative expression”. His aim was instead to transmit to us a comprehensive drawing technique whereby our visual impressions would be faithfully conveyed. He insisted in particular on the accurate contouring and the rendering of forms, volumes and shadows. He also stressed how important it is for an architect to have both a correct and a quick grasp of shapes, proportions and the economy of light and halftones. His purpose was to train us in the art of accurate observation; to make us distrust ‘atmospheric’ vagueness as opposed to clear form. He taught us self-control. Later on, he even introduced us to color exercises. Here again, his fear was the student’s allure of arbitrary impressions and “inspirations”. Therefore, he usually tried exercises in pure formal – not figurative – composition, such as collages of colored papers. His focus was strictly on the correlation of chromatic and tonal values, the interaction of complementary colors, the relative impact of juxtaposed colors within the overall composition. One day he leaned over my drawing and pinpointed with his particularly impassive but penetrating tone: “You’re doing well. But do mind your ease”. This admonition has been following me all my life and in any other endeavor ever since.

“If you do not hope, you will not find that which is not hoped for, the unexplored and inaccessible”, Heraclitus tells us. That first encounter with Dimitris Pikionis, my teacher, I had secretly contemplating long before I met him. This stochastic man eventually became my mentor. He projected a warm human radiance, a profoundly good intention, a generosity of spirit. He had the gift of great intuition and empathy. He was wholeheartedly devoted to his work. His presence was lively while his manner evoked that intimate relationship between teacher and pupil which is so rare.

In the context of the then fashionable ‘international movement’, Pikionis’s intellectual and artistic orientation seemed like a peculiar anachronism. His ideas reflected an obsessive Hellenocentrism. Because of his predilections Pikionis was accused of formalism and romantic localism. To be fair, Pikionis should be seen as an early regionalist several decades before the term ‘Regionalism’ was even coined in western Europe; in other words, he believed in the universal principles of functionalism and constructive honesty, yet at the same time, he claimed that architectural forms be suitable to their natural and cultural environment.

I was nearing graduation when I enjoyed the special privilege of providing service to Pikionis as his spiritual ‘errand boy’ in “holding threads” for the laborious stone paving alignment of the access paths to the Acropolis, that is, Pikionis’s legendary architectural feat. This remains an unforgettable experience.

How did Pikionis contribute to my career and personal life? I feel like a loyal disciple of his even though I did not imitate him in any way: I did not try to design buildings as he did, I was not particularly interested in folk art as he was, I did not immerse myself in Japanese painting or architecture as he did. However, I must acknowledge the catalytic influence he had on me in helping me develop my true potentials and inner possibilities. He aroused both my interest in and devotion to two subjects: first, Attica's nature and landscape, wherein I was born and raised to manhood; second, the urban development of the new city of Athens over the past two centuries.

It was Pikionis who turned my attention to these two subjects, which, no doubt, had been already dormant in me. However, now they were set clear in front of my eyes as my future life pursuits because of him. My entire research career emerged as the natural outcome of the first spark that my teacher instilled in me. I am indebted to him for the fact that he broadened my perspectives, that he intensified my sensibilities, and that he solidified my emotional ties with my place of origin. As a result, he definitively sustained both my career and my life. Therefore, he is constantly present for me.

In July 1956, I received the degree of architecture at the very age of 23. Three months before the final exams for the diploma my father died. Still very young, I had to take my life into my own hands, which I did.

In the autumn of 1956, and only two months after my graduation, some of us – fellow students and graduates of the Polytechnic – were granted a six-month deferral of conscription to join the so-called ‘Santorini Group’ of the Ministry of Public Works (Housing Service). Thus, we made our way to the earthquake-stricken place to provide our service to the ‘Devil's Island’, as we used to call it then because this is how it seemed to us at the time.

We settled in the newly erected hotel ‘Atlantis’, which was the only nearly intact building in the island. We were headed on site by the architect Konstantinos Dekavallas, our eight years senior. All as a team we were practically doing the work of both architects and scavengers since we had to constantly dig through ruins. Our chief supervisor was Prokopis Vassiliades, seated in his Athens office and serving the then Prime-Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis as his right-hand man in matters of urban planning. The north wind was lifting clouds of ‘aspa’, that is, the black Theraic soil, which made the dramatic outlines of the ‘caldera’ (i.e., the indrawn volcanic bay) disappear like in a mist. On the ‘Devil's Island’ we received the

anointing of our professional chiasm in such an atmosphere of companionship and utter isolation. Toil, fun and a very decent first paycheck.

Subsequently, I was drafted in the Navy (1957-1959) and fulfilled my military duty while providing my architect's services to the Office of Naval Public Works of the Naval General Staff.

For almost a decade, from 1957 to 1967, I enthusiastically practiced architecture in Greece, at a time when self-employment was still possible for early career architects. I worked on various projects for the Greek National Tourism Office, the Public Electric Power Company, and the Archaeological Service. I also undertook several private commissions. In 1960 I was assigned two important projects: the design of the archaeological site fronting the Odeon of Herodes Atticus and the Kephalaria Park in Kiphissia. I designed and built, among others, the hotel of the Tourism Organization on the island of Siphnos and the tourist pavilion in Trophonion of Livadia, the Cousins residence on the island of Paros, the Diamantides villa in Kephalaria-Kiphissia, the Tower of the Crossfields of Skiathos, the Alexiou apartment building in the Lycabettus district of Athens, the Arias restaurant in Plaka, the BP roadside station on the Athens-Lamia national highway.

From the very start, I had developed a keen interest in the urban planning processes related to my home city, Athens. I even envisaged myself writing a doctoral thesis in 1962 on the development prospects of the Athenian basin, but I was discouraged by the Polytechnic professors under the excuse that only those who planned exclusively for a university career were considered worthy of a doctoral degree. That was still the general attitude at the time! My desire for research however remained undiminished and my drive to broaden my horizons persisted. In 1963, on a French government scholarship, I was invited for post-graduate training in urban planning by the Ministry of Public Works in Paris. The following year, I published my first research report entitled *Housing in Greece, an Organization Proposal*.

In 1965 the State Ministry of Public Works (Housing Service) expressed an initial interest in developing a comprehensive preservation plan for Plaka, the old city of Athens. Hence, the so-called 'Plaka Office' was founded, that is, a site-specific study group under the architect Georgios Bogdanos, whose aim was to develop a comprehensive survey of the residential, formal/stylistic and functional aspects of the district. I joined that group as an associate researcher. As a coordinated group, we carried out important documentation work until 1967, when the office's operation was suspended upon the rise of the dictatorship.

In January 1966, the urban planning of Athens became the central theme of the Fifth Panhellenic Architectural Conference which took place in Athens (Zappeion). I participated with a proposal for the preservation of Plaka, which I had already published a month earlier in the board of engineers' journal 'Technika Chronika'. This has been the first comprehensive proposal for the protection of Plaka as an urban ensemble at a time when expert opinions were still deeply divided between a pro-archaeological and a pro-architectural one, where the former pleaded for a total excavation plan involving the total erasure of the area's urban fabric while the latter furthered its preservation as a multi-layered historical entity.

During the years 1966-1967, on behalf of the Greek Tourism Organization I carried out a study on the conservation of monuments and the development of tourism for the island of Chios, which was published in 1967. The prospects of a professional career in Athens at the

time seemed promising. Nevertheless, my disappointment of the country's both social and political situation in the period 1964-67, followed by the oppressive regime of the colonels, was so deep that pushed me toward new horizons to explore. In 1967, three months after the Coup d'État, I closed my architectural practice in Athens and set off to Germany on an invitation from the Technical University of West Berlin to teach as a guest lecturer. I was 34 years old then.

At an age when my coevals are intensifying their professional endeavors, improving their financial situation and starting a family, here I am making a whole new beginning. From an early age I was trained in self-awareness: the assessment of my virtues and weaknesses and, above all, the knowledge of my roots. However, my relationship with my place of origin was then divided: on the one hand, a deep existential bond with the place I grew up, i.e., mainly Attica, with its particular light, topography and history; on the other hand, barely any identification with the social milieu I was born in, i.e., my countrymen. In reacting to their habits and attitudes I developed a very critical view of them. Still to this day these habits and attitudes remain alien to me: short-sighted entrepreneurialism, frequent lack of self-discipline, materialistic utilitarianism, proneness to enthusiasm followed by easy disenchantment. At the time, I only had these negative feelings.... All the virtues of my compatriots – i.e., their courage, their humanity, their solidarity – I discovered much later, after been long separated from the known and the familiar.

Within a year (1969) I completed my doctoral thesis concerning the ethics and practices of the protection and development of the historic towns of Europe. I was awarded a doctorate in engineering from the Technical University of Berlin (Charlottenburg) in 1970. In that same year my thesis was published in three languages: German, French and English. Its English title was *Continuity and Change: Preservation in City Planning*. It was the first methodical exploration of the preservation problem of historic cities in Europe, which five years later was to become the central subject of the European Year of Architectural Heritage and the Amsterdam Proclamation of 1975.

In Berlin I worked (1970-1971) with the most progressive group of urban planning studies in Germany at the time, the Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin, and in 1971 I was appointed by UNESCO as a research-expert to coordinate foreign archaeological missions to Iran.

In 1973 I was commissioned by the French Archaeological School of Athens to prepare a study on the urban planning of ancient Delos, entitled *Délos, études urbaines sur une ville antique*, which was published ten years later. This was an unprecedented scientific investigation of the urban phenomenon of an ancient Greek city with the tools of modern urban planning methodology. In this project, my characteristic interdisciplinary approach to all the issues and values related to the human environment becomes evident. Architecture, urban planning, history, archaeology and monument conservation are in my view interconnected scientific areas, and inseparable from one another. All my subsequent research work is issuing from this Delos project interdisciplinary methodology, which pitifully, even today, is met with reservation, if not suspicion, by many specialists. And yet, it is this synthetic view that we particularly lack, and the interdisciplinary approach that will, I believe, be appreciated in the future.

In 1960, my uncle, the painter Angelos Spachis, bequeathed me his house in Hydra. It is the only piece of property that was granted to me in my life. This house, high on the Cape, is my anchorage, a fixed point of reference in an eventful life. Its porch and its inner rooms – a sequence of familiar spaces – are much like a trench. Around is the world: the great world, the ebb and flow, the relentless drill. Here, inside is the sweetness of Greek nature. Peace. What I have been occupied with for 62 whole years in this house, remains unchanged to this day and I hope it will stay so to the end. It is not just the tinkering and the painting. It's the self-directed ongoing activity in an environment that is completely intimate, experiential and aesthetic; the ritual of self-care for the necessities of life; the manual activity both inside and outside the house, on the rocky slope, on the plot of land on which I have been improvising for thirty years in building dry stone walls, planting cacti, liming stones. And then there are those hours of contemplation on the balcony, in watching the perpetual transformation of the sea and the distant contours of the Argolis mountains. This is a great opportunity for reflection and self-reflection, that is what is missing in the turmoil of ordinary life, is here, granted to you as a secret opening to the world. Yes, this house, which I visit and inhabit often, has been a blessing to me, which perhaps I deserve somehow, because I was able to recognize and honor it. A house is like a child: what you give, you get.

In 1974, after the restoration of democracy, I returned to Athens and at the suggestion of the State President Konstantinos Tsatsos, I was appointed personal advisor to the then Minister of Culture, Professor Konstantinos Trypanis. Working in close cooperation with this enlightened Hellenist, I enthusiastically devoted myself for three years to major cultural issues: Greece's activities and participation in the European Year of Architectural Heritage (1975), the Greek presence at Habitat I (the first United Nations meeting on human settlements, 1976), the coordination of the UNESCO expert activities with the Greek Acropolis Restoration Works Commission, the redesigning of the organization chart of the Ministry of Culture.

I represented Greece in the Historic Monuments and Landscapes Commission of the Council of Europe and I gradually established both my authority and expertise in the protection of cultural heritage internationally. I was then invited to teach at the Raymond Lemaire International Postgraduate Centre for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Buildings in Bruges (i.e., the only Greek in this post) and then at the University of Louvain. I worked as a university professor for a total of ten years, that is, from 1976 to 1985.

In the 1970s and 1980s I worked with my colleagues Alexandros Kalligas and Aristides Romanos on two major protection and development studies for the Ministry of Coordination, and more specifically, for the island-complex of Mykonos, Delos and Rhenia, and for the medieval city of Chania. Both studies were exemplary as they introduced for the first time in Greece the methodology of conservation and enhancement of historic urban nuclei and archaeological sites.

My life was not lacking in important and intimate relationships with the other sex. On the contrary, women had both an instrumental and formative impact on my personal development. None of these relationships though was as definitive as to lead me to create a family. I had to reach the age of 45 to recognize the simple truth: one cannot have it all. It is practically impossible for a person to combine a family life – bringing along not only gifts and joy but also responsibilities – with the freedom of constant existential renewal as related to total devotion to research work. I then realized that my choice had already been made

despite the high price I had to pay for it, as is normally the case with every choice we make in life.

In 1976 while being in Athens, I met the German archaeologist Gerhild Huebner, who later became my wife. By inner inclination she had made Greece her second home, as in turn I, myself, had made Germany my second home, much before we even knew each other. We were united not only through our matching interests and academic backgrounds, but most importantly, through our common view of things and similar life orientation. I would daresay that we even share a common ethos. This bond is a gift, or even more so, a life's blessing, for which I am grateful.

In 1978 I resettled in Germany, and more specifically, in Munich this time, engaged mainly in teaching and research. Between 1978 and 1982 I worked jointly with Professor Gerd Albers, the dean of German urban planners, on a composite research project examining the trends in American and European urban planning in the period 1945-1980. I had first met Gerd Albers some ten years before, in the role of my doctoral thesis consultant. Our early acquaintance matured into a real friendship when we started working on our major joint research. After writing our parts separately, we frequently met and read them to each other while sitting in the small garden of his Munich residence. We made assessments, revisions, and content improvements until we reached a consensus on its final form. Our cooperative work resulted in a two-volume study which was published in 1982 in German by the Wasmuth publishing house.

In 1982 I was appointed as an expert of the United Nations Habitat Centre for the preservation of the historic earthquake-stricken towns of Montenegro while in 1987 I was elected corresponding member of the German Academy of Urban and Regional Planning in Munich.

During the decade 1984-94, still in Germany, I became more systematically involved in the study of the modern urban and cultural history of my home city, Athens. I set on an intensive research of unpublished material – mainly located in Munich archives – with reference to both the foundation and formation of Athens into a modern metropolis. To access the original manuscripts, I took special advantage of my proficiency in reading the old Gothic handwriting.

Being away from one's familiar ground perceptions are multiplied and sensations are enhanced. Neither have I denied my home country, nor have I lived half of my more mature life in a state of sterile nostalgia. On the contrary, the benevolent critical eye has made things more accessible by looking at them from afar. Athens remained my *cantus firmus*, the constant reference point of all my experiences. I returned to her from time to time for wandering, collecting information, researching and continuing to experience her magic and her growing evils.

This lengthy occupation with research brought me not only an existential determination, but also an intensive identification with the place of my origins. In 1994 my two major works were published. They concerned the foundation of modern Athens, with a special focus on the first plans, the archaeological landscape and the related public policies. These were: *Hauptstadt Athen. Ein Stadtgedanke des Klassizismus* (in German) and *The Ancient Heritage and the Historic Cityscape in a Modern Metropolis* (in English, by the Archaeological Society of Athens). They were followed by a single volume entitled *Athina: Dokimes kai*

Theoriseis [Athens: Studies and Reflections] (in Greek, 1996), that is, a collection of shorter studies and papers, which I had published over a period of 30 years on a variety of topics, such as history, urban planning and archaeology.

I taught four times as a guest professor in German universities: the Technical University of Stuttgart (1981-82), the Technical University of Munich (1996-97), the University of Heidelberg (2003-04) and the University of Munich (2008-2009). In Germany I found the appropriate conditions and the intellectual environment that allowed me to fully dedicate myself to my research task. Both the German National Research Foundation and the Volkswagen Foundation repeatedly funded my work. German scholarship – that is, both people and institutions – recognized my commitment as an Athenian researcher.

During my long stay abroad, I made every possible effort to honor my origins. I relied neither on Greek state funding nor on political connections, but solely and exclusively on the resolute realization of my research and teaching work.

On 10 November 1998 I was awarded an honorary doctorate from the School of Philosophy of the Kapodistrian University of Athens. The subject of my introductory speech was: “The Acropolis of Athens. Experiential values of a Monumental Ensemble”. I have no political or managerial work to boast of, so it follows that I have received no medals or other public distinctions. Art and scholarship have been my life’s only pursuits; therefore, I feel this academic distinction is a fair honorary recognition.

In 1999 my book entitled *Athinon Aglaïsmā* [Athens Radiant] was published. It encompassed a series of studies on the evolution, problems, and perspectives of the Attic landscape from 1830 to this day, that is, the outcome of my team research at the Technical University of Munich.

In 1998-1999 I enthusiastically participated in the development and setting of the monumental exhibition titled *New Greece: Greeks and Bavarians in the Era of King Ludwig I*, which took place in Munich. I also substantially contributed to the exhibition catalogue with many written parts.

Early in the year 2000 my monograph on Eduard Schaubert was published (both in Greek and in German). It contained important documents on the founding of two cities, Athens and Piraeus. This book completes a trilogy dealing with the destinies of modern Athens. In the same year my book entitled *O Leo von Klenze stin Ellada* [Leo von Klenze in Greece] was published, too, which has been the first comprehensive treatise in Greek on the work of the great German architect of classicism in Greece.

In the summer of 2000, I accompanied my wife to the ancient site of Thermon (Aetolia), where she conducted archaeological research. I, myself, worked on the color reproduction of twenty archaic antefixes, a task that gave me great pleasure. My aptitude for artwork is further testified by the circa 120 oil paintings that I have painted over the years on the inexhaustible theme of the Greek sea. This is a body of entirely personal work, developed ‘in secret’, which has never been publicly exhibited.

The following year, 2001, I published the Greek translation of my seminal work on the foundation of new Athens (already published in Munich in 1994) entitled *Athina: Ena orama tou klasikismou* [Athens: a Vision of Classicism]. In the same year, 2001, I also published my

memorial testimony of my time-old professor, *Dimitris Pikionis (1887-1968)*. This has been a transcribed version of the lecture I delivered in his memory at the National Technical University of Athens.

My writing pace intensified after the age of 70. In 2004 my study-report on the history of the access-paths to the Acropolis was published (both in English and in Greek) under the title: *The Athenian Walk and the Historical Site of Athens*. What follows is *To Stigma enos Athinaiodifou* [The mark of an Athenian researcher], that is, an extensive collection of discourses, letters, memories, reviews, and meditations related to my both private and professional life; much like a travelogue.

In 2005 I collected in a single volume all my published articles of the preceding 10 years (1996-2005) under the title *Ichni Ellinika* [Greek Traces]. In 2006 I published two more works of historical documentation with commentary: *The Unpublished Correspondence of Ludwig Ross and Leo von Klenze (1834–1854)* (in German by the Archaeological Society of Athens), and *He Athina tou Mesopolemou mesa apo tis 'Meres' tou G. Seferi* [The Inter-War Athens through G. Seferis's Diaries], that is, a critical reading of all the Athens-related parts of the famous poet's annotations.

In the same year (2006), the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece issued the album *Athinaika Spitia* [Athenian Houses], with unpublished painting themes of houses by Nikos Engonopoulos, to which I contributed a critical introduction. In 2008, my work *O Kipos tis Amalias* [Amalia's Garden] came out in an illustrated volume, that is, a thorough presentation of the design and development of the National (former Royal) Garden of Athens. In the same year (2008) my study entitled *Poleis kai Mnimeia sten Ellada tou Othonos* [Cities and monuments in King Otto's Greece] was published (in Greek and in German). It is a critical presentation and commentary of the extensive article by Friedrich Stauffert, the municipal architect-engineer of Athens (1835-1843), dealing with issues of architecture, urban planning, archaeological research and public works during the first decade of the modern Greek state.

Having submitted my candidacy for the chair of History and Theory of Architecture at the Academy of Athens in 2010, I was nominated by an overwhelming majority of the Class of Arts and Letters. The plenary session however elected no candidate and declared the competition null and void.

In 2011 I was invited by the Municipality of Livadia to a conference on the restoration of the tourist pavilion of Trophonion (i.e., a key historical location), that is, a structure built 50 years before (1961-62) by the National Tourism Organization (EOT) on my plans, but was destroyed by fire in 2009. I was both surprised and moved by the locals' identification with that humble token of my youth, which they acknowledged as a landmark of their town!

In the following year, 2012, I published a collection of my articles both in English and German in a volume entitled *In focus Athens*, a compendium of topics on the history and urban planning of Athens.

In 2012 I opened my personal website [www.papageorgiou-venetas.com], which features, besides my detailed biography and bibliography, a dozen of my articles (in Greek and other

languages) and eight video tapes on various subjects of my scholarship, such as Dimitris Pikionis, National Garden, Friedrich Schinkel, Leo von Klenze, etc.

In 2013 I collected and published my articles of the previous eight years (in Greek), in a volume titled *Ellados Epainos* [Greece's praise]. I presented it in the Athenian literary hall 'Parnassus' in February 2014, where I delivered a lecture titled "A Midsummer Night's Dream: K.F. Schinkel's plans for a palace of King Otto on the Acropolis".

In the same year I republished the work of my Hellenist grandfather Dimitrios G. Papageorgiou entitled *Olympia kai oi Olympiakoi Agones* [Olympia and the Olympic Games], that is, the first book in Greek (1890) dealing with the excavations in the site of ancient Olympia in conjunction with the history of the Games in antiquity.

In 2015 the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece published my new book entitled *To Syntagma tis Athinas* [The Syntagma square of Athens], that is, an exhaustive analysis of both the foundation and formation principles of the principal urban square of Athens. The following year, 2016, a peculiar study on the introduction of western gardening into the Attic landscape was published by the same Society under the title *Treis Kipoi: Dyo oramata kai mia Parousia stin Attiki ge* [Three Gardens: Two visions and one presence in the Attic land]. Finally, in 2017, I collected and published in a limited-edition volume the entire corpus of my painting work (1952-2016) under the title *Askiseis me tin Grafida kai ton Chrostira* [Exercises with the stylus and the color-pencil].

In the spring of the same year I lead a seminar of the postgraduate department at the School of Architecture of the University of Patras, on the subject: "Dimitris Pikionis's access-paths to the Acropolis". This encounter with young people – in fact, two generations younger than me – brought me face to face with the ever-present problem of how to establish a creative relationship between people with a significant age difference. It is rather true – and even more so today – that an older man has the hardest of time to identify with the living and working patterns of that much younger people. This ancient saying applies here: "Tempora muntantur et nos mutamur in illis" (Times change and we change by submitting to them). No matter how well disposed and sympathetic you may be, sharing in youth habits is not always feasible.

For me, to 'be' ostentatiously "young", in trying to be liked by the youth and share in their concerns, is both pretentious and futile. I would rather remain instead who I am, with all my successes and failures, with my intellectual interests and dedication to the subjects of my own choice. Furthermore, I am always willing to pass on knowledge and experience to those who are drawn to me based on the subjects of my personal research. I have no idea what the future will bring and I am not willing to enter into arbitrary speculations, because I am not going to be part of what is going to come. Every generation is destined to experience and master its own limited world.

On the other hand, the experiences of the past, both personal and communal, have left me traces, memories, scars and gains, all of which comprise my spiritual 'capital'. Without being subjected to the sterile nostalgia of the past, I have been enriched and instructed by the latter. I always keep in mind that I live in a communion with 'the living and the dead'. I preserve a living contact, both mental and emotional, with all my beloved and worthy fellow humans, whether on this or the other side of existence.

Under this mindset I set on a new and important project. I retrieved from obscurity Kostas Biris's (1899-1980) monumental archives on the urban development of modern Athens, which remained unpublished for 75 years. I sorted out all the numerous documents in a single volume at the end of 2017, which I amplified with my editing and commentary and which was finally published by the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece under the title *He Nea Athina, proteuoussa tou Ellinismou* [New Athens, Capital of Hellenism]. This was my personal token of appreciation and respect towards this pioneering researcher of Greek urban planning.

In 2018 I participated as a keynote speaker at the DOCOMOMO conference in Chania, Crete, on the theme of *Modern Greek architecture and landscape*. The title of my talk was "Architecture driven by nature and history: The tourist pavilion at Trophonion, Livadia" (i.e., the aforementioned work of my youth). In that event, a younger colleague, Alexandros Zomas, presented a broad range of my early landscape projects from the 1960s (the Kephalaria Park in Kiphissia, the design for the archaeological site fronting the Herodion in Athens, the Waterfall Park in Edessa).

Having seized the opportunity of the conference to stroll around the medieval city of Chania, I realized that although the proposals which I, along with my colleagues, had developed forty years earlier for its protection and enhancement, were never adopted officially, they had a lasting impact on the local community by the very fact that they once had come to public attention. That pioneering study guided future planning decisions toward the implementation of pertinent measures against the destruction of the historical character of the site. A firm conclusion: Urban planning studies, although they rarely come into full fruition, leave a permanent mark on the local community, even though indirectly. Thus, they greatly contribute to the improvement of urban living conditions.

In 2018, too, I collected the remains (i.e., lectures and speeches) of my late friend and colleague Panagis Psomopoulos into an edited volume, which I published under the title *Panagis Psomopoulos: Themata Oikistiskis* [Panagis Psomopoulos: Ekistics-related themes].

In a lecture delivered in the School of Architecture of NTUA, in the context of its yearly advanced seminar series, I presented a comprehensive survey of the historiography concerning the founding of modern Athens in the 1830s, that is, an ongoing endeavor of many scholars including myself for the past 180 years.

The year after, i.e., 2019, I participated in the conference *Rencontres interdisciplinaires franco-helleniques*, with my lecture entitled "Autonomy and interdisciplinarity from an architectural perspective". In that I resolved to summarize my experience of my professional and scientific work, with a special focus on the breadth of the architect-planner's offer to society.

In 2019 my study entitled *Ernst Curtius: to Taksidi tou Nostou stin Ellada* [Ernst Curtius: the nostos journey to Greece] appeared. In this research narrative – combining Curtius's journal notes with my own commentary – I tried to unravel the youthful experiences of this great German archaeologist and Hellenist during his first stay in King Otto's Greece (1837-1840).

During the first two years of our confinement, due to the coronavirus pandemic, I retired with my wife to our cherished retreat in the island of Hydra. Living relatively secluded is nothing unusual to us. On the contrary, this has been our familiar way of being, both in Athens and in Munich, while devoting long hours to our study, – she in Greek archaeology and myself in my Athenian research.

The frugality of life in wintertime Hydra suits us well. We draw joy from nature and the company of fellow Hydrians, known for their Dorian temperament combining stiffness with honesty. As always before, now too, I continue to plant trees, whitewash walls and paint on old wood. But above all, I write and prepare three works for publication, that is:

- The documentation and commentary of the first public debate on the future of Plaka, the historic district of Athens, which took place in the Athens city hall in 1966.
- Five critical essays matching five texts by my teacher Dimitris Pikionis.
- An independent essay on: “The city as entelechy and the living experience of Athens in the poetry of Andreas Embiricos”.

I have also ventured to translate into Greek two seminal poems of German literature: the “Requiem” by Rainer Maria Rilke and the “Archipelagus” by Friedrich Hölderlin.

Every day I climb almost 220 steps from the harbor to the house. I walk slowly but steadily at eighty-nine years of age, with deep gratitude for the grace of living here, upright and active.

This is my journey to date. Besides my architectural and urban planning works, I have published 34 books and 113 articles in Greek, French, German and English. All this happened among many vicissitudes, reversals and varied experiences, while living a life without much security but within an enviable context of relative freedom. I am grateful. I have tried to follow Mark Aurelius’s biosophical admonition: “Accept without pride, relinquish without a struggle”.

In the company of Ferdinand Gregorovius, Dimitrios Kambouroglou, Kostas Biris and Ioannis Travlos as my shining examples, I unceasingly study the history, urban planning, archaeology and topography of Athens. My life and my inspiration have led me to this intensive study of the destinies of my native city; and I will continue on this path as long as I am given the grace to do so.

Hydra, May 2022