

Smyrna and Me – 10.10.2023

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Before I begin my speech, I want to thank the BAYETAV foundation for inviting me here and giving me the opportunity to present my works about Smyrna, now İzmir, and talk about my relationship with this beautiful city.

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My relationship with Smyrna began when I was still a young boy, and the culprit was my grandfather Stamatis Hadjiyannis. Both my maternal grandparents were born in the village of Kato Panagia, now Çiftlik near Çeşme, which at that time was inhabited solely by Greeks. In 1910 my grandfather went to Athens to study Byzantine music, and afterwards worked in one of the best hotels in Athens, getting to know many prominent people, both Greek and foreigners.

In 1917 he enlisted in the Greek army, fighting first at the Macedonian front during the 1st World War, and then in Asia Minor, taking part in the Greco-Turkish war as an artillery sergeant. After the defeat of the Greek army he was forced to jump into the sea of Mudanya and swim to a British warship in order to avoid being captured by the Turks. Later he ended up in Athens, but he never forgot his homeland and his experiences during the war.

Many years later, when he was about 60 years old, he wrote down his memoirs, both of the war and of what he remembered from the life in his village. But he also wanted to pass on his memories to newer generations, and that included me. He never stopped telling me stories, sometimes even chasing me through our house when I was tired and tried to avoid him. The stories he was telling me were of course about the war and his village, but also about Smyrna, which he had visited twice in 1919.

This was the first spark that kindled my interest for the eastern side of the Aegean.

[3]

In 1980 my grandfather took me with him to visit his village, Kato Panagia. We managed to locate the house of my grandmother, then inhabited by a Turco-Cretan family, the İnam, who welcomed us heartily. The older members of the family, especially Ali İnam, whom you see at the top left photo together with my grandfather, still spoke Greek with Cretan accent.

Afterwards we visited İzmir, but unfortunately I took only 2 photos at the time, which you can see at the right side of the slide. I still remember 2 incidents from this trip. The first was when I saw the Konak building, which was then standing burned and abandoned. I immediately thought, "Well, this must be a remnant of the Great Fire of 1922. They have probably left it so as a memorial, just like the bombed Kaiser Wilhelm church in Berlin!" Only much later did I learn that the Konak survived the Great Fire, to be destroyed by an accidental fire in the 1970's.

The 2nd incident that I remember occurred when our wanderings led us to the upper part of the city, probably to the Eşrefpaşa neighborhood, where we stopped at a coffeehouse to rest. The old people there, hearing us speaking Greek, immediately approached us amicably, addressed us in our language and invited us for a cup of tea. It turned out that they too were Turco-Cretans, ending up in İzmir after the population exchange.

[4]

Twenty years later, in the year 2000, I visited Kato Panagia again. My grandfather had passed away, as had Ali İnam. The next generation of the family still understood some Greek, but they couldn't speak it, so we had to communicate in Turkish with the help of a distant uncle of me from Chios. He had learned Turkish during the German occupation of the island in the 2nd World War, when he fled to Çeşme and lived there for 3 years. The İnam family welcomed us again in their new home, next to the old house of my grandmother, which was by now derelict. The garden though was in full

bloom, and some furniture, salvaged from the old house, still existed, including a couch and the elaborate mirror you can see on the right.

This time I didn't manage to visit İzmir.

[5]

George Miniotis, the distant uncle of mine who acted as an interpreter for Turkish in 2000, had been a resistance fighter during the German occupation of Chios, sailing through the eastern Aegean and working together with British intelligence based in İzmir. In 2008 he entrusted me with his memoirs about this period, and I proceeded to edit them and enrich them with photos and maps. This resulted in a book, which was eventually published in 2018. You can see it at right.

During my research for this book I came into contact with descendants of Levantines, people of Western European origin who had lived and worked for many centuries in the Near East, and especially in İzmir. One of them, Noel Rees, who was British vice-consul in İzmir during World War II, was at the same time acting as head of British intelligence there and was co-operating with my uncle.

Learning about what I was working on, the administrator of the Levantine Heritage web site invited me to speak about it at a symposium in İzmir, which was scheduled to take place in 2010. This is how I came to the city for the 2nd time. At the top left photo you can see me speaking about Greek naval resistance in the eastern Aegean at the Levantine Symposium, and at right with fellow speakers and friends in front of the Aya Vukla church, which was then being renovated.

[6]

During the Levantine Symposium I got to know 2 Levantines, both born in İzmir: Alex Baltazzi, of Venetian and Greek descent, who was still living in the city, and George Galdies, who had Maltese ancestors and was then

living in London. George had the idea to collect words and expressions from the Greek dialect of Smyrna, which was the mother tongue of both of them.

This we did, and 2 years later a trilingual dictionary was published, sponsored by the İzmir Chamber of Commerce and titled “A Lexicon of Smyrneika” or “İzmir Rumcası Sözlüğü”. The dictionary, which included some funny dialogues in Smyrna Greek written by Alex Baltazzi, underwent 3 editions, 2 in Turkey and one in the USA. It is considered a valuable resource for linguists. Alex, in the photo at top right, has since passed away, but I continue to co-operate with George Galdies in various other projects.

[7]

While I was in İzmir for the Levantine Symposium, I wandered with friends and colleagues through the city, visiting various old places of interest, including orthodox churches, schools, mosques, Muslim cemeteries etc., and my interest for the city was awakened. I realized then that if I wanted to seriously delve into the history of İzmir, the first thing I had to do was to understand its topography as it was before the fire.

What better way to do it than to gather and study as many old maps as I could? So this is what I did while my 2 Levantine friends and I were preparing our Lexicon. At some point I discovered an old Smyrna map in a Greek newspaper of the 1930's, buried inside my grandfather's papers. The newspaper was in bad condition, ready to fall apart, and it was as if the map was crying out: “Save me! Save me!”

So I decided to re-draw it, and you can see the result at left. Later I discovered that the Greek map was based on a map drawn in 1913 by Ernest Bon, then president of the administrative committee of the Smyrna fire department. This map proved very popular due to its small size suitable to be included in a book, and up to this time it is featured in more than 15 books written in many languages, including Greek, Turkish and English.

Some years later, a Greek friend of mine encouraged me to draw another map, this time of modern İzmir, which would include the locations of old

monuments, most of them now lost. This map would be useful for Greek visitors who would be searching for the places where their ancestors had lived. I agreed, and the map at right was published privately in 2017.

[8]

In the meantime I had an idea for yet another map project. That is, to create a high resolution map of old Smyrna as it was before 1922, by incorporating every bit of information I could extract from other maps and plans, but also from books, newspapers, aerial and ground photos, personal reminiscences etc., in short from every conceivable source. This was a very large project that took about 9 years to complete. The resulting map was published in a book which had the form of a travelers' guide for someone who wanted to visit Smyrna in the year 1922, and as such it presented the city as it was during the Greek occupation.

You can see the full map at left, and the Traveler's Guide books in the original Greek and the Turkish translation at top right.

The last map I have created up to this point, at bottom right of the screen, is an interactive map of modern İzmir featured in my web site, which pinpoints the locations of sites of interest of pre-1922 Smyrna, both existing and lost. By clicking on the map, photos and information concerning these sites is provided, in Greek, Turkish and English, stemming from a variety of sources.

[9]

When I came to İzmir again in 2014, it was to speak at the 2nd Levantine Symposium about a new project. This was the re-constitution of the majestic strip of buildings at the Quay of Smyrna, as it was before the fire of 1922. In that project, which had begun in 2012, I was collaborating with Achilleas Chatziconstantinou, whom I had first met during the 1st Levantine Symposium. We did the research together, gathering every bit of information we could find and collecting thousands of photos of the Quay. After dating the photos, determining the building locations during various

time periods and assigning unique codes to each building, I finally began with the drawing of the more than 200 buildings, while my collaborator wrote a chapter of text for each of them, incorporating everything we had found about the building itself, but also about its owners and residents.

In the 2nd Levantine Symposium I presented the first drawings of Quay buildings, among them the Grand Hotel Kraemer Palace, which you can see at right.

[10]

To draw a building, we first had to straighten the photos, since most of them were taken at an angle due to the small width of the Quay. This we did by a geometrical technique called “orthogonal rectification”. Next we had to find the correct dimensions of the building. For the width we used old maps such as the Goad map shown at lower left, as well as current aerial photos available online, while for the vertical dimension we compared the heights of lost buildings to the heights of surviving ones.

Finally, we used rectified photos to draw the building in the computer in stages, each time adding more detail. More than one photos were used to add minuscule ornamental details, like the ones that are visible in the small overlaid photo pointed by the red arrow.

[11]

To determine the owners of the buildings or plots, the most valuable resources were three Quay plans from different dates, which list the plot owners. The first two, from the years 1889 and 1914, are to be found in the Ottoman archives in İstanbul. Parts of them you can see at left. They depict a house block in Bella Vista, current Gündoğdu. As you can see, the large middle plot belonged to the Armenian family of Spartali, whose name is written on this plot on both maps.

At the time when we were trying to obtain a copy of the 1889 plan, the Ottoman archives were being relocated to new buildings, where they were

going to be digitized. Until their digitization, the archives would be inaccessible to the general public. To overcome this difficulty, we engaged a local researcher, who used his connections to access the several meters long plan, spread it on the floor and photograph it for us. Luck for us, because this plan was indispensable for our work.

The third plan at right is from 1936, when most buildings formerly belonging to Armenians or Greeks had changed hands. The building number 5 in the middle then belonged to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as you can see in the list below the plan. It is the current Atatürk museum.

We located this plan in the İzmir Cadastral Office, where we gained access through our connections with the İzmir Chamber of Commerce. While consecutive plan sheets were being brought to me to take photos of them, the clerk who was bringing them asked me anxiously if I would hand the plans to descendants of the previous owners, so that they could use them at court to claim the properties. Smiling, I reassured him I would do no such thing. He returned the smile and continued to serve me without reservations.

[12]

In January 2018, after 6 years of hard labor, the “Smyrna Quay” manuscript was finally completed and handed to the publisher. 10 months later the two-volume book was presented for the first time at the 3rd Levantine Conference which was held in Athens, and in December of that year the official presentation of the book followed. It was hosted at Cotsen Hall of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, which you can see at the bottom of the screen. The book generated a lot of interest, its publishing being reported in the news of the main Greek TV stations.

[13]

Our efforts were acknowledged in December 2019, when, in a ceremonial session, we were awarded one of the two yearly prizes for books on general history by the Academy of Athens.

Although the COVID pandemic hindered us during the following 2 years, we managed to introduce the “Smyrna Quay” in a lot of Greek and international presentations and conferences, in Greece, Turkey and Armenia. At the middle of the bottom row you can see me speaking about the book at the İzmir Limanı Symposium held in spring 2022, and at bottom right a large copy of a drawing of part of the Smyrna Quay, displayed at the grand centennial exhibition of the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe, as it is called in Greece, which was organized by the Benaki Museum in Athens.

There is though something that we haven’t yet managed to do, and that is the translation of the book into English and/or Turkish.

[14]

I told you before about my aspiration to create a high resolution map of old Smyrna as it was before 1922. This project took about 9 years to complete, and the map was finally published in the form of a travelers’ guide, including a lot of information about Smyrna and its environs as they were in 1922, just before the Great Fire.

In 2022 the book earned an award from the Hearth of New Smyrna society in Athens. It was also the first book of mine that was translated into Turkish with the help of İzmir Municipality, the Altay Sports Club and a number of Turkish friends, especially Ayşen Teksen, Teodora Hacudi and Professor Çınar Atay. On account of the launch of the Turkish translation, I visited İzmir again, met with my Turkish friends and spoke about the book at the presentation organized by Altay.

[15]

When my friend, the film director Angelos Kovotsos first saw the “Smyrna Quay” book, he was fascinated. It was not long before he suggested that we make a documentary to portray the Quay, and also illustrate the manner in which the “Smyrna Quay” book was created. In 2021, with Angelos having secured the funds required, we traveled with his team to İzmir to shoot some scenes of the film, as you can see at the top row. The shooting took

place at various locations in İzmir, including the Bazaar, Aya Vukla, Bornova, and of course the Quay. We continued shooting in Athens, at places such as the library of the Hearth of New Smyrna and the home of Elli Solomonidis, the niece of Christos Solomonidis, who had authored a lot of books about old Smyrna.

The completed documentary was first screened in September 2022 by a Greek pay-tv channel and has since been shown in various countries, including Greece, France, the USA, and last weekend also Turkey, at Foça.

Following my speech, some excerpts will be shown here too.

[16]

In the summer of 2022, a major Greek TV Channel filmed yet another documentary about Smyrna, in which I and Achilleas, the co-author of the “Smyrna Quay”, were invited to participate. We spoke about Smyrna as it was 100 years ago, our work and the “Smyrna Quay” book, and about the Great Fire that destroyed a large part of the city in 1922.

Many distinguished researchers and historians also took part in this film, including Izmir Levantines Andrew Simes and Mark Giraud, the British author Giles Milton and the Turkish professor Erkan Serçe. The documentary was also shown for the first time in September 2022, and is currently available for viewing on YouTube.

[17]

Although I have already done much work on the topography and architecture of Smyrna as it was before 1922, and especially on the Smyrna Quay, until recently I hadn't done any research about the people who lived at that time in this complex, multi-cultural city.

I got the opportunity to do this when I was invited to speak at an international conference organized by the University of Athens in the spring of this year. I thought I could present life in Smyrna during the second half

of 1908, right after the Young Turk revolution and the reinstatement of the constitution.

This was a very interesting period, full of events:

The joy and fraternization of people from all communities for the unprecedented freedom that ensued, culminating in demonstrations in support of the constitution;

The visits of many prominent persons, including the Greek princes Andrew and Alice, Enver bey, prince Sabahattin and the Armenian patriarch;
Amnesty of all prisoners, including criminals, and subsequent demolition of the prison;

The abolition of informers and censorship, followed by the publishing of 48 new newspapers and magazines in Smyrna, in Greek, Turkish, French, Italian, Armenian and Ladino, the language of Smyrna Jews;

A lot of strikes demanding better pay and less work hours, including those of the harbor and railway workers, which continued for many months;

A big accident at sea when a small Hamidiye boat crashed with a large passenger steamship, resulting in the sinking of the small boat and the drowning of 63 people;

And, finally, elections held in Smyrna for the Ottoman parliament, where 2 Turks, 2 Greeks, 1 Armenian and 1 Jew were elected as deputies.

This project of mine resulted in a full-length book, which was presented at the Athens conference and will soon be published in Greece. Let's hope I'll find a publisher for Turkey too.

[18]

Any serious engagement with Smyrna would be incomplete, if a researcher has not delved into the subject of the Great Fire. There are many questions about it to be answered conclusively, such as: Who, why, how, where, when?

While I will uphold the answers to the first 3 questions until I have completed this project, let me show you the answers I have arrived for the last 2 ones, where and when.

The fire started on September 13 about noon in the Armenian quarter, colored in green in the maps, at a point near Basmane station, marked with a fire icon at the left map. Consecutive red dotted lines show the advance of the fire in time, thicker lines being earlier and thinner lines later. In the left map you can see the fire's advance up to 11 at night of the first day, when the fire department headquarters got fire and were burned.

The map to the right shows the extent of the fire during the next hours and days, up to the final limits marked with the thinnest dotted line. In the end, the Great Fire swallowed about 60 % of the total area of central Smyrna, that is not including the suburbs.

The thick black line at the bottom of the maps, together with the red line above it, mark the location of a wide avenue, which although incomplete at the time, prevented the fire to spread to the Turkish quarters in the south. It is the current Fevzi Paşa boulevard.

For this project I have used a variety of contemporaneous sources from a large number of archives, in Greek, English, French and Turkish, with some of them never having been used before.

[19]

While old, pre-1922 Smyrna is the main topic of my research, the current city of İzmir and its people have a place in my heart too. In these photos you can see me and my Turkish friends, consuming delicious meze, drinking rakı and enjoying co-operation and peace between our 2 countries.

[20]

This concludes my presentation about my relationship with Smyrna / İzmir. Thank you for your attention!