

# A Page from the History of the Greek Presence in the Pacific Rim

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The field of history in relation to the Greek Diaspora is one which is immensely rewarding for the researcher. It constitutes a treasure trove of lives and achievements of Greeks who have crossed the oceans to the Antipodes and, according to their ability and talent, made a contribution to their new homeland. For a very few of these, Australia has even been a stepping stone to further lands, where they shared their skills, their knowledge and the flame of Hellenism.

This paper examines one such latter case which my research has uncovered, bringing to light the admirable life, achievements and contribution of a Hellene who spent almost half a century in the Pacific Rim, and in whose person merged the educator, industrialist, press man and diplomat.

## Introduction

The history of the Greeks of the diaspora is a fascinating and rewarding field for both the scholar and the general reader. It is replete with the lives of immigrants who, through hard work and sometimes good business acumen, have made a new life for themselves in their second homeland. Most have settled down and stayed, while others have repatriated. But for a very few the new land has become a stepping

Kanarakis, George 2005. A Page from the History of the Greek Presence in the Pacific Rim. In E. Close, M. Tsianikas and G. Frazis (eds.) "Greek Research in Australia: Proceedings of the Biennial International Conference of Greek Studies, Flinders University April 2003", Flinders University Department of Languages - Modern Greek: Adelaide, 315-330.

stone to a third country where they have finally put down roots.

This paper deals with the case of such a Greek, who spent almost half a century in Pacific Rim countries, namely Australia and the Philippines. This was George Lucas Adamopoulos (Adamson) in whose person merged the newspaperman, industrialist, educator and diplomat.<sup>1</sup>

Even as a young boy Adamopoulos, who was born on 28 April 1899 in the village of Polydrosso, Mount Parnassos, revealed an enquiring mind with a practical orientation. These personal qualities found an outlet in 1916 when, having completed high school studies at Amphissa in central Greece, he embarked on a two-year diploma course in telecommunications and postal services at Athens Technical College. But this diploma would not satisfy either his ambition or his thirst for knowledge, so on learning that a School of Chemistry had just opened at the University of Athens he enrolled in the Bachelor of Science course, thus becoming, in October 1918, one of the first students to join the new School.

However, after his graduation in 1924 — his university studies having been interrupted for three years by military service in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Thrace (1920–1923) — the narrow confines of Greece of those times left this ambitious young man restless. He was convinced that real success could only be found in foreign lands,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the life and achievements of George Lucas Adamopoulos, see *The Greek Star* (Chicago), 3 October 1947:1; Spiliadi, 1970:28–30; Mertzos, 1974:2; Kandilis, 1974: 148–49; Mendoza, 1983:32–41, 64–65.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Mrs Evdokia Adamopoulos in Athens, 10 January 1991. Mrs Adamopoulos (née Savaides) was born in Calcutta, India to Greek parents, both British subjects, her father originally from the Dardanelles and her mother from Cairo. Her father worked for Rallis Brothers as an accountant in London and then as a manager in Calcutta. Because of the climate in Calcutta, her parents sent Evdokia to live with relatives in Marseilles, France, where she stayed until the age of fourteen. When her parents moved to Athens, she joined them there and attended the American College for Girls (Deree-Pierce) in that city. So, Evdokia spoke fluent English, French and Greek. Later in Manila, married to George Adamopoulos, she continued her studies and received a Bachelor of Education in 1949, a Bachelor of Law in 1954 and

an idea strengthened by an acquaintance of his named Economou, a lawyer in Sydney who encouraged him to move to Australia. So, in 1927 Adamopoulos settled his affairs in Greece, and on 1 May left for Sydney.

## The newspaperman

The second part of the decade of the 1920s was a period of unusual turbulence for the Greeks of New South Wales, and especially of Sydney. Certain events which occurred in those years would have a formative and irrevocable impact on the historical course of Hellenism in Australia. These were the results of the fierce and openly-fought dispute between the Church and the Sydney Greek Community, which for the first time split the people and polarised them into pro- and anti-Metropolitan factions. The cause of this dispute was mainly the actions of Metropolitan Christopher Knitis (appointed in July 1924)<sup>3</sup> to assert his authority not just over ecclesiastical but also over secular matters. The second important event, which resulted from this antagonism, was the founding in Sydney of the newspaper *Panellinios Kiryx* (Panhellenic Herald) on 16 November 1926 to counteract the pro-Metropolitan stance of the newspaper *To Ethniko Vima* (The National Tribune). *To Ethniko Vima* was owned by Nikolaos Marinakis, whose brother, the priest Dimitrios, was a contributor to the newspaper and for two years from the beginning of 1924 its editor, but who had been relieved of his position as a parish priest by the Greek Orthodox Community of Sydney in mid-November 1923 (Kanarakis, 2000:70, 133).

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a Master's in Education in 1955. In that year she also became Dean of the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts at Adamson University, which she held until 1967 when she retired as Dean Emeritus of Adamson University.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Knitis was the first Metropolitan of the new Metropolis of Australia and New Zealand — with its base in Sydney — founded by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in March 1924.

It was during these years of bitterly factionalised atmosphere that Adamopoulos, totally unaware and unprepared for such conditions, would arrive on Australian shores.

This was fortuitous for *To Ethniko Vima* as the previous editor, Dr Cimon Verenikis, had resigned from his position with the newspaper and Marinakis was searching for someone to take his place, and who better than the university-educated Adamopoulos, who by now had developed an experienced and rounded personality.

Of course, this position and its ensuing responsibilities would bring Adamopoulos to the fore in the rivalry between the two newspapers, as well as making him an object of attack and ridicule by Alex Grivas, the main article writer and columnist of *Panellinios Kyrix*.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, Adamopoulos always retained his dignity and the respect of the people, despite the disheartening atmosphere and the vitriolic personal attacks which were flung at him.

Although Adamopoulos' venture into the area of the press would not become a major career move for him and he would remain with the newspaper for only three years (1927–1930), nevertheless, while he was at its helm, *To Ethniko Vima* upheld its stance and its principles, and was a quality publication much appreciated by its readers.

## The industrialist

Yet, however successful Adamopoulos was as a newspaperman, this was not where his real inclination lay. Coming from a family which had a cotton processing business and a flour mill in Greece, a company of which he had been a co-owner and a director since 1924, and stemming from his higher education in telecommunications and chemistry, industry was much more in line with his aptitudes and interests.

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<sup>4</sup> For the life of Alex Grivas, his powerful role in Greek community affairs, especially in New South Wales, and his contribution to the newspaper *Panellinios Kyrix*, see Kanarakis 1997:111–37.

A proof of this is that just the year following his arrival in Sydney, Adamopoulos started a chemical manufacturing company based in Redfern, Sydney, producing “Rayospa” mineral waters and mineral bath salts. While running this company he became further involved in industry the following year (1929) by taking on the responsibilities of organiser and technical consultant to Australian Absorbent Cotton Wool Products Limited, also in Sydney.

Further and deeper involvement in industry would happen when, by chance, the whole direction of his life changed. Keenly interested in new ideas and developments in industry, especially in areas such as soap-making and ceramics, after three years in Australia Adamopoulos set off for a vacation in Japan where he intended to investigate new developments in these areas. But Japan would not welcome him yet. When the boat stopped at Manila in October 1930 en route to Japan, Adamopoulos was introduced to Kyriakos Tsounakos, originally from Sparta. Tsounakos, who owned the Mayon Distillery in Albay which made wines and coconut liqueur, confided in Adamopoulos that his wines were turning sour — a problem Adamopoulos was soon able to rectify. Delighted, Tsounakos offered Adamopoulos the position of chemist with his company, which Adamopoulos accepted. As a result, Adamopoulos never completed his journey to the Far East, thus closing the chapter of his activities in Australia and opening a new one in the Philippines.

Soon after we find Adamopoulos and Tsounakos having formed a company together, the Chunaco-Adamson Chemical Company, producing vanilla, orange, raspberry and banana juice. The company would last until 1932, the year in which Adamopoulos opened in Manila a laboratory for the testing of metals and ores. Over the following decades this laboratory would become a major testing, assay and analysis facility for a wide range of materials, such as fuels, textiles, foods, soils, chemicals, medical products, etc., providing a valuable service to industry and agriculture in the country.

But Adamopoulos’ questing mind could never be still, and other interests would claim much of his attention for the next decade and

a half. Then in 1948 he was attracted once again to new ventures in industry. From this point on until the end of his life he would be involved as founder, president, director or consultant in nine more industrial companies, concerned with textiles, metals, surgical dressings, pharmaceuticals and engineering. In these capacities he made tremendous contributions to industry in the Philippines and, as a consequence, to the economy of his new homeland.

This contribution was made greater by the fact that he was a member of various scientific and industrial organisations in the Philippines including the Philippine Textile Research Institute, a government body of which he was the Vice-Chairman, and the Philippine Chamber of Technology of which he was a director.

## **The educator**

Prior to all these post-World War II industrial ventures, however, in 1932 when Adamopoulos ended his association with Tsounakos and returned to Manila from Albay, another ambition was already burning inside him.

Some years earlier, while he was still in Greece, he had opened and run for four years (1923–1927) a private coaching college preparing students for university entrance examinations, teaching chemistry and other science subjects. Adamopoulos had found this to be extremely rewarding and he had gained much fulfilment in sharing his knowledge with the students. Now in the Philippines, where tertiary education was almost exclusively limited to the humanities, he saw an even greater need for educational facilities in the sciences. Moreover, he realised that this archipelago of 7,100 islands was rich in resources but technologically and industrially underdeveloped, reinforcing his view that for the future of the country it was imperative that the young people receive education in technology, industry and science.

So on 20 June 1932, after careful consideration of the prevailing educational and industrial conditions, Adamopoulos opened the

Adamson School of Industrial Chemistry in Manila. With this move he became the pioneer of industrial education in the Philippines, and at the same time he publicly declared his debt to his Hellenic heritage by choosing Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom and education, as the School's emblem. In the meantime, on 15 July 1932 he was joined by his cousin Alexander Athos Adamopoulos who would play an important role in the future development of this educational endeavour.

In the School's first brochure Adamopoulos would write:

There are many changes going on in the business world today. The law of progress demands them if growth is taking place. During the past 25 years the Philippine Islands has shown a large and steady growth.[...] Demand for Philippine manufactured goods is far above anything which could have been predicted five years ago and is reflected in the fact that foreign sales are increasing at a faster rate than is domestic production.[...] The Adamson School of Industrial Chemistry is for the purpose of teaching students how to expand along scientific lines and how to develop the resources of these islands (cited in Mendoza, 1983:35).

In the words of Jose M. de Ocampo, Assistant Dean of the Institution's future College of Education

the foundation [...] came about when the country was departing from the colonial type of economy and entering into a stage of industrial awakening. It was exactly in this period of transition that a school that would diffuse knowledge along industrial lines and train students to direct the resources of the nation toward economic stability, was a pressing necessity (de Ocampo, 1957:12).

Initially a night school with forty-two students, in only one year the enrolment had grown to 300 students, and 400 by 1934. That year he also established a technical high school — the only one in the Philippines whose graduates were eligible for admission to or scholarships at a number of technical colleges in the USA and in Europe.

Two years later he amalgamated his two schools into the Adamson School of Industrial Chemistry and Engineering. Under its new

structure the School continued to increase by leaps and bounds in number of students, courses and educational facilities, to the extent that by 1939 it was offering, among other courses, four-year college industrial chemistry, mining engineering, reserve officers training corps and chemical warfare service, liberal arts, business studies, preparatory medicine and education, as well as graduate studies (Masters) in chemistry. An obvious outcome of this expansion of the curriculum was that the School had to move to much larger premises.

In retrospect, the years 1935–1941 are considered by economists to be a period of change in the Philippines towards a more industrialised economy. Without doubt, the Adamson School made a definite contribution towards this change.

In parallel, the academic reputation of this institution grew from strength to strength, and on 5 February 1941 a major milestone was reached when, after only nine years of existence, the Adamson School of Industrial Chemistry and Engineering was authorised by the Philippines Department of Education to become a fully-fledged university, with George Lucas Adamopoulos becoming its President and his cousin Alexander Athos Adamopoulos its Vice-President and Treasurer (*The Adamson Chronicle* (Silver Jubilee Issue), 1957:13; *The Adamson University Bulletin of Information*, 1961:13). The next day Carlos P. Romulo, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, wrote in the *Philippines Herald*:

The establishment of the new Adamson University at this time is one of the finest commentaries that can be made respecting the condition of our security as well as the nature of the tasks to which we would rather devote ourselves. Here is one more point of light amidst the encircling gloom. In a world that is threatened with an imminent blackout of civilization, it is pleasant to be able to feel that in this new Philippine institution of learning we shall have one citadel more in which we shall hold out against the universal enemy (cited in Mendoza, 1983:40).

A burning ambition of Adamopoulos had now been achieved to the benefit of the students and the Philippine nation.

But the war was expanding in the Pacific and with the occupation of Manila by the Japanese in 1941, the University was to enter a new and dark chapter in its history. On 3 January 1942 the University was seized by the Japanese, its library ransacked with thousands of volumes sent back to Japan, and the Adamson family interned as enemy aliens. The premises themselves and the University equipment were used by the Japanese as a secret radio transmission station. Nor was this the end of the ignominy suffered by Adamson University, for when liberation came to the Philippines in

Dr. George Lucas Adamopoulos

1945 the retreating Japanese razed the entire University — the buildings, all its equipment and the depleted library — to the ground leaving no remains whatsoever of this once flourishing educational institution other than smoke and ashes.

However, George Adamopoulos was not a man to be defeated, and rather than being disheartened by this tragedy he was stimulated by the challenge of rebuilding his University. So, upon the invitation of the Fathers of San Vincente, Adamson University moved into the building of their former convent and re-opened to students. Once again it took on the mission of educating the youth of the Philippines. The re-opening of the University, which was inaugurated by the Vice-President of the Philippines and Secretary of Foreign Affairs Elpidio Quirino, took place on 20 June 1946, the same day and month as the founding of Adamopoulos' first educational institution in the Philippines, the Adamson School of Industrial Chemistry, on 20 June 1932 (*The Adamson Chronicle*, 1950:4).

In the years that followed, Adamopoulos would expand the reputation of the University, as well as his own reputation, on an international

basis, becoming a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, Bangkok, Thailand, and being accepted as a member of the New York Academy of Sciences. He was also a delegate to the International Conference of University Professors at Nice, France in 1951, in the same way that in 1937 he had been a delegate to the Seventh World Educational Conference in Tokyo.

The next milestone in the history of Adamson University would occur in 1964. In the period up to that year, the University had continued its strong and steady growth in all areas, especially in the number of its courses, schools, Philippine students and overseas students from China, Thailand, Borneo, Japan and other areas of the Pacific Rim; but a basic problem of ownership was threatening.

George Adamopoulos, although a permanent resident of the Philippines, had never renounced his Greek citizenship, and this ran contrary to the new government policy that all private educational institutions should be owned by Philippine nationals. In order to avoid nationalisation by the government, Adamson began negotiating with the Vincentian Fathers for them to take over his University. So, on 4 December 1964 the Vincentians assumed ownership, while George Adamopoulos remained President of the University.

At this point the student enrolment had reached 4,072, while the University comprised:

The Graduate School (Master of Arts in Education and Master of Science in Chemistry)

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Chemical Research, Industrial Chemistry, Geology, Pre-Law, Pre-Medicine, English, Literature, Journalism, History, Philosophy)

College of Education

College of Commerce and Business Administration

College of Law

College of Pharmacy

College of Engineering (Chemical, Civil, Industrial, Mechanical,  
Electrical, Mining)

School of Architecture

University High School

Testing Laboratories (Physical, Chemical, Assay, Metallurgical)

Naval Science and Tactics

Graduands in front of Adamson University in Manila (22 March 1958).

In its modern history, Hellenism of the diaspora can boast one other similar instance of a Greek establishing an institution of tertiary education in the diaspora, but on a much smaller scale. This was Constantine N. Merianos, a Greek immigrant in the United States, who founded a tertiary-level College of Pharmacy in Boston, which in 1963 was absorbed into Northeastern University in that city.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>5</sup> Ziogas, 12 April 1974:7 fn 1. Ziogas' Greek-language article was republished, under its original title, in the newspapers *Panellinios Kiryx*, 17 April 1974:17 and *Panurope – Hellenisme* (Lausanne), June 1974:6.

a condition of the transfer of ownership of Adamopoulos' University was not only that the name of the University must be retained unchanged, but also that the goddess Athena must remain as its emblem, and these are so until today.

Finally, on 26 January 1967 Adamopoulos, now sixty-eight years old and with thirty-five years as an educator in the Philippines, resigned as President of Adamson University while, out of respect and appreciation for his long contribution to the University, the Board conferred upon him the title of Founder and President Emeritus.

With this event a chapter in the history of Adamson University drew to a close, a chapter which was appreciated by the people of the Philippines as well as by the country's leaders. For instance, President Ramon Magsaysay wrote on the occasion of the University's silver jubilee in 1957:

From entirely modest beginnings in 1932, this school has risen to the position she now occupies as one of the better known centers of learning in Manila. Her graduates can be found in numerous fields of endeavor where they have well proven their worth and where their accomplishments truly attest to the sincerity with which they have lived up to the ideals of their Alma Mater. With twenty-five years of educational service to the Filipino youth, Adamson University has every reason to be proud of its record (*The Adamson Chronicle* (Silver Jubilee Issue), 1957:3).

In a similar manner former President Elpidio Quirino stated:

Adamson University has offered a unique service to the Philippine people. During its pioneering educational contribution, this great institution was always among the pioneers of our higher education (cited in Ziogas, 1974:6).

Today, the student population of Adamson University exceeds 22,000.

## **The diplomat**

A fourth aspect of George Adamopoulos' contribution, this time to the Greek nation in particular, lies in the area of official representation of the Greek government.

When after World War II the Greek government was invited to send a representative to the Proclamation of Independence of the Republic of the Philippines to be held on 4 July 1946, it was George Adamopoulos, now a respected industrialist and educator in the Philippines, that the Greek government turned to, to be their official representative.

Following this development in the history of the Philippine nation, in 1947 the Greek government decided to appoint a Consul, and again it was George Adamopoulos that they chose. In this honorary position he assisted in the conclusion of an Air Agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the Kingdom of Greece, in Athens in 1949, and in Manila in 1950 he was the Chief Delegate and Signatory to the Treaty of Friendship and Consular Establishment between the Philippines and Greece.

Obviously, the Greek government appreciated the assistance given by Adamopoulos in these two matters, as well as the manner in which it was carried out, and the following year (1951) promoted him to Honorary Consul General. One of his numerous responsibilities during this period of service as Consul General, a position he held until 1973 just before his passing, was that of Delegate of the Greek Government to the International Economic Conference for Customs Regulations and Tariffs, an important forum held in Manila in 1960.

## Recognition

George Adamopoulos' contribution in these various arenas of life did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. The first expression of recognition came in 1937 with the conferring on Adamopoulos of an honorary doctorate by the University of Athens on the occasion of its centenary. The Greek government itself bestowed on him the Order of King George I Gold Medal and the Gold Cross of the Order of the Phoenix, while the Greek military awarded him the Greek Expeditionary Forces in Korea Gold Medal. In the Philippines the Women Chemical Engineers of the Philippines awarded him their Gold Medal, while Adamson University itself gave him a number of

awards. In addition in 1968, under Resolution No. 996 (October 1968) of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, His Holiness Athenagoras, Patriarch of Constantinople, bestowed on him the title of Offikion tou Archontos Exarchou (Office of Lord Exarch) for founding a university in the Philippines.

Eight years after his death, in 1982, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Adamson University (as the Adamson School of Industrial Chemistry), George Adamopoulos' outstanding contribution to education was still valued and celebrated in both the Philippines and Greece. The fiftieth anniversary celebrations were held in Manila on 17 February 1982. Many government members and dignitaries from the Philippines as well as from other countries attended the celebrations, signifying the esteem in which this institution and its founder were held. That same year the Greek government issued a set of commemorative stamps and minted medals portraying George Adamopoulos as founder and President of Adamson University in recognition of this anniversary, and also of the tremendous contribution of one of its native-born sons to a country in the Pacific Rim not usually considered a land of the Greek diaspora (*I Vradyni* [The Evening Newspaper] [Athens], 28 April 1983:4).

## Epilogue

George Adamson died on 28 February 1974 in Athens after having returned two years earlier to the country of his birth. He was survived by his wife, Evdoxia and their son Dr Lucas G. Adamson, also a chemical engineer.

A constant reminder of the man, his life and his achievements stands in the grounds of Adamson Centre, the headquarters of the Adamson and Adamson Company in the centre of Manila. It takes the form of a small and beautiful building, the St George Orthodox Chapel, erected by his son. Byzantine in architectural style, the interior is an exquisite blend of Greek Orthodox and traditional Filipino art. The chapel embodies the blend of Adamopoulos' own Greek values and his pride in his second homeland of the Philippines. Moreover,

George Lucas Adamopoulos will long be remembered for his roles as newspaperman, industrialist, educator, and diplomat, as well as for the contributions he made to the three nations in which he lived, especially the Philippines where he so successfully fostered education, a traditional and age-old Hellenic ideal.

St George Greek Orthodox Chapel in the Adamson Centre, Manila.

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