

The Kymi Odyssey Honorary Ceremony and the Future G.N. Papanicolaou Museum: A Personal Appeal for Support, Enrichment, and Visitation

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This *Meeting Report* is a personal narrative. It describes events leading up to, and those likely to follow, Friday, September 15, 2023; what was a historic day for Kymi, Greece, the birthplace of Dr. George N. Papanicolaou, and for clinical cytopathology.

The consultancy, CellPathology Plus, organized *The Kymi Odyssey Honorary Ceremony* in partnership with the Papanicolaou Institute and Mayoral Office in Kymi. The ceremony had humble beginnings; it also had a noteworthy finale. It was conducted in the recently renovated Papanicolaou homestead wherein George N. Papanicolaou lived as a young boy. The very same residence is now poised to house the future G.N. Papanicolaou Museum. Though, whereas September 15, 2023, marked the finish line for one marathon, it conceived the beginning of yet another. These marathons are of significance not only for Kymi, but also for the international cytopathology community, hence this narrative in *Acta Cytologica*.

The odyssey that meandered toward the Honorary Ceremony in Kymi had crystalized 8 years prior. In early January 2015, I visited Dr. R. Marshall Austin in Pittsburg, PA, USA, to discuss academic and collaborative ventures. It was during that visit that we shared an evening casually examining various artifacts pertaining to Dr. G.N. Papanicolaou that Dr. Austin had organized with affectionate custodianship. The compilation of materials included photographs, hand-written letters in Greek, manuscripts, various professional and lay publications, and an original copy of the legendary *Atlas of Exfoliative Cytology*, published in 1954. The assortment also included Dr. D. Erskine Carmichael's biography published in

1973, entitled: *The Pap Smear: Life of George N. Papanicolaou*. Dr. Austin gave me that little gray book as a token of our friendship. Yet, those artifacts formed a special, mutual passion that continues to bond us. We then pondered where and how may these artifacts be organized, catalogued, and curated for the benefit of humanity. It was my natural inclination that they ought to be showcased ideally in Kymi, Greece, Papanicolaou's birthplace. Dr. Austin and I considered this notion repeatedly during our conversations and encounters since 2015. Alas, in parallel with our ongoing careers, this enterprise assumed substance; it also beacons the way toward a noble cause governed by a distinctive momentum, and undoubtedly one all its own.

My inclination eventually placed my wife, Stavroula Chantziantoniou, and I upon a pilgrimage course taking us to Kymi in September 2017. It was a career dream to visit Papanicolaou's birthplace. The surprises that awaited us were stunning and highly motivating, as if pre-planned. Our initial visit point was the Folklore Museum of Kymi, established in 1981 by the Cultural Association of Kymi (<https://meskimis.gr/en/>) (Fig. 1).

Aside from the remarkable historical and traditional artifacts so elegantly curated, the museum also housed an exhibit dedicated to Dr. G.N. Papanicolaou showcasing various photographs and publications (Fig. 2). Nevertheless, the exhibit could not in any way encompass the man and scientist that seemingly stood taller than the Acropolis in Athens, nor possibly reveal the enormity of his life's selfless work toward the betterment of humanity.



Fig. 1. Mrs Stavroula Chantziantoniou by the Folklore Museum (Kymi, Greece, September 13, 2017).



Fig. 3. Papanicolaou homestead (Kymi, Greece, September 13, 2017).



Fig. 2. Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou by the G.N. Papanicolaou exhibit, Folklore Museum (Kymi, Greece, September 13, 2017).

These dilemmas aroused poignant emotions, but they were highly inspirational, nonetheless.

Less than 200 m away from the Folklore Museum is the Papanicolaou family homestead. The stone house in which Papanicolaou lived his youth exhibits traditional architecture. It stands proud and tall, and exudes elegance

and precision. It also then stood empty, yearning to be noticed and for life to return (Fig. 3).

Amidst these revelations, a curiosity began to instill: *Why couldn't the Papanicolaou homestead become a dedicated museum enabled to exhibit not only the life and work of Dr. G.N. Papanicolaou and the evolutionary elements of cytopathology, but also its own history and legacy?*

Two days later, in the Kymi town square that proudly hosts the G.N. Papanicolaou bust, we met with Mr. Nikolaos Piteros, Secretary General of the Cultural Association of Kymi (Fig. 4). It was during that meeting that I proposed a future symposium in Kymi with an objective to inspire the conversion of the Papanicolaou homestead into the G.N. Papanicolaou Museum, and the follow-on aggregation of relevant artifacts from around the world. The idea, far-fetched perhaps, was well received and it espoused a sincere partnership. In contrast, however, the looming marathon was remarkably underestimated both in scale and scope. Yet, while everything in the cosmos, it seems, begins from one, sentinel element, so too did the first marathon.



Fig. 4. From left to right: Mrs Stavroula Chantziantoniou, Mr Nikolaos Piteros, and Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou, town square (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2017).

Accordingly, by 2019, a team of international and local speakers in Greece were enlisted, professional biographies were scheduled along with lecture titles, partnerships were forged with local authorities in Kymi, hotel rooms were reserved, and the relevant logistics were secured for the Kymi Odyssey Honorary Symposium; except for one impassable roadblock that suddenly interrupted this race from the start: COVID-19.

Eventually, in 2020, with very cautious ambitions of a short-lived pandemic, the team agreed to resurrect the project aiming for May 12–14, 2021. The symposium was hence widely announced to raise awareness (Fig. 5). Unfortunately, the announcement was soon thereafter pulled with much disappointment, and the symposium was never realized as planned.

In September 2022, I received a surprise correspondence from Dr. Dimitris Latsis, Assistant Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, at the University of Alabama. He conveyed to me a message from Dr. D. Erskine Carmichael. These communications were truly surreal. As it were, after reading *Papanicolaou Revisited*, a book I co-authored with Dr. Mathilde E. Boon in 2013, Dr. Carmichael requested my acquaintance and I obliged wholeheartedly. Upon our telephone discussions, I advised Dr. Carmichael of the unrealized symposium that aimed to support a new Papanicolaou museum in Kymi, but I also informed him of a second symposium attempt then under consideration for September 2023. We agreed to meet in person at the first opportunity possible. Indeed, my wife and I made the effort and drove to Birmingham, AL, USA, to

meet Professor Latsis and now retired gynecologist, Dr. Carmichael in March 2023. Our meeting awakened another bout of emotions as I silently reflected upon the unbelievable encounter, and the little gray 1973 biography that I had received from Dr. Austin in 2015. Nevertheless, Dr. Carmichael, a composed gentleman by nature, had graciously organized the materials he researched during the 1960s in preparation for his Papanicolaou biography asking if we would accept the artifacts and transport them to Kymi as his personal contribution towards the new museum in memory of Dr. George N. and Mrs. Andromache Papanicolaou, and on behalf of cytopathology (Fig. 6). Dr. Carmichael's gesture made our wishes come true, and we accepted his request with abundant gratitude.

The second run to organize the Kymi Odyssey Honorary Symposium for September 2023 was similarly disrupted, but by the aftermath of COVID-19; a stark reminder that the life we once knew had yet to return. Instead, the idea for an Honorary Ceremony was raised by Stavroula Chantziantoniou to celebrate the life and work of G.N. Papanicolaou, the newly renovated Papanicolaou homestead and future museum, and Kymi's newest inheritance: The artifacts we managed to gather and formally transfer for the new museum. The Honorary Ceremony would be open to the would-be symposium speakers, and visitors from near and afar.

The artifacts donated by Dr. Carmichael included letters; dated photographs with negative prints; anonymized cytopathology reports signed by Dr. Papanicolaou using Pap Class terminology; scientific manuscripts and papers; commemorative postage stamps formally released in the USA and Greece; newspaper clippings and miscellaneous publications; interview notes; correspondences; and relevant books. Dr. Carmichael also produced a live video for the ceremony conveying his greetings for a successful event.

In all, including my wife, Stavroula, and I, 6 additional colleagues traveled from abroad to participate in this event; and their passion, whilst obvious, cannot be overstated. And along with them, additional materials were gathered for the museum: Dr. R. Marshall Austin (USA) brought personal letters of Papanicolaou which were submitted to the Papanicolaou family, photographs, Dr. Carmichael's biography, and an original copy of Papanicolaou's *Atlas of Exfoliative Cytology*. Dr. Mathilde E. Boon and Dr. Lambrecht Kok (The Netherlands) brought books and biographies in various languages. I brought along a copy of *Papanicolaou Revisited* that was graciously donated and autographed by Mr Ernest Knesel (CEO, President, CellSolutions LLC, Greensboro, NC, USA). Visiting also were Dr. Amber D. Donnelly and Ms

ANNOUNCEMENT OF SYMPOSIUM

The Kymi Odyssey Honorary Symposium celebrates the life & career of Dr. George N. Papanicolaou

For registration and other symposium details, send your email to: Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou

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ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ Ν. ΠΑΠΑΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ
1883-1962

The Kymi Odyssey

Honorary Symposium

Palace Hotel, Kymi, Greece

May 12, 13 & 14, 2021

Οδύσσεια

Της

Κύμης

Τιμητικό Συμπόσιο

Ξενοδοχείο Παλας, Κύμη, Ελλάδα

Μάιος 12, 13 & 14, 2021

International Speakers

Dr. R. Marshall Austin (USA)
Dr. Mathilde E. Boon (*The Netherlands*)
Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou (*Canada*)
Dr. Amber D. Donnelly (USA)
Dr. Andrew S. Field (*Australia*)
Dr. Daniel F. I. Kurtycz (USA)
Dr. Kari Syrjänen (*Finland*)

Special Guests

Dr. Giouli Kokkori
Dr. Efstratios Patsouris
Hon. Athanasios Bourantas
(*Mayor of Kymi*)

National Speakers

Dr. Aristidis Diamantis
Dr. Helen Koutselini
Dr. Nikolaos Margetis
Dr. Emanuel Mastorakis
Dr. Panagiota Mikou
Dr. Ekaterini Politi

Organized by: *CellPathology Plus* (Richmond Hill, Canada) - In partnership with: *Mayor's Office* (Kymi & Aliveri, Greece)

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Fig. 5. Announcement of Symposium; *Acta Cytologica* (2020, Vol 64).

Debbie Jacobsmeier (USA); Ms Sasha R. Milenkoff (State of Qatar), and from Athens, Dr. Panagiota Mikou represented the Scientific Committee of the Papanicolaou Institute (Fig. 7).

The Mayor of Kymi, Mr Athanasios Bourantas, and officials from the regional municipal agencies attended, as did representatives from professional, medical, and lay organizations. The honored international guests enjoyed a



Fig. 6. From left to right: Dr. D. Erskine Carmichael, Mrs Stavroula Chantziantoniou, and Dr. Dimitris Latsis. Organized materials (Birmingham, AL, USA, March 10, 2023).



Fig. 7. From left to right: Dr. R. Marshall Austin, Dr. Panagiota Mikou, Dr. Amber D. Donnelly, Ms Debbie Jacobsmeier, Dr. Mathilde E. Boon, Ms Sasha R. Milenkoff, Mrs Stavroula Chantziantoniou, and Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou. The foreground tables at the Kymi Palace Hotel organized the materials gathered and donated for the future museum (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2023).



Fig. 8. From left to right: Ms Sasha R. Milenkoff, Dr. Mathilde E. Boon, Dr. R. Marshall Austin, Dr. Nikolaos and Mrs Stavroula Chantziantoniou (Kymi, Greece, September 14, 2023).

splendid seaside dinner and mementos courtesy of the Mayor's Office, a guided tour of the Kymi G.N. Papanicolaou General Hospital, and of the Kymi Folklore Museum prior to the ceremony on September 15, 2023 (Fig. 8).

The Honorary Ceremony was attended by over 150 people in the newly renovated Papanicolaou homestead. The home has regained its splendor through stunning craftsmanship adorned by stonework, marble flooring and staircases, traditional wooden windows and shades, and an upper-level lecture hall with parquet flooring (Fig. 9, 10). The lower levels are dedicated to the new museum proper under the command of a team of curators and architects to design and install the appropriate displays. The Honorary Ceremony's program included a presentation through which I described historical insights lending a sense of chronology and significance to the artifacts donated (Fig. 10, 11). The event was a tribute to the life achievements of Dr. G.N. Papanicolaou and was moving for both the honored international visitors and the local authorities, but also for the attending citizens of Kymi. The ceremony included commemorative mementos for the international guests, traditional foods, garments, and dances, and all the emotions of a celebration in our Hellenic culture.

Dr. Mathilde E. Boon and I dedicated our book, *Papanicolaou Revisited*, in memory of Dr. George N. and Andromache Papanicolaou (Fig. 12), and along with Carmichael's biography, donated by Dr. R. Marshall Austin, these artifacts became the first symbolic installations for the future museum (Fig. 13).

The Grand Opening Ceremony of the future museum is tentatively scheduled for mid-August 2024. It promises to be an equally spectacular event. A formal symposium is also under consideration by the Papanicolaou Institute in Kymi to coincide with this historic celebration. These events will be announced accordingly in due course. Despite the



Fig. 9. Main entrance reception, Papanicolaou homestead (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2023).

heartaches, the disappointments, and COVID-19, it is nonetheless gratifying to see that the unrealized symposia created the needed momentum toward a worthy museum in the renovated Papanicolaou homestead. With time, Dr. Pap's odyssey, and the evolutionary saga of cytopathology, may be professionally curated and proudly exhibited in *their* homestead for generations to come.

The second marathon conceived by the Honorary Ceremony considers the implementation of cytopathology services in the G.N. Papanicolaou General Hospital in Kymi and the receipt of additional artifacts for the future museum.



Fig. 10. Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou, Honorary Ceremony presentation (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2023).

I remain eager to facilitate these efforts. As such, the international cytopathology community is herewith urged to support these dynamics, to enrich the future museum, and plan for ongoing visitation. If nothing else, the Honorary Ceremony showcased a true inheritance for humanity and Kymi, and staged the ultimate memorial for Dr. George Nicholas and Andromache Papanicolaou that they so much deserved.

I sincerely and gratefully thank Drs. R Marshall Austin and Mathilde E. Boon for being my mentors and the driving forces behind these achievements, and all our friends, colleagues, and mentees that similarly strove for an honorable cause.

Without reservation, I may now restfully assert that cytopathology has acquired a homestead in Kymi, Greece; and all that it needs henceforth is support, adornment,



Fig. 11. Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou presenting Dr. Carmichael's biography (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2023).



Fig. 12. From left to right: Mrs Iliana Zioga (Museum curator) and co-authors Drs. Mathilde E. Boon and Nikolaos Chantziantoniou dedicating a copy of Papanicolaou Revisited (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2023).

and visitation. I call upon all cytologists to visit the future G.N. Papanicolaou Museum in Kymi and to, amongst other splendors, also witness the tri-autographed copy of *Papanicolaou Revisited* – the book that sparked a marathon. And a marathon that may never end given the book's most-appropriate title.

Acknowledgments

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Fig. 13. From left to right: Mrs Iliana Zioga (Museum curator), Dr. Giorgios Zervas (local Physician and Papanicolaou Institute official), Mr Athanasios Bourantas (Mayor of Kymi), Dr. Nikolaos Chantziantoniou, and Mrs Maria Samara-Gkotsi. First symbolic artifact installations for the new museum (Kymi, Greece, September 15, 2023).

Statement of Ethics

The author verbally requested and received publication consent from the individuals evident in the photos.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest arising from this work.

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