

Emblematic Greek Figures

Alexander the Great



Born: July 356 BC, Pella

Died: June 323 BC, Babylon

Nationality: Greek

Alexander III of Macedon, commonly known as Alexander the Great, was a king of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon and a member of the Argead dynasty. He was born in Pella in 356 BC and succeeded his father Philip II to the throne at the age of 20. The Greek philosopher Aristotle tutored the teenage Alexander during Phillip II's reign. Scholars have attributed Alexander's diplomatic skills and habit of carrying books with him on his military campaigns to Aristotle's influence.

Alexander took the throne at age 20 after his father's assassination. He quickly harnessed the military forces of the Hellenic League, assembling an army of more than 43,000 infantry and 5,500 cavalry.

In 334 B.C., he led the Macedonian army across the narrow straits of the Hellespont (today called the Dardanelles) into northwest Turkey. In one long military campaign that lasted 11 years, he conquered the Persian Empire, making Macedonia the largest, most powerful empire in the world.

Alexander the Great's Macedonian Empire spanned from Greece to India. He died of unknown causes in 323 B.C. in the ancient city of Babylon, in modern-day Iraq. He was just 32 years old.

Quotes

There is nothing impossible to him who will try.

I am indebted to my father for living, but to my teacher for living well.

Remember upon the conduct of each depends the fate of all.

Mikis Theodorakis



Michael "Mikis" Theodorakis is a Greek songwriter and composer who has written over 1000 songs. He scored for the films *Zorba the Greek*, *Z*, and *Serpico*.

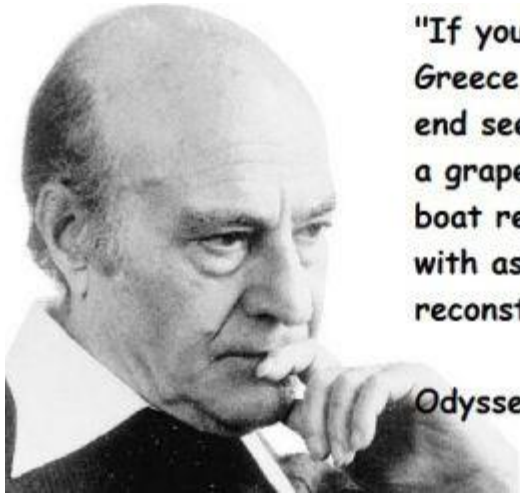
Born: July 29, 1925, Chios

His fascination with music began in early childhood; he taught himself to write his first songs without access to musical instrument and he gave his first concert at the age of seventeen. He went to Athens in 1943. During the Greek Civil War he was arrested, sent into exile. His most significant and influential works are based on Greek and world poetry – *Epiphania* (Giorgos Seferis), *Little Kyklades* (Odysseas Elytis), *Axion Esti* (Odysseas Elytis), *Mauthausen* (Iakovos Kambanelis), *Romiossini* (Giannis Ritsos), and *Romancero Gitano* (Federico Garcia Lorca). In 1964, he wrote the music for the Michalis Kakoyiannis film *Zorba the Greek*, (Zorba Played by Anthony Quinn) whose main theme, since then, exists as a trademark for Greece. It is also known as 'Syrtaki dance', inspired from old Cretan traditional dances.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZWoQZ2oH2Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UV6HVMRmdk>

Odysseas Elytis



"If you deconstruct
Greece, you will in the
end see an olive tree,
a grapevine, and a
boat remain. That is,
with as much, you
reconstruct her."

Odysseas Elytis

Born: November 2, 1911, Heraklion, Crete

Died: March 18, 1996, Athens

Education: Sorbonne, National Kapodistrian University of Athens

Awards: Nobel Prize in Literature

Odysseus Elytis was regarded as a major exponent of romantic modernism in Greece and the world. In 1979 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. His poetry has marked, through an active presence of over forty years, a broad spectrum of subject matter and stylistic touch with an emphasis on the expression of that which is passionate.

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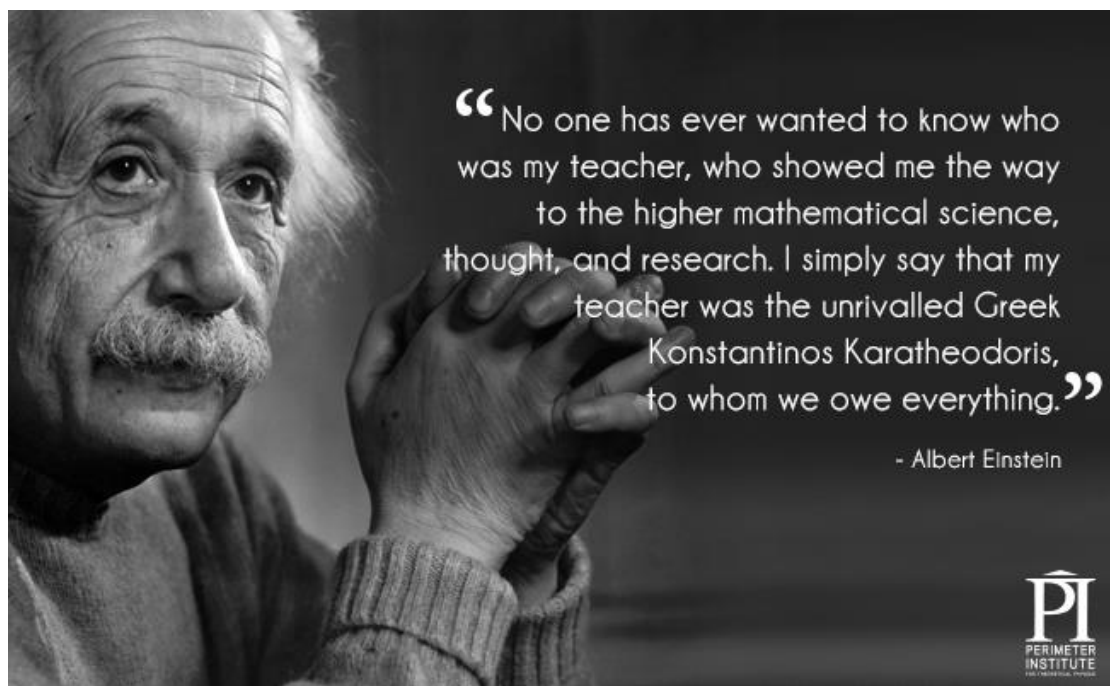
Konstantinos Karatheodori



Born: September 13, 1873, Berlin

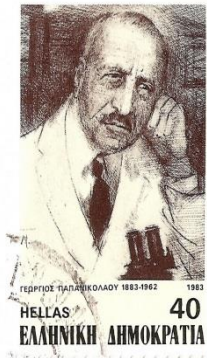
Died: February 2, 1950, Munich

Konstantinos Karatheodori was a Greek mathematician who spent most of his professional career in Germany. His father Stephanos, a lawyer, served as the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin. He made significant contributions to the theory of functions of a real variable, the calculus of variations, and measure theory. He was the teacher of Albert Einstein. Einstein himself said about Karatheodori:



"You ask me to answer to all sorts of questions, but no one has ever wanted to know who my teacher was, who showed me the way to higher mathematical science, thought and research. I simply say that my teacher was the unrivalled Greek Konstantinos Karatheodori, to whom we owe everything..."

Georgios Papanikolaou



Born: May 13, 1883, Kymi, Greece

Died: February 19, 1962, Miami, Florida, USA

Georgios Nikolaou Papanikolaou was a Greek pioneer in cytopathology and early cancer detection, and inventor of the "Pap smear".

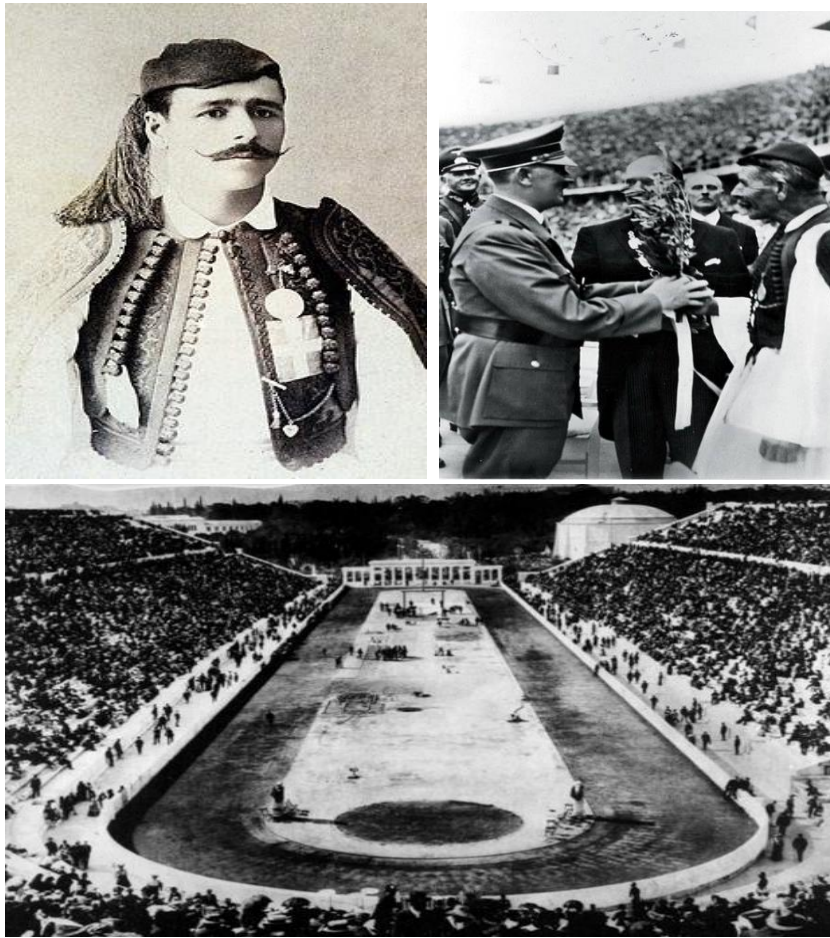
Papanikolaou studied at the University of Athens, where he received his medical degree in 1904. Six years later he received his PhD from the University of Munich, Germany. In 1913 he emigrated to the U.S. in order to work in the department of Pathology of New York Hospital and the Department of Anatomy at the Cornell Medical College Cornell University. He first reported that uterine cancer could be diagnosed by means of a vaginal smear in 1928, but the importance of his work was not recognized until the publication, together with Herbert Frederick Traut (1894–1963), of *Diagnosis of Uterine Cancer by the Vaginal Smear* in 1943. He thus became known for his invention of the Papanicolaou test, commonly known as the Pap Test, which is used worldwide for the detection and prevention of cervical cancer and other cytologic diseases of the female reproductive system.

Asclipios



Asclipios was a god of Medicine in ancient Greek Religion and Mythology and represents the healing aspect of the medical arts. He was born in ancient Trikki, now named Trikala. He was the son of Apollo and, according to the earliest accounts, a mortal woman named Coronis. The most ancient and the most prominent aslcepeion (or healing temple) according to the geographer of the 1st century BC, Strabo, was situated in Trikala. From the 5th century BC onwards the cult of Asclepius grew very popular and pilgrims flocked to his healing temples (Asclepieia) to be cured of their ills. Ritual purification would be followed by offerings or sacrifices to the god (according to means), and the supplicant would then spend the night in the holiest part of the sanctuary – the abaton (or adyton). Any dreams or visions would be reported to a priest who would prescribe the appropriate therapy by a process of interpretation. Some healing temples also used sacred dogs to lick the wounds of sick petitioners. In honor of Asclepius, a particular type of non-venomous snake was often used in healing rituals, and these snakes — the Aesculapean Snakes — slithered around freely on the floor in dormitories where the sick and injured slept. These snakes were introduced at the founding of each new temple of Asclepius throughout the classical world.

Spyros Louis



Born: January 12, 1873, Athens

Died: March 26, 1940, Athens

Spyridon Louis, commonly Spyros Louis, was a poor Greek water-carrier who won the first modern-day Olympic marathon at the 1896 Summer Olympics. Following his victory, he was celebrated as a national hero. A former soldier, Louis was encouraged to try out for the Olympics by his former commanding officer. After his victory, Louis received gifts from many countrymen, ranging from jewellery to a lifelong free shave at a barber shop. It is unknown whether Louis accepted all these gifts, although he did take back home the carriage he had asked of the king. After the Olympics, Louis ended his athletic career to become a farmer and a police officer. His last public appearance came in 1936, when he was invited to be a guest of honour by the organizers of the 1936 Summer Olympics, held in Berlin. After bearing the standard of the Greek team during the opening ceremonies, he was received by Adolf Hitler and offered him an olive branch from Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic Games, as a symbol of peace.

Vasilis Tsitsanis



Born: January 18, 1915, Trikala

Died: January 18, 1984, Royal Brompton Hospital, UK

Tsitsanis was born in Trikala. From a young age, Tsitsanis was interested in music and learnt to play the violin, mandola and the mandolin which were the mainstay of so many of his songs. In 1936 he left for Athens to study Law, and by 1937, had learned also bouzouki and made his first musical recording.

In 1938, he moved to Thessaloniki, where he served his military service, and stayed there for about ten years, during the German occupation of Greece. There he became famous, opened also an tavern, got married and wrote many of his best songs that were later recorded after the end of the War. By the shut-down of the record companies by the German occupation Forces in 1941, he had already recorded about 100 of his own songs and played on many recordings of other composers.

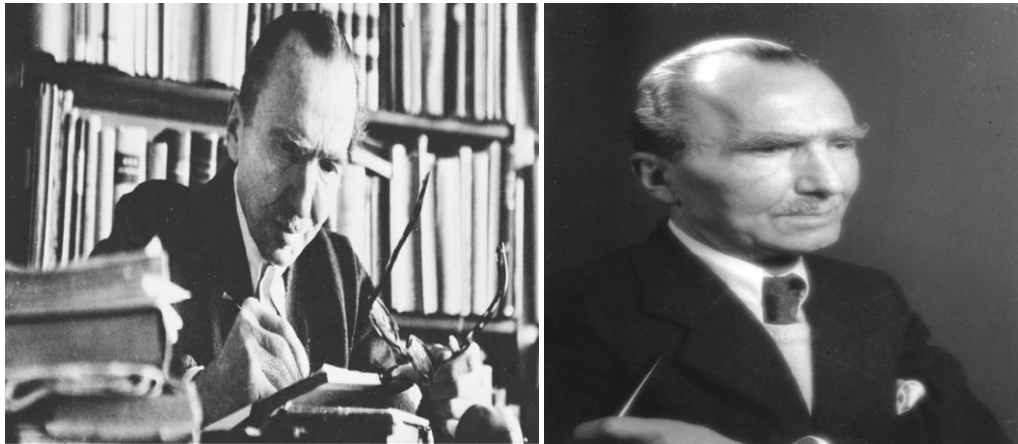
In 1946, Tsitsanis returned to Athens and began recording many of his own compositions that made famous many of the singers that worked with him, such as Sotiria Bellou (*Σωτηρία Μπέλου*). Tsitsanis developed the "westernization" of the rebetiko and made it more known to large sections of the population, setting also the bases for the future *Laiko* (something like Folk music)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiFdBWx_zA8

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2mVTBwSyjY&list=RDG2mVTBwSyjY&start_radio=1&t=156

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPJSqnMPno4>

Nikos Kazantzakis



Born: February 18, 1883, Crete

Died: October 26, 1957, Germany

Nikos Kazantzakis was a Greek writer. Widely considered a giant of modern Greek literature, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in nine different years. Kazantzakis' novels included *Zorba the Greek*, *Christ Recrucified*, *Captain Michalis*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*. From 1902 to 1906 Kazantzakis studied law at the University of Athens. Then he went to Sorbonne in 1907 to study philosophy. Through the next several decades, from the 1910s through the 1930s, Kazantzakis traveled around Greece, much of Europe, northern Africa, and to several countries in Asia. Countries he visited include: Germany, Italy, France, The Netherlands, Romania, Egypt, Russia, Japan, and China, among others. These journeys put Kazantzakis in contact with different philosophies, ideologies, lifestyles, and people, all of which influenced him and his writings. Kazantzakis would often write about his influences in letters to friends, citing Sigmund Freud, the philosophy of Nietzsche, Buddhist theology, and communist ideology and major influences.

Quotes:

Every perfect traveler always creates the country where he travels.

In order to succeed, we must first believe that we can.

I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free.

Maria Callas



Born: December 2, 1923, New York, USA

Died: September 16, 1977, Paris, France

Maria Callas, Commendatore OMRI was an American-born Greek soprano. She was one of the most renowned and influential opera singers of the 20th century. Many critics praised her bel canto technique, wide-ranging voice and dramatic interpretations. Born in New York City to Greek immigrant parents, she was raised by an overbearing mother who had wanted a son. Maria received her musical education in Greece at age 13 and later established her career in Italy. Forced to deal with the exigencies of 1940s wartime poverty and with near-sightedness that left her nearly blind onstage, she endured struggles and scandal over the course of her career. She turned herself from a heavy woman into a svelte and glamorous one after a mid-career weight loss. The press exulted in publicizing Callas's temperamental behavior and her love affair with Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis. "More than forty years after her death, she's still the definition of the diva as artist—and still one of classical music's best-selling vocalists.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYI8GRJGnBY>

Aristotelis Onasis



Born: January 20, 1906 Konak, Minor Asia, Turkey

Died: March 15, 1975, France

Education: Evangelical School of Smyrna

Aristotle Socrates Onassis was a Greek shipping magnate who amassed the world's largest privately owned shipping fleet and was one of the world's richest and most famous men. Onassis was born in Smyrna (modern day Izmir in Turkey) and fled the city with his family to Greece in 1922, when the Turks set the city on fire. He moved to Argentina in 1923 and established himself as a tobacco trader and later a shipping owner during the Second World War. Moving to Monaco, Onassis fought Prince Rainer III for economic control of the country through his ownership of SBM and its Monte Carlo Casino. In the mid 1950s he sought to secure an oil shipping arrangement with Saudi Arabia, and engaged in whaling expeditions. In the

1960s Onassis attempted to establish a large investment contract, Project Omega, with the Greek military junta, and sold Olympic Airways which he had founded in 1957. Onassis was greatly affected by the death of his 24-year-old son, Alexander, in a plane crash in 1973, and died two years later.

Quotes:

The secret of business is to know something that nobody else knows.

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.

We must free ourselves of the hope that the sea will ever rest. We must learn to sail in high winds.

Manos Hatzidakis



Born:October 23, 1925, Xanthi, Greece

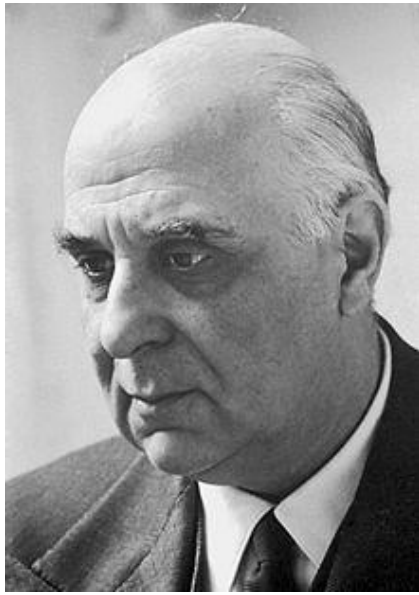
Died: June 15, 1994,Athens

Education: National Kapodistrian University of Athens

Manos Hatzidakis was a Greek composer and theorist of Greek music. His musical education began at the age of four and consisted of piano lessons from the Armenian pianist Altunian. At the same time, he learned to play the violin and the accordion. the beginning of World War II, brought the family into a difficult financial situation. The young Hatzidakis earned his living as a docker at the port, an ice seller at the Fix factory, an employee in a photography shop and as an assistant nurse at the 401 Military Hospital. He wrote countless songs and music for Greek films.In 1960 he received an Oscar Academy Award for Best Original Song for his song “Never on Sunday” from the film of the same name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCFXGanTx4A&index=1&list=RDYCFXGanTx4A>

Giorgos Seferis



Born: March 13, 1900, Urla, Turkey

Died: September 20, 1971, Athens

Awards: Nobel Prize in Literature

Education: University of Paris

Giorgos Seferis was a Greek poet-diplomat. He was one of the most important Greek poets of the 20th century, and a Nobel laureate. He was a career diplomat in the Greek Foreign Service, culminating in his appointment as Ambassador to the UK, a post which he held from 1957 to 1962. His father was a lawyer, and later a professor at the University of Athens. In 1914 the family moved to Athens, where Seferis completed his secondary school education. He continued his studies in Paris from 1918 to 1925, studying law at Sorbonne. While he was there, in September 1922, Smyrna/Izmir was taken by the Turkish Army. Many Greeks, including Seferis' family, fled from Asia Minor. Seferis would not visit Smyrna until 1950; the sense of being an exile from his childhood home would influence his poetry, showing itself particular interest in the story of Odysseus. Seferis was also greatly influenced by Kavafis, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Music has been composed for a lot of his poems.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoGdeg2K81c&list=RDYCFXGanTx4A&index=3>

Dominikos Theotokopoulos



Born: October 1, 1541, Crete, Greece

Died: April 7, 1614, Toledo, Spain

Dominikos Theotokopoulos, most widely known as El Greco, was a painter, sculptor and architect of the Spanish Renaissance. "El Greco" was a nickname, a reference to his Greek origin, and the artist normally signed his paintings with his full birth name in Greek letters, "Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος", often adding the word "Κρής", which means Cretan. In 1570 he moved to Rome, where he opened a workshop and executed a series of works. During his stay in Italy, El Greco enriched his style with elements of Mannerism and of the Venetian Renaissance taken from a number of great artists of the time, notably Tintoretto. In 1577, he moved to Toledo, Spain, where he lived and worked until his death. In Toledo, El Greco received several major commissions and produced his best-known paintings.

Laskarina Bouboulina



Born: May 11, 1771, Konstantinople

Died: May 22, 1825, Spetses, Greece

Laskarina "Bouboulina" Pinotsis was a Greek naval commander, heroine of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, and the first woman-admiral of the Imperial Russian Navy. Bouboulina was born in a prison in Konstantinople. She was the daughter of Stavrianos Pinotsis, a captain from Hydra island. The Ottomans had imprisoned Pinotsis for his part in the failed Orlof Revolution of 1769–1770 against the Ottoman rule. During one of her mother's visits she was born. Her father died soon afterward and the mother and child returned to Hydra. They moved to the island of Spetses four years later. She fought against the Ottoman rule. She bought arms and ammunition at her own expense and brought them secretly to Spetses in her ships, to fight "*for the sake of my nation.*" The construction of the ship *Agamemnon* was finished in 1820. She bribed the Turkish officials to ignore the ship's size and it was later one of the largest warships in the hands of the Greek rebels. She also organized her own armed troops, composed of men from Spetses. She used most of her fortune to provide food and ammunition for the sailors and soldiers under her command.