



THE GENESIS AND HISTORY OF THE BOOK.....LIFE IN AUSTRALIA

From Hugh Gilchrist's *Australians and Greeks*,
Volume II. The Middle Years.

Chapter XIV: *Guides for the Greeks*, pages 253-257.

Author: Sponsored by **Ioannis D. Kominos (John D. Comino)**
and largely written by **Georgios Kentavros** and the brothers
Kosmas and Emmanouil Andronikos.

Published in 1916 by Australia Press.

Availability: Out of Print. Rare. Expensive.

Description: Hard cover, 310 pages.



Hugh Gilchrist Presenting credentials as Ambassador for Greece. The Royal Palace. October, 1968.

Between 1915 and 1939 three Greek books were published in Australia. All had a similar purpose: to guide Australia's Greeks and promote their welfare. What they also did was to raise comparisons between aspects of the Greek and the Australian way of life, as then lived.

I ZOI EN AFSTRALIA

I Zoi en Afstralia – Life in Australia – which appeared in 1916, was sponsored by **Ioannis D. Kominos (John D. Comino)** and largely written by **Georgios Kentavros** and the brothers **Kosmas and Emmanouil Andronikos**, Sydney merchants and leaders of the Greek Orthodox Community.

Sub-titled “An Encyclopaedic Book, with many Artistic Pictures, Biographical Notes on Prominent Citizens, Interesting Statistics, a full Commercial Guide, etc, etc”, it also recorded exemplary instances of successful Greek enterprise in Australia. Its aim, as stated by Kentavros, was “to provide useful information about Australia and the Greek community there, both for those already living in Australia and for those who come here in the future.” He firmly denied, however, any intention to stimulate migration, saying: “Not for one minute did we have that in mind, nor have we told a single untruth which might lead people to regard us as advocates of emigration.”

A hard-cover book of 310 pages, *I Zoi in Afstralia* was published in Sydney by the Australia Press. Its setting and printing, however, were done in Melbourne by the Australian Printing and Publishing Company Limited, which, directed by Efstratios Venlis, was printing Australia's first Greek newspaper, *Afstralia*. Ten thousand copies were printed, of which the majority were to be donated to various official bodies concerned with Greek welfare at home and abroad. Today it is one of Australia's rarest books.

I Zoi en Afstralia provided facts, figures and photographs of many aspects of Australian life: history, population, constitution, government, industry, transport, and communications with Europe. It outlined—very sketchily—the history of Greek settlement in Australia, especially in New South Wales, and of the activities of the Greek Orthodox Church and its Sydney and Melbourne Communities. Practical information was offered on Australian immigration policy, labour laws and business practices, and on the functions of the Greek Consulates. Some 215 brief biographies followed, in most cases adorned with photographs, of Greeks who had succeeded in Australia – most of them as shop-keepers in New South Wales – and who were praised for their industry, philanthropy and philhellenism.

Compilation of the book, Kentavros declared, had been no easy task; nor had its compilers received as much co-operation from their compatriots as they had hoped. Many of our compatriots refused or disregarded our requests for information—and efforts to identify every Greek in Australia had fallen far short of success. When attempts to elicit replies to letters proved largely futile the authors had visited Greeks wherever they could be found—a slow and costly process; a tour of New South Wales had cost about £1,500.

When the text was nearing completion, Kentavros wrote, “serious difficulties occurred, due to jealousy, indifference and misunderstanding”, and the outbreak of war in 1914 had created “insurmountable obstacles.

“For 14 months we laboured to produce this very difficult and expensive publication, and achieved what many thought impossible: the production of the first book in Australia, about Australia, in the Greek language.”

For its completion he gave credit to the patriotic faith and strong will of John D. Comino, and to the help provided by four Brisbane Greeks: Christos Frylingos, Emmanouil Meimarakis, Theodoros Kominos and

Ioannis Mavrokefalos (John Black), and by TM. Mantzaris in Newcastle and Konstantinos Argyropoulos (Fisher) in Parkes, and also Greeks in up-country New South Wales, “without whose enthusiastic subscriptions the book would never have been published”. (Its price was not recorded.) In a diplomatically-worded reference to the host country Kentavros added:

“On the whole, the laws of Australia, which are to be found in no other country, and the excellent results of their enforcement, have greatly contributed to our venture”; and no official obstacles had been placed in its way while Australia was at war.

The Andronicus brothers seem to have provided most of the book’s factual information, to which Kentavros added an account of his tour in 1914 of the New South Wales north coast. Greeks in other Australian states received scant mention, and were clearly beyond the authors’ financial resources. Despite its shortcomings, however, the authors felt that they had produced a work which Greek communities everywhere would value.

I Zoi en Afstralia’s moral tone was lofty and its message specific: work, honesty, philanthropy, compliance with Australia’s laws, and devotion to the Hellenic fatherland. Its biographical sketches were strenuously complimentary, although Kentavros disclaimed any intention to publicise individuals, saying the aim was to tell the truth about those who had created something good by honesty, industry and efficiency— and “to prod those who think that success comes through a philosophy of ‘easy come, easy go’, or who offer the excuses that the present is not a propitious time for achievement, or that Australians dislike foreigners, or that wages are too low and costs too high, or that nothing can be done unless one is supported”.

Writing of Australian immigration policy, the authors stated that persons with a knowledge of farming were preferred, but that anyone free from contagious disease and able to work was allowed entry

except “people of Oriental origin” (Chinese, Japanese, Indians and Africans), criminals deported from other countries during the last five years, depraved or mentally retarded persons, persons considered to be a danger to public security, and a few other categories; migrants might be subjected to a language examination, but that was “very rare and confined to certain types of case”; anyone entering Australia without official permission, however, risked six months imprisonment and a fine. Intending migrants were told that if they applied to the *Australian High Commission* in London they could expect an answer within 15 days, whereas an enquiry addressed to Australia would not be answered within less than three months.

Advice on nationality was also offered, including a warning by Consul Maniakis that Australian nationality acquired by a Greek had absolutely no effect in Greece, and that a Greek who had not complied with his national obligations before leaving Greece would be prosecuted on his return there; indeed, that the only way to divest oneself of Greek nationality was to have it annulled by royal decree. Nor would a Greek be entitled to consular help unless he had paid his annual “residence fee” of eight shillings to the Consulate.

I Zoi en Afstralia conceded that a Greek could change his name in Australia without formality, but declared that it was better to do so officially and to announce it in the press. Many Greeks in Australia, it went on, had changed their name, but this was not advisable, because it could arouse suspicion, and could also create difficulties on return to Greece. “It is certainly true that long, unintelligible and not easily pronounced Greek names are an obstacle in foreign countries, especially in the British Dominions and among business people; but it is better to leave one’s name as it is, or at the most alter it slightly to make it sound more English, rather than replace it by something quite different.”

Among other practical counsel the authors recommended solicitors Harold I Morgan in Sydney, Eustace Flanagan (of Pavey, Wilson and Cohen) in Melbourne, and O’Shea and O’Shea in Brisbane, as legal

advisers; and, for medical attention, Dr Howard Bullock and Dr Ramsay Sharp in Sydney and Dr Constantine Kyriazopoulos in Melbourne.

“Indispensable guidance” was also given on how a Greek should behave in Australia. Many Greeks, it was stated, flattered themselves that they were superior to Australians in their level of civilization and in their commercial astuteness. On the contrary, *I Zoi en Afstralia* asserted, the Australians—with the few exceptions to be found in all countries—were superior to the civilized peoples of Europe. Greek migrants were therefore advised to preserve their own customs, but also to familiarise themselves with those of the host country. “Shouting, banging the table, gesticulating, rudeness, going about in gangs in the streets, and dirty attire” were things which aroused Australian dislike of foreigners, the authors warned, adding that this was not due to xenophobia. “The Australian, wherever he may be, eats, dresses, sleeps and walks with care and circumspection, and always prefaces his conversation with ‘Please’ and ends it with ‘Thank you’.”

Every Greek was urged to do his duty not only to himself and his family but also to his neighbour in trouble, to Greece, and to the Church, and to pursue the highest Christian ideals. Some had apparently fallen below this standard, for the authors added: “The worst aspect of all—not just for our compatriots in Australia now but for those who may come in future—is that some individuals—probably only a few— after working honestly for years and having made their money, evade their obligations to other businessmen who have behaved honourably towards them, and think it clever to abscond from Australia, persuading themselves that they will never return.” On such persons, they warned, “the heavy axe of justice will inexorably fall, condemning them to six years jail and payment of all debts and costs.”

Contrasted with such delinquents were those who had voluntarily returned to Greece to fight in the recent wars against Turkey and Bulgaria. On them *I Zoi en Afstralia* bestowed the highest praise, listing

23 by name and recalling that many had paid their own passages home to enlist, at great financial sacrifice; and somewhat acidly the authors noted that, although Greek law imposed imprisonment for evasion of the call-up, the Greek Government had made no proper arrangements to help men to return to Greece.

I Zoi en Afstralia's account of the discovery of Australia was imaginative, referring to "an ancient Chaldaean legend about a great continent to the south of India", and to rumours brought back by soldiers of Alexander the Great, and to mention of Australia by the ancient geographers Aimilianos, Manilios and Ptolemy, and alleged Arab visits before the Dutch and Portuguese.

On firmer ground was Kentavros's account of his ten day tour of northern New South Wales. Armed with a suitcase and a rug, he took the train to Taree and by various means reached Murwillumbah, calling on Greeks in the region's towns, and travelling up the Manning River in the motor-launch *Ariadne*, operated as a ferry service by a member of the Comino family. A hired car and driver took him to Wauchope, Port Macquarie, Kempsey and other towns. He travelled by train to Casino and in a wildly driven buggy from Kyogle to Byron Bay, and ended his journey with a stormy voyage in a small steamer from Lismore to Sydney. Despite bumpy roads and occasional punctures, he found the scenery beautiful and his compatriots hospitable, and he was impressed by the region's dairying and oyster-culture. Every Australian farmer is his own master, he declared, and he fears neither domination nor theft nor loss.

"A future edition", Kentavros hoped, would show Australia's Greeks "demonstrating the same intense love of their native land, as well as higher levels of commercial and social success". And Charles (Kosmas) Andronicus, regretting that lack of space had precluded mention of many interesting aspects of Australian life, declared his intention to remedy this in the next edition. None eventuated, but *I Zoi en Afstralia* retains a unique place in the history of Greek settlement.