**ONASSIS INTERNATIONAL PRIZES**

**LAUDATION**
**For the**
**NATIONAL CENTRE FOR HELLENIC STUDIES AND RESEARCH**
**by**
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Athens, 18th October 2006

Your Excellency, Mr President,

Distinguished Colleagues:

It is a privilege and a pleasure to have the opportunity to present this laudation in celebration of the success of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research in the promotion, enhancement and dissemination of Hellenism, not just locally, not just within Australasia and Oceania, but in a wider context embracing Latin America and most recently China.

I want at the outset to stress the vital and immediate significance of these activities not just for Hellenes but for the world at large as society adopts an increasingly utilitarian focus and is faced with unrelenting pressure to devalue its cultural heritage, a heritage that in the west owes so much to the contributions of Hellenism. In the struggle to prevent a descent into an arid and functionally-oriented society, redolent of the nightmare outlined in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and lacking respect for culture and the arts generally, Hellenism is in the forefront. For, just as in antiquity it provided the spark to ignite the flame of genuinely civilized society (as indeed Perikles reminds us in his Funeral Oration, as reported by Thucydides) so now it must be strongly promoted to keep this flame from being extinguished. This was, of course, famously recognized and expressed by the English poet Shelley, who wrote some two hundred years ago in his poem *Hellas* .. "We are all Greeks – our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece. But for Greece, Rome …. Would have spread no illumination with its arms, and we might still have been savages". Shelley's words, of course, relate to western society but they have relevance still today to remind us of our debt and to assist others in understanding the fundaments of western society, culture and thought. And in this general context the mission and objectives of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research are highly topical and their achievements are, I believe, magnificent and laudable.

The National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research was established in 1997 at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia (a city with a substantial Greek component) and its rapid growth has been facilitated by the strong support and commitment of the University, by the beneficence of many eminent Hellenes, notably Dr Zissis Dardalis, by the encouragement of the governments and other bodies in Greece and Cyprus, and above all by the enthusiastic participation of the Hellenic communities throughout Australia. The vision of the Centre, the success of which has been frequently and admirably attested , is to promote Hellenism in the broadest sense of that term within the university and within the local communities and to disseminate it to a still wider audience internationally, notably in Asia. Its ambit is comprehensive, encompassing the history of the diaspora in the Australasian and Oceanic regions, the state of the Greek language in its various constituencies, the study and promotion of Greek-Australian literature, significant biographical studies, the building of substantial archival repositories, and epigraphical, historical and prosopographical studies from antiquity. Within the Centre there are also separate Institutes for Pontic and Asia Minor Studies, for Cypriote Studies and for Macedonian Studies as well as sections concerned with outreach to the community at large and with Hellenic business within the diaspora.

Amongst the wealth of activity from these Institutes and sections I would highlight especially the interaction with secondary schools – and I stress this feature for the reason that the future of Hellenism is in the hands of the youth of today and that it is the youth of our society that we need to convince of the value of carrying the torch of Hellenism into the future – no easy task in a blatantly utilitarian social environment, with little or no respect for the achievements of the past.The National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research has taken this task very seriously and in recent times has organized highly successful student competitions on Hellenic topics, which have to date involved more than 700 schools and more than 10,000 students from all over Australia – numbers that will continue to rise and numbers that, importantly, already include many students of non-Hellenic background. To this highly meritorious manifestation of public outreach should be added the constant stream of exhibitions and lecture series on the part of Hellenes, Hellenists and phil-Hellenes, which along with other features such as the museum, the library and archival collections combine to make the Centre a vibrant public facility.

Quite apart from its outreach to the community the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research is a significant research and archival centre. Two unique and comprehensive archival collections call for special mention as vital repositories of materials for research. Firstly there is the Dardalis Archive of the Hellenic Diaspora, which contains more than seven million items charting the history of the Hellenic diaspora in Oceania, Australasia and South America from the 1880s onwards. This

unique collection, which contains documents and photographs relating to Aristotle Onassis, is being digitized in its entirety and is available with a comprehensive search engine for interested researchers. It offers a unique opportunity for historians of the Hellenic diaspora. Secondly, there is a comprehensive collection of Greek and Balkan newspapers from 1904 to 1994, again providing a wonderful quarry of materials for academic research.

The Centre has itself been very productive in research, boasting some thirty major research publications in its relatively short lifespan in fields as disparate as the history of the Greeks in Australia and Latin America, linguistics, biography and ancient epigraphy and prosopography. It maintains close ties with seven universities in Greece, with the University of Cyprus and with many major institutions with Hellenic interests overseas for the prosecution of co-operative projects.

In terms of promotion of Hellenism and Hellenic Studies the Centre has been very successful not just within Australia but in other countries too, perhaps most notably in recent times in China, where it is playing a key role in the establishment and development of Hellenic Studies in leading Chinese universities. On the eve of Greek independence the poet Shelley wrote the immortal lines:

Another Athens shall arise
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendour of its prime.

It is our duty, and certainly it is an aspiration of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, to ensure that this splendour firstly is not dimmed and secondly is universally appreciated.

Naturally, the meteoric success of this Centre owes much to the enthusiastic support of Hellenes throughout Australia, but paramount credit must deservedly be reserved for the charismatic and energetic Director, Professor Anastasios Tamis, who with his dedicated team of staff has guided the activities of the Centre from its inception and who by his energy and output has inspired the admiration and confidence of the Hellenic community and of all who have visited the Centre.

Mr President, it is with great pleasure that I commend to you the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research of La Trobe University (Melbourne) as a beacon light for the promotion and dissemination of Hellenism and thereby as a worthy recipient of this supremely prestigious award.