



Professor Vassileios Christides (1928 Cairo, Egypt - 2024, Athens)

In Memoriam: Professor Vassileios Christides Father of Arabic Studies in Greece

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On October 21st, 2024, in Athens, the distinguished Greek Arabist, Professor Vassileios Christides, passed away. Born in 1928 in Cairo, Egypt, he graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (1955). He continued his studies in the United States at the University of California, Los Angeles (MA 1962) and Princeton University (PhD 1970), earning a doctoral degree with a dissertation titled *The Image of Pre-Islamic Arabs in Byzantine Sources*.¹ Among his professors were the distinguished orientalist Philip K. Hitti and Bernard Lewis.

Throughout his career, he taught at St. John's College in Annapolis, (1969-1970)) at the University of Minnesota (1970-1971), and at Columbia University (1971 to 1977). He further, served as a visiting scholar at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in 1980, 1996, and as a research fellow in 1999. From 1978 to 1982, he taught at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He taught at the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Ioannina from 1989 until his retirement in 1998.² Professor Christides was the founding figure of Arabic studies in Greece, holding the first Chair of Arabic Culture ever established in a Greek university.

A tireless teacher and dedicated scholar, Professor Christides delivered lectures at dozens of universities around the world, including the Universities of Sorbonne, Berlin, Bergen, Prague, Cordoba, Cairo, 'Ain Shams, Yarmouk, Khartoum, Kuwait, Istanbul, Guangzhou, Johannesburg, Pretoria among others. He was honored with American Philosophical Society Award (1973), the American Council of Learned Societies Award (1973), the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship, University of Oklahoma (2002) and the Honorary Medal of the Department of Asian and African Studies of St. Petersburg State University (2006).

As a devoted seeker of historical truth, he authored hundreds of academic publications³ in numerous journals such as *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, *Le Muséon*, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*,⁴ *Antiquité Tardive*, *Byzantinoslavica*, *Byzantion*, *Berytus*, *American Neptune* and many others. He was member of the External Referee Committee of the journal *Collectanea*

¹ V.Christides, *The Image of Pre-Islamic Arabs in Byzantine Sources*, Princeton 1970 (dissertation)

² For the detailed biography of Professor Christides, see G. Livadas, Biographical Note, *Graeco-Arabica* 9-10(2004), pp. 19-25.

³ For the detailed bibliography of the published works of V. Christides for the period 1962-2004, see Idem, pp. 26-33.

⁴ V. Christides, Religious Syncretism in the Near East: Allat-Athena in Palmyra, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 1(2004) pp. 65-82.

Christiana Orientalia, contributed to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, The Dictionary of Middle Ages, Oxford Encyclopaedia of Maritime History. Among the research areas to which Professor Christides devoted his scholarly work were maritime history, Byzantine and Arab navigation in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean, as well as the comparative study of the different types of ships in the Byzantine and Arab navies. As, the founder of the Institute for Graeco-Oriental and African Studies (1979), he promoted research on Byzantine and Arabic studies and disseminated this knowledge within the academic community by conducting 14 conferences and by publishing 13 volumes of the journal Graeco-Arabica, which was highly praised by the French Academy. Throughout his life, his steadfast companion and supporter was his wife, Evridiki Savvidou.

A significant portion of Professor Christides' scholarly endeavors focused on the Andalusian Emirate of Crete. His monumental work, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam*,⁵ published by the Academy of Athens in 1984, remains the only modern scholarly study on the Emirate of Crete. As a profound connoisseur of Classical Arabic and Greek, he was the first to conduct in-depth comparative studies of written sources in both languages uncovering entirely new evidence about the Cordoban Emirate of Crete and at the same time shedding light on the historical interactions between the Iberian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean.

His numerous activities in the study of the Andalusian period of Cretan history included academic publications⁶ and the organization of conferences, the most notable being held in 2011 and 2019 in Crete. The proceedings of the 2011 conference were published in the 11th volume of Graeco-Arabica by the Vikelaia Municipal Library of Heraklion,⁷ while the proceedings of the later are to be published in 2025.

A diligent researcher of the historical Andalusian presence in Crete, Professor Christides published one of his latest studies, *The Odyssey of the Andalusian Conquerors of Crete: From Cordoba via Alexandria to Crete*⁸ in 2017. In 2018, he participated in a conference in Cordoba commemorating the 1200th anniversary of the "Suburb Revolt", the exile of its residents, and the founding of the Emirate of Crete. Even during our last meeting, together with his wife and Prof. José Esquinas-Alcázar, in the summer of 2024, at the age of 96, he offered to

⁵ V.Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam*, Athens 1984.

⁶ V.Christides, The Raids of The Moslems of Crete in The Aegean Sea Piracy and Conquest, *Byzantion* 51(1981), pp. 76-111; V.Christides, From the Cycle "The Conquest and Occupation of Crete by the Arabs" in Skylitzes' Illuminations: A Naval Battle and the Execution of General Crateros, *Studia Semitica Necon Iranica, dedicated to Rudolf Maruch* (1989), pp.53-64 ; V.Christides, Raid and Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Treatise by Muhammad bn. Umar, the Faqih from Occupied Moslem Crete and the Rhodian Sea Law, Two Parallel Texts, *Graeco-Arabica* 5(1993), pp. 63-102 ; V.Christides, Relaciones entre Creta bizantina y los Omeyas de Siria y al-Andalus, *El esplendor de los Omeyas cordobeses* 2001, pp. 62-67 ; V.Christides, Creta, enlace entre Oriente y Occidente, *Al-Andalus y el Mediterráneo en torno al año mil. La época de Almanzor* 2003, pp. 215-224 ; The Cycle of the Arab-Byzantine Struggle in Crete (ca 824/6 — 961 AD) in the Illuminated Manuscript of Skylitzes", *Graeco-Arabica Ad Cretam Dedicata* 11(2011) p. 17-50 ; V.Christides, The Odyssey of the Andalusian conquerors of Crete: from Cordoba via Alexandria to Crete", *Graeco-Arabica* 12(2017), pp. 21-56.

⁷ Graeco-Arabica, Ad Cretam Dedicata, vol. 11, Heraklion - Crete 2011.

⁸ V.Christides, The Odyssey of the Andalusian conquerors of Crete: from Cordoba via Alexandria to Crete, *Graeco-Arabica* 12(2017), pp. 21-56.

travel and speak at a potential conference in Crete to promote the twinning of the cities of Heraklion and Cordoba based on their shared historical and cultural heritage.

This was Vassileios Christides: a kind, honest, and selfless seeker of truth, a great scholar committed to his mission until the very end. His monumental work, ethical stature, and way of life stand as a lasting legacy to the global academic community, the peoples of the Mediterranean, and especially the peoples of Spain and Greece.

May our Lord rest his soul in peace.