

THE “OPHTHALMIATRION” AS A MONUMENT IN THE HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY GREEK OPHTHALMOLOGY¹

by

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The history of contemporary Greek Ophthalmology theoretically begins in 1835, soon after the liberation from the Turkish yoke, and the establishment of the new nation. At this time, Dr. JOHN COLETIS founded the “Establishment for the Instruction of Surgery, Pharmacology and Medicine”, which naturally included Ophthalmology. This school must be considered the forerunner of the Medical Faculty of Athens University, which was formally established in 1837, with JOHN OLYMPIOS appointed as its first Professor of Surgery, which included the teaching of Ophthalmology, the latter becoming a separate entity later.

After some years, in 1842, a group of Athenian philanthropists decided to found a special hospital for the treatment of eye diseases, which at that time were widespread, favoured by the existing unhygienic conditions, dust and flies, frequently causing blindness.

¹ This subject was first presented by Dr. Fronimopoulos in a speech at the meeting of A.O.L., May 9th, 1981, Acapulco, Mexico.

QUEEN AMALIA (*fig. 1*), was informed of this movement, and accepted with pleasure the patronage of the institution; thus the hospital was officially founded the next year, in 1843, by royal order.

Financial support for this scheme was gathered with great enthusiasm, although meeting with little response, so that only after four years, in 1847, the foundations of the hospital were laid at a specially organized ceremony. The location selected for the building was near the University, thus facilitating the teaching and training of students.

This beneficial institution is said by historians to be the first of its kind founded during the revival of the new nation.

Unfortunately, after the foundations were laid, certain factors delayed the continuation of work on the hospital. Thus, the first design by the famous architect, Christian Hansen, based on a strictly neo-Greek classical style, could not be realised because of financial problems. After the departure of Hansen, another architect, Lissandros Kaftantzoglou, changed the original plan of the building according to the wishes of KING OTTO, to the Byzantine style (*fig. 2*). Finally, seven years later, in 1854, the building was completed, and this, in practice, should be considered as the beginning of contemporary Greek Ophthalmology.

In the same year, 1854, ANDREAS ANAGNOSTAKIS (*fig. 3*), returned to Athens after a long period of studies in Europe, and was appointed Director of the institution, then bearing the name "Hospital for Eye Sufferers in Athens". After a while, he changed the name to "Ophthalmiatrion", and in 1856 was elected by the Medical Faculty to be the first Professor of Ophthalmology, and Director of the University Eye Clinic, established in the same building.

The success of the activities, under the direction of ANAGNOSTAKIS, of the Ophthalmiatrion, (which during a political change came totally under the administrative control of the University), proved the necessity for extension of the building.

The extension constituted the addition of a second floor, designed by the architect Gerassimos Metaxas. Thus, the building took its final form — preserved until this day (*fig. 4*). The external and internal Byzantine style of the building was completed with fine decoration, giving a specially aesthetic harmony to this traditional institution.

The fact that the Ophthalmiatrion was established so soon after the liberation was the main cause for the projection and advance of new Greek Ophthalmology.

After the death of A. ANAGNOSTAKIS in 1897, (whose name is associated with his ophthalmoscope, a modification of, and improvement on, the complicated original by HELMHOLTZ, and those of FOLLIN and NACHET,



Fig. 1: Queen Amalia (1818–1875), the first Queen of Greece, patroness and founder of the Ophthalmiatrion.
Portrait in oil, Ophthalmiatrion.

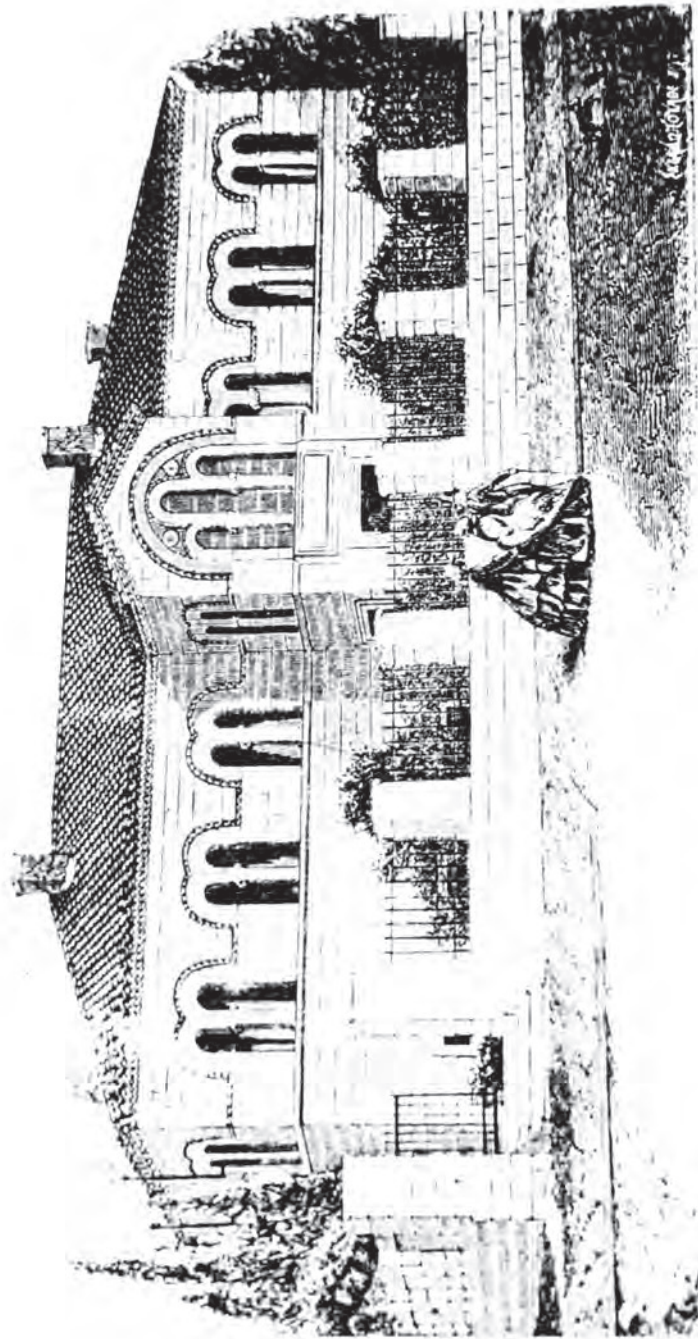


Fig. 2: The Ophthalmiatrion, as it first appeared.

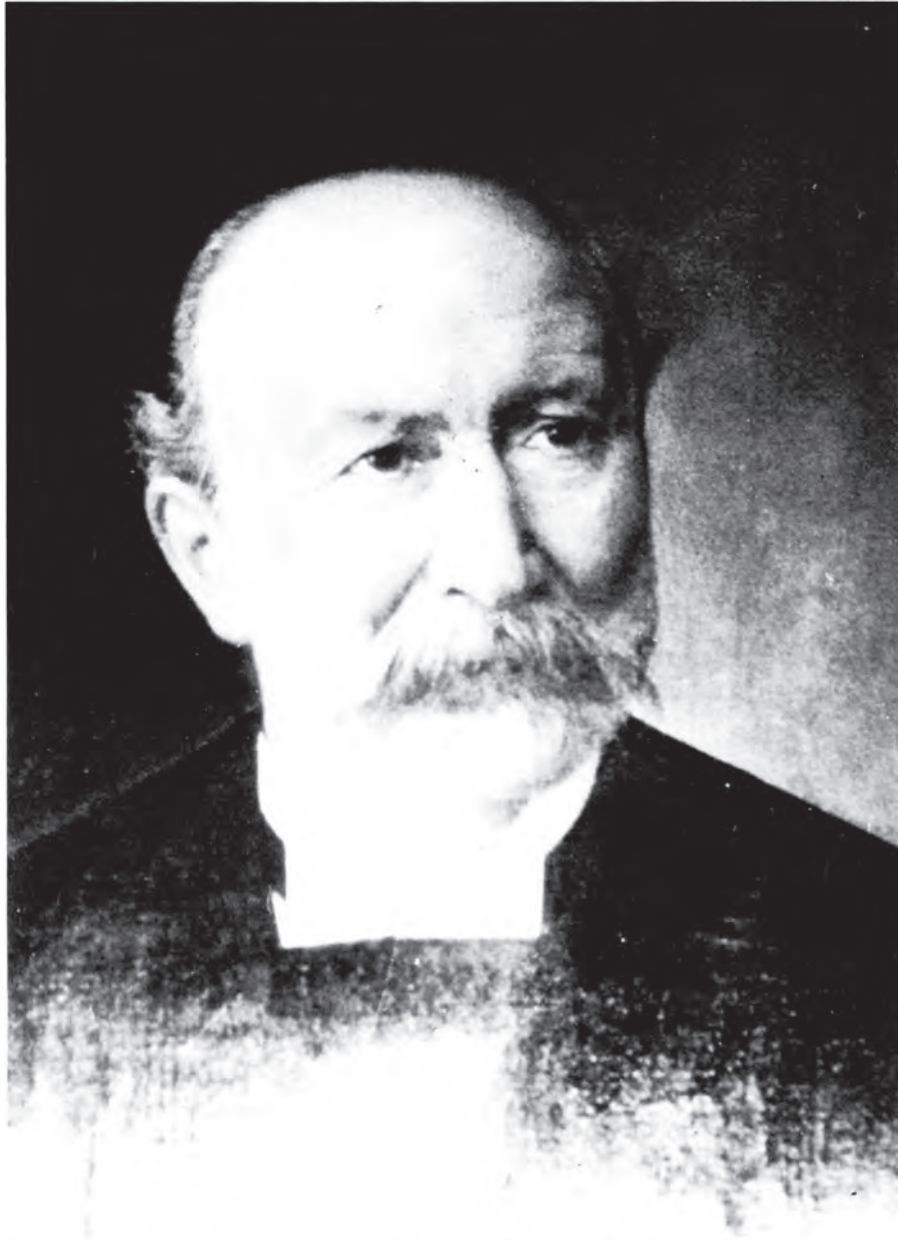


Fig. 3: Andreas Anagnostakis (1826 – 1897), the first Professor of Ophthalmology and Director of the Ophthalmiatrion.
Potrait in oil, Ophthalmiatrion.



Fig. 5: The Ophthalmion today.

RUETE, COSSINS and JÄGER, and bearing the essential corrections of their defects), NICHOLAS DELLAPORTA was elected in his place.

Two years later, in 1899, he was dismissed, and GEORGE GAZEPIs replaced him as Professor and Director of the Ophthalmiatrion, in which position he remained until 1910, when he, in turn, was dismissed. In the same year, N. DELLAPORTA was re-elected as Professor and Director of the Ophthalmiatrion until 1912, when the chair was split, and there existed two Professors of Ophthalmology: GAZEPIs in the Ophthalmiatrion until his death in 1929, and DELLAPORTA in the Eye Department of the Astyclinic until his retirement in 1922. From then on, only one professor maintained the chair.

In 1908, the Ophthalmiatrion was facing financial problems, and was in grave danger of being closed down. Its director, Prof. G. GAZEPIs, addressed himself to, among others, the famous satirical poet of that time, G. SOURIS, and organised a charity dancing festival in aid of the hospital. This took place during carnival time, in the hall of the Municipal Theatre of Athens.

The poet recited a poem entitled "Eyes", which has remained a classic, praising all kinds of eyes, their colour, movement, cleverness, stupidity, in youth and old age, clerical and aristocratic eyes. It began as follows:

*"Wise ophthalmologists, and you my dear Gazepi,
in this false world of ours, what eyes can make you happy?"*

and ended:

*"and eyes of all, who've come to this wide hall to see
each other and to aid this Clinic philanthropically.
The eyes of this sly world are very diverse in habit,
You can't compare the owl's eyes with those of the rabbit!"*

After the death of GAZEPIs, J. CHARAMIS temporarily directed the Ophthalmiatrion as assistant of the Clinic for two years, 1929–1931, when GEORGE COSMETATOS was appointed as Professor and Director of the University Eye Clinic in the Ophthalmiatrion, where he remained until his retirement in 1947.

At this time, Prof. G. Gosmetatos was replaced by Prof. J. CHARAMIS, who, even after his retirement in 1970, continued working there until his death in 1978, as a member of the administrative council of the Ophthalmiatrion.

In 1973, the University Eye Clinic, with the new Professor, P. VELISSAROPOULOS, who replaced J. Charamis, was transferred to the new building of the "Ophthalmological Centre", (an institution founded through the tremendous efforts of Charamis, a sculptured copper portrait of whom is now embedded in the hall of the Centre). Thus from that time until the present

day, the Ophthalmiatrion has been functioning independently as a private foundation, under the scientific direction of Ass. Prof. J. TSAMBARLAKIS.

Thus it was, that in this traditional institution, ophthalmology was taught for more than a century, by outstanding personalities like A. Anagnostakis and his successors, and in this way, the Ophthalmiatrion proved to be a significant scientific centre, contributing essentially to the education of students and specialists. We must also consider its tremendous help to the Medical Society of Athens, established in 1837, and presided over for twenty years by Prof. A. ANAGNOSTAKIS, who housed the Society for many years in the small auditorium of the Ophthalmiatrion. There, also later was founded the Hellenic Ophthalmological Society in 1931, and housed there until 1975, when it was transferred to the larger auditorium of the Evaglisthos Hospital.

While on the subject of this traditional building with its excellent Byzantine style, preserved to the present day, we must admit its bonds with the history of contemporary Greek Ophthalmology. We must also acknowledge that it was not maintained as it ought to have been by the predecessors of J. CHARAMIS, who from his first days as Director of the hospital, renovated and restored this monumental building, protecting it by all possible means from the ravages of time, and preserving it as a cultural treasure. He also enriched it with a collection of old instruments and books, thus creating a small museum. Therefore, the presence of J. Charamis as Professor and Director of the Ophthalmiatrion for 23 years, and the exceptionally creative work carried out by him, played an important part in the preservation and projection of this monument.

I strongly believe that we must try to preserve such historical and traditional treasures from the passage of time, so that they may never reach the point where their restoration would become a major undertaking, fraught with difficulty.

Greece's intellectual position is indeed most enviable, and the state is obliged to take care of old and new cultural treasures. The Ophthalmiatrion is one such cultural and traditional treasure, not only for Greek ophthalmologists, but for all intellectual and scientific people.

It is a sad fact that technological progress has sometimes stripped us of priceless legacies — old and new art. We must recognize this and not allow our apathy, neglect or careless behaviour to result in destruction.

Today, the Ophthalmiatrion not only represents the traditional form of Byzantine architecture, but also may be seen as the cradle of development for contemporary Greek Ophthalmology; a centre of education for generations of ophthalmologists; a place in which eminent personalities taught science and ethics; a corner-stone in the therapy of eye-patients.

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Eyes

Poem by

G. Souris (1908)

English translation

Kimón Friar (1981)

Wise ophthalmologists, and you my dear Cazepi,
in this false world of our, what eyes can make you happy?

Dull eyes that make you sleepy, till you begin to yawn.
and eyes that flaunt temptation, then make you sin till dawn
eyes that the troubles here of a dark life have blurred,
and eyes that forever open the Gates of Paradise,
all eyes that lead unwillingly to sins unknown, unheard
until you got to the devil, or God knows what foul sties.

Eyes that you swear in truth must be the devil's own,
eyes that will gulp you down with but one glance alone,
eyes that will cast their spells because they see your riches,
nor see you beg for pennies, nor spread a palm that itches.

Eyes that will cast their glances high
and seek there their divine reward,
and eyes that cast their glances low
and scrounge for coins they long to hoard.

Eyes that will darken the light, like bats that flit and scare,
eyes that will open and dazzle you dizzily everywhere,
eyes that will glow deep blue, and eyes with a shrimp's stare
that make you clutch your wallet to cut offentry there.

Eyes whose black splendor poets, who are always thunder-stricken,
warble both night and day with their lyrical desires,
shy eyes that drop their eyelids and almost sweetly sicken
with their false modesty, with hypocritic fires.

But there are other, virgin eyes
with an angelic innocence
whose shyest glances never rise
above a modest eminence.

Eyes that are always mocking, filled with a shameless spell,
eyes that you howl at, bewitched: "May you be cursed in Hell!"
eyes that can make what's crooked look both straight and true,

and eyes so wonderously aroused
they frighten even when they're closed

and then quadruple into four and see behind them too.

Eyes that are oh so sly you'd say they were but made
to swoon away in rapture in loveland's panegyrics,
eyes that were once valcanos but now are spent and staid,
and eyes that glow like emeralds, sung in a thousand lyrics.

Eyes that are dull and stupid, eyes foolish that look blank,
eyes you would say were made to be only eyes, no more,
and some that weep at random, and some by habit dank,
some drip like broken jugs, and some spill out and poor.

Eyes that will open and close, and tell you horrid lies,
and some that still keep looking, although they know not why,
eyes full of reveries, the lovely house of dreams,
the gigolo's languid eyes, filled with encircling flames,
some are Deleliah eyes, and some but female schemes
that long for shopping sprees, for dances, teas, and games.

Eyes that are maddening, cray, where youth within them shines,
where winged passions dwell, where adolescence pines,
eyes of old doddering codgers, seductive glances seeking,
that sometimes spark with flames, with mucus sometimes leaking.

Eyes of a staid society,
or eyes of monks shocked frightfully
and often scandalized until with rage they glare
at those who dare to eat at Lent black caviar.

Eyes that saw Troy destroyed and massacred in blood,
and gloried in blind Homer and in his twanging lyres,
and blind myopic eyes like those of mine that flood
to see black widowed weeds instead of barefoot friars,
and eyes of all who've come to this wide hall to see
each other and to aid'this Clinic philanthropically.

The eyes of this sly world are very divers in habit,
You can't compare the owl's eyes with those of the rabbit!

Summary

The Ophthalmiatrion, the cradle of modern Greek ophthalmology was opened in 1854. Its first director was Professor A. Anagnostakis. This elegant Byzantine building has since then been a center of ophthalmic teaching and patient care.