For thirty years, the vision of Stanley J. Seeger Jr. ’52 *56 has challenged Princeton University to embark upon what has proven to be one of the most exciting and important ventures, both in the humanities and in international studies, that any American or European university has ever pursued. Supported by the Stanley J. Seeger Hellenic Fund, the Program in Hellenic Studies has lived up to this challenge, year after year, in ways which were barely imaginable when the Program was founded. The history of the Program has been the history of a shared journey of discovery. This journey has taken our students, faculty and colleagues all further afield, with greater depth and with greater intensity, into aspects of a tradition whose potentialities have unfolded themselves ever more fully as the work of the Program has proceeded. The present vision of the future of the Program is based on a sense of the excitement generated in us all by this journey of discovery.

It is a journey in time and in space. The Program has striven to offer, to Princeton University and to the world at large, a sense of the full complexity of three millennia of the history of the Greeks. It has done this, on the Princeton campus and in the field (Greece and the Hellenic world at large), in such a way as to ensure that disciplines as widely diverse as classics, classical archaeology, comparative literature, history, anthropology, the creative and the performing arts, and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, are challenged and enriched, each in different ways, by contact with the multiple experiences of the uniquely long and vivid Hellenic tradition.

It is the glorious diversity of this tradition that has been central to the work of the Program. We have explored the evolution of Greek civilization throughout the ages, each stage understood as a living experiment in culture and society in its own times, hence the importance of appointments made in periods and areas that reach far beyond the conventional boundaries of the classical world (in the past) and the national boundaries of the Greek state (in the present). Faculty positions in Byzantine history have been created and filled in such a way as to emphasize both the unique social experience of the Greek Middle Ages and the role of Byzantium as a crossroad between past and present in joining the science and philosophy of the ancient world to its medieval and early modern successors, and as a crossroad between East and West in joining the civilization of the Islamic Middle East to western Europe. The social experience of Greeks in the Ottoman world, and especially the role of Greek merchants in a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mediterranean world divided between Muslim and Catholic powers, enables us to relish the vivid texture of Greek culture under Turkish rule and the complexities of national and religious identity in a not-yet-modern world. In the same way, the flowering of Greek literature at the time of the emergence of the independent Greek State has been set against the wider background of the European Romantic movement, while the great Greek poets of the twentieth century have been read in the context of Anglo-American literary philhellenism. In each case,
consideration of the Greek experience has enriched the work of the disciplines in which these posts were created.

The sense of scale involved in the study of the Hellenic tradition at Princeton is equally important. Here, we have made every effort to incorporate the diversity of the experience of Greek communities scattered across Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa -- not to mention the Greek communities in the New World. In constantly expressing an interest in and openness to the neighbors of the Greeks from Georgia and the Crimea, through Turkey and the Middle East, to Egypt and Africa, the Program has contributed decisively (mainly, at this time, through its sponsoring of lectureships and its postdoctoral, research and visiting fellowships) to the mutual understanding of regions, states and peoples more usually noted for conflicts with the Greeks and with each other. It is thanks to the work of the Program that contemporary Greece has come to be seen, in Princeton and the international academic community, as a privileged observation point from which to view three central preoccupations of the modern age: the peace process in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean; the creation of a wider European community (with all that this implies for the law and culture of a vital modern state); and the nurturing of the environment in the ancient but much-battered landscape of the Mediterranean.

Last but not least, the flexibility of the Program has allowed Stanley Seeger’s challenge to be pursued on every level, moment and context. The constant turnover of visiting, postdoctoral and research fellows has now placed Princeton at the center of Hellenic Studies, as much in Greece as in the United States and the rest of the world. The Stanley J. Seeger Hellenic Fund has made it possible for countless Princeton faculty and students to travel to Greece each year for study, fieldwork, creative activities, and research, exploring and learning alongside their Greek counterparts. From undergraduates making their first visit to Greece under the auspices of classes and workshops supported by the Program to scholars of world renown finding in Princeton (and especially in the unique resources which the Program has built up in Firestone Library) an unequalled environment for research and vigorous discussion, everyone has benefitted, each in different ways. The succession of academic events that draw large and lively audiences from all over campus to the Hellenic seminar room has become like the purr of a great engine, fed, on a day-to-day basis, unpretentiously but with continuous purpose, by what has become (over the years) a firm, unquestioned bond between Princeton University and all that is most interesting and vigorous in Greece and in Hellenic culture worldwide.

It is on this momentum and on this continued sense of the excitement of the task which Stanley Seeger has set us that we can look forward with confidence to even further development of his initial vision. By consolidating and building on the successes of the Program, we aspire to deepen our commitment to Hellenic studies and expand in exciting new directions, at the forefront of knowledge, teaching, and research in the humanities, international studies and the creative and performing arts.

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