

THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF ASIA-MINOR IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF NEA SMYRNI

Mitoula Roido

*Associate Professor, Harokopio University
El.Venizelou 70, 17671, Athens, Greece
mitoula@hua.gr*

Georgitsoyanni Evangelia

*Associate Professor, Harokopio University
El.Venizelou 70, 17671, Athens, Greece
egeorg@hua.gr*

Abstract

The municipality of Nea Smyrni is situated in the southern part of the urban complex of the Attica district in Greece. In this paper we will try to investigate to what extent the contemporary municipality of Nea Smyrni still carries elements of the physiognomy of Asia-Minor. To that end we will look into cultural events, customs and traditions, monuments, important buildings as well as street names in the area. The fieldwork shows that the elements of the old Smirna are still present in the vastly expanded urban environment of contemporary Nea Smyrni.

In addition, the results of the research makes up a table, which indicates that 77 of the 260 streets in Nea Smyrni, originate in Asia Minor, about 40 of them are given names of important figures that affected Asia-Minor in significant ways. Therefore, more than 130 streets in Nea Smyrni have names derives from Asia-Minor.

Keywords: *Nea Smyrni, physiognomy of Nea Smyrni, physiognomy of Asia-Minor*

1. Introduction

The municipality of Nea Smyrni has a long history. Residential development and progress begins in the area after the displacement of Greeks from Asia-Minor. The local history of Nea Smyrni begins when displaced Greeks fled the burning town of Smyrna to avoid the Turkish violence and sought refuge in the fatherland in the beginning of August 1922. The first permanent residents settled in the area in 1923.

In this paper we will try to investigate to what extent the contemporary municipality of Nea Smirni still carries elements of the physiognomy of Asia-Minor. To that end we will look into cultural events, customs and traditions, monuments, important buildings as well as street names in the area.

Since we will use the term “physiognomy” extensively, it is necessary to clarify what it refers to. To that end we will try description of the physiognomy of Nea Smyrni, which is redolent with items found exclusively in Asia-Minor such as:

- monuments, sculptures, churches etc which refer to Asia-Minor
- Street-names inspired by Asia-Minor

Following that, we will proceed with a brief historical account how the refugees from Asia-Minor settled in the area and how this led to the creation Nea Smyrni. This process begins a few

months after the destruction of Asia Minor⁶ as the more affluent Greeks that arrive from Smyrna try to resolve their housing issue. It was them that decided where to build their new houses and the place where they create the new Smyrna (Nea Smyrni).

In the following text we see how the small initial settlement becomes a city. Nea Smyrni develops into a large urban area, which is the result of the circumstances but also greatly facilitated by the refugees' creativity. The fieldwork shows that the elements of the old Smirna are still present in the vastly expanded urban environment of contemporary Nea Smyrni.

2. Definition of the concept "physiognomy of the city"

According to encyclopedic sources "physiognomy" is the sum of all the characteristic traits of a thing or the general impression that it creates (Babinotis, 2002). When we refer to the physiognomy of a place, we examine the place in an anthropomorphic manner in an effort to define its character.

Place and time are the fundamental constituent elements of "physiognomy". Space alone is very abstract and has no character or any particular physiognomy. But when space connects with time and the human presence it becomes a place. It is the presence of man and human activity that render space specific. Place has character and should be seen as an entity which includes the people and their habits that define its physiognomy. (Stefanou J., 1993)

Therefore, although the terms "character" and "physiognomy" refer to place, they can only be conceived as a result of how the specific place becomes perceived by the community of the residents, visitors and users. (Mitoula R., 2000)

All this data play their part in shaping the unique physiognomy of every city. In the following section we will look into how specific cultural elements, such as cultural centers, events, street-names etc in the municipality of Nea Smyrni are manifestations combine to create a physiognomy that is directly connected with the physiognomy of Asia-Minor. This physiognomy of course was shaped and defined by the immigrants from Smyrna as they brought with them their customs, experience, way of life and social organisation. (Tzoulakis, 2012)

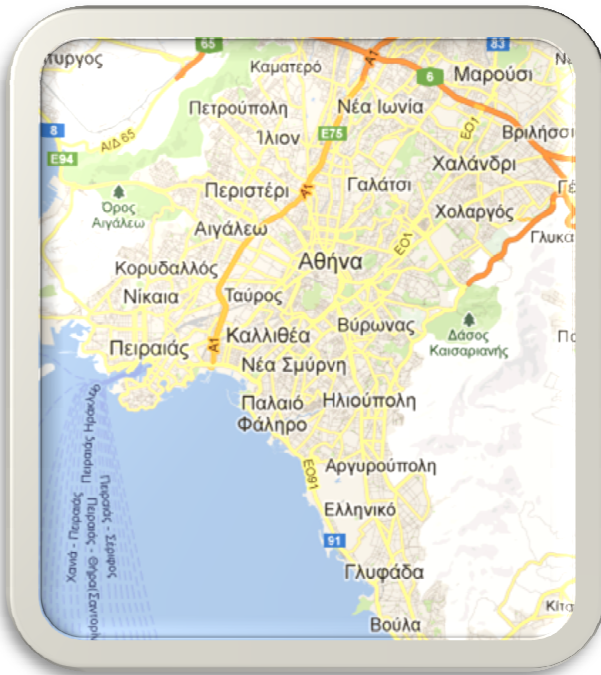
3. Nea Smyrni

The municipality of Nea Smyrni is situated in the southern part of the urban complex of the Attica district in Greece (map 1). On the northern side Nea Smyrni borders with the city of Athens at Kratitos street. On the north-east with the municipality of Dafni with Ainou and Akropoleos streets as limits. On the east it extends until Euxinou Pontou street which is where the municipality of Agios Dimitrios begins. On the south it borders with the the municipality of Palaio Faliro and extends until Psaron, El. Veizelou, Pamfilias, Kyprou and Nazliou street. On the west we find Sygrou Avenue which seperates it from the municipality of Kallithea (map2)

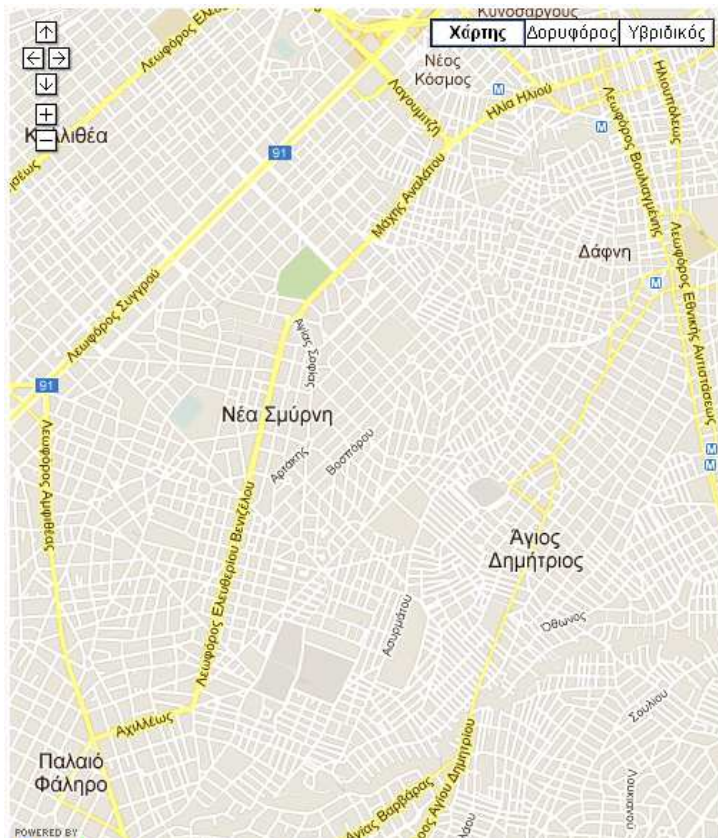
Before the arrival of the refugees, Nea Smyrni used to be barren area full of rocks and dried up streams. The western part was owned by landowners from Plaka area and the eastern part belonged to landowners from Brahami. (Hatzatourian,, V. 1999) A few months after the destruction of Asia-Minor the refugees began their efforts to obtain housing for themselves. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in July 1923, was one of the steps towards resolving this issue. The final choice of the place where the refugees will create their settlements is by no means random or insignificant. The site of the new city is connected with roads with Athens and Piraeus and is situated near both of them. The name that will be used is also self-evident, Nea Smyrni (New

⁶ With the phrase "destruction of Asia-Minor" we refer to "Μικρασιατική καταστροφή", which is the standard Greek phrase used to describe the events of 1922 at the end of the war between Greece and Turkey and underlines the violent uprooting and the accompanying atrocities perpetrated against the Greeks in Asia-Minor. (translator's note)

Smyrna), and the the first refugee residents make clear that they will try to revive their beloved city of Smyrna that will lost to them.



Map 1. Nea Smyrni in Attica



Map 2. Urban Map of Nea Smyrni

In 1924 the Kaligas committee drafts and publishes the "New Athens Plan" which includes the "Urban Settlement of the Refugees From Smyrna" (Pantazis, Ant., 1993), (Pantazis, Ant., 2000). This plan raises a lot of reactions and is soon amended. The amendments, for the most part, concern the widening of the streets. This change proves particularly beneficial for the future development of the city, as it made wide spaces and large streets possible. The area was divided into 3 different types of land properties which were then allocated by lot. Each of the 3 types of allotment had a different price that the settlers were expected to pay. The value of each parcel of land, which was intended for public works in the new settlement, was paid by the new settlers proportionately. Finally, Nea Smyrni started getting built in 1926. During that year 13 new building licenses were issued and the first houses were built. (Ananiadis, Vas. 1990)

The first primary school starts operating in 1929, housed inside a wooden building where we find Taxydromeio square today. During the same period a small temporary chapel dedicated to Saint Fotini functioned for the religious needs of the citizens on the site where the Agia Fotini temple is today.

Between 1933 and 1940, the small settlement of Nea Smyrni is transformed into a city. During that period we see the operation of the first six-grade school as well as the Evangelical School which is housed in a building near the central square. Also the first sports clubs make their appearance during that time.(Ananiadis Vas., 1990). In the following years the population of Nea Smyrni grows rapidly. From 6500 residents in 1934 it reaches 15.114 on the eve of the 2nd world war, 22.074 in 1951, 32.856 in 1961, 42.512 in 1971. By 2001 the population of Nea Smyrni almost doubles reaching 73.986. According to the National Statistical Service the population of Nea Smirni is approximately 100.000 today (Data from the National Statistical Service)

The first houses built in Nea Smyrni were for the most part single-storey or two-storey buildings and their architecture had a lot in common with other similar buildings of the post-war period. Between 1955 and 1960 the first blocks of flats make their appearance around the central square.

The development of the city, its organization and the population growth is not only the outcome of the general historical, political and social conditions in Greece after the German occupation but is also directly connected with the vibrant creative force introduced by the refugees from Asia-Minor. (www.nea-smirni.gr/)

As it will be demonstrated in the following section the immigrants from Smyrna brought with them a particular lifestyle which defined their actions in the new settlements throughout the years. This lifestyle did not manifested itself only in their habits and customs but also actively in the way they reinstated cultural centers, sports clubs, churches etc from Smyrna. At the same time they built monuments and named the streets in a way that would remind them of the fatherland they left behind. Their everyday life was a recreation, to a large extent, of the way they lived in Smyrna. Arguably, then, all the habits, lifestyle, events, monuments, churches etc from Smyrna that were revived in the new country give it the same physiognomy. Most crucial though is the presence of the people themselves, who were first-generation immigrants, people who had direct life experience of the old way of life in Asia-Minor and not just descendants.

4. The Cultural Heritage of Asia-Minor In Nea Smyrni

Today, almost 90 years since the creation of Nea Smyrni, there is still plenty of evidence of the origins of the first settlers. This evidence is not measurable in many cases. However, many buildings, monuments, statues, cultural centers and street-names remain as testament of the Asia-Minor roots. The following section we will try to present a record of the most important amongst them.

Estia N. Smyrnis (Εστία Ν.Σμύρνης): In 1930 the “Union of Refugee Commoners” founded “Nea Smyrni Club”. According to the statute of the Club its aim was the “cultivation of friendly relationships between its members and the creation of means that will be used from here on for the purposes of beneficial social action and recreation”⁷. In 1938 the Club was renamed “Estia Neas Smyrnis” (The Hearth of Nea Smyrni). In the new statute the aims and aspirations of the organization were expanded. Its aim was now to “salvage, collect and study material that relates to the Hellenism of Asia-Minor, as well as to develop social, educational, national and charitable actions”⁸. Since its inception the Club relocated many times. In 1975 it acquired its own building after a donation by Aristotelis Onassis. The architect I. Pavlides design the building that still houses the Club today on the Chrysostomou Smyrnis square.

“Estia Neas Smyrnis” is still today an important cultural center of the city. That's where most cultural events still take place nowadays. The building houses several cultural activities (dance classes, chess lessons etc) as well as a library with close to 50.000 books on the Hellenism of Asia-Minor. There is also a large hall used for the presentation of theatrical productions, showing educational films and other similar activities (www.estia-ns.gr)



Image 1: The building of Estia N. Smyrni

Iosifogleio: The “Iosifogleio” orphanage for boys was the built by the the banker Charalambos Iosifoglou, who was from Asia-Minor. It was built on a 8.415 square meter lot granted by the Greek government. Building was complete in 1929 and the orphanage started operating in 1932. Inside the yard there is the chapel of Agios Charalambos, that was initiated by the founder and completed by his son Homer Iosifoglou. In 1941 the orphanage was commandeered for the accommodation of the occupying forces. After the end of the occupation it operated again as orphanage and later as a “paidoupoli”⁹. Today the building houses the “Agia Varvara” Special

7 «καλλιέργεια φιλικών σχέσεων των μελών της και η εντεύθεν δημιουργία μέσων προς επωφελή κοινωνικής δράσιν και ιδίαν ψυχαγωγίαν»

8 «η διάσωση, συλλογή και μελέτη υλικού που αφορά στον μικρασιατικό ελληνισμό, καθώς και η ανάπτυξη κοινωνικής μορφωτικής εθνικής και φιλανθρωπικής δράσης»

9 A type of institution that housed the children from areas that were ravaged during the Greek civil war. (translator's note)

Vocational School for teenagers which functions as part of National Welfare Organization as well as workshops on pottery, carpentry, sewing and embroidery. (www.neasmyrni.net.gr)



Image 2: The Iosifogleio School, Nea Smyrni

Ethniki Stegi: Founded by the “Association for the Rights of Women” with Aura Theodorakopoulou as president. Since 1922 it functioned initially in Kalithea as orphanage for refugee children. It functioned as orphanage until 1988. The current building was built on land that was donated by the municipality and the whole project was overseen by Eleutherios Venizelos personally. Soulis and Konstatnides were the engineers that designed and supervised the construction and in 1938 the architect P. Manouilides added a new wing to the original building. Today it functions as daycare center and it also hosts several cultural events. (www.neasmyrni.net.gr), (www.lyk-evsch-n-smyrn.att.sch.gr/)



Image 3: Ethniki Stegi, Nea Smyrni

Museum of Pontian Hellenism: The Museum of Pontian Hellenism folklore is a cultural hub of particular significance for Nea Smyrni. The museum's materials consist of the spiritual and material civilization of the Pontic Greeks of Macedonia as well as family relics of Pontic Greeks from the whole of Greece. The museum hosts items from that date between the 17th and early 20th

century. The museum's collections of traditional female garments, historical documents, household objects, photographs as well as the vast archive of historical music, song and voice recordings compiled by Simos Lianides provide a substantial account of the material as well as the spiritual aspects of the civilization of the region. (www.epm.gr)



Image 4: The Museum of Pontian Hellenism

The Evangelical School: Founded in 1934, it is in fact a continuation of the old Evangelical School of Asia-Minor. It constitutes a reference point as well as a place of great significance in terms of cultural heritage. The Evangelical School essentially continues the work of the original school of the same name and offered a lot to the local community of Nea Smyrni in particular and Greece in general. Recently it was renamed to “Model High School of the Evangelical School of Smyrna” (www.lyk-evsch-n-smyrn.att.sch.gr/)



Image 5, 6: Evangelical School in 1934 near the central square of Nea Smyrni and the current building on Lesvou street)

From all the above it can be deduced that Nea Smirni, for the last 90 years following its inception by the refugees from Smyrna, has been full of cultural activities reminiscent of the old town of Smyrna in Asia Minor. In addition to cultural centers and buildings, squares, alongside the grove of Nea Smirni we find statues and monuments by great artists which function as reminders of the “lost homelands” in Asia-Minor. It is worth mentioning the square of Chrysostom of Smyrna (also known as "Monument Park"), with its many busts of people such as Leonidas Paraskevopoulos, Ioannis Sykourtis etc. On the same place there is the statue of Archbishop Chrysostom of Smyrna.



Image 7: The statue of Archbishop Chrysostom of Smyrna, Nea Smirni square.

It is not surprising that we find many orthodox temples in a city with such strong bonds with Asia-Minor. The churches function both as places of worship and as places of memory. The names of many temples derive from temples in Smyrna. Also in many of them are adorned with icons and screens that have been transferred from Smyrna. The screen of the Agia Fotini church for example is from a temple in Smyrna. This temple is a faithful recreation of the one in Asia-Minor. Also, the temples of Agioi Theodoroi (19th century) and Agia Paraskevi are clearly indicative of the Asia-Minor physiognomy. Agia Paraskevi was a small temple in Smyrna that was actually destroyed and was rebuilt in Nea Smirni in 1926 and eventually housed all the religious relics that were salvaged from Smyrna. (www.neasmirni.gr)



Image 8: Agia Fotini



Image 9: Agia Paraskevi

Besides the aforementioned monuments, churches etc which testify the connection with Asia-Minor the customs and traditions of Smyrna are also very visible in Nea Smyrni. The dances, songs and music are also elements of the identity of Asia-Minor that reappear. The refugees from Smyrna brought their music tradition along with their traditional dances with them. All these elements of folk culture have grown new roots in Nea Smyrni and still survive. The most characteristic dances of the area are the Asia-Minor Syrtos, Chasapikos, Karsilamas and Zeimbekikos.

In contemporary Nea Smyrni the old sport clubs of Smyrna, such as Panionios, were revived in the new city



Image 10: The original logo of Panionios sports club



Image 11: The Panionios team of Smyrna

5. Street-names

The Asia-Minor influence is also very pronounced in the names of the streets in Nea Smyrni. As it is generally the custom, the local authorities name cities and events according to the region's history in order to underline the living history of the place. In this manner the the knowledge of history is re-enforced.

The results of the research we conducted in Nea Smyrni indicates that a large portion of the streets have names from Asia-Minor. (Koliopoulou-Griva K., 1978-1983)

The results of this research makes up the following table, which indicates that 77 of the 260 streets in Nea Smyrni, originate in Asia Minor, about 40 of them are given names of important figures that affected Asia-Minor in significant ways. But if one takes a closer look it becomes clear

that about 21 of the names that have religious-christian origins are also derived from Asia-Minor. Therefore, more than 130 streets in Nea Smyrni have names derives from Asia-Minor. (table 1)

Table 1

Asia-Minor (Areas – Institutions)		Significant personalities (that played important parts in the history of Asia-Minor)	Religious – Christian character
Ankara	Mainenmenis	A. Athenogenis	Agiou Andrea
Adanon	Mydias	Ag. Antoniadou	Amv. Moshosiou
Antiocheia	Magnisias	Aroni	Agias Sofias
Armenia	Mersinis	El. Venizelou	Agias Lavras
Artakis	Makris	Voutyra	Ag. Polykarpou
Attaleias	Myraktis	Davaki K.	Agias Foteinis
Amisou	Mykalis	Douka Ouran.	Aimm. Gevenon
Alikarnasou	Nikomedeias	Daniilidou	Ag. Theodoron
Alyos	Nymfaïou	Emmanoulides	Vasileiou Mega
Aidiniou	Nasliou	Eugeniou	Gedeon
Adramutiou	Homeriou	Zarifi	Greg. Kydonion
Amaseias	Odemesiou	Iosifogou	Damaskinou
Vournova	Prigkiponneson	Kioupetzoglou	Diakonou Goun.
Vaindiriou	Prinis	Katakouzinou	Zahoupoulou Ioan.
Vryoulon	Panormou	Korai	Motropolitou Isaak
Vithynias	Proikanesou	Karolidou	Euthyvouli
Voutza	Pisidias	Karatheodori	Chresostomou Patr. Gr. IV
Gordiou	Prousis	Lignadi	Patriarchou Ioakeim
Dorylaiou	Pergamou	Nider	Patriarchou Fotiou
Dardanelion	Panfylas	Oikonomou	Profiti Elia
Evangelikis Sxolis	Rodon	Oikonomidou	
Ellespontou	Seleukeias	Pesmatzoglou	
Ephessou	Sinopis	Paraskevopoulou	
Eptalofou	Sokion	Plastira N.	
Ikoniou	Sevdikiou	Palaiologou K.	
Ionias	Sevasteias	Papoula	
Kallipoleos	Tmolou	Sperantza	
Kappadokias	Trigeias	Syggrou Andr.	
Kasaba	Tandalou	Spanoudi Sof.	
Kilikias	Tenedou	Seizani	
Kordeliou	Tsantarli	Spathari	
Koukloutza	Fanariou	Solomonidou	
Kyzikou	Filadelfeias	Salteli	
Kostantinoupoleos	Flavianon	Seferiadou	
Krinis	Frygias	Sykoutrti	
Kotyaiou	Fokaïas	Tsantalidou	
Kaisareias	Chrysoupoleos	Tsakiroglou G.	
Kydonion		Horton G.	
Lykias		Psaltof Kon.	
Lamsakou		Psachou Kon.	

6. Epilogue

Taking into account all the arguments so far, we have proven that the physiognomy of the city of Nea Smyrni is the same with Asia Minor. A city of refugees in 1922 now a city of the new millennium. That is the course of Nea Smirni, a place that gave shelter and received the fugitives of one of the great disasters of 20th century.

As the city of Nea Smyrni evolves it manages to retain its beauty. Most importantly though it manages to combine tradition the old with the new. A testament to that is the Asia-Minor physiognomy of the region. This should be attributed primarily to the residents who have not forgotten and who have kept memory alive. That specific physiognomy of the modern Asia-Minor city, is made up of both tangible and intangible elements, such as monuments, cultural buildings, educational buildings, churches, events, sport-clubs, street names and many more that have not been documented in this paper.

The composition of the population of Nea Smyrni today has changed and many residents no longer descend from Smyrna. But even they, are imbued with the culture of Asia Minor as they experience it in their daily lives.

The phrase, inscribed at the entrance to the grove, accompanies always the residents of Nea Smyrni:

"How can I forget beloved Smyrna ?"

References

- Babinotis G., (2002) "Lexico tis Neas Ellinikis glossas", Kentro Lexilogias E.P.E, Athens
- Stefanou J. and Collaborators (2000), Laboratory of urban Composition, "The physiognomy Greek city" ed. NTUA - Ministry of Environment and Public Works, Athens
- Stefanou J., (1993), "La physionomie des Lieux. L'empreinte des specificités d'une société à l'espace" Revue Sociétés No 40, ed.Dunod, Paris
- Mitoula R., (2000), "Oi epiptoseis tis Europaikis Enopoiisis sti Physiognomia tis Ellinikis Polis», Doctoral Thesis for the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, Athens
- Tzoulakis St. (2012), "Oi Mikrasiates tis Neas Smirnis» Paper presented during the study day: "O Politismos tou Ellinismou tis Mikras Asias", Harokopio University, Athens, 22 June
- Pantazis Ant., (1993), "Nea Smirni to chroniko mias polis 1940-1942», 3rd volume, Aspasia Ant. Pantazi editions, p. 15, Estia Neas Smyrnis library
- Pantazis Ant. (2000), «Nea Smirni i politiki istoria tis», p. 29, Estia Neas Smirnis library
- Ananiadis V. (1990), «60 chronia Neas Smirnis, 1929-1989», Elli Zannou editions, Athens.
- Data from the National Statistical Service regarding the population of Nea Smirni, Athens 2012
- Koliopoulou-Griva K. (1978-1983), «Selides Istorias. Oi Dromoi Tis Neas Smirnis», Editions of Nea Smirni municipality, Estia Neas Smyrnis Library
- www.nea-smirni.gr (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- www.estia-ns.gr/page.asp?pid=1 (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- www.neasmyrni.net.gr/portal2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=14 (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- www.neasmyrni.net.gr/portal2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=13 (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- www.lyk-evsch-n-smyrn.att.sch.gr/School/history/Historical.htm (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- www.epm.gr/18/12/2011 (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- www.neasmyrni.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56%3Awelcome&catid=71%3A2008-06-05-14-31-09&lang=e (last accessed 1/10/2012)
- (http://www.musicheaven.gr/html/modules.php?name=Splatt_Forums&file=viewtopic&topic=11986&gotolast=1) (last accessed 1/10/2012)