



## ✦ *The Greek Diaspora*

For generations, seagoing Greeks told stories to their families of faraway places where their ships had docked. These stories invariably included meeting *patriótes* (fellow countrymen) in restaurants and at card tables in exotic places. Years ago these chance encounters seemed wondrous. A Greek could travel halfway around the world and find a fellow Greek speaking the mother tongue and sharing common friends and relatives from a village or town in Greece. These transplanted Greeks comprised the Greek Diaspora still thriving throughout the world. According to a Greek government ministry, “[M]ore than five million Greeks (or more than half of Greece’s domestic population) live outside of Greece’s borders.”<sup>1</sup>

The word, Diaspora, is one of various Greek terms commonly used when referring to Greeks living outside Greece. Diaspora comes from the Greek word, *diaspora*, which means “scattering.” Another word, *omogenia*, translates as “same birth.” (The English word, “homogeneous” comes from this root.) The Greek government uses the term Apodimos Ellinismos (Greeks Abroad) for the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad, a department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry created to interface with Hellenes in other parts of the world. In this text the term Diaspora is used according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition: “a dispersion, as of people of a common national origin or of common beliefs.”

However, this seemingly simple term, “Diaspora,” creates controversy among the Greeks. Some of the controversies are semantic or academic, relating to the circumstances of settlement and migration. On a personal level, some individuals take exception to the term as not describing their own condition or attitudes. For instance, some Greek Americans say they are Americans of Greek ancestry, not Diaspora Greeks. For simplicity’s sake, the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is used here.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Accurate statistics about the various Diaspora populations and the definition of who belongs in them are difficult to obtain, but the



Greek national government published the following numbers in 1997:

America (US, Canada, and South America)	3,402,220
Oceania (Pacific islands, Australia, and New Zealand)	710,000
Asia	69,200
Europe	1,286,740
Africa	<u>132,790</u>
Total	5,607,950 <sup>2</sup>

According to Richard Clogg in *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, the countries with the largest Greek Diaspora populations, in descending order, are the United States, Australia, the republics of the former Soviet Union, Canada, South Africa, Germany, Argentina, and Brazil.<sup>3</sup> Greek communities exist in other parts of the world also, including Egypt, England, Morocco, the countries surrounding the Persian Gulf, and Zaire.

## **A LONG HISTORY OF GREEKS ABROAD**

Distant settlements date back to the times of the ancient Greeks who were not organized into a single nation but by city-states, leagues, and colonies throughout the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and beyond. Herodotus, the Father of History, writes in the fifth century BC in *The Histories* about Greek colonies stretching from Olbia (near Odessa) on the Black Sea in the East to Thuria, Italy, in the West.<sup>4</sup> The Greek language and culture were not confined to the present-day boundaries of the Greek state, and were expanded further when Alexander the Great established Hellenistic communities from the great city of Alexandria, Egypt, to India, in the fourth century BC. Greeks, along with their language and thought, were prominent in the vast Byzantine Empire, which lasted one thousand years from 324 to 1453 A.D.

Throughout the centuries, countless small migrations occurred from the motherland and surrounding communities. A Greek presence was recorded in such distant places as the state of Florida in 1768; in Russia, in part due to the invitation of Catherine the Great, in 1779; and in Calcutta with the completion of a Greek Orthodox church in 1780. During the 1800s, migration from Greece accelerated primarily to the nearby areas of Russia, Romania, Turkey, and Egypt. However, migrations to further locations also occurred,