

# Immigration with a difference

▶ Greek adventures in the South-West Pacific rim ▶

Adventurers in the regions  
north of Australia

## PART TWO

### Mick George

The tropical Melanesian islands of the Trobriand group became a haven not only for Nick Minister but gradually for a number of other Greek adventurers and fortune seekers, who secured a hold on the lapi-lapi pearl trade in those waters of the south-west Pacific Ocean.

Among the Greeks of the trading “colony” which grew on the Trobriands, there was a trader by the name of Mick (Michael) George. Combining the information about the time Mick George lived and traded on the Trobriands provided by the famous Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1894-1942) in his studies on the Trobriand islanders, with what we know regarding Nicholas Minister’s activities, we would not be surprised to conclude that Mick



was one of Nicholas’ younger brothers, brought out from Patmos to join Nick in his pearl trading enterprises. Furthermore, it is quite probable that he joined him around 1890. By the end of 1917, when Malinowski met Mick there, the latter had already spent about 27 years in the settlement of Kiriwina/Kiribi on the north end of the island of Boyowa, the largest island of the Trobriand group. Malinowski relates a congenial conversation he had with Mick on 10 November 1917 calling him “Mediterranean”, crouching like Achilles. He also refers to him as “a Greek trader long resident in the Trobriands”, mentioning Greek-Turkish cuisine.

Malinowski also admits that he liked Mick, that he frequently stayed in his home when he was on the island of Boyowa, and he acknowledges that Mick, who was middle-aged by that time, helped him as an informal source with his ethnographic studies, in particular with the language and the customs of the Trobriand islanders. Of course, Mick George did not miss the opportunity to talk to Malinowski about his countrymen and his island home. Malinowski’s often-mentioned deep appreciation of the invaluable assistance and hospitality he was offered by Mick George and the other pearl traders and buyers of the Trobriand Islands, however, is clearly attested even in the acknowledgements of his book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published about two years after his 1914-1920 fieldwork expeditions.

In reality, Mick George was a trader in pearls, pearl shell, copra and other goods, such as tobacco and benzine, confronting the tough competition among the traders. He had been in the Trobriand Islands for several years before the Commonwealth Government of Australia took the whole area over from Great Britain in 1905 and the time when Malinowski arrived there in 1914.

Mick was generally regarded as having a hospitable manner and outgoing personality, and he appeared to have been liked by the islanders as well as visitors. However, he fought against the indigenous people and became an absolute master in his treatment of them, so that after the Australian Government assumed control of south-eastern New Guinea and the nearby surrounding island groups as the Territory of Papua, Mick was threatened with capital punishment.

Nevertheless, Mick also made a somewhat valuable contribution to communal life in the Trobriands, al-

though it was always within the frame of

money-making. He introduced the European type of pig for which the islanders coined a new word to describe it, bulukwa Miki meaning “Mick’s pig”. These pigs were valued highly, that is one would bring five to ten native pigs in exchange.

Finally, Malinowski remembers that on a visit to Kiriwina in December 1917, he found Mick very unwell, coughing horribly. It was obvious that Mick may have been suffering from the last stages of tuberculosis. In February 1918, Malinowski met Mick looking a melancholy sight “sitting there, wasting away, watching the gray lagoon”. Malinowski also noticed that Mick’s house was empty and that he was squatting with a towel in hand on the crumbling veranda, obviously quite ill and very lonely. From Malinowski’s references to Mick’s coughing and colour, it appears that he might also have had malaria in addition to tuberculosis.

Mick did not manage to live beyond 1918. He died on the island of Boyowa, four years after Nick Minister’s death in the same island group.

Mick had been lured by the idea of making a fortune in an unknown and distant foreign land. He ended up alone, almost penniless, and destroyed by disease – not an unusual story in the world of most fortune hunters attempting the impossible by reckless means.

### Conclusion

Nicholas Minister and Mick George are only two, and perhaps not the most inspiring examples, of the many Greek adventurers and fortune hunters who, driven by their life circumstances or the Argonautic spirit, sought a place in the remote south-west Pacific rim as a base for their bold and imaginative enterprises.

Their turbulent lives are fascinating subjects. It would not be surprising if research unearthed more Greeks of this type in the Pacific rim north of Australia. Definitely more research is waiting for us, challenging our interest and our imagination.

*(This is an abridged version of an essay included in Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand), A Journal for Greek Letters, Vol. 14, 2010.)*



Professor George Kanarakis  
Charles Sturt University

## State Coroner to investigate Katsidis’ death

The State Coroner’s Office this week confirmed it would investigate the sudden death of prominent Queensland jockey Stathi Katsidis, according to reports in *The Chronicle*.

Katsidis, 31, was found dead at his home in Hendra, on Brisbane’s northside, on October 19 last year, just two weeks before having his first ride in the Melbourne Cup on Shoot Out.

Katsidis’ fiancée Melissa Jackson found him dead on the lounge room floor where he had fallen asleep after returning home from a night out drinking with friends.

Preliminary police investigations found there was no suggestion of suicide or foul

play. Under the Coroner’s Act, the state coroner can investigate unusual deaths and then decide whether a full inquest is necessary.

A spokesperson for the State Coroner’s Office told *The Chronicle* Katsidis’s death had been the referred to them but no decision had been made on an inquest.

A decision was unlikely until later this year.

A spokesperson for the Queensland Police Service said toxicology results on samples taken from Katsidis’s body would be included in the report to the coroner. However, the results had not been made public.



Stathi Katsidis died on October 19, at just 31 years of age.