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## JOHN MINOS TZANAKAKIS Obituary

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## PROFESSOR JOHN MINOS TZANAKAKIS, 1927-2025

### **An exceptional entomologist, a rare personality**

Born in Thessaloniki (Macedonia) in January 1927. His father originated from Western Crete (village Elos, Kissamos province), while his mother from Constantinople (Istanbul). During his early years of high school (World War II, German occupation period) he lived in Kissamos, where, among others, he was cultivating vegetables to feed his family. This agricultural activity marked out his inclination to agriculture and in particular plant protection. Thereafter, his successive main steps were: Agricultural University of Athens (then Highest Agricultural School of Athens) 1945-1950, Shell Company (Hellas) (plant pest control) 1953-1955, University of California at Berkeley Department of Entomology Ph.D. 1955-1959, Laboratory of Entomology at the “Democritus” Nuclear Research Center Athens-Greece founder and head 1963-1969, Professor of Applied Zoology and Parasitology at the Department of Agriculture and Forestry of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki 1969-1995. From Berkeley he received several letters of recommendation, all praising his integrity and extraordinary achievements in his graduate work. As an example, Professor D. D. Jensen, then advisor of graduate students, concludes: “I consider him as one of our 3 best graduate students among over 60 enrolled at present in Entomology”.

Minos authored or co-authored over 100 publications in prestigious international journals and over 10 books or textbooks. In certain cases, he was invited by foreign Publishers to write his books in English. He participated in the organization of international symposia, and following invitation he evaluated international



research proposals, doctoral candidates and theses and participated in editorial committees. He also participated in Consulting Committees or Governing Boards of Research Institutes. His main research interests and research publications were on insect biology, diapause included, sterile insect technique and other pest insect methodologies, alternative to insecticides, effects of antibiotics used in insect artificial diets for larvae or adults, on their symbiotic bacteria, pest insect pheromones etc. With the sterile insect technique against the olive fruit fly, a species with larvae feeding exclusively in olives, fruits of a highly complex synthesis, he succeeded, amongst others, following laborious efforts, to develop a larval medium and a rearing methodology for mass-rearing, which is the only in existence till present. He used to say always that his research activities and outcomes were made with his research colleagues. The Laboratory he founded at “Democritus” was funded by a series of research fundings, of the United States Department of Agriculture to work on the Sterile Insect Technique against the olive fruit fly. The Laboratory continued to be funded by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the same purpose in the years to come. In these early years,

following his finding that the laboratory olive fly larvae could not grow in the olive fruit tissue because their symbiotic bacteria were killed/altereD by the larval food media antibiotics and preservatives, he organized field experiments on a possible “new control methodology” based on luring the wild population and killing its symbiotic bacteria. He was also invited by the IAEA to establish a growing olive fly colony at the Seibersdorf Laboratory insectary. His Research Laboratories at “Democritus” N.R.C. and the University of Thessaloniki served as “nurseries” for several successful entomologists of Greece. Finally, Minos helped decisively both the Entomological Society of Greece and its scientific journal *Entomologia Hellenica* at their birth and at difficult times along the way.



**Minos (in front) pressing grapes during the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Fruit Flies, Kolymbari, Crete, Greece, September 1986.**

He continued to publish books till the age of 97. His last one was a historical book of 450 pages on his father, Minister of Defense and thereafter Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army in Crete and Egypt following the invasion of Germans to Greece during the World War II. The book was completed in fall 2024 with the Publisher insisting that it ought to be presented officially in public because of its historic value.

Concluding, I consider Minos Tzanakakis as an exceptional personality of outmost integrity and the most prominent entomologist in Greece, during the recent decades.

He is survived by a daughter and a son, and three granddaughters.

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