

Modern Greek Minor Chris Apostoleris Wins a CFC Translation Award for 2005

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Burnt Butterfly

History has a fixation on the mountains. Minoas received laws from Zeus at the heights of Cretan Idi. Idi meant a place dense, mountainous, and often forested; a place from where you see the sun before it rises. Moses also received laws from Yahweh among the burning brambles of Sinai. (The term "Sinai" may originate from Sin, the Canaanite god of the moon.) Again on a mountain, Hammurabi received laws from Marduk. And Zoroaster-probably a contemporary of Pythagoras-lived ten years on one mountain of Bactria to record his laws. He used to say, "You shouldn't let yourself conform to your destiny".

The laws have ever clashed with sacrifice, and the high places were clearly considered suitable for spots of sacrifice due to being located geographically closer to the sky. They sacrificed their lives or the lives of others. The priests would overthrow the heights, paying the penance of solitude. And when they didn't use the mountains, they constructed pyramids and ziggurats in the style of the mountains. Or they established cities between the sky and the earth: from Lasa and Athos to Nephelokokkygia. The high cities joined the idea of fortification with officiating sacrifice on a more worldly level.

The Acropolis of Athens is considered the feature of this reflection: it is a symbolic architectural work that combines the charm and worship of the Wise Virgin. Lamartine described the Parthenon as petrified light. After the times of triumph, adornment of this architectural wonder fell into the hands of the Christian people and continued into the hands of the Muslim masses. Kampouroglous writes, "In the middle of the 17th century, inside the Parthenon, there were silk textile pieces hung everywhere and old red-yellow or yellow-green flags, and each visitor added whatever strange thing he had carried away from his trips or different offerings that he had artistically created. The main church, disguised as a mosque, was dark. From its ceiling hung hundreds of oil lamps decorated with ostrich eggs, crystal balls, and copper-painted metal plates which, blowing in the wind, made strange whistling sounds."

Deep inside there were two hidden crypts sealed in marble. They may have been common tombs; it has always been said that in the one they locked up the Christian ecclesiastical brassware, and in the other, the holy things of the ancients. One time someone opened one out of curiosity, it is said, and immediately the plague spread throughout the city.

The first description of this sickness comes from Libya in 40 B.C. A large epidemic had fallen in 531, under Justinian, and exterminated half of the population of the Mediterranean while, two centuries later, a new epidemic arriving up to the Mesopotamia decimated Constantinople. In 1347, the Bubonic plague spread to all of Europe, annihilating 1/3 of its population-about 25 million people of God. In 1437 in Paris, 50,005 were counted dead; in 1679 in Vienna, 100,001, dead. In 1720, another 50,005 were dead in

Marseille, of which 666 were illegal prostitutes, and of these, 197 were named Mary and 72 were named Rozy. (The remainder had different disyllable names.) Marseille's last raid made its mark in 1994 in Sourat, north of Bombay, the processing center of uncut diamonds, with again thousands of victims.

In Athens, the malady was connected at one time with the temple of Olympian Zeus, a colossal work that was finished under Adrian and originally had one-hundred-and-twenty pillars, of which sixteen remained. When and how the rest were lost is unknown. We know only that in 1759 a Turkish soldier demolished one pillar and made it into lime for the building of some shrines. The plague fell a few days later, and the people, who believed that buried diseases lay below the columns, attributed the disaster to the destruction of the pillars and hastily threw the army commander from the city.

To this day, no one has dared to touch the other crypt. It's said that the crypt is full of water that comes from the farthest depths of the earth—from the caves where wonders are created; caves in which Plato was initiated and in which he described, metaphorically, some of his journeys; caves of marble overflowed with ashes; caves of algebra where documents of the model of constellations are protected, winged names that die before they're born; caves where the voice of Philemon, the comedy writer who died on his hundredth birthday in Elaphebolion [ninth month of the Attic year, named for the festival of Artemis], still resounds bursting with laughter; stoas where his voice cycles like air or like methane; electrified eel of Phriganas; intricate passages where tribes of cyclops and ranks of people cross; gates where gold suddenly rusts and where dull aluminum is reborn; chambers that are sealed forcefully in the name of Hermes of Trimegistou and form the grandeur of vacuum; caves of unconsciousness where the mine of world order is shaken; invisible railroad crossings; vast networks of pipes; caves of Arachne that perpetually lavish the veil of drought and the mast of the Panathenians and that thirstily draw water from Ilike to Marathon; the heavenly caves of Pan and of Bacchae. [Note: This paragraph was presented as one sentence due to the original translation's format.]

In one text from the twelfth century written by Benjamin of Toudeli, we read a related narration: in some constructs close to the wall of Jerusalem, two workers raised a rock, and the opening of a cave was discovered. They entered and arrived in a room covered in gold and silver supported by marble columns. In the center, a golden table with scepters and crowns dominated: it was the tomb of David. The tomb of Solomon was next to it; further down, the tombs of all of the kings of Judea were found. Still further, there were other sealed rooms of unknown content. The two workers went to continue, but a terrible wind threw them down, and a ferocious sound put them to flight. They notified the authorities, but they didn't dare enter the cave again to show them the way, and the place was sealed.

This history was extended by the rabbi Tambal Isaac, named by the Greeks "Kelephos" (i.e., the one with leprosy), in his work Stars (1512), which isn't mentioned in astronomy but includes the lives of important personas according to his notions. Writing the biography of an award-winner, Kelephos mentions that he sent a platoon of unsuspecting soldiers who walked with bags loaded with rocks so as not to be swept away by the mysterious air, and, one by one, they opened the sealed rooms to confirm that they didn't contain anything or, probably more precisely, that they contained Time. And the four rooms were lined with ceramic slabs without any adornments at all and ended up in a circular corridor in which the soldiers, running through from left to right, were instantaneously growing old until decomposition, but while walking in reverse, they were becoming children again until defecting into the form of an embryo. It appears that the critical cause of change from one nature to the other was this and only this: a dark, pulsating whirlwind in the center that smelled imperceptibly of a burnt butterfly in the brilliance of the moonless night.

The rabbi's descriptions aren't, it's understood, so clear, but the experts more or less conclude translating the four-digit cabalistic work that he wrote. Disagreements are expressed chiefly about the texture of the smell of the burnt butterfly. Few of the infantrymen perceived what happens in time and collectively withdrew, and of them, the majority were squashed by landslides and cries of fright, as similar situations often end. And probably solely one person was actually saved, deservedly the anonymous person whose biography we read, who remained in the history of cabalism because, coming out, he had erased from the annals of his mind his entire time-expired past along with his name. He just made it in

time to stammer some numbers and wholeheartedly bid farewell to the sensible world, and then from then until the end of his life he tenderly conversed with the locusts and fish. The numbers, however, were enough for the experts to decode, with the right combination, the contents of the crypt.

Returning to our own affairs, we arrive at midnight on the 9th of December, 1947. While my mother is already uncomfortable and dreams of ice cones in the middle of winter as she lightly carries my features, the poet George Drosines, Greece's candidate in those years for the Nobel Prize in literature, writes in his diary:

The most incredible dream that I have seen until now: a catastrophe happened at the Acropolis. An ancient monument suddenly became demolished. And this monument wasn't one of the known. It was some other monument, non-existent in reality, but, according to the dream, important for Art and History. Hurriedly, we archeologists and writers went up together. Between them was the archaeologist Tsountas, [Zachary] Papantoniou, and Spiro Patses the mayor. The staircase that we ascended was wooden with planks, lined steps difficult to climb. With unmeasured steps and with difficulty and shortness of breath, I ascended them. When we arrived at the top of the landing, we saw the ruins of the demolished monument that had once been something very high, like the pillars of Olympian Zeus. We were interested to determine how only this monument, of all the monuments on the Acropolis, had so suddenly fallen from its height. Tsounta's idea was that the Acropolis was built on top of a large underground lake. From this lake was the water of Klepsydras. From this lake the large reservoirs of Asklemieios were filled. From this lake, the old city, excavated by Dairpheld, was supplied with water, with its 39 wells now used in the neighborhood houses and more in the coffee houses and bars on the warm and dry days of summer. As fragments of the crust of the earth are eaten and yield under pressure, likewise earthquakes and sinking of the earth occur with destruction of villages and cities. In this same manner, a piece of the Holy Rock was cut and sunk precisely below the foundation of the demolished monument without the others suffering destruction.

As in tales, many times strange waterworks befall dreams; mainly, these dreams are caused by the previous evening's consumption of beer or refreshments that later unfailingly tames the adrenal glands.

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