
Poetry and Politics: The First Postwar Generation of Greek Poets

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PERHAPS WE CAN EASILY AGREE THAT our title implies an inter-relationship between two distinct areas of life and expression. The difficulty begins when we consider these two areas not only distinct but also antithetical, as many believe them to be. To the extent that poetry is determined by its λόγος and politics by a λόγος of its own, the two truly seem unreconcilable, at least on first examination. This hypothesis, however, would lead us to the premature conclusion that the relationship between poetry and politics must necessarily be antipathetic, with the meaning this term carries in Chemistry: that the formers' λόγος develops at the expense of the latter's; when the former's strength increases the latter's decreases, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, even if we accept that every convergence between poetry and politics is necessarily illegitimate and violent, we may still discern certain historical circumstances which occasionally favor it. As far as the first postwar poetic generation is concerned, all commentators agree that the specific historical circumstances brought poetry and politics close to each other, even to the point of friction.

Regardless of how the relationship between poetry and politics is defined in our century, it is useful to bear in mind the ways in which this problem was faced in Greek antiquity, when the fortunes of European poetry were being shaped. I will refer to three characteristic examples.

According to the historical and philological evidence Hesiod could be considered the first political poet of Greek antiquity. The occasion of his *Works* is the trial between the Ascrean poet and his brother Perses, during which the bribed judges demonstrate their partiality. However, indirectly, this is the first instance in the history of European literature that poetry is used as a measure by which to criticize political power.

Three centuries later, the Platonic *Republic* will reverse the terms of Hesiod's controversy. This time it is philosophizing politics which, in order to serve its model of governance, banishes poetry from its domain, considering it dangerous for the strict education of citizens in the ideal republic.

In the Sixth century, Solon found himself somewhere in the middle of this conflict between poetry and politics: with his double and indivisible activity as poet and legislator, the Athenian sage succeeded in merging the two arts.

I attempted this rapid review to demonstrate that, under certain conditions, the distance between politics and poetry is not absolutely unbridgeable, as it is usually assumed to be. Moving ahead, it is not difficult to separate what is poetry from what is politics in Modern Greek times — let us say from 1830 to the present: on the one side we would place the whole of our poetic production after the establishment of the Modern Greek State, and on the other the developments in politics and perhaps warfare. But as soon as we try to match the two words in the framework of Modern Greek history, in order to see what results from their combination each time, we encounter problems. The specific research which would assist us in this pursuit is still lacking. In the absence of descriptive and demonstrative evidence, I will attempt to sketch out a simplifying diagram of the relations of poetry and politics in the context of the Modern Greek State, hopefully without betraying the major facts of our political and literary history.

During the era of the Greek Revolution of 1821 poetry, to the extent that it is political, is patriotic; it is the poetry of Rigas's "Θούριος," of the early Solomos, of Kalvos's *Ὠδὲς*. With Solomos's mature work things begin to change already: a second matrix of political poetry is formed, akin to the earlier one, which I would call "national poetry." This shift occurs partly under the influence of foreign movements relevant to both literature and politics, such as the movement of Romanticism, which fostered the rise of national conscience in Europe. Indigenous circumstances, including the vision of the Megali Idea and the belief in the unbreached continuity of Hellenism, also contribute to this change as they begin to come about around the middle of the 19th century.

Yet, the model of national poetry and the national poet appears to be established by the poetic generation of the 1880's. Kostis Palamas plays an important role in this development, as he reads Solomos and Kalvos in order to articulate his own magniloquent poetry, especially the two lyrical epics *Δωδεκάλογος τοῦ Γύφτου* and *Φλογέρα τοῦ Βασιλιᾶ*. Angelos Sikelianos succeeds Palamas as he begins to form his own poetic sequences around 1910, projecting the Greek consciousness,

diachronically as well as synchronically, as the pre-eminent cultural paradigm. The model of the national poem reaches its climax with these two figures. Its development is favored by crucial political events: the terrible adventure of 1897, the revolution of Goudi and Eleftherios Venizelos's rise to power, the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and, finally, the First World War, with the hopes it inspires for the advancement of the Greek State. But in 1922 the Asia Minor Catastrophe shatters the magniloquent national poetry of Modern Hellenism along with the rest of its visions.

In conclusion, I suggest that between 1821 and 1922 Modern Greek poetry moves in two directions which are at least partly political: the patriotic and the national. Nevertheless, strictly political poetry does not appear to develop in metropolitan Greece until 1922. This does not mean of course, that poets are not interested in the genuinely political circumstances; but in their work these circumstances are generally translated into patriotic or national anxiety, elevation and anticipation.

An outstanding exception here is Constantine Cavafy who, living in Alexandria, refuses almost provocatively to write patriotic and national poetry. In his work, which tends progressively towards a kind of anorthodox poetic realism, politics is manifest indirectly in its economic, social and ideological dimensions, usually behind a historical alibi.

The complete change of the political conditions following the Asia Minor Catastrophe affects Modern Greek poetry as well. After, the dramatic clash between King Constantine's royal populism and Venizelos's bourgeois liberalism, the way is open for new political developments: the Pangalos dictatorship on the one hand, and the establishment of a party of the Marxist left on the other, indicate this general shift, which is marked by the failure of the Megali Idea, the bitter problems of the refugees and, ultimately, by an anti-war and anti-heroic spirit. These new political conditions bear a direct influence on the course of our poetry, which now becomes strongly pessimistic, sarcastic, protest-oriented, sometimes revolutionary. Two figures complement each other in expressing this poetic tendency: Kostas Karyotakis and Kostas Varnalis. Both object to the type of the national poet-prophet, as well as to the patriotic and national verse of epic proportions.

In the case of Varnalis's *Σκλάβοι Πολιορκημένοι* (*Slaves Besieged*) the aim is already evident from the title: a blatant reversal of Solomos's *Ἐλεύθεροι Πολιορκημένοι* (*The Free Besieged*), and therefore rejection of any heroic tone or beautifying ideology. Sour reality replaces here the Solomic ideal.

In Karyotakis's "Εἰς Ἀνδρέαν Κάλβον," on the other hand, we find a clear statement on the bankruptcy of Kalvos's lyre, whose song

is now declared outdated and considered useless and distorting in an age dominated by self-interest and political servility.

More generally, Karyotakis and Varnalis undertake to denounce the petit bourgeoisie, whose clerkish misery and hypocritical morality surrounds them. Even the common people are often accused in their poetry for their inertia and indifference, sometimes for being bought by politicians as well.

This is the first instance, then, that political reality intrudes to determine the content and form of our poetry: traditional rhythms are deliberately distorted or complemented by prose; the vocabulary of poetry is provocatively marked by everyday speech, sometimes the bland idiom of the market place. The boundaries between prose and verse are blurred.

If Karyotakis's protest takes the form of an anarchic cry and results in suicide, Varnalis, influenced by Marxist socialism, moves beyond the denouncing of the petit bourgeoisie, towards the promise of a deeper social transformation. The two major branches of political poetry thus shaped during the '20s will grow over the next decade and bear fruit in the first postwar generation.

The decade of the '30s is the most crucial for our political and literary affairs in the first half of the twentieth century. The major political events in Europe are the establishment of fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain, and the outburst of World War II. During the same decade in Greece we see: the failure of Venizelos' attempted bourgeois transformation of Modern Greek society, the systematic coalescence of the left before and during Metaxas's dictatorship and finally the epic, as it is commonly known, of the Albanian war, which acts in many respects as a catalyst.

As far as literature is concerned: modernism is now officially introduced into our letters, both in its Anglo-Saxon variety, by Seferis, and as a projection of Spanish and French surrealism, by Embirikos, Elytis and Engonopoulos. Leftist poetry is developed and promoted more actively with the early Yannis Ritsos as its major figure. Finally, a marxist poetic theory begins to form, oriented towards the principles of the newly arrived socialist realism.

More specifically: the '30s are marked by the rise and gradual establishment of a figure who will henceforth dominate the scene of Greek poetry: George Seferis. His work offers fresh material for the interrelationship of poetry and politics. His *Μυθιστόρημα* of 1935 and *Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Α.* of 1940 introduce a type of political poetry which I would call anthropological and, after Seferis's well known conjunction, myth-historical. This poetry aligns contemporary Greek and international political events with the earlier adventures

of Hellenism. Current history meets the ancient epic and tragic myth, and their union leads to contemplative accounts of the past, anguish for the contradictions of a fluid present, and ill-omened anticipation of the imminent future. Seferis's political awareness, as it springs from his poetry of this decade, consists of: aversion, for the advance of fascism; agony for the world-wide massacre which already overshadows the late '30s; and strong opposition to every kind of politicizing, narrow-minded conservatism and hypocritical moderation. This is a citizen-poet constantly kept on guard by a rich historical and literary memory, one who converses with his times without ever attempting to beautify them and with the true intellectual's proper attentiveness and sense of responsibility.

As for the Greek surrealists, one issue is particularly striking: while they inherit their European masters' sensual joy of the liberated unconscious, they fail to receive their radical political concern. As a result, contemporary political reality is almost totally absent from Greek surrealist poetry in this decade. For the sake of the euphoric poetic utopia it proclaims, Greek surrealism of the '30s rejects the dark political omens of the times.

Leftist poetry on the other hand is increasingly oriented towards the various versions of Marxist socialism arriving from abroad. Still, this is the first time that contemporaneous political events, such as the bloodstained tobacco-workers' rally at Thessaloniki in the middle of the decade, become immediately registered in poetry. The characteristic example is Ritsos's *Επιτάφιος*. As far as form is concerned, the leftist poetry of the decade remains basically conservative; when it dares move towards certain innovations, it does so hesitantly and always at a safe distance from both scandalous surrealism and Seferis's difficult modernism.

In the meantime, several journals of the decade (including the early *Νέα Επιθεώρηση*, *Πρωτοπόροι*, *Νέοι Πρωτοπόροι*, *Σήμερα*, and *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα*) allow leftist criticism to begin forming its own credo on the social function of literature and art in general. It amounts to the following prescriptive rules:

1. Literature can and must reflect the social, economic and political reality of the era. It also ought to support the vision of, and actively serve the struggle for, socialist transformation.

2. Literature has a duty to define itself as marxist in content and form, in clear distinction from the earlier and current versions of bourgeois decadence.

3. Since the literary work is destined for a wider public, aiming not only at aesthetic edification but also at political mobilization, it must pay more attention to its ideological message and less to form. Formal

characteristics may never obstruct the common readers' immediate communication with the literary work.

With this ideological triptych the left obviously intends, and to a certain extent achieves, to dominate the arts and letters of the decade. The dogmatic character of this political interference in literary affairs may disturb us today; but we must bear in mind that it comes from an isolated quarter as it tries for the first time to define, organize and defend itself in an environment that grows increasingly hostile with the progress of the decade. The persecutions of the left in Greece are legitimized by the 'Idionym' law voted by Venizelos's administration in 1932 and worsen during Metaxas's dictatorship, when a fascist censorship punishes violators with, at best, exile. On the other hand, the utilitarian and servile role assigned to literature and the arts is based on the left's optimism for the immediate future. It considers the socialist transformation of the Modern Greek society imminent and believes that literary and artistic requirements must be sacrificed, if necessary, for its sake.

As far as the leftist writers of the decade are concerned, they generally accept this directive, although there are the rare exceptions who point out the dangers involved in such a suffocating embrace of literature by politics. The advent, however, of the German Occupation, the Resistance, the events of December 1944 and the Civil War will incite a new, critical approach to this prescriptive program, redefining both political and literary opinion. An important role in this critical confrontation will be played by some of the most talented leftist poets of the first postwar generation.

Until recently, poets of the first postwar generation had every right to complain that critical attention to their work was occasional and somewhat condescending. During the past decade, however, things have changed drastically. With the publication of around twenty relevant studies since 1974, primary among which are commentaries by the poets themselves, the reader is now adequately equipped, if not already over-burdened.

Perhaps the first piece of information we need in our effort to define this poetic generation is the dates of their birth. Alexandros Argyriou recently included in this generation poets born between 1917 and 1928, suggesting the years 1920-25 as the nucleus. George Savvidis, on the other hand, restricts this margin to the years between 1917 and 1925, thereby placing Takis Sinopoulos and Manolis Anagnostakis at its two ends. The issue is still under discussion; but instead of lingering on this debate, I prefer to concentrate on the historical events and political occurrences which marked the lives of poets in the first postwar generation, even if we have to include those born up to 1928.

Between their early teens and middle age these poets live through a dense complex of collective and personal experiences: the list includes World War II, the Greek Occupation and Resistance, the events of December 1944 and the Varkiza Agreement, the Civil War and the ultra-conservative era which followed it, the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the dramatic events in Hungary, the Prague Spring and its repression, the French May of '68, the Greek dictatorship and the splitting in two of the Greek Communist Party. In this experiential circle's margin we must note the memory of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the spreading of fascism in Europe and Metaxas's dictatorship.

The second piece of information we need is the approximate number of poets in this generation. Argyriou offers three indicators: a maximum number of 133, estimated with very flexible criteria; a middle number of 47, with relatively stricter standards; and a minimum of 20. In all three cases the aim is to have a characteristic representation of the generation in all its typical tendencies. Michalis Pieris, on the other hand, offered in his recent lectures at the University of Crete a more conservative and precise list, consisting of the following names: Alexandrou, Anagnostakis, Dallas, Doukaris, Focas, Kaknavatos, Karouzos, Katsaros, Kyrou, Livaditis, Papaditsas, Patrikios, Pavlopoulos, Sahtouris, Sinopoulos, Thasitis, Vacalo, Vavouris.

Despite the differences between these indicators, we may already come to a partial conclusion on the character of the first postwar generation: the number of poets has obviously multiplied, compared to the generation of the '30s or the '20s. Poetic λόγος now seems to be shared by more people, as if we were entering an era of poetic democracy.

A third piece of information: Out of the 47 poets anthologized by Argyriou, four take part in the Albanian war. Two participate in the battle of Crete. Three are led to the El Dabba desert, one is imprisoned by the Italians in Athens, one (Anagnostakis) is sentenced to death during the Civil War, and six (Alexandrou, Livaditis, Thasitis, Doukaris, Patrikios, Kostavaras) are exiled. In general terms, twenty out of the forty seven poets support the struggle of the broader left, while eight defend the liberal bourgeois ideology.

In conclusion, most poets in the first postwar generation including its major figures, are involved in the wars and the political confrontations of their times in an unusually active and riskful manner; this involvement marks their poetic work indelibly.

A fourth piece of information: The eras of the Albanian War and especially the Resistance during the occupation of Greece are characterized by two empirical facts which determine the style and ethos of poetry:

a) From 1940 and up to the end of 1944, despite the unfortunate circumstances, a kind of combatant optimism prevails all over Greece, one which anticipates not only the final victory and the condemnation of fascism, but also the establishment of a socialist democracy. After the events of December 1944 and the Civil War this expectation is cancelled and the sore hopes of the war and the Resistance denied. This dramatic curve from an early political optimism to the final pessimism is reflected in the work of the major poets of the generation.

b) During the Occupation and the Resistance a remarkable outburst occurs in Greek publishing, indicating the desire for ideological and artistic renewal which followed the political awakening. In this atmosphere, the party's dogmatic model of the relationship between politics and literature gives way; the free exchange of ideas without any compulsory restrictions is established, as the control of the communist party over the ever-growing leftist movement loosens. But the events of December '44 and especially the Civil War suspend this ideological liberalization. Under the pressure of relentless persecutions, the left is forced to return to its dogmatic models of literature and art, while the conservative intellectuals, re-assuming political power, reject all leftist propositions as one-sided and uphold the doctrine of non-engaged art. This is a second curve, parallel to the one previously mentioned with crucial consequences for the poetic production of the age: the former ideological alliance of progressive intellectuals is followed by a deep schism, where manichean distinctions prevail.

Fifth piece of evidence: I would agree with George Savvidis, who recently divided the poets of the first postwar generation into three groups: marxist, existentialist and surrealist. We may consider Manolis Anagnostakis as the representative of the first, Takis Sinopoulos of the second, and Miltos Sahtouris of the last. This example however already indicates how confused the limits are between the three groups. Existential themes and tendencies are certainly not missing from the poetry of Anagnostakis and Sahtouris, while surrealist traces can be discerned in the work of Sinopoulos. Furthermore, if the core of the marxist branch is intense ideological and political concern, we must acknowledge its explicit marks on the poetry of Sahtouris as well as Sinopoulos.

Still, insisting on the triple distinction with the necessary precautions, we can discern corresponding influences from abroad: poets of the marxist group often refer to Mayakovsky, Aragon, Neruda; their colleagues of the existentialist group often recall Joyce, Eliot and Rilke; finally, the surrealists sometimes remind us of Eluard and Lorca.

The literary journals of the era offer another perspective of these poetic tendencies: for the leftist poets we have to look mainly at

Ἐλεύθερα Γράμματα, *Ἐπιθεώρηση Τέχνης*, and *Κριτική; Κοχλίας*, published in Thessaloniki, seems more suitable for the existentialists; but as far as the surrealists of this generation are concerned, there does not seem to be a corresponding journal — even one to assume the role of *Νέα Γράμματα* in the previous decade.

More important in my opinion for this chapter is a point made by Yannis Dallas, perhaps with some exaggeration, in 1959. Whether we are speaking of political leftist poetry in this era or of existentialist and surrealist, it is true that these three imported movements whose combination formed the whole of modern poetry in the previous decade are now assimilated for the first time. They are supported, in other words, by personal and specific Greek experiences and not limited to formalist pursuits and ideological generalizations.

This last observation brings us to a new chapter, which I would call "Common characteristics of the first postwar generation;" they exist despite the internal distinctions and sub-divisions usually and legitimately drawn. The relevant bibliography abounds with lists of common characteristics; the one I am offering is from my *Poetic and Political Ethics: First Postwar Generation: Alexandrou — Anagnostakis — Patrikios* (Athens, 1976).

1. I have already discussed the multiplication of poets in this generation in comparison to the earlier ones. I would like to add that the traditional evaluative scale previously used to rank poetic excellence also tends to be abolished in this era. This is not to say that every sort of discrimination is abandoned, but rather that criticism as well as the reading public are not so interested in distinguishing between major and minor poets. The emphasis falls now on good poems rather than good poets, as if there is a common poetic pool in which everyone takes part more or less on equal terms. Some lines even circulate from poet to poet, abolishing in a way the concept of poetic property.

2. As the political and ideological duty burdens the majority of these poets heavily, their work abounds with didacticism, a kind of moralism with no metaphysical implications and always with a specific target in mind. This fact explains, in my opinion, the indirect or even direct return of some poets of this generation to the historical and ethical Cavafy, contrary to the official party line for which the Alexandrian poet was still a decadent bourgeois.

3. The tone of satire is favored by the leftist poets of this generation, both in their criticism of the adversary ideology and, later on, in the painful self-criticism they take up in order to react to their leadership's dogmatic obsessions with socialist realism and Zhdanov's directives. In this respect they prefer to follow Karyotakis's more intense and modern combination of sarcasm and self-criticism over Varnalis's satire.

4. As in the period between 1940 and 1955 leftist esthetics still believes that the poetic projection of political reality is best facilitated by extended compositions, considering the short lyric as the form of subjective introversion and therefore suitable for bourgeois poetry, analytical manner and rhetorical development can not be avoided. Palamas and Sikelianos serve less as models here; exuberant Yannis Ritsos casts his shadow over the poets of the first postwar generation, particularly those in exile.

5. Otherwise, among the masters of the generation of the '30s Seferis is the one who influences postwar poets the most. His middle poetry (let us say that of his two *Ἡμερολόγια* and *Κίχλη*) created a common poetic idiom, which was readily assimilated rather than copied by postwar poets. Once I wrote that this may be Seferis's greatest contribution to our letters; I would still support this view. The surrealists of the '30s exert much less influence on the language of postwar poets; Engonopoulos is the most prominent among them in this respect, especially after the publication of *Μπολιβάρ*.

6. I would suggest that in the best poets of this generation the poem's focus in relation to its empirical motive changes. The latter is no longer an alibi for the formation of poetic expression; it is now modestly received inside the poem, even when its reception leads to a kind of theme-writing. Poets are themselves aware of this danger and often confess their embarrassment, as Anagnostakis does in his "IF:"

If — I say if . . .
 If everything hadn't happened so early
 Your expulsion from High School in 11th grade,
 Then Haidari, Ai-Stratis, Makronisi, Itzedin,
 If at 42 you didn't find yourself with spinal-arthritis
 After the twenty years in prison
 With two dismissals from the party on your shoulders, a statement
 Of repudiation, when they isolated you in the Psych Ward
 If — an accountant in a grocery today—
 Of no more use to anyone, a squeezed-out lemon,
 A finished case, with ideas long outdated,
 If — I say if . . .
 With a little good will everything had turned out a little differently
 Or out of some chance coincidence, as with so many
 Classmates. friends, comrades — I don't mean without pain
 But if . . .

(Enough. Poems can't be written with this stuff. Don't insist.
 They need another air to be liked, some kind of "transformation."
 We've over-indulged in theme-writing.)

1970

Contemporary reality, then, is not the ground for the poet's observation, but the field where poetic emotion is tried and extinguished. What counts, as Titos Patrikios's triplet illustrates, is not the poet's wisdom, but his confrontation with reality:

CONTEMPLATIO

Not yet.

It is too soon
 for an old man's wisdom.

1953-54

I have reached the center of my subject and thus the end of my lecture; I would like to close it with a few words on what I believe to be the distinguishing core of this poetic generation, and which I have elsewhere called *poetic and political ethics*. The basis of this double and bipolar ethic is, in my opinion, a multiple contradiction which I will try to describe, if somewhat rhetorically, in the following words:

The poets of the first postwar generation felt the old and new quarrel between politics and poetry in their very flesh, living as they did through auspicious as well as ominous years. They learned that the former's *λόγος* is by convention impersonal, the latter's personal. That the former's time is open and historical, the latter's closed and biological. That politics considers an individual death as an ordinary occurrence whereas for poetry it is an irreversible event of ultimate importance. They were instructed that disillusion belongs to the history of politics, failure is its rule, that here errors are forgotten almost instantly, injustice renamed justice, that spilt and wasted blood makes speeches through the mouths of sometimes unworthy descendants. But in poetry disillusion bewilders a man's mind, injustice shatters him, the blood of companions suffocates him and becomes his constant nightmare. Finally, the poets of the first postwar, generation learned that politics may postpone the vision of social change continuously, whereas in poetry the cancelled vision becomes a tormenting obsession, at times a schizophrenic fixation.

This web of contradictions often justifies the distinction or even the divorce of poetry from politics. But postwar poets, almost all of them, not only undertook to express the contradictions in their work but also to live them, at any expense and to the end. In the mine-field of these contradictions they won their double ethic and attempted to take it over to the opposite shore.

Which shore? The one where the traditional gap between poetry and politics is bridged, as the former concedes to be politicized and the latter to be humanized. The point, in other words, where politics accepts

the *λόγος* of poetry and poets the act of politics. It is a desperate hope, as it not only insists on the demand for the world to change, but also asks how and when it is going to change. And if it does not change? Then it seems that we should abandon not only politics, but poetry as well. It is precisely on this edge, I think, that the political and poetic ethic of the first postwar generation balances itself. It is reflected in the following poems, with which I would like to end this presentation. The first, Manolis Anagnostakis's "When I said goodbye," was written in 1955:

When I said goodbye to my friends
Day was forgotten on this world
And nights alternated with nights.

How could I speak? The crowd tamed
The rabble-rousers and the deceivers. With daggers
They nailed my words. How could I speak
When secret gallows were erected
On every door ambushing sleep
And how could so many facts be piled up
So many faces turn into numbers once again

How could I explain more simply what Elias was
Claire, Raoul, Egypt street
The 3rd of May, streetcar no 8, "Alcynoe"
George's house, the Infirmary.
I'll speak to you once again with signs
With dark parables, with fairy-tales
For symbols outnumber words
Personal adventures have overflowed
The impeccable face of History blurs
A new day begins which no one sees
Nor yet suspects
But it has crept in through the heart's seams
In coffee-houses and stock exchanges
In rainy hours, empty parks, museums
In studies and stores
It changes the composition of the atmosphere
The taste of a kiss, the luxury of sin
The chemistry of the cell, the squall's force.
The stage has been set but the spotlights are not on
And all the characters are here — worthy of the drama
Generation after generation of hypocrites: the wretched mistress

The man with the smile, the oath-breaker
The fool's bells, every inferior race
Aristocrats and plebians and self-punishers.

How can so many faces turn into numbers
And so many events into simple books
Without the invention of a new arrangement of the elements
Without a new initiation, that will sweep away the stage curtain
Splitting the rotten apple into two
So that holy things will return to the dogs, infants to the womb

And the Deed stand upright like a lighting-rod.

The second poem is from Titos Patrikios' *Προαιρετική Στάση*, and was written in 1969:

When the oak-tree fell
some snapped off a branch, drove it in the ground
inviting homage for that same tree,
others lamented in elegies

the lost forest their lost lives,
others made collections of dried leaves
showed them in fairs and made their living,
others asserted the harmfulness of deciduous trees
while disagreeing on the kind, or even the need for reforestation,
others, including me, argued that as long as there are
earth and seeds there is the possibility of oak-tree.
The problem of water remains open.

And finally Aris Alexandrou's "Sunrise," written in Paris in 1971:

It was the time when the street-lights were about to come on.
He had no doubt, he knew they would go on any moment now,
as they did every evening. He went to the crosswalk and stood
there, to be precise he stood on the safety island, to see the lights
go on simultaneously on the vertical as well as on the horizontal
street.

With his head fixed, he turned his right eye to the right, his
left to the left. He waited, but the lights would not go on. His
eyes grew tired, they begun to hurt in this uncomfortable position.
In a while he could not take it any longer and left.

Still, next day at dusk, faithful to his duty, he stood again

on his island. The lights didn't go on again, either on that evening or on the following nights, but his eyes grew used to it little by little, they didn't get tired any more, they didn't hurt.

And finally, as he stood there waiting, all of a sudden the dawn broke. All of a sudden, he saw the sun rise, simultaneously from the vertical street and from the other one, the horizontal.

Edited and translated from the Greek by Takis Kayalis

All poems translated by Takis Kayalis and Hugh Blumenfeld

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Greek Workers in Egypt 1900-1930

ALEXANDER KITROEFF

STUDIES OF THE GREEK DIASPORA of the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and the early twentieth centuries have concentrated on the activities of merchants who were the dominant element of diaspora communities based in the mercantile centers of Marseille, Venice, Trieste, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Odessa, Smyrna, and Alexandria. The history of the "ordinary people" of those communities the small owners and employees who were the most numerous element within each community remains to be written. Likewise, the emergence of a Greek working class element therein has not been satisfactorily accounted for.

The reasons for this are quite straightforward. At best one could say that the activities of the dominant, mercantile bourgeoisie were awarded a higher priority. At worst, the implications of class-based activity by Greek workers was willingly ignored by Greek nationalistic historiography. Admittedly there are several methodological obstacles to reconstructing the life of groups which belonged to an anonymous mass and left behind very few records of their activities. Furthermore, the fact that "history from the bottom up" is enjoying so much popularity currently does not necessarily force us to consider that all anonymous groups were in fact significant historical actors in their time. All the same, it can be safely said that the emergence of a working stratum and the stirrings of a labor movement in the Eastern Mediterranean are subjects which merit closer attention than they have received before.

What work has been done on the study of early labor movements in the Eastern Mediterranean has concentrated primarily on the situation in Thessaloniki and to a lesser extent several other Ottoman urban or industrial centers.¹ There are several theoretical issues addressed by

¹ Aside from the work of Greek scholars such as G. B. Leon, A. Liakos, K. Moskoff,