IV

Byzantine Cities

All morning the sea had been flat. There was no horizon betwen it and the overcast, glaring sky; the sea and the sky were the same color as the barren rock of the shoreline where only ruins of scattered watchtowers suggested something human. Just before one o'clock, a massive rock detached itself from the shore and drifted toward us: Monvemvasia, the last island at the end of the world, and it was the shape of an Irish fisherman's hat. The hydrofoil arrived at the pier, travellers competed for the clustered taxis, an old man brandished a branched pole hung with strings of beads. Abruptly, the quay emptied, the taxis and beads gone across the causeway to the right into the new concrete block town, the boat blurred eastward into the glare.

The road to the old city of Monemvasia followed the brim of the hat, past the ruins of a Venetian leper colony, though what was leprosy was not then distinguished from chronic skin infections or the results of poor nutrition and sanitation. All color was bleached out in the glare that battered the sparse twisted pines, raw red rock, disembowelled cisterns lined with pink-tinted plaster, fragments of a thousand years of walls. Below the road were cuttings into the rocks for ships' berths or defenses. The ruins clustered more densely closer to the city walls: nothing in sight was green or whole.

There was one entrance to Byzantine Monemvasia, which is what the name means, and that entrance was nearly at the far end of the island. Every person or every item of supply for the town or for the fortress high up on the escarpment, past or present, entered through that one gate by foot or in panniers on donkeys: all food, cement, plumbing fixtures, firewood, cannon. It was designed for defence: the passgeway narrowed to a right turn so an attacker would be helpless on his left, then bent left, and back out into the glare. The gate itself was Venetian, wooden, banded with rusting iron, studded with nails, stippled by lead nubbins of bullets.

It was siesta time. On the main street, the only animate life was the canaries hung out in the sun. The town was all stone arches, arched doors, arched windows, arches of stones supporting stone vaults supporting the street or house above, hot monochromatic bleached stone. The main street was paved, all the rest were of cobblestones, slightly canted, leading up or down through arches, past arched doorways.

Few had enough room for two to walk abreast; every bit of space had once been used and reused for living, and nine-tenths of Monemvasia was in ruins.

The roofless medieval houses stood like exposed nerves in the glare. Sometimes there was the shock of color from a pink room standing alone, the frescoed apse of a private chapel, a rug on a window sill -- fragments of stage sets. Lintels, arches, corner blocks, doorposts were carved with Byzantine knots and twists, Venetian lions, Turkish arches; the facades were composed from blocks of carved stone, used and reused, turned upside down, and many of the doors were less than five feet high. A fig tree was the only inhabitant of a roofless room, lizards the only pedestrians. Through the arches, the were glimpses of bare church domes without tiling were indencent like old men caught naked.

Passageways went through vaults, under arches, over vaults, ending on mounds of rubble like alley cats. Corners had been sliced away to supply a few more centimeters of public space. Down by the sea wall I turned over the shards from another world, frightening lizards to uncover the belly of a small Byzantine pitcher, iridescent fragments of glass, the side of a green incised Byzantine bowl, a sliver of blue-threaded Venetian glassware.

Few Greeks live in Monemvasia now and even a hundred and more years ago, the town was nearly empty. The houses, or the ruined walls, have mostly been bought up by real estate speculators, to be sold for a million dollars apiece to wealthy Europeans, all apparently lean and blonde, to judge from the ones sunning themselves nude on the rocks below the sea walls. They have yachts and run the craft shops on the main street, and play jazz and Mozart in the medieval houses down the cobbled streets.

Monemvasia began as a port for the Byzantine Empire and a refuge for Peloponnesian Greeks against the dark ages of the Slavic invasion of the mainland. It remained unconquered for forty years after the Franks had taken the rest of Greece. Guillaume Villehardouin took it finally in 1249, after a siege, in his first campaign as Prince of the Morea. His father and brother, Princes of the Morea before him, had never found it necessary to attack Monemvasia, but it was the only thing they had left for him to accomplish, and so he took four borrowed galleys, catapults, and all the knights and lords he could muster.

There is no naturally occurring fresh water on the rock: all water must be stored during the winter rains, all food brought in. The Monemvasians held out for three years, exposed on the rock "like a nightingale in a cage," before they came to surrender,

and then, it was on their own terms. Having made his point, and probably anxious to be done with it all, Villehardouin allowed the city its independence and all its requests, and presented the archons extravagant, if inedible, gifts of horses and scarlet silk robes.

Within ten years, Villehardouin had to relinquish Monemvasia to Michael VIII of Byzantium. It came under the Venetians in 1464, the Turks in 1540, the Venetians in 1689, the Turks again in 1715, and finally the free Greeks in 1821 at the start of the War of Independence. Most changes of ownership coincided with starvation, plague and massacre. The Turks called it the "Fortress of Flowers." During the Middle Ages, it was ta source of Malmsey for western Europe, that wine which provides such pleasure to readers of *Richard III*. The medieval Malmsey seems to have been heavy and sweet, something like Marsala; now, the local wine is liquid sunshine, with a musty, musky taste that evokes memories not yet experienced, long-forgotten comforts.

Monemvasia has a dozen churches within the walls, and dozens of private chapels, nearly all in ruins. The keys for all of those with four walls and roofs were in a pocket of the aged drooping apron of Kyria Eleni, a bird-boned, swollen-footed old woman, her a body doubled over by osteoporosis, and her feet grotesquely twisted and ankles swollen. She was shockingly thin. What care there was of the churches was hers, polishing for love, proud of the trust, tender for the proprieties; she insisted that a man in shorts, and a sleeveless woman cover themselves before they could go in.

She offered us water from a well of sweet salt water below the Panagia. It might have been the only natural source of fresh water on the island, but just enough sea water pushes up into the well to make it an ideal drink after a long and parched walk, but useless for most things. Once an icon of the Virgin was found in the well, delicately painted by the hand of St. Luke -- possibly it had been washed ashore in a storm. It was covered with silver, for homage and protection, all but the face. A smaller copy bears three silver and diamond starbursts, a gift of Queen Olga early in the century. The diamonds are poor. The Panagia has a chandelier from Russia, gilt and enamel over brass, purchased at a cost of 26,000 gold coins, and Kyria Eleni remembers when the Queen came to Monemvasia to dedicate it.

The Elkomenos was a twelfth-century basilica, with two white marble thrones used by the Emperor Andronicos II and his Empress in the late thirteenth century. There was a powerful icon of the *Elkomenos* -- Christ in the red robe and crown of thorns, his hands bound. In addition, there was a magnificent fourteenth-century icon of the

Crucifixion, probably from Salonika, second only to a similar icon at the Byzantine Museum in Athens. I saw a photograph of it the next year, in a police bulletin of art thefts, and thought of the slender, tanned people and their private yachts. The Elkomenos, too, had a chandelier from Russia and hanging oil lamps given 200 years ago. Everything wanted polishing, and the work was too much for this tiny crippled woman who depended on the erratic kindness of strangers to eat at all.

The farther we went from the main gate, the sparser the buildings. Zig-zag steps mounted some five hundred feet from the barren town to the top of the escarpment; it was a long climb caught between the heat of the afternoon sun and the heat of the rock-face which had been absorbing sun all day. Finally at the top, there was a blank wall, a gate leading to a long grey tunnel and portcullis, with spaces above for defense and rooms for storage, and a well-head carved with two shields and dated MDXIV. A road wound up to Agia Sophia, a bulky tenth-century church building of mounded arches on the edge of the precipice. The sun was relentless and there was no water. A woman came out of the church holding out her water bottle.

Her name was Magda; her husband, Ark, sensibly waiting below, was a retired banker from Athens. Walking the zig-zag steps down the escarpment, she told me about her family: three children, a son in Brussels just married, two others in school in Johannesburg. They visited every July for a month; Ark had managed the Praetoria office of National Bank of Greece until he had a stroke and retired. We travel, she said, and speak to whom we choose.

When I pointed out Kyria Eleni, Magda frowned, questioned her intensely, then slipped a generous fold of money into her apron pocket. Snatching my hand, Magda barrelled down the little main street, pausing at the gate to point out the house of the poet Ritsos; she wanted to introduce me but he was out of town. We took a taxi to the mainland. She questioned the driver whose name was Stasi. Stasi took us to the house of the town president who had been comfortably enjoying his afternoon nap. She discussed with the town president the history of Monemvasia, the fame of its churches, its honor. Touching honor, she moved to the old woman. The town president gave a tragic shrug. He explained with great patience the legal jurisdictions and said that where the old city was concerned " unfortunately, this was not his responsibility. He discussed the bureaucracy with sadness. He himself had often spoken to the priest about her, but the priest had assured him that, unfortunately, she was not in his jurisdiction either. The town president

suggested that Magda talk to the Metropolitan Bishop in Sparta.

Magda wanted me to meet Ark. Then she decided Ark should take us to Ai Yanni for ouzo. Stasi drove us up among the hills through the vineyards that produce the twentieth-century Malmsey, through olive orchards that were producing in Byzantine times. Ai Yanni was a village too small to have a plateia, just an irregular tetragon where small cars could turn around, but it had a cafe with tilted chairs and shabby men, all of whom seemed to know Ark and Stasi. During the afternoon, more joined us. We had ouzo, a lot of ouzo, sitting there in the sun, and magnificent scorching bits of fried octopus still salty from the sea. Magda hemmed the edge of an antique piece of silk embroidery for a gift. By sundown, she had finished. She jumped up, declaring it time for supper.

Night came as if someone had thrown a switch. Stasi negotiated the taxi back down the mountain curves without his headlights, but because of the ouzo, it was quite painless for all of us. We ate outdoors under a string of colored Christmas lights, at a group of tables that trailed down into the waveless water. It was warm and breezeless. We had green olives and bread and golden wine and mounds of delicate sunset-pink barbounia. "In Greece, the cats never get to eat the heads of the barbounakia," Ark quoted, then he read from the label on the wine bottle which claimed this to be the wine drunk by Socrates and Pericles.

The conversation moved to the war. Magda's father in Salonika, too old for the army, had a reputation for being able to find food when no one else could; he could charm or persuade foodsellers to save items for him. Some of the villages had food. He and his wife would walk, thirty kilometers if necessary, and bring back flour or lentils or whatever they could find, on their backs, and share it with the neighbors. Ark lived in Athens. He went to the train station every day to carry loads for the Germans on the chance of getting a little money. Once he was paid with a little box of raisins. The Germans had an eight o'clock curfew. He was twelve, he was playing in the street with friends a few moments after eight. A soldier stopped him, knocked him down, then stomped on his leg, breaking it in three places, and went off, leaving him lying there. Ark still does not feel easy about Germans. "They lost the war, Germany and Japan. They took us with guns. Now they come again and take us this time with little pieces of paper."

The meal finished with fresh cucumber to cleanse the palate. A girl from one of the restaurants rinsed out her mop in the sea. Just out of the light, a small owl swooped and called. At the next table, a bored child was inserting a small eel into a bottle. It kept

extruding its tail which had to be swatted back in, again and again. When the family rose to go, he poured the eel back into the sea. We watched the moon rise, gilding a path from us to it. The great rock of Byzantium was dark even in the moonlight of the longest day of the year. A fishing boat without running lights glided toward us, its gilded wake curving across the water.

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Monemvasia was the Waste Land; Mistra was the land of the Sleeping Beauty, of the Once and Future King. It, too, was built on concentrated space with arches and vaults, but it is overgrown with vines and flowers, budding with countless little frescoed churches, clusters of terracotta-tiled domes like bunches of strawberries, a palace with great moon windows, fountains.

The origin of the name " Mistra " is unclear. It probably derives from the name of a cheese, *mizithra*, or from a person of that name, but it has been suggested as an old form of "mistress." A fortress called "Mistress" brings up images of Dien Bien Phu and the hills rumored to have been named for General de Castries' mistresses, but the connection with cheese is obvious. The pinnacle of Mistra looks as if it has been precisely sliced from the side of the larger mountain which is a spur of Mt. Taygetos. To make misithra, cheesemakers add rennet to fresh heated sheep's milk. After an hour or so, when the cheese has become semi-solid, it is sliced apart with string and salted to further draw out the whey. As the cheese ages, the chunks draw apart but they retain the shape of the original slice. If you knew the cheese, you could hardly have avoided naming the place for it.

Guillaume Villehardouin found the hill with its small chapel, they say, one day when he was out riding in the willows along the river Eurotas; he built a castle on the summit, began an Italianate palace overlooking the fruit-growing, silk-producing valley, and brought there the beautiful and witty Greek princess who was his young bride. He moved his court from La Cremonie " which is how the Franks pronounced Lacedemonia, their name for Sparta, brought there his thousand knights with golden spurs. English and Florentine bankers followed them, artists " wherever the Princess lived there were artists, and the ladies and courtiers of the Principality of Achaia or Morea. After ten years, Villehardouin had to surrender Mistra, along with Monemvasia, to the Emperor of

Byzantium, but already it was renowned in Europe, and of a renown that lasted so Goethe could write it into the second part of *Faust*.

Much of this is legend, especially the part about the golden spurs, and it is difficult to believe in a thousand knights, but the Byzantines found it equally enchantin. They built small elegant arched houses, with porches and porticoes and arched stables. There was little space and that mostly vertical, so there was crowding and building over the passageways that replaced streets near the palace. Natural springs provided water as high as the palace, after that all water depended on cisterns. Mistra produced silk and fruit, and controlled the abundantly fertile plain of Sparta which most long-distance travellers in the Peloponnesos have to cross at some point. All summer, fresh water comes easily, cold and clean from the crevices of Taygetos, even in August the Eurotas below flows cold, and there was snow from the mountain peaks for sherbets. The Byzantines gave their Despot a palace with arches and tracery and pink marble facing, and a banqueting hall with high round windows for watching the moon or the snows on Taygetos. They loved painters, these Byzantines; dozens of painters worked in Mistra to fresco the churches that budded out from the hillside. Nowhere else are there frescoes of this loveliness: frescoes shot with light, frescos tender as sun-warmed skin, frescoes sweet as the colors of pomegranates and fresh grass " they make profound statements about the content of Faith, but their great conviction is of Beauty.

Mistra was a Despotate under the Emperor of Byzantium, though Despot had not then the connotations with which we are familiar, and Despotate would be the equivalent of Duchy. The Despots were brothers and sons of the Emperors of Byzantium, and some of them became Emperors themselves. The Despots were:

1348 Manuel Cantacuzenos, first despot, son of John VI
1380 Matthew Cantacuzenos
1383 Theodore I Paleologos. He took Nauplion and Argos briefly, the Venetians took them back.
1407 Theodore II Paleologos. He abdicated to become a monk; his tomb is in the Aphendiko.
1443 Constantine XI Paleologos, last Emperor of Byzantium.

In 1446, Murad II of the Ottomans who held most of what is now Turkey, invaded the Peloponnesos and required Constantine to pay tribute to him. In 1448, the Emperor John VIII, his brother, died. Constantine reached The City in 1449.

1449 Joint Despotate of the imperial brothers, Thomas and Demetrios.
[*1453 29 May. Fall of Constantinople*.]
1460 Mistra surrendered to Mehmet II. Thomas lit out for Rome where he became a Papal pet and the model for the great statue of St. Paul at the entrance of St.Peter's. Demetrios scampered around the Peloponnesos until he was captured by Mohammed who found him beneath contempt.

Mistra was besieged and captured briefly in 1464 by Sigismond Malatesta, condottiere, on behalf of Venice. He was famed at home as a humanist, so at Mistra he acquired the remains of Georgios Gemistos Plethon, a famous and interesting philosopher (who was the only person before the twentieth-century every to demonstrate a concern for an economic and social structure to solve the poverty of the Morea), which he took away and interred in a sarcophagus at the Tempio at Rimini. The Turks retook Mistra immediately and continued producing silk and fruit. There was another siege in 1687 by a Crusade of the Holy League under the command of the Venetian Generalissimo Morosini.

Morosini was in Athens, commanding the assault on the Acropolis and aiming cannon at the Parthenon, so the Swedish Count Königsmark mopped up the Peloponnesos. He sent six thousand Maniots to beseige Mistra. When Mistra surrendered, it was announced that the women and the old men would be set free; men between the ages of seventeen and fifty were to be enslaved or sent to the galleys unless they could redeem themselves as a group for 200,000 reals in gold, jewelry, silver and coin, which they could have acquired only if they had worked alchemy on the rocks of Taygetos. Plague broke out. The Venetians quarantined the people of Mistra, whether ill or well, within the city, and confiscated their horses and guns. Thirty-two citizens were sent south to Gytheion and quarantined on a plague ship as hostages for the rest. The plague was exacerbated by famine; the weather that winter was the coldest and harshest in memory. Some few managed to escape the walled and guarded crags and made their way through the snow-covered mountains to Monemvasia. Morosini wrote letters complaining of how tedious it all was.

Near the end of January, Benzon, the Venetian administrator for Mistra, was ordered to move the residents. The Villehardouin castle on the crest of Mistra had held out after the rest of the town surrendered; when the garrison finally wanted to surrender, a Council of War at Nauplion determined that the people of Mistra had to be punished more severely than had been announced because they had not surrendered soon enough, also

some had sneaked to Monemvasia, and some had stolen food. The Pasha and two thousand, four hundred and twenty prisoners, most of them suffering from illness and malnutrition, were marched north and east over the mountains to Myloi where they were loaded on ships and taken round to the islands off Tolo, eight miles below Nauplion, which were to serve as their quarantine and concentration camp. There, at the little beach on the island called The Tits of Aphrodite, they were forced into the winter water and baptized en masse; three hundred and twelve new Christians, adolescent boys and girls, were then handed over to the officers of the Holy League as their personal slaves. The Pasha was executed. Seven hundred and seventy-eight men were assigned to the galleys, others suicided, the elderly were exchanged for Christian prisoners held by the Turks. The surviving nine hundred were taken to Piraeus by ship and confined in a camp where plague had already broken out. Public opinion in Venice held that the treatment was deserved: the Turks had not surrendered properly. Morosini considered the whole thing "a most amazing embarrassment."

Mistra was the Venetian headquarters of the Braccia di Maina, the Arm of Mani, prosperous and heavily taxed until 1715 when it was handed back over to the Turks, under whom it was more prosperous, more peaceful, and less taxed. The Pasha of the Peloponnesos made it his headquarters. The population of Mistra and the immediate area may have been as much as forty thousand. The Russians invaded in 1770, in what was called the Orloff Rebellion. The Greek Bishop prevented a massacre of Turkish residents, but after the Russians pulled out, there were severe reprisals against the Greeks from the Turks and their Albanian military. In ten years the population was down to eight thousand. A generation later, in the 1820s, there were the terrible massacres, famines and epidemics of the Greek War for Independence.

At the end of World War Two, Mistra became one of the battlefields *of O Emphilios Polemos*, the War Between Brothers. This was an area of Royalist sentiment, but Communist troops occupied the ruins and few inhabited houses of the old city. There is some question as to whether the Communists had tried to surrender. The hill was surrounded by Royalist troops who beat their way up the hill, picking off Communists like rats on a city dump. The remaining houses were pulled down, the population resettled, the city taken over by the Greek Archeological Service.

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We watched the restorers on their scaffolds in the Pantanassa. They were very solemn, these young workers in white lab coats. Two of them quietly tapped along the surface of a fresco, occasionally injecting an adhesive with a large hypodermic syringe. Another worked with tiny scrapes to remove accumulated mold. A fourth, in a small tent with spotlights, carefully cleaned the surface of a small area. From outside, we could hear birds and bells, loud noises from children of the workers playing during their lunch break.

In the museum, the poignant fragments of Byzantium " brown, grey, green, yellow glazed shards decorated with a spotted leopard, fish, hares, ducks, swans, panthers, eagles, swords, parts of armor. A blue and white plate with fruits. Ivory-handled knives, three-tined forks. Hanging oil lamps. Great iron storybook keys. Carved gryphons. Glass bracelets. Gold earrings inlaid with enamel. Fragments of the dress and hair of a lady " la princesse lointaine " pavane for a dead princess.

Kings retired here in the disguise of monks. A carved double-eagle marks where the last Emperor knelt to receive his crown in a hurried ceremony before he went away to disappear in the final assault on Constantinople. The air is full of thyme and myrtle and echoing sheep bells under the snows of Taygetos, apple trees skirt the hillside, nightingales sing. When the prince kisses the princess, the fountains will play again, the philosophers will begin to debate in the throne room, the artists will pick up their brushes, the Venetian ambassador will bow to the Despot, the ladies' silks will flutter like butterflies, and the warriors with breastplates of gilt and red-dyed leather will clatter out of the great gates, their double-eagled pennants snapping in the wind off the snows.

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We stopped at a village on the side of Taygetos for ice cream. The store belonged to an elderly couple, small and blonde like Helen of Sparta, or the Slavic invaders who refused to be assimilated. She asked if I were an American. When I said yes, she seized my hand and kissed it. She said: "We were hungry and you sent us food. We were starving and you gave us bread." I was baffled*: Lord, when saw we Thee ahungered?* Then I remembered the Marshall Plan. "President Truman," I said through tears. "Yes, yes. President Truman," she was radiant. Her husband joined her, "When you go back to America, please tell President Truman how we thank him."

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Geraki ("hawk") is almost inaccessible to travellers today, and those who do go there, fresh from Mistra " and most of them very briefly " may wonder why this barren, parched ridge was so honored as to have had fifteen churches built in one century. The large number of exceptionally gifted painters working at Mistra to the utmost of their gifts do not seem to have spilled over to Geraki, and the radiance of the frescos of the one interferes with perceptions of the other. For those who care, Geraki has three examples of the egg-dome style of Byzantine churches, and several graceless examples of twinned churches. In the main, Byzantine buildings make poor ruins. Built as they were from so many scavenged materials, once they begin to deteriorate, they do not take on a romantic aura as do columns and Gothic arches: mostly, they look a mess.

Remains of aqueducts cross the fields, millstones of varying sizes and grades are strewn about. The stone walls that divide the fields run under the arches of the aqueducts, and the little brown churches with their domes and vaults nestle among the olive trees like so many plump partridges. In Roman times, Geraki was grew cotton and wheat for Rome. The Romans built aqueducts to bring water to mills at the base of the hill, and developed a system of watercourses and wells. In medieval and Turkish times, it was called The Mills, and continued to produce grain and cotton. The Venetians took Geraki from the Turks in 1686; in 1715 the Turks recaptured it.

Guillaume Villehardouin seems to have assigned Geraki and its fields to a vassal, possibly a Guy de Nivelet whose son Jehan built an attenuated castle along the ridge about 1254. Villehardouin surrendered it along with Monemvasia and Mistra. It was, for Greece then, a wealthy area; there was plenty of room for horses, the land was full of orchards and golden wheat and white barley,

Today's inhabitants say that when the Turks came into the Peloponnesos after the fall of Constantinople, the people of old Geraki on the ridge buried their gold, turned around the horseshoes on their horses' feet, and trekked to the Mani. They also say that in the early 1900s, the British were excavating on one of the hills. One day the workmen were given an extra week's pay and sent home. That night the British dug alone, and the next day they left town with thickly wrapped bundles which they guarded with guns. This story is, of course, absolute proof of the truth of the first story; what would the British have stolen, if not gold?

1

That summer, Geraki was dying from thirst. No one could remember when they had last grown wheat. The sparse millet harvests were ground in a government-owned electric mill. The town water came from a row of kitchen facets on a concrete tank at the bottom of the hill, pumped up to the houses once a day. Houses were rationed to one toilet flush a day; bottled water was bought for drinking. All day there was a steady procession to the town tank of men and women with animals and containers, little tractors pulling small water tanks. As a corollary, alcohol was extremely inexpensive. Five drachmas " 15 cents " bought a glass of ouzo and a small sandwich to go with it.

Within five minutes of my arrival, half the town had their heads out their windows, calling welcomes and directions to the hotel. It was in the care of another Kyria Eleni, tiny and toothless, beaming from her afternoon nap. She selected one of her five rooms, and then began single-handedly to remove the second bed. I opened the window; she shut it, protesting anxiously that if it were open at night, I would get a *miasma*, though considering the nearly total absence of water in town, malaria seemed almost miraculous. Kyria Eleni took me onto the balcony and pointed out the domes of several of the plum brown churches, naming each proudly. I was to find O Fyllakos who had the key. Inquiring about, I was told O Fyllakos would be at the plateia. I went there, chose the best-shaded of the three cafes, and settled down to ouzo and lunch.

The visitor to a small-town cafe becomes Odysseus and receives the age-old greetings: "Welcome, stranger! Where do you come from? Where do you go?" I answered their questions. They answered mine, and told about the drought, and the British taking their gold. After an hour, which seemed a fair period of time, I asked, and was assured that O Fyllakos could be found at the town water supply, "*Kato, kato -- o platanos.*" Down the hill, at the platan tree; platans grow by water.

O Fyllakos was not at the water supply, but I was assured he would be there momentarily, or perhaps in an hour or so, as he was now known definitely to be sleeping. I followed a path between walled fields of olive trees " the walls come about as a place to put the stones removed from the ground, and there were a lot of walls " to several churches, but all were resolutely locked. Back at the water supply, I was discovered by a Hello-boy. He chattered without waiting for a response:

"Hello. I am not from here, I am from Australia. Do you know Australia? I have friends in United States, in Vancouver. I am not from here, is dead town. Is nothing to do. Do you like Greece? Is too quiet, this town. Last night I am at party in this another

town, until four o'clock we are, with drinking and dancing and bouzouki. So. Do you like bouzouki? Tonight we will have another party, like so. Ooooo, my head, today I can do nothing. These town is stupids. Shall I show you the castle?"

I turned away with what I hoped indicated regal disdain. He brought out a bag of figs and tried to discuss me with a man whom I had already met at the plateia. The man quietly explained that not only was I married, with three children and a house in Greece, I spoke Greek. The Hello-boy left. The church beside the water supply was unlocked. It was dedicated to Chrysotomos, the Golden-Tongued fifth-century preacher; it dated from about 1400, and had a good supply of queens and saints in Byzantine court dress. More interesting were the marble slabs incorporated around the front door which had long lists of names in Greek, scavenged from a building of a thousand and more years earlier.

I was drinking with my hand, Gideon-style, from a tap at the water tank when a shadow stopped beside me: "Surely you know the story of our great philosopher, Diogenes?" A stocky, elderly Greek with a cane held out a bag of fresh figs to me. "Which story?" I asked, thinking of Alexander's shadow. He said, "Once Diogenes saw a child drinking from a fountain using his hands, as you do. Diogenes threw away his cup and said he was ashamed to have to learn a lesson in simplicity from a child."

We introduced ourselves; he was Atha Leontakianakis, the *-akis* indicating he was from Lower Mani. We strolled back to the cafe in the plateia, he told me his story. He had been born in Areopolis, in Mani, in 1911; his father, a blacksmith and electrician, then moved to Geraki. In 1930, Atha joined the army and was a cavalry gunner stationed at Larissa. He took a job at Eleusis, loading lint and castor oil for export by day, attending school by night. He moved to Volos, learned plumbing and got a certificate for naval and land engineering. In early 1935, he went to Abyssinia to fight against the Italians, and by August was in Gibraltar.

He worked his way to Argentina on board a sailing ship; there he joined the Argentine army in a war over the oil fields. A year later, he worked on board a ship to South Africa, changed his name to Koutoupis, and spent a year and a half working for a big game hunter. When war was declared, he was conscripted for the South African army. The Greek consulate wanted to reclaim him, but as he had married out of the Orthodox church, he knew the Greek government would not recognize his marriage. He joined the South African army.

In the army in 1940, he said, he served with Jomo Kenyatta and Idi Amin. In January 1941, he went to Abyssinia and was present at when Mussolini took the surrender in March of 1941. During the formalities he acted as interpreter for Heile Selassie who had been to school in Greece. The army sent him to Kenya, then to Tufiq on the Red Sea. By November of 1941 he was stationed at Ft. Ameira, sixty miles from Tobruk, fighting against Rommel, "We gave them very good hell." He trained thirty South Africans for sabotage and suicide missions behind enemy lines, to blow up munitions and food supplies, and interrupt communications. On one detail, they found the British line had shifted: Tobruk had surrendered to Rommel. Atha killed a Italian *bersagliere*, and wearing his uniform, marched in his own thirty-one men as if they had surrendered to him. The Italians assigned him two trucks and a German escort to take the prisoners. Out in the desert, they overcame the German escort, took their uniforms, captured seventeen Italian engineers who were supposed to be removing minefields near Tobruk and forced them to escort the column out of danger. When they got to Mazamatru near Alexandria, they were nearly killed by the British because they were still wearing Italian uniforms.

He had a great war. I loved every minute of it but I was beginning to get fuzzy; the ouzo saucers were piling up and the sun was warm. I missed the details of tank training, the origins of his diamond mine and alluvial gold deposits, and only caught up with him on the spine of Italy, between Alexander and Patton, where he was unhanging seventy Italians hanged in the course of German reprisals. There was a parade at Praetoria with Jan Smuts in attendance, medals, honors, a recommendation for the VC and a knighthood.

After the war, Atha moved to Rhodesia, went into tobacco, experimented with new fertilizers, and was the first white man to get 2,300 pounds of Virginia tobacco out of an acre where the average was 500. At the present, he said, he owned three mines " one manganese, two gold. His wife was drinking heavily, they were divorced. His land had fifty kinds of fruit, fifteen different colors of roses, a football field, squash and tennis courts, and bull roasts for 500 people. He spoke eight European languages, plus Greek and English, and five African dialects. He got on well with the Rhodesians, and had schools for his workers which let the children out to work in tobacco season. He supported Papadopoulos during the junta and produced 50 million dollars worth of emeralds for him.

Atha said he always gave people what they asked for: English and the South Africans always repaid loans, often early " Greeks never. He couldn't trust Greeks:

Greeks caused their own downfall. Why did he give? He remembered what it was to be hungry; besides, it is a privilege to cooperate. Greeks can't cooperate, you have nothing unless you cooperate.

He was proud to be from Mani. Over and over he mentioned that. He hadn't married a Greek girl because he hadn't met one with whom he could discuss anything; they only seemed interested in money. He needed to be able to share his ideas and interests. He was visiting Geraki to show his grandchildren their heritage. The water had been lost in his lifetime, when the ground shifted early in the century. He had once pointed out to the village council a fig tree on his land where there was a constant updraft of cool air, and said that on so-and-so's land, it was the same. He tried to persuade the villagers to invest together to follow out those underground passages where they were guaranteed to find water. "But those bastards, those bloody bastards, those Greeks wouldn't cooperate. They never accomplish anything because they won't trust each other. Always sitting in the cafes arguing. And they have no water."

He pounded the table: there is water there, good water if they go for it. See those colors in the cliffs, the green and the black? He pointed. A sure indication of copper here, manganese here, and there is a full vein of iron in the hill behind the castle. But they prefer to sit and say they have no water.

O Fyllakos appeared, three hours and a half after I had originally left the hotel in search of him, bearing every sign of not only having drink taken but of imminent sun. He was determined to make up for the delay, and took me through five churches in thirty-five minutes, which time included that required for dashing through thistles and climbing over the stone walls between fields and churches. Ag. Nicholas Didymos, a twinned church, was a prime example of clumsiness, but there was a nice row of frescoed feet in the second half, and behind the bema, a naked, scrawny Mary of Egypt, well-removed from public view. Ag. Athanasius, Ag. Sozon, and the Evangelistria all had egg-domes but none of the taste for proportion seen in the egg-dome churches of the Argolid. Ag. Athanasius had frescoed fragments showing hands and feet, also a memorable Last Supper with Christ and John in an impossible clinch, and Judas lunging across the table to grab at a fish.

O Fyllakos considered his duty accomplished and after we set a time to see the castle in the morning, he went away. I walked back up a long uphill into the town. There was a newer church, new as of 1702. The senior priest, Pappas Athanasios, had

heard there was a *kseni* in town; he wanted to show me his church. It was merry and clean on the inside, painted with stars and garlands, and possessing two items of great importance to him: one, a 17th century icon of Ag, Pantaleimon from Mount Athos; the other was the throne of the bishop who had built the church, sawed down by some idiot to make an icon stand.

Pappas Athanasios was a gentle, cheerful man. We perched in the choir stalls while he talked about going to the United States in 1924; he worked for two years to pay back the $1,800 which had allowed him to emigrate. He bought a candy store for $4,000, with $1,000 down. After two years, he had paid off another $2,000. Then there was the Great Crash, and he lost the store and had to go work for someone else. His English seemed to come from long ago and far away. Then he said, "Excuse me, I have to do my service now." It was seven o'clock as I left the church, and the bell, ringing electrically, was ringing to be heard all the way to Sparta.

There was one restaurant in town. As I was eating supper, O Fyllakos appeared at the door, freshly shaven and nicked, and announced in an authoritative, manly sort of way that we would meet at the fountain at seven in the morning to go uphill. Everyone heard him, and agreed on my behalf. I walked through the town a last time in the dark, and then returned to Kyria Eleni's hotel. My room was immaculate. There was a forty-watt bulb hanging in the middle of the room. I compromised on miasma by opening only half the window. The bed had a deep depression to hold the rump. I fell asleep immediately.

O Fyllakos was not at the fountain at seven in the morning; I don't know why I thought he might be. I wandered up and down the hill. At seven-thirty, an impossibly poor and elderly woman called me into her home. She had no running water, she brought up her water in bottles from the tank below. Her outhouse was a cave in the rocks behind the house; another cave held cannibalistic chickens; a third cave had a stone sink, and water heating in a huge copper pot for her laundry. She fed the fire with nutshells, cigarette papers, and any scraps she could pick up. She had a huge wooden chest of millet, and a hand mill. She insisted that I sit at her table; she made coffee and held a loaf of bread against her chest while she cut two large slices. It was dry and coarse and tasteless. She gave me cheese, almonds, figs, and when I tactfully tried to eat only a little, wrapped up the remainder and insisted I take them with me. She was too worn for gallantry; her behavior was pure decency. I gave in exchange what I had of oranges and

ouzo and chocolate in my knapsack.

Back down at the water supply, I announced to the men who had come on their motorcycles with large tins to fill with water for home that O Fyllakos had said seven; they had all heard him at the restaurant, they agreed, and here it was well after eight. He appeared on a worn, once-red motorcycle. They reproached him. He told me to get on, and we put-putted out of town. Just out of the sight of those upright men with working machines, the motorcycle died. After experimentation, it was determined that it could only manage one person. O Fyllakos suggested that I walk. I stumbled up the loose-rocked hill while he zig-zagged back and forth on the hairpin road, alternately urging me to hurry, and reproaching me for trying to impose such a burden on his machine. He tolerated only a very brief visit to the castle, a stylish attenuated fortification, stretched along a ridge. The de Nivelets had allowed it a remarkable supply of cisterns and views and churches. Below it on the hillside was a Paraskevi of 1500 with funny, primitive carvings inside that looked like squirrels, or possibly, sheep " O Fyllakos and I disagreed on this. There were a lot of these animals represented in Geraki. There was a twinned Ag. Demetrios from 1700. A Panagia of 1400 had arches which were Gothic on the outside and rounded on the inside; it had impressionistic carvings of lions, and a stone altar painted to look like draped cloth. Much of the frescoing in the church was in abstract designs; it must have been extremely gay and chi-chi once.

The medieval and Byzantine city of Geraki had been built all over the hill; there was a minor gate between the city and the castle proper. The main church of Ag. Georgios had a small plateia in front, overlooking the olive-treed, egg-domed valley. Sometimes people from the town went up for festivals and dancing. In the early 1920s, Atha and his friends dug up some graves, likely from the monastery attached to the church which had been built before the castle, in the early 13th century. In its present form, Ag. Georgios has three naves, apses, vaults, all apparently built by enthusiatic and friendly amateurs. The remnants of the frescoes gave a cozy glow to the interior. Over the fresco of Ag. Georgios to the right of the iconostasis was a large riotously-carved shrine with Celtic crosses, da Vinci knots, weaving patterns, star and crescent, and checquerboard with a bend, palm branches and leaves. Ag. Georgios had a crescent and star on his shield. He was warmly revered by the Turks, not for the least of reasons that he had lived too long ago to have been fighting them.

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