

Cristache Gheorghiu

**With Love
from Athens**

The First Experience

Athens, 2011-04-07

Peak manners



On the first day in Athens, after a 24-hours journey by coach and a first walk through the city, I was so tired, that, on the street, I gave priority to my own image, reflected on the mirror of a newsstand on the pavement. Good luck that I recognised myself pretty quickly; otherwise, maybe I would have tried a short conversation.

The streets of Athens are not crowded, but extremely crowded. The first recommendation that is made to those coming here with their cars is to leave them in parking. It is why the proportion of taxis in traffic is about fifty percent. And among the cars, the motorcycles strain with speed, so that crossing streets on other places than intersections with traffic lights is impossible. Only there, all vehicles stop; not the pedestrians, who do not wait for green colour, but immediately rush to cross in any tiny break.

* *
*

A remark of a black man in New York is coming in my mind. He spoke it after a scene involuntarily generated by myself: while I was trying to get information from the dispatcher in a taxi station, a driver were pretty aggressively protesting, with the absurd claim that he should not give customer relationships. Later, I leave even with that taxi driver. On the way I asked him what the dispatcher's nationality is, because his English was very approximate: what is his native

language? The black man's reply stunned me: "Which language? That guy does not know any language; he is Greek." For him, there is not a Greek language; only his English - I don't know if his accept the literary one - perhaps Spanish and Chinese have the right to exist. I don't think he has an idea about the role of the Greek language and culture in the European civilization and the American now. I reported this happening also in the book "America after America".

With ten lessons from "Τα νέα ελληνικά", the practical course of Greek language, which I managed to read from, I do not know Greek but I hope to learn more and - especially - to get an idea about what the ancient Greek culture meant at its native place.

* *
*

There is a receptionist at the hotel whose name is Christos, with accent on "i" for not confounding with Jesus Christ, in Greek also Christos, but with accent on "o". The name is extremely frequent in Greece, and this need an explanation. Even my name, Cristache, has a

Greek origin, (they call me Christakis) although I am not Greek.

Jesus Christ was mentioned in the Greek text of the Gospel as Hristos Iisus (Χριστός Ἰησοῦς); in Latin transliteration: Iesus Christus. On the other hand, the Greek form for Hristós (Χριστός), is a translation from the Hebrew "mašiach" (Messiah), meaning "anointed", gold-plated. As a matter of fact, in modern Greek language, "hrisós" means gold.

Now, we can explain why there are in Greece so many first names of Christos. They come from a common noun, which existed before Jesus Christ: Χρυσός (hrisos), meaning gold, polished with gold.

Athens, 2011-04-08



Acropolis cannot miss from the smallest trip in Athens, at least because it is on the hill, but not only for that. Down, Zeus's Temple is maybe equally famous, but much less spectacular.

In a small square, just near the Roman Agora, at the base of the hill, someone was playing a Cimbalom Italian music. I must say that he was very good, and the instrument sounds fabulous in his hands. The last time when I saw a Cimbalom was in 1959 or 1960, in a tavern in Bucharest, singing - obviously - music suitable with that place. This time, I had to revise my opinion on

the instrument. The truth is that, technically, he is not even a little a rudimentary one. On the contrary, it is even very pretentious and perhaps just this seems to be the reason because of which people abandoned it.



(In another day, in the same square, somebody sang a guitar, also Italian music. I would be sat there the whole day, but I still had to visit a lot of other places.)

Roman Agora is remarkable for Hadrian's Library and the Tower of Winds. It is comforting to loiter there, but I have to climb the hill. Toward Acropolis, I avoided the roads and climbed a

path, meandering among the rocks. The way up was pleasant.



After hours of riding on highways or walking narrow and very crowded streets, a mountain path is something from another world.

* *
*

Here, on the hill, I found that almost all Greece is on the marble, or almost. I said almost, because the difference between limestone and marble is only of the quality, both being based on the calcite. The one from here has much iron, visible by some insertions, which changes the

reddish defect in a particularly aesthetic effect. Everywhere, you step on marble. Around Acropolis, stone is so polished by the feet of millions of visitors, that the pavement is very slippery. In wet weather, the climb may be problematical.



* *

*

Now, I am in a place called *Ários Págos* (*Άρειος Πάγος*) and I try to put down a few impressions, even the bustle of tourists is intense and loud. They come around, take photos and depart.

The name of the place causes to me a slight confusion (if it was not just its goal). The translation, accredited by a tourist guide, is "The Stone of Ares", Ares being the god of war in Greek mythology. It is not specified whether it was his stone tomb - although the gods, being immortals, didn't need graves and the less tombstones - or a stone that someone would have



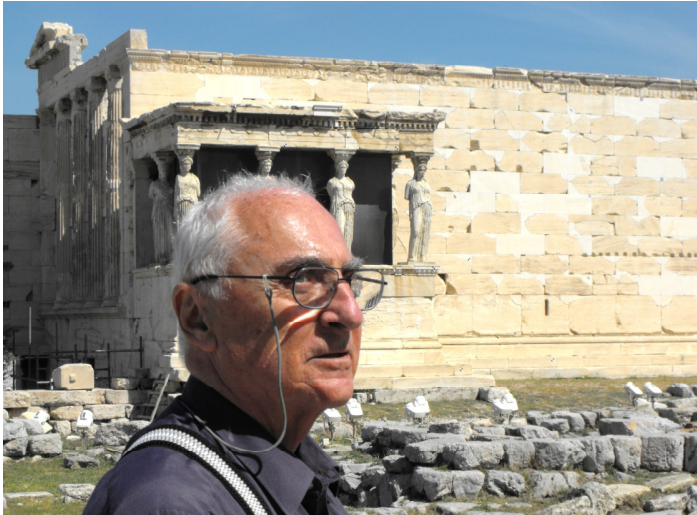
hung at his foot, in order of diminishing his warlike soar. I admit, this interpretation is a personal one and comes from my affinity for the moral sense of Greeks' mythology. The translation is obviously wrong. In another dictionary, I found a different interpretation for *págos*. It is ice, which has no connection with

Ares and even less with the climate of the place. This time, the error comes from the wrong use of modern language dictionary and not of the old one, in which *págos* means a piece of rock. Yes, the "The Rock of Ares" makes sense. Here, probably, the god used to come to take upsurge, or for silence.

A second interpretation, probably closer to the truth, comes from *areopag*. The toponymy is the same, but the meaning is different. The term defined The Supreme Court in Athens of 7-5 BC centuries: a forum, consisting of philosophers and artists of great skill, who used to judge the most serious problems of the city and its citizens. It is said that there were the place of the meetings of the Tribunal, although it seems unlikely, because of the difficulty of climbing, too tedious for some old people, because the members of that tribunal, nine in number, were elected among the elders people, who demonstrated their high qualities of model citizens. *O tempora, o mores!* (Poor Cicero ...)

Anyway, using the hill for two activities so different it is not beneficial either for the supporters of the war and for those of the

justice, granted by a court. But, let's suppose that the elder members of the Tribunal were taken up there with a lectic or something similar. Instead, those who were seeking justice had to



climb the path on foot: an excellent opportunity to observe the difficulty of obtaining it.

This was occurring then, many centuries ago. Now, out of urban bustle, the climb - albeit equally tedious - is an opportunity of relaxing, especially since on the top there is nobody to judge us. Judges of nowadays are down, sometimes very down. (To forgive me those from Greece, as I do not know them. My thought is

heading towards what I know, although I like not to think of them.

I am still wondering why the modern justice is based on the idea that an ensemble of laws must be perfect (if it is not yet, it can be improved), and trials must be conducted according to the rules and not following judges' reason and judgement, even if they may be wrong. The idea of an ideal law code would be great, if not utopian. We know very well the effect of a similar concept: the ideal communist society. Any idea of perfection in real life already denotes an unacceptable level of ignorance. Where we are moving with conceptions?

Going through Propylaea? I had the feeling that I was fulfilling a ritual of initiation, a passage through a gate - it just is a gate - mostly because the advancing through the crowd of tourists was quite difficult; you should work for it, to be active. Of course, the imposing columns impress, but once you overcome the gates, you feel to pass at a higher level, after successful completion of that ritual. On the top, you are in the area of high spheres, as above only the sky is. Even the sea, visible in the days with clear

atmosphere, is somewhere underneath. Maybe Athens is not a city of the top, but Acropolis is "the city from the top". You are there after you went through Propylaea.



The same day, evening

I don't know how I would have reacted today at the happening of yesterday, when, passing through a narrow place, I gave priority to myself, actually to my image reflected in a mirror. After a sunny day, during which I walked from morning till night, my face is so red that I had a shock

when I saw myself in the mirror. The speed of the reaction would have been much different and who knows what other gestures would have done.

* *
*

An idle thought: one of the capital punishments in the past was the killing with stones, in Greek language "lapidare". I could speculate and say that dilapidation is an act that would be punished in this way: by stoning. If it had to be applied today, I guess that in Romania there are not enough stones.

Athens, 2011-04-09

It seems that what was inevitable has occurred. Among the many of my defects - known and unknown - the tendency of generalizing excessively is often invoked by friends. I admit, I like to do that, but here, in Greece, where I am for several days, any attempt of identification some general characteristics of people hits by its opposite. To say about Greeks that are friendly, for example, is very true. They are particularly helpful as possible. When I asked an aged gentleman for a piece of information, he immediately requested the help of a young man, which - in his turn - landed another guy who was just walking around, so that, finally, my question becomes subject of a public debate in full street. I say 'finally' because I left, but their discussion went on. It happened in Lavrio, near the southern extremity of the Attic peninsula, where I was looking for a host.

Yes, Greek people are very communicative. In tram, buses, stations everywhere, they started discussions with anyone happens to be there, without knowing someone. Usually do it persons

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

