



## **The Hellenic Society Prometheas**

### **Newsletter 25**

**October 2003**

### **Prometheas' Kafenio at St. Catherine's on Friday, Sept 26.**

Prometheas held the first kafenio of the season at St. Catherine's Greek Orthodox Church in Arlington, VA. More than 130 people attended. The participants enjoyed the mezedes, the friendly environment and danced to the music of the most entertaining band of Achileas and Compania.

### ***Mark Your Calendar***

### **Prometheas Elections on October 17 at St. George, Bethesda, MD**

The biannual elections of Prometheas will be held on Friday, October 17<sup>th</sup> at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Bethesda, MD. ALL members are encouraged to participate (vote and run for office). Following the elections, there will be a showing on video of two brief documentaries about Crete and Meteora.

### **Glykeria in town on October 3rd**

Glykeria is scheduled to be in the DC on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. She will sign at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Arlington VA. For more info, call Asteria Productions (703-208-1923)

### **Lecture of M. Sarbanes at The Italian Embassy on Oct 8th**

The Society of Preservations of Greek Heritage in collaboration with the Italian Embassy and The Istituto Italiano di Cultura invites everybody to a lecture by Mr. Michael Sarbanes on "Democracy, Empire and Disaster: The Athenian Expedition to Sicily" at the Italian Embassy on Oct 8<sup>th</sup> 7:00 pm. R.S.V.P. 202-612-4462 or [dverrone@itwash.org](mailto:dverrone@itwash.org)

### **Grecia Salentina at The Italian Embassy on Oct 9th**

The Embassies of Italy and Greece present a musical program "Grecia Selentina", a tribute to the Greek-speaking villages of Southern Italy at the Italian Embassy on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> 6:30 pm. Signing by the renowned Greek signer Ellie Paspala. Special appearance by "Avledda Music Ensemble". R.S.V.P. 202-612-4462 or [dverrone@itwash.org](mailto:dverrone@itwash.org)

## **The Future of Hellenism in America, Oct 18<sup>th</sup> in DC**

The American Hellenic Institute Foundation (AHIF) in cooperation with the Foundation for Hellenic Studies presents the 2nd Annual Conference on The Future of Hellenism in America, Oct 18<sup>th</sup> at J.W. Marriott Hotel. For more information, call 202-785-8430

### **Misc Articles of Interest**

#### **PAGES FROM HISTORY"**

The Story Behind **The Creed** of Nicaea

By Prof. D. G. Kousoulas

Special to the National Herald

Scanned from the Ethnikos Keryx of 8/9-10/03

For almost one hundred years, the Christian communities in the eastern part of the Roman Empire were embroiled in a profound controversy over the divine nature of Jesus. Was Christ a God like the Father, without beginning, or was he created by the Father?

Around 313 A. D., Arius took over the torch initially lit almost one hundred years before by bishop Paul of Samosata and kept aflame by Lucien, a holy man revered by Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. Arius was a priest in one of the major churches in Alexandria, Egypt, the great center of learning with its long tradition of Greek thought. A tall, slender man, with regal bearing, magnetic eyes, and mesmerizing eloquence, always dressed in a simple sleeveless tunic, Arius had attracted throughout the East a large following to his argument that Jesus was "not of the same substance as the Father."

The controversy threatened to break up the Church. In 325 Emperor Constantine, who, since 312 A.D. had taken the Christian religion under his protection, decided to step in. In late March of that year, he sent a letter to all bishops throughout the empire. In it he wrote:

"It is clear to all, I think, that nothing is more precious in my eyes than our religion. Although it was previously settled that the Synod of bishops should convene at Ancyra in Galatia, it has now been decided for many reasons that it should meet at Nicaea of Bithynia, both because the bishops from Italy and other parts of Europe are coming, and because of its pleasant climate, but also because I wish to be near to observe and take part in the work of the Synod. I, therefore, inform you, beloved brethren, that I expect you to come to Nicaea as soon as possible...."

The time for the Synod was set for June. Nicaea was near Nicomedia where Constantine resided - Constantinoupolis had not been in existence then, and as he had written in his letter that he wanted to be near, "to take part in the work of the Synod." To Constantine, the unity of the Church was paramount because he believed that God would blame him for dissension within its ranks.

In June of 325, they started arriving in the charming city of Nicaea, on the shores of the Ascanian lake. The response to the emperor's call was not as universal as Constantine had hoped. Over 250 bishops came from the East but only a few came from the West because most of the clergy there had no interest in the dispute, which appeared to many of them as too esoteric. Sylvester, the bishop of Rome, excused himself because of his advanced age and poor health but he sent two presbyters, Vito and Vincentius, to represent him. Eustorgius came from Mediolanum (Milan), Marcus from Calabria, and Theophilus the Goth came on behalf of the northern tribes. Caecilianus came from Carthage in North Africa. Constantine was pleased to see that a few bishops came from countries out-side of the empire. Two came from Cherson (the Crimea), two from the kingdom of Armenia, and one from Persia. Clearly the composition of the Synod was overwhelmingly from the East. Greek, not Latin, was the language spoken by most participants.

On the 3rd of July, Constantine came to Nicaea. Eusebius, the bishop of Caesaria and the author of the History of the Church, has reported the highlights of the Synod in the vivid, descriptive language of an eyewitness. Here is his account of the opening ceremony. "All the invited prelates came to the palace, escorted to the great hall where rows of seats were set on each side, and took their places in proper decorum. As the moment of the emperor's entry approached expectant silence fell in the hall. The first, the second, and then the third of the emperor's officials came in as well as others, not the usual armed guards but only his friends [who believed in Christ]. When the signal was given, they all rose from their seats, and Constantine entered. He walked through the middle of the hall as if he were a celestial angel of God, attired in a garment which was shining as though radiant with light, reflecting the glow of the deep red cape adorned with gold and precious stones.....His soul infused with the fear of God and with reverence, his eyes downcast, his face slightly flushed, his walk measured. He was taller than everyone else. When he advanced to the front of the assembly, he remained standing at first. A gilded seat was waiting for him but he did not sit until the bishops motioned to him to do so."

Constantine gave the opening speech in Latin to underline the solemnity of the gathering by using the official language of the empire. Later, he spoke mostly in Greek, which he spoke quite well since he had lived in the very same area as a youngster for many years.

It is interesting to note that he spoke only of the "Supreme God" because he did not want to prejudge the outcome of the Synod. He concluded with an exhortation, however, that sounded more like an imperial order: "Begin now to cast aside the causes of dissension which exist among you, by controversy. For by so doing you will be acting in the manner most pleasing to the Supreme God, and thereby confer on me, your fellow servant an extraordinary favor."

He underlined his words with a telling gesture. The day he arrived in Nicaea, he found waiting for him many petitions submitted by bishops accusing each other of heresy, or misconduct. In the words of Eusebius, "he took out of the folds of his toga the scrolls, had a brazier with burning coals brought in, and declaring under oath that he had not read any of them, he threw them upon the fire."

Once the debates began, the dazzling impression of the opening ceremony rapidly faded, as contention and acrimony took over. The main issue before the Synod was the divine nature of Christ. As it happens in large contentious conferences, three major groups emerged: those who sided with Arius, forcefully rejecting the doctrine that Christ the Son was a God of the same "substance" as the Father; those who denounced the Aryans as despicable heretics; and those led by Eusebius of Caesaria who wanted to strike a balance to preserve the unity of the Church.

It seems that soon after the discussion started, Eusebius of Nicomedia, as the bishop of the imperial capital, presented to the assembly a statement of faith to serve as the basis for discussion, it was clearly a pro-Arian document.

Many among the bishops rose in anger and literally tore the paper to pieces. It was now evident that strong anti-Arian sentiments dominated the Synod. But just as determined were those who sided with Arius. [Incidentally, Eusebius of Nicomedia, a pro-Arian bishop, could count on the support of Constantine's sister Constantia and even of his mother Helena]. At times the debates broke out into a shouting match, even in the presence of Constantine.

After a few days of acrimony, Eusebius of Caesaria, with Constantine's encouragement, quietly offered for discussion the statement of faith being used in his diocese at the baptism of new members. Some of the sentences can be found in the formal statement of faith eventually approved by the Synod. Constantine told the bishops that Eusebius' statement was a good basis for a more constructive debate.

The major stumbling block was what it had always been: the nature of Christ as the Son of God. They all agreed that Christ was the Son of God. But was he of the same substance as the father? Was he a creature of God, like all other creatures? Did he have a beginning or was he without beginning like the Father?

For them, those were the critical questions. They were also questions that could not be answered. No logic could really provide the answer, and no proof could be offered by either side. The answer could only be accepted by faith. Still, they debated as though the subject of their debate was subject to proof.

Eusebius of Caesaria leaves the impression that it was Constantine who came up with the magic word *omooussios*. In Greek the word means "of the same substance," "consubstantial." Some of Arius' more moderate friends, including Eusebius of Nicomedia, tried to change the word by inserting the Greek letter "i" so that the word would be "*omoiousios*," meaning of a similar substance. Their effort failed.

In the end, the statement of faith that was approved by the majority of bishops at the Synod of Nicaea is what has come down through the centuries as the Nicaea Creed (To Pistevo). It read in the crucial part: "I believe in one God, Father Almighty, the maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten (*ton monogeni*). Light of Light, a True God from a True God, begotten, not Made (*gennithenta, ou poiithenta, omooussion* to the Father who has made all things..."

Some changes and additions were introduced later, but these never touched the central doctrine. Above all, the omoousios remains unaltered.

All those who refused to accept the Creed were anathematized. Undaunted, Arius held to his beliefs. Another historian, Philostorgus, has left this report. "When Arius' supporters refused to adhere to the faith of the Synod, the emperor declared that those who refused to accept the general ruling of the bishops, whether they were priests or deacons or other members of the clergy, would be exiled. Philomenos, the magister officiorum, the chief of the civil service, was assigned the implementation of the order. He presented the formal statement of faith to Arius and those with him and gave them the choice of signing or going to exile. They chose exile." Arius was sent to Illyricum, in the Balkans, too far from Egypt for him to cause more trouble. But it will be a mistake to assume that this was the end. His ideas remained powerful for more than two hundred years after his sudden death in 336.

This article features excerpts from D. G. Kousoulas' book, "The Life and Times of Constantine The Great." The book, in its 2nd Edition, is available at the bookstore of The National Herald.,"

## Shakespeare's Greek Chorus Washington Theater Takes 'Oedipus' to the Acropolis

By Peter Marks  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Wednesday, September 10, 2003; Page C01

NEW YORK -- Michael Kahn was facing his accustomed audience, a roomful of actors, though what he had to talk to them about was anything but customary. Normally, on this first day of rehearsal he'd give them an intimate sense of the surroundings in which they would be putting on their play at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, where he is the artistic director.

In this instance, however, he could offer no such helpful insight. The production they were preparing here in the studios of the Juilliard School, for which he also runs the drama division, was headed no place near Kahn's longtime D.C. stomping ground. It would, instead, be traveling where no Kahn production had gone before, to a vast, ancient space in the cradle of world drama.

"It's the big Roman theater below the Parthenon," he told the actors. "You climb up to the Acropolis, and there is this big Roman theater. And it seats 4,000 people."

The company was impressed. Murmurs rose in the rehearsal room.

"It's a little bit daunting. Challenging is really what I mean," Kahn said. "This is a way to see a play they know really, really well. And see it differently."

Actually, daunting was the right word. Bearing Greek drama to the Greeks is like cooking a Wolfgang Puck recipe for Wolfgang Puck. Yet Kahn had readily agreed when organizers of the Athens Festival, Greece's premier arts extravaganza, offered the Shakespeare Theatre an opportunity to bring its Sophoclean trilogy "The Oedipus Plays" to the Acropolis. This would represent that extremely rare event, an American theater company -- in a production made up entirely of African American actors -- reciting the venerated texts in an amphitheater packed with the Athenian cognoscenti.

As a result, the Shakespeare Theatre will make its Acropolis debut tonight, ending its visit after a second performance tomorrow. With Avery Brooks reprising the role of Oedipus, and featuring such other returning actors as Earle Hyman (as Teiresias) and Cynthia Martells (Antigone), the production is very similar to the one Kahn staged at the Shakespeare two years ago. Though during that run, there was no need for surtitles.

Not only is "The Oedipus Plays" the longest-distance transfer in the history of Kahn's theater, it's virtually the only such transfer. Some years ago he took an "As You Like It" to the University of South Carolina, and that's about it, Kahn said, for the Shakespeare Theatre's experience on the road. The company's limited wanderings may be a function of the high cost of mobility: The price of exporting "The Oedipus Plays" to Greece is about \$400,000. Most of the money was raised from private sources, although the U.S. government is picking up a fraction of the tab -- \$15,000, according to Kahn.

"I was very surprised and very pleased," Kahn said over breakfast before the rehearsal. "How many American theater companies go to Greece?"

He was impressed, too, when he went to Athens in April to discuss the production with the Greek news media. He was expecting a few vaguely engaged arts writers. What he found was a packed news conference with 70 journalists. And they actually seemed interested in the details about the production and its artistic ambitions.

"The Oedipus Plays" is three of Sophocles' works -- "Oedipus Rex," "Oedipus at Colonus" and "Antigone" -- condensed into a single evening, in an English translation by Nicholas Rudall. Kahn's notion was to shift the setting to ancient Africa and draw parallels between Greek and sub-Saharan cultures by showcasing the movement, music and ritual in the

plays. He even took his creative team to Zimbabwe to absorb the local rhythms.

The production was greeted with mild applause by some critics -- in *The Washington Post*, Nelson Pressley remarked coolly on a certain "resolute stateliness" in some performances -- but it was embraced wholeheartedly by the Greek Embassy. Greece's ambassador at the time, Alexander Philon, was enchanted and told Kahn so. He urged Kahn to consider coming to the Athens Festival, which in the past had welcomed such celebrated artists as Maria Callas and Leonard Bernstein and such institutions as the Kirov Ballet and New York Philharmonic.

"I went to the production and I really loved it," recalled Connie Mourtouपालas, cultural attache in the Greek Embassy in Washington. "I come from Thebes, and there you grow up with these legends. They're talked about like they're your family's next-door neighbors." With such familiarity had come some jadedness; many modern Greek productions, Mourtouपालas said, offer austere interpretations that fail to touch her.

"This production did a really wonderful job of bringing emotion into it, without making it sentimental or melodramatic," she added. "The way Michael did it really captured the elements that are present in Greek culture -- emotion and sensuality."

The news of the potential Acropolis gig was an emotional high for the actors. "When I heard the possibility that this would happen, I told Michael I would swim all the way to Athens," said Hyman, a veteran of the classics who, at 77, is the senior member of the ensemble. "I am deeply moved by this opportunity, and my deepest worry is I not burst out crying."

As unusual as it is for an American company to declaim in an Athenian amphitheater, it's almost as rare for black actors in the United States to fill the cast of any major classical production, from the smallest parts to the largest. That the Greeks had asked for this "Oedipus" was a matter of special pride to these actors, who stand, as a result, to garner more attention in Europe for their work in this project than they did during its U.S. run.

"It's a real testament to the depth of talent in the pool of African American actors in the classics," said Wendell Pierce, who is new to the production, playing Creon. "It also saddens you, knowing that these opportunities are few, not only for African Americans but for all actors."

"Obviously, this gracious invitation is quite extraordinary," Brooks said in a phone conversation a few days after the initial read-through. "It's quite a blessing to have the opportunity to stand on such historic ground, have

this wave of history wash across us." The actor seemed pleased that the festival was so open to a setting of the plays that posited a bridge between the evolution of culture in Athens and Africa, a hot topic in academic circles.

"The further you go back, there are some common elements," Brooks said. "You're talking about a relationship with the earth, and the presence of sounds and music and dance and oral tradition. Once you have this group of people set foot in Greece, the connection is made."

Kahn had some logistical issues to deal with before these actors could make their Athenian entrances. The sets were superfluous: "We don't have any scenery because it's the most famous archaeological site in the world," he explained. And the costumes would be carried on the plane, in hand luggage. The scale of the production had to change, because the amphitheater stage is 50 feet longer than the one in Washington.

"It's a long way from the back of the theater, a verrry long way," Kahn told the actors in the Juilliard studio that day. The company will be in Athens a total of about a week, and because of the heat, rehearsals on the Acropolis on the days before the first performance would not get underway until 4 p.m. and not end until 4 a.m. "I can't say, 'Don't go out after rehearsal,' because there won't be anywhere to go," Kahn added.

Housekeeping matters seemed to be of only minor consequence to the cast at this particular moment. They had their minds on bigger things. "To do a play that came from that ground and that place thousands of years ago is a great honor," Pierce said later. "The level that it hits me at is so beautiful and so deep."

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