



## The Hellenic Society Prometheas

### Newsletter 36

### October 2004

*The first Kafenio of the Season* took place at *St. Catherine's Greek Orthodox Church in Arlington, VA on Friday, September 24<sup>th</sup>*. It was a delightful evening; more than 120 people attended and had great time until 11:30 PM with live Greek music by **Achilleas and Co.** The showing of the Olympics' opening and closing ceremonies made the evening even more pleasant. Congratulations to the Dance Committee and all who helped organize a great event.

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

On Wednesday, October 20, 2004, 8:00 p.m. at St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Bethesda, MD Prometheas in cooperation with the Press and Information Office of the Greek Embassy presents editor Thanasis Maskaleris on **“Preserving the Greek Heritage/The Role of Literature”** with a special tribute to Nikos Kazantzakis. (For more details please click [here](#)).

On Friday, October 29, 2004, 7:30 p.m. at St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Bethesda, MD Prometheas presents an evening on **“Reflections on the Athens 2004 Olympics”**. Professor Alexander Kitroeff will be the speaker and panel moderator of a discussion among a number of Olympic volunteers. A video of the Olympics will also be shown. (For more details please click [here](#)).

### **Misc Articles of Interest**

### **It's cool to be Greek**

**by Dino Siotis\***

Because of the Athens Olympics, Greece has made an unexpected jump from the tourism-industrial complex to the cultural-industrial complex. The Games provided an excellent opportunity for improvements to the Greek capital's infrastructure, and they contributed to the metamorphosis of Athens, which has been transformed into a modern city with the Ancients everywhere accessible. Thanks to a series of vast works, Athens now boasts a modern and effective transportation network. With a new metro (many stations display antiquities found during the excavations), a new tram system, a light rail train, a new airport, renovated museums, new art galleries, pedestrian walks and the

Athens Music Hall, Athens has taken its place among the most advanced world capitals. After so many years it's cool to be Greek again.

This is not the Athens of “Zorba the Greek”, nor is it the red-light district of Piraeus so lovingly filmed in “Never on Sunday.” There’s no going back to the fifties and sixties. Those were the days of happy Greeks full of optimism about their future. Now are the days of cool Greeks who know how to surprise the world, and maybe themselves, and who have shown they can undertake a worldwide multicultural and sporting event, and do it with class. Visitors to Athens met self-disciplined Greeks, whose hospitality was genuinely friendly, displaying a generous spirit, helping their guests to thoroughly enjoy the Games and the city. Their extraordinary knowledge of foreign languages made them especially helpful to foreign visitors—after all they have a word for hosting foreigners: *philoxenia*—and they showed they are ready to turn the page.

It's as though euphoria has permanently descended on the city. Two weeks after the Olympics, Athenians are still polite to each other, still avoid the Olympic auto lane and take care not to litter... anywhere. Even stray dogs are happier, though fewer in number. They are back in the streets of Athens, neutered, well fed, bathed and healthier.

Athens offered the world unique and unforgettable Games on a human scale, focused on the Olympic ideals that unite the whole world: the pursuit of personal excellence through peaceful competition.

The Hellenes’ achievement has been to give the world an Olympics of which they are proud and to provide profound pleasure to all spectators—those in Athens and those watching via TV. If the rest of the world had been able to realize this during the months before the Games, there wouldn’t be any need for an apology from *The London Times*, CNN, *The San Jose Mercury* and *The Washington Post*. *The Boston Globe*, to its credit, did not join the chorus of Cassandras who rushed to condemn Athens for not being “secure” or “ready.”

For some reason, *The New York Times* was hell-bent on demeaning Athens for its security system, even though Athens had the largest, most comprehensive and best-funded security system in Olympic history. And the system worked! Moreover, the magical part was that no one felt invaded by the marvelous security people, who themselves were cool.

The media were mocking, dismissive and flat-out wrong. Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis, former Prime Minister Costas Simitis, and Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki said it again and again: “The Games will take place. Greece will give a unique answer to those who dared to cast doubts on its ability to finish the projects.” OK, the swimming stadium had no roof. How many Olympic cities have had an Olympic stadium with a roof? None. Zilch. Nada. Maybe that’s what made Michael Phelps say, “It’s cool to be in Athens.”

Greeks are cool again. The 50,000 volunteers of the Games were proud Hellenes whose smiles were an extension of their souls. They are cool because instead of the daily traffic anarchy there is order in the streets of Athens. Drivers leave their cars at home and take the new, extended mass transport system. The daily grind has been replaced by politeness, enthusiasm and full-blown joy. Greeks did everything they could to keep each visitor happy. Now the Athenians are telling the world that the Games were not a parenthesis in their daily life, but a synthesis of body and mind, of soul and spirit, of energy and vision.

Because of the Athens Olympics, a new Greece is emerging: looking forward, and ready to embrace the realities and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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### **Alexander and the Rustle of Black Wings**

**By Rick Weiss**

**Washington Post Staff Writer**

**Monday, July 19, 2004; Page A06**

Medical investigators in Virginia and Maryland are engaged in an unusual public tussle over the death of a celebrity patient whose presumed death-by-poisoning has come under growing scrutiny.

It's not often that doctors and medical researchers argue in public over a possible misdiagnosis. But when the patient has been dead for 2,327 years -- and when that patient just happened to have conquered the entire known world by the time he was 25 -- well, the usual courtesies of patient confidentiality can hardly be expected to apply.

So it is that ancient descriptions of Alexander the Great's final days are being scrutinized anew for clues to the Macedonian king's death. Amid a growing consensus that an infectious disease, not poison, was the likely killer, experts have narrowed their focus to typhoid or a brain inflammation caused by West Nile virus -- two competing diagnoses proposed by medical sleuths in Baltimore and Richmond, respectively.

It's a duel of opinions unlikely to be fully resolved. Although historical documents indicate that Ptolemy, the Egyptian general, had Alexander's body preserved in honey and his sarcophagus displayed for many years, the corpse was eventually lost to history. So scientists have no tissues to test for microbial DNA or other clues.

But getting a final answer is not really the point, said John Marr, state epidemiologist for Virginia's Department of Health. "It's intellectual candy," Marr said of his post-mortem. "And it's a reminder of how to look at signs and symptoms, which is

something that's being lost as the art of medicine is being usurped by electronic messiahs" such as laboratory tests, echocardiograms, scans of various kinds and other modern tools of diagnosis.

The debate began in earnest six years ago when David Oldach and colleagues at the University of Maryland School of Medicine published a report concluding that Alexander had died of typhoid.

The university has a proud history of diagnosing illnesses of the long-dead. A special program there devoted to the practice takes on a new celebrity each year -- concluding in recent years that Beethoven died of cirrhosis and syphilis, and Edgar Allen Poe of rabies.

Oldach's team relied largely on remarkably detailed descriptions of Alexander's death recorded by Plutarch a few centuries after the event. Alexander's medical chart, Oldach determined, would have read something like this: A 32-year-old soldier, widely traveled, with many wives and one son and a history of excessive alcohol consumption, experienced escalating fever, great thirst, profuse sweating and acute abdominal pain soon after returning to Babylon. For two weeks the patient suffered from delirium, loss of voice and increased weakness, gradually progressing to paralysis and death.

In the December 1998 issue of *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, a journal of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oldach and his colleagues concluded that Alexander's symptoms pointed to typhoid, a life-threatening bacterial disease, transmitted by contaminated food and water, that causes sustained high fevers, can be accompanied by stomach pains and sometimes affects nerves -- possibly accounting for Alexander's paralysis.

Then, in 2002, a group preparing a documentary about Alexander asked Marr to reconsider the evidence for typhoid. Marr read Oldach's paper and was at first inclined to agree with it. "But then I said, 'What the heck. Let's re-look at this thing from a larger scale,'" he recalled.

That meant going beyond the descriptions of Alexander's symptoms to include questions of what was going on at the time around Babylon (near today's Baghdad), including the kinds of plants and animals there and what the landscape and climate were like.

While Marr was doing so, he got a call from a colleague studying West Nile encephalitis, an unusual complication of West Nile virus infection that can cause a polio-like syndrome called flaccid paralysis. "That made a light flicker in my head," Marr said. "I remembered that Alexander was awake but had to be carried."

Then Marr and fellow epidemiologist Charles Calisher of Colorado State University found a passage in Plutarch's writing that other diagnosticians had not noted.

As a still-healthy Alexander had approached the Western gates of Babylon, something strange happened: A flock of ravens flew erratically overhead, and several fell dead at Alexander's feet.

Marr and Calisher knew that corvid birds, a family that includes ravens and crows, are exquisitely susceptible to West Nile. In fact, finding dead crows in the Bronx in 1999 first alerted scientists that the Old World disease had reached the United States.

They also knew that West Nile was first identified, and probably originated, near Egypt. And they learned that the Western approach to Babylon would have taken Alexander along a swamp -- one probably inhabited by mosquitoes, which transmit West Nile from birds to humans.

No one knows whether the disease existed 2,000 years ago. But when Marr and Calisher loaded all of Alexander's symptoms -- along with the word "ravens" -- into a computer program that diagnoses infectious diseases, the software backed up their intuition: West Nile encephalitis.

Case closed? Hardly.

This month's issue of *Emerging Infectious Diseases* includes several letters to the editor responding to Marr and Calisher, whose report appeared in the December 2003 issue. Oldach and his colleagues were among the letter writers.

Because Plutarch wrote about events already past, the Marylanders wrote, he had ample opportunity to inject "predictive" signs, including some linked to the then-popular practice of avian augury -- predicting events from bird-related clues. In Plutarch's other writings, they noted, "wild birds perched on the forum" before Caesar's assassination; a flock of crows "pecked the ends of the ropes" as Cicero fled in a ship after Marc Antony's death sentence; and Remus "saw six vultures" shortly before his death.

"Marr and Calisher, perhaps unaware of the magnitude of Plutarch's obsession with avian auguries, have been led down the feathered path," they quipped.

The Virginians took the critique as intended: lightly. Truth is, they had briefly mentioned in their December report the possibility that Plutarch had resorted to a bit of reverse fortune-telling.

If additional research offers convincing evidence that typhoid was, in fact, the cause of Alexander's death, Marr and Calisher wrote in a response to Oldach, the two "are willing to eat *Corvus brachyrhynchos*" -- the scientific name for American crow.

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## **Book Review**

Mysteries: Dangerous liaisons, a clever Greek and a deadly diamond

By Paul Skenazy

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In the Down-Under Boondocks

Garry Disher's *The Dragon Man* (Soho, \$23) is a lean, compelling police procedural that uncovers rural Australian life in all its hazardous dailiness. Detective Inspector Hal Challis runs the police office on the Peninsula, "a comma of land hooking into the sea south-east of Melbourne." Women have been disappearing along the Old Peninsula Highway. One body has been discovered. While mothers and friends appeal for help in finding the other women who are missing, Challis and his mates at the police station try to trace a pattern in the crimes. They also cope with a rash of burglaries and a series of mailboxes set on fire. And a car set on fire. And a house set on fire.

Disher keeps his style curt, his bits of dialogue short, his invasions of the psyche pointed. Weaving back and forth between the police and the criminals, and among the uniformed cops and detectives, Disher smoothly creates a choral portrait of the police and the people they work with and for, delivering a community of stories. Loneliness is as commonplace as the muddy roads and broken fences. The police force that Challis commands is a varied lot, including a wife frustrated by an indifferent husband and rebellious daughter, a cop who falls for a cocaine addict and starts supplying her from the evidence locker, a young recruit recovering from a car accident who is as interested in her surfing teachers as in her police procedures. Challis himself is the "dragon man" of the title (a nickname that refers to his efforts to restore a vintage airplane, a de Havilland DH 84 Dragon Rapide). He fluctuates between exhausted patience on the phone with his ex-wife, who is in prison for trying to kill him, and a discreet and intermittent affair he's having with a local newspaper reporter. Though Disher broadcasts the killer's identity a bit too early, this is still a first-rate piece of crime writing: a dense, hard-nosed portrait of a world unto itself.

The Bard of the 87th Precinct

Ed McBain (a.k.a. Evan Hunter), the grand master of the police procedural, returns in *Hark!* (Simon & Schuster, \$24.95), his 54th book about the 87th Precinct cops, the crimes they solve, and the lives they live outside the station house. The thief known as the Deaf Man has returned, eager for revenge on the woman who left him for dead (he shoots her in the first scene) and eager to mock the 87th crew with a series of teasing clues about his next crime. Steve Carella, Meyer Meyer, Kling, Cotton Hawes and the rest start receiving messengered notes that seem impossible to decipher. Some prove to be anagrams, some

palindromes, some quotes from Shakespeare. The notes appear to define the date, and even hint at the crime -- except they hint at several crimes at once.

Meantime, the detectives are clueless about what to do with their own lives. Carella is trying to avoid thinking about the joint wedding he is planning for his mother and sister. Cotton Hawes is making it with Honey Blair of Channel Four News, until someone starts shooting at the two of them. Kling is worried that his sweetie is meeting secretly with a man she used to date. And the Deaf Man (who calls himself Adam Fen) wanders the city, visiting the New York Public Library to view an original copy of Shakespeare's First Folio on display, showing intense interest in a classical violin recital. He shacks up with a prostitute named Melissa Summers, whom he sends on errands to find delivery men for his notes to Carella and Co. And he waits.

McBain is playing for laughs, and he gets them, working skillfully to create just enough intrigue to keep us interested in the bad jokes, the puzzling riddles and the domestic melodramas. The whole performance is deft and light, like a magician's sleight of hand: The trick is pulled off while you look the other way. There's nothing lasting here, except the pleasure of watching a master having fun -- and that's a kind of Shakespearean delight in itself.

### Murder Greek Style

Just as the Olympics have brought Greece to the world's attention comes the first American publication of Petros Markaris's Greek crime fiction. *Deadline in Athens*, ably translated by David Connolly (Grove, \$23), features Inspector Costas Haritos, an edgy, cynical policeman in a contemporary Athens more notable for its traffic jams and rainy weather than its classical ruins. Like all good fictional cops, Haritos is in trouble with his superiors and unwilling to settle for the convenient, if unconvincing, solution. So when an Armenian quickly confesses to killing two other Armenians, Haritos is willing to follow a tip from Janna, a zealous, ambitious TV reporter, that there is more to the case than appears. Then Janna herself is found murdered, just before she was set to air a sensational news story. And soon after, Janna's successor is found dead as well. The evidence from one murder slowly intersects with the next, leading Haritos to an accused child molester who has just been freed, a love affair Janna had with her station manager, and the shipping records of a well-connected travel agency. At home he struggles unsuccessfully to appease his wife, Adriani, who spends her days watching TV crime stories, and to find time to see his daughter, who is away at school. But the real story here is the geography and culture of Athens. From Haritos's wily boss Ghikas, the chief of security, to the Armani-suited corporate TV executives, this is a world where the rich and powerful rule. Newscasters point a finger at an innocent man, and Haritos spends days tracking him down as much to protect as to arrest him; Haritos builds a case against a TV producer only to find himself facing suspension.

Ghikas urges him to be more "flexible," while Haritos charges on, pushing his way through doors that want to remain closed. *Deadline* is a satisfying if sometimes slow-paced read, the wayward elements of the plot wandering in and out of focus as Haritos

reaches one wrong conclusion after another. Still, the material is rich, the characters are drawn with depth, and Haritos himself is an intriguing find: zealous in his work, more in love with his wife than he will admit, suspicious by training, his only relief from work being the hours he spends learning new words in his dictionaries at home. Two more Haritos tales are promised for the near future, and I look forward to reading them and spending more time with this snarling, amiable Greek.

### Multi-Faceted Plotting

Skye Kathleen Moody's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agent Venus Diamond returns for her seventh outing in *The Good Diamond* (St. Martin's, \$24.95). This time Diamond's name claims major attention as a pun that echoes from start to finish in a story about diamond trading and the international arms trade. Big Jim Hardy, a reclusive prospector, discovers a 384-carat rough diamond he calls "Lac de Lune," after the lakebed where he found it, just outside the small prospecting town of Yellowknife in Canada. But as he is about to depart to have the diamond cleaved, his compound is invaded, he is killed, the diamond is stolen, and his geologist is taken hostage. Before he dies, however, Hardy has time to send an e-mail and scrawl Venus Diamond's name in blood. Still with me?

Because now the plot really gets farfetched. Sgt. Roland Mackenzie of the Royal Canadian Mounties is convinced that Hardy has written his murderer's name and so arrests Diamond, who then reveals that Big Jim Hardy was really Buzz Radke, a U.S. federal undercover agent whom Diamond worked with years before. The escaping thieves are, it seems, part of a militant group that dubs itself the Nation of God's Chosen Soldiers (or "Company 8"), headquartered on the Lay-a-Day Chicken Ranch just across the U.S.-Canadian border. They want to trade the diamond for arms, through a diamond trader in New York who is sending the guns out West with two hoodlums in a truck with New Jersey license plates. Evidence turns up that seems to link Mackenzie to the killing, so suddenly he is arrested and needs to turn to Diamond for help trying to clear his name. Three master diamond cutters -- in New York City, Antwerp and South Africa -- are working on models of the huge diamond to see if they can successfully cleave the delicate stone. The New York traders are ruthlessly working to procure the diamond and frighten competitors away from the chase. And there are rumors that the stolen diamond itself might be a fake substituted for the real stone to prevent just the kind of theft that occurred. Moody has always liked to stuff her books with plots until they burst at the seams, and this outing is no different.

White supremacists, greedy hoodlums, devious diamond cutters, desperate jewel traders; Canadian tundra, Seattle digs, border chicken farms, New York streets, Antwerp hovels; a militant's wife who offers a captive a tape recorder and tapes so she can explain her life (and fill in the plot details); a hoodlum who deserts his post to sit in the library -- the unbelievable elements and events spiral out at an alarming pace. Lost in the frenzy is the issue of diamonds-for-guns -- the trade in what are called "blood" diamonds that support arms shipments to militant groups worldwide. Lost too is Venus herself, who becomes a cipher that we watch from increasing distances as she tries to make sense of the confusing events. You will not be bored by this book. It is filled with interesting diamond

lore, and it clips along, jumping with often comic cunning among its various plots. But Moody seems so anxious to fit them all in that she sometimes sketches in her stories rather than writing them out. The result is a confusing, faceless tale.

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