



The Hellenic Society Prometheas

Newsletter 30

March 2004

Mark your calendar

THE HELLENIC SOCIETY PROMETHEAS & THE HELLENIC ORGANIZATIONS OF THE WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA

Invite you to a celebration of

The 183rd Anniversary of the Greek Independence

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Vassilis Lambropoulos

C. P. Cavafy Professor of Chair of Modern Greek Studies, Professor of Classical Studies
and Comparative Literature, University of Michigan.

The Paradoxes of Philhellenism

(in English)

This year we honor the contribution of the **Philhellenes** to the struggle for independence with brief literary readings and recitation of poems. Folk dances will be performed by the **Return to Origins** dance troupe under the direction of Rena Papapostolou. Reception to follow.

Saturday, March 27, 2004 at 5:30 p.m.

ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH, GRAND HALL

7701 BRADLEY BLVD. BETHESDA, MD 20817

301-469-7990

Co-sponsors

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St. George Greek Orthodox Church
Sts. Peter & Paul Greek Orthodox Church
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Return to Origins

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“Tribute to Greece and to the Athens 2004 Olympics”

Prometheas, with the support of the Greek Ministry of Culture, is organizing a concert of classical and contemporary music with the theme **“Tribute to Greece and to the Athens 2004 Olympics”**. The event will take place on Sunday, May 23, 2004 at 7:30 pm at the prestigious Lisner Auditorium of the George Washington University. It will be a world premiere of a concert to be conducted by the renowned composer **Dinos Constantinides**, Boyd Professor of composition at the Louisiana State University and Music Director of the Louisiana Symphonietta. A 14-member ensemble from Baton Rouge, Louisiana and the Greek mezzo soprano **Angelica Kathariou** will perform (see the [attached flyer](#)). A brief video presentation about the Olympics will precede the musical part.

THE GREEK ARCHITECTURE OF WASHINGTON - SMITHSONIAN

Washington's Glorious Architecture: The classical Greek and Roman architecture of the monuments of Washington, the U.S. Capitol, Union Station, National Gallery of Art, Ronald Reagan Building . . .

Walking Field Trip on the Mall

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<http://residentassociates.org/com/washington.asp>

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Request tickets online or call (202) 357- 3030, weekdays 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Classical is Washington's predominant style. Columns, arches, and domes were major features of the city's earliest buildings and monuments, and they are prominent architectural elements in the latest additions to the city, such as the new Ronald Reagan Building. This course traces the surprisingly resilient history of the classical tradition in Washington, from its selection for the earliest Federal architecture through its cyclical rise and fall from favor, each time transformed in new ways to suit the tastes, politics, and symbolic needs of changing times.

Icon making involves spirit as much as art

PAN ORTHODOX ICON EXHIBIT

STS. CONSTANTINE & HELEN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH, WASHINGTON, DC

By Lisa Rauschart

SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The full panoply of icons from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, as well as contributions from the iconographers from the main story, can be seen March 13 and 14 at the Third

Pan-Orthodox Icon Exhibit at Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, 4115 16th St. NW.

Just before Maria Leontovitsch Manley gets ready to apply the gold leaf to an icon, she prepares a piece of fatty clay called an Armenian bole. She will press that onto the surface of her icon to ensure that the gold will adhere without imperfections. Like the paint, the gold leaf and the technique for making the icon itself, the clay bole has been used this way for centuries. And just as iconographers have done for centuries, Mrs. Manley takes the small piece of clay into her hands and, ever so gently, breathes on it. "You have to do it slowly," Mrs. Manley says. An internationally recognized iconographer, she became interested in her religion, Russian Orthodoxy, and its icons after the death of her father when she was just 16.

A gentle breath on the clay is all it takes: Breathe too quickly and the gold leaf will blow away. Certainly, it's an old technique. Today, there would be more-efficient ways of easing the gold leaf onto the prepared bole. But warm breath on cold clay also echoes the act of God giving Adam life so long ago. That's an important consideration for iconographers, who blend technique and symbol in a form that owes a bit to art and much to spirit.

The slow and symbolic work of the icon maker will be showcased at the Third Pan-Orthodox Icon Exhibit, at Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Northwest on March 13 and 14. Now prized by art collectors, icons are designed not as pieces of art but as objects for religious veneration. "Icons were the books of the unlearned," says Father Nicholas Manousakis, the Proistemenos, or pastor, at Saints Constantine and Helen. "When you saw icons embellishing the walls of a church, you learned Christianity by knowing what the icons represented. They are windows to heaven."

Icon makers, called iconographers, rarely refer to themselves as artists and rarely sign their work. They speak of "writing" icons rather than painting or making them. Using techniques that have remained the same for centuries, the iconographer is more conduit than creator, participating in a spiritual journey that begins and ends in prayer. "This is not art first, not art as is," or art for its own sake, says Irena Beliakova, a Russian iconographer who came to the United States in 1982. "There's something behind it called the spirit."

When Mrs. Beliakova began learning to make icons, religious practice was still illegal in the Soviet Union. Now the fall of the communist East and a reawakening of the need for religious ritual has brought a resurgence of interest in icons and icon making. Slowly, and without much fanfare, iconographers from various traditions are breathing new life into an old form. "We follow the old rules and the mystical colors," says Valentin Ciucur, who, along with wife Maria, "writes" icons following the style they learned in art school back in Romania in 1977. "Blue shows divinity, red shows purity. Every rule has a purpose."

Yet the spiritual qualities that invest an icon and give it meaning can be difficult to teach. "If the student does not have that inside, they never come any more," says Mrs. Beliakova, who has been teaching an icon class at Georgetown's Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church for the last nine years. What is constant is the technique. Every iconographer begins with prayer, often to the figure that will be represented. Some iconographers will even fast during the writing of an icon, which can take up to a week or more for an iconographer working eight hours a day.

After prayer, the iconographer takes up a block of wood and prepares the board by laying down cheesecloth and layers of gesso, a mixture of animal glue and chalk or powdered marble, until the surface is thick and smooth. While the gesso is drying, iconographers prepare a "cartoon," a line-by-line drawing of the icon that they want to write. Most work from icon pattern books. A particular saint, for example, has a special set of characteristics associated with him or her that help to express a sacred as well as human identity.

After the cartoon is transferred from the paper to the prepared board, the iconographer incises the lines. The gold leaf is laid down. Paint is applied, usually starting with the dark colors and finishing up with the light in a layered process that echoes the journey of the Christian through the icon itself, out of the darkness of the world and into the light of the holy. "All the layers add dimension," Mrs. Manley says. "At the same time, they are transparent. You can see through them into a previous layer."

While some iconographers work in acrylic paints, many still work in the old style, using earth-toned pigments made from crushed minerals. These they mix up with water, vinegar and an egg emulsion. "People understand why we work with pigments that come from stone," says Mrs. Beliakova, who uses holy water to mix her paints and clean her brushes. "It's very warm and lifelike."

Finally, the icon is covered with several layers of varnish or shellac. But even with the principles carefully set, there is a range and variety in iconography that hints of the individual within the work. "When I work with a student, we go through the steps together," says Mrs. Manley. "I do them on my icon and then the student will do his. We both paint the same thing, but the icons end up looking totally different."

At Mrs. Beliakova's icon class recently, just one of the attendees was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church. The rest were Roman Catholics, parishioners at Holy Trinity.

Picture four men and two women, hunched over tables that during the day seat restless classes of preteens from Holy Trinity's middle school. The minutes tick by slowly. Conversation is hushed, with a few soft voices talking about the symbolism of cloth or the significance of color. And that is how it should be, according to iconographic tradition.

Icon making, after all, is a slow process. But some of the icons here may not be all that familiar to the Russian Orthodox iconographers of centuries ago. Dan MacDougall, from Arlington, is working on an icon of St. Columba, an Irish saint. Meanwhile, Neil

Pelletier is toiling over a copy of a Coptic icon, a rounded style he favors. And Grace Liddy, from Fort Washington, is creating an icon of the Virgin of Tenderness, in honor of her grandmother, Maria, the family matriarch.

Through it all, Mrs. Beliakova moves effortlessly among her students, correcting a line here, a shading there. "She's made this thing come alive," marvels Mr. Pelletier.

Working with a real iconographer can make all the difference, says Nadine Thola, an iconographer who got her start after her pastor encouraged her to read a book about icons. While a student at Laurel High School in the late 1970s, the 16-year-old ended up at the studio of Maria Manley, her first teacher.

There was just one problem. The teenager was allergic to eggs. "I wanted to do it so badly," says Mrs. Thola. "But I broke out with an egg allergy every time I wrote an icon." She was introduced to acrylic paint by another teacher who also taught her crosshatching, the technique she uses to shade faces in her icons. Today, her technique reflects the contributions of several mentors. "I still use the same prayer that Mrs. Manley does," she says.

Now Mrs. Thola is passing iconography on to her son, 13-year-old Michael, a student at Carl Sandburg Middle School in Alexandria. Like many children of iconographers, Michael got his start with the simple things, like sanding the boards, when he was just 7 or 8 years old. But even then, he wanted to do more. "It connects me in a way that I never really have before," he says.

It's the kind of connection that makes some iconographers willing to risk everything for their calling. Back in Romania, Valentin and Maria Ciucur persisted in writing icons despite the restrictions imposed by the communist government. For Mrs. Ciucur, writing icons was simply an expression of a long-standing faith. She had always been religious and continued to practice despite official pronouncements to the contrary. Only beginning in 1982, when then-leader Nicolae Ceausescu allowed the production of icons for export, could Mrs. Ciucur write icons in the open.

As a member of the Romanian merchant marine, Mr. Ciucur continued to make icons while at sea. "All the time when I was on the sea I painted icons 'underground,'" Mr. Ciucur says. Today, the Ciucurs live in Woodbridge, Va., but they still make icons the way they learned in their home country. "Romanian icons have less green and less shading than Greek icons," Mr. Ciucur says.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the Ciucurs opened a small studio. The entire family emigrated to the United States in the summer of 2000 and have since had their work exhibited at the National Cathedral and the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, as well as at Orthodox churches throughout the country.

Mrs. Ciucur still begins every icon the same way she did back in Romania. "Before she starts working, she prays to the subject," says her son, Emil, 22. "She prays for the people

who are going to own the icon, that they have luck and health and that all their wishes come true. If she doesn't pray that day, the icon doesn't come up."

For the iconographer, completing the icon means a new connection with the world of the spirit and a new reason to rejoice. "When I stop working, I feel a happiness, a fullness," says Mrs. Beliakova. "But I am not happy for me. I am happy for the icon."

What you'll see at icon exhibit

The images created for Orthodoxy and the Christian East over the centuries fascinate art lovers even today.

The full panoply of icons from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, as well as contributions from the iconographers from the main story, ***can be seen March 13 and 14*** at the Third Pan-Orthodox Icon Exhibit at Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, 4115 16th St. NW.

The exhibit includes images from the Greek, Russian, Antiochian, Armenian, Bulgarian, Carpatho-Russian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Romanian, Serbian and Ukrainian cultures.

Exhibit hours are noon to 5 p.m. March 13, 1 to 5 p.m. March 14. Some icons will be offered for sale. Two concerts are scheduled for March 14: a performance by the Sts. Constantine and Helen Choir at 1 p.m., and one by the Slavic Male Chorus at 3 p.m. The exhibit, the concerts and the parking are free. For more information see the Web site at www.stsconstantine-helen.com or call Margot Kopsidas Siegel at 202/667-4564.

Other events are scheduled in conjunction with the exhibit:

- John Alexiou, scholar and frequent visitor to Mount Athos in Greece, will discuss the holy mountain, the center of Eastern Orthodox monasticism. 8 p.m. March 5. Free.

- Noted iconographer Dennis Bell of Painesville, Ohio, will teach a one-hour class on creating an icon. 1 p.m. March 13. \$5 materials fee.

- Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557), opening March 23 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, exhibits works from more than 30 nations, and 40 icons from the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai.

An audio tour, part of the Metropolitan's Audio Guide program, will be available for rental (\$6, \$5 for members, and \$4 for children under 12). See www.metmuseum.org.

Contacting iconographers in D.C. area:

The iconographers featured in the main story have their own studios and classes. See these sources:

- Irena Beliakova, icon painter and restorer, displays a full gallery of her icons and discusses her painting techniques on her Web site at www.iconstudio.us. 11707 Highview Ave., Wheaton, Md. 20902. Call 301/728-3942 or e-mail her at IBeliakova@yahoo.com.

- Valentin and Maria Ciucur have a number of upcoming shows in addition to the exhibit at Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church. They also provide home tours of their icon collection at 14251 Farmer Court, Woodbridge, Va. 22193. See their

Web site at www.ciucur.com, e-mail them at icons@ciucur.com or call 703/580-6642, 703/597-8783 or 703/786-7311.

- Maria Leontovitsch Manley has a Web site, complete with an extensive array of icons, at www.icon-studio.net. She can be reached by e-mail at maria@icon-studio.net.

- Nadine Thola is available for lectures, classes, glass icon workshops and Greek festivals. For more information, e-mail inkspots@cox.net.

Misc Articles of Interest

When the Games Began: Olympic Archaeology

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD

March 9, 2004

New York Times

Opening day of the ancient Greek games was a spectacle to behold, a celebration of the vigor and supercharged competitiveness that infused the creative spirit of one of antiquity's most transforming civilizations.

People by the thousands from every corner of the land swarmed the sacred grounds, where altars and columned temples stood in homage to their gods. They came from cities that were often bitter rivals but shared a religion, a language and an enthusiasm for organized athletics. There was no doubt in their minds that the games were as much a part of Greek culture as Homer, Plato or Euripides, and on a summer day at Olympia, perhaps more so.

At dawn, the opening procession of athletes began: runners and jumpers, discus and javelin throwers, boxers and wrestlers and charioteers, all young men, marching to the stadium and the hippodrome. They went from one altar to the next and past shrines to heroes of previous games. Finally, a trumpet sounded the beginning of the big event.

The exuberance and pageantry of the original Greek games — even the spirit of community among rivals, however fleeting — will be re-enacted in August at the next modern Olympic Games. They will be held in Athens, in the land where it all began.

A closer study of ancient texts, art and artifacts and deeper archaeological excavations are giving scholars new insights into the early games and just how integral athletics was to ancient Greek life. The games, said Dr. Stephen G. Miller, an archaeologist who is a classics professor at the University of California, Berkeley, "ran hand in hand with Greek cultural development."

For almost 12 centuries, starting as early as 776 B.C. at Olympia in the Peloponnesus, organized athletics were so popular that nothing was allowed to stand in the way. When it was time for the games, armies of rival cities usually laid down their weapons in a "sacred truce." In 480 B.C., while the Persians were torching Athens, there was no stopping the foremost games at Olympia.

In athletics, scholars are finding, the ancient Greeks expressed one of their defining attributes: the pursuit of excellence through public competition. The games were festivals of the Greekness that has echoed through the ages and reverberates in the core of Western culture.

"Of all the cultural legacies left by the ancient Greeks," Dr. Edith Hall of the University of Durham in England has written, "the three which have had the most obvious impact on modern Western life are athletics, democracy and drama."

As Dr. Hall noted in the Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece, all three involved performance in an adversarial atmosphere "in open-air public arenas in front of a large mass of often extremely noisy and critical spectators."

In these competitive exhibitions, she added, "success conferred the highest prestige, and failure brought personal disappointment and public ignominy."

Dr. Donald G. Kyle, a professor of ancient history at the University of Texas in Arlington, said that long before the Greeks, others engaged in competitive sports like running and boxing. Contemporaries of the Greeks in Egypt and Mesopotamia put on lavish entertainments at court, with acrobats and athletes performing, and also promoted some sports as part of military training. Dr. Kyle is writing a book on sport and spectacle in the ancient world.

But the Greeks, the historian said, took athletics out of the court and into the wider public, beyond the singular spectacles to regularly scheduled competitions. They spread their games as they colonized Sicily and southern Italy and Alexander the Great conquered Eastern lands, he said, "in the same way the British took cricket everywhere they went."

"The Greeks linked their games to recurring religious festivals," Dr. Kyle said, "and this regularized and institutionalized athletics."

In "Ancient Greek Athletics," a book being published next month by Yale University Press, Dr. Miller of Berkeley has sifted through literature, art and recent archaeology to compile a comprehensive history of sports in ancient Greece and their relationship with social and political life. Dr. Kyle called the book "very authoritative, really a momentous publication."

What have the Greeks ever done for us?

From the Independent Newspaper in London, February 21, 2004

Well, for a start they founded our language, philosophies, politics and culture, retorts Tim Salmon. Still in doubt? Then visit the sites where it all began.

Given that a classical education seems about as relevant to modern life as medieval history, you could be forgiven for thinking that all the Greeks have ever done for us was whine about some Marbles and introduce an undrinkable wine and cheesy salad to our diet. But think again: we owe practically everything to the Greeks.

THE ALPHABET

The be-all and end-all, the alpha and omega of our culture. Out of Latin, via Etruscan and back to the Greek, the language of Europe's first literary work, Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. In its earliest form, Linear B, it survives in several thousand clay tablets, found in Crete at the Minoan palace of Knossos (open 8am-5pm), admission €4.50 (£3); in the Peloponnese at Mycenae; at the great walled palace of Agamemnon (open 8am-7pm), admission €6 (£4), and at Pylos (8.30am-3pm, closed Monday), admission €3 (£2) in the palace of Homer's wise old King Nestor.

The National Archeological Museum in Athens, which houses samples of practically everything Greek including the most spectacular finds from Mycenae, is closed until summer; thereafter it should be open Monday (10.30am-5pm), Tuesday to Sunday (8.30am-3pm), admission €6 (£4).

ARCHITECTURE

Practically all the elements of the English neo-classical style come from the Greeks: pediments and porticoes; the orders of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian; triglyphs and metopes; sculpture as ornament. In the middle of Athens at the Acropolis (open from 8.30am-7pm in the summer, 8.30am-2.30pm Nov-March, admission €12/£9.85) you can see it all: the perfect classical proportion of the Parthenon, the exquisite little temple of Athena Nike, and the elegant Erechtheum, its porch supported by sturdy girls.

DRAMA

"Dhrama," say the modern Greeks, with a slicing motion of the hand, to describe any kind of scene, fuss or hullabaloo. Polonius, vaunting the talents of the players in *Hamlet*, calls them "the best actors in the world - for tragedy, comedy, history...". The words are Greek and the tragedies and comedies of their great playwrights of the 5th century BC are the direct ancestors of our theatre.

Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, with Aristophanes providing the irreverence, competed with each other at the spring festival of the Dionysia in the theatre that you can see today on the southern slope of the Acropolis in Athens (open daily from 8.30am to

7pm in the summer, 8.30am to 3pm daily except Monday between November and March), admission €1.50 (£1). Many of their works are set in towns that are within half a day's drive of Athens. Antigone and Oedipus Tyrannus take place in Thebes, whose little-visited museum (open 8am-2.30pm, closed Monday) has a wonderful collection of painted sarcophagi; admission €2 (£1.35). Keep on along the road to Delphi and you come to the crossroads where Oedipus killed his father, with consequences as dire for the modern psyche as Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The most complete of the surviving ancient theatres, Epidauros (open 8am-7pm; admission €6/£4), is 90 minutes' drive from Mycenae. Here every summer many of the classical works are performed as part of the Athens Festival (00 30 210 928 2900; www.greekfestival.gr).

POLITICS

Politics: the business of running a polis, or city. Ancient Greece was not a single unitary state, but a collection of small independent cities. They all tried various forms of organising their lives: oligarchy, tyranny, democracy and versions thereof which frequently degenerated into anarchy. Democracy, the particular invention of the classical Greeks, reached its fullest and, some no doubt would say, most florid and degenerate form in fifth-century Athens - the richest, most powerful and creative of the city-states.

If you live in a small Greek town or village today and you want to meet your plumber, he won't have a business address; he will tell you to meet him in the agora. He means the cafés in the square where people gather to do business. In ancient Athens, it was the huge area on the north side of the Acropolis, extensively excavated now and dominated by the near-perfect temple of the Theseion. Here you can see the bouleuterion, the meeting place of the executive council of the Athenian democracy, and, on the hill of the Pnyx overlooking it, the place where the Assembly met, in whose debates every one of the roughly 30,000 adult male citizens (but no women, immigrants or slaves) had the right to participate. Some of the machinery of this democracy is on display in the Agora Museum (open 8.30am-3pm, closed Monday, admission €4/£2.70), where you can see jurors' disks for pronouncing verdicts of guilty or not guilty, a water clock for timing lawyers' speeches and pottery shards for voting to "ostracise," - ie. banish for 10 years - politicians and officials who had fallen from grace. A precedent there, perhaps.

SCIENCES, -OSOPHIES AND -OLOGIES

Master of all - philosophy, moral and political; literary criticism; biology and physics - was the great Aristotle. Born in the village of Stagira (on the road from the northern town of Thessaloniki to the monastic republic of Mt Athos) he came to Athens to study with Plato, who was in turn a pupil of Socrates.

Medicine was called "hygiene" by the Greeks, after Hygeia, daughter of Asclepius, god of healing. Hippocrates, of the Oath, practised it at the sanctuary of Asclepius (admission €4, (£2.70); open 8.30am-3pm, closed Mondays) on the island of Kos. You can reach Kos on some charter flights from Britain, or via Athens, or by ferry from Rhodes or Piraeus.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The message of Christ first came to Europe in Greek. The Greek-speaking St Paul brought it, when he landed at the northern Greek port of Kavalla AD49 and made his first converts in the neighboring town of Philippi. The other island associated with the beginnings of Christianity is Patmos, which is connected daily by ferries to Rhodes and Pireaus. Its beautiful castle-monastery of St John, founded in 1088, commemorates the presence here of St John the Apostle, author of the gospel and the Book of Revelations, which he is said to have written here.