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Letters to the Editor

A response to 'disgusted' Greek Americans

God bless Greece, God bless the USA

I write in response to the letter to the editor from American archaeologist Stephen Miller (September 28, 2001). I, too, am an archaeologist with long and strong ties to the country of Greece, its people, its history and its cultural traditions. My work covers all of Greek history from the arrival of the Indo-European speakers to the study and interpretation of the first writing systems used in Western civilization (Linear A and Linear B) and most recently to the comparisons that can be drawn between the experiences of warfare in ancient Greece and those in the 20th and now 21st century.

I have lived in Greece many times since 1976 (in 1979-80 as a Fulbright scholar) and I have held a MacArthur fellowship for my work on Aegean scripts and prehistory. I have set up a research institute devoted to this field. I can say that in many ways I have given my life to what Greek culture stands for, and I do this gladly.

My own views, as well as those of one of my best friends in the field of Mycenology, ironically were expressed in an opinion piece in the London Times Higher Education Supplement the same day as Professor Miller's. In it I speak of the need for Americans not merely to look in the mirror, but to see ourselves as the rest of the world sees us. I think that Professor Miller's letter proves we Americans still have a long way to go.

My answer to Professor Miller's rhetorical questions is that, of course, he and the American contributors to the Nemea project have done much good, economically, culturally and personally for Greeks in Nemea and for Greece in general. I doubt



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whether any Greek burned an American flag in hatred of the Nemea project or Professor Miller. But it is disingenuous to interpret world events entirely through one's own personal experiences.

I would ask Prof. Miller to contemplate American foreign policy in Greece during the years 1967-1976 and ask why political discussions in Greek kapheneia turned away from the pro-American sentiments symbolized by the pictures of John F. Kennedy that hung on many of their walls and turned toward criticisms of why the United States supported a military junta in the motherland of Western intellectual freedom, a junta that banned the reading of Plato and Euripides and Aristophanes.

I would also ask Prof. Miller to read the speeches of Pericles in Book 2 of Thucydides, one with its glowing praise of the ideals of ancient Athens, the other with its brutally pragmatic discussion of what ancient Athens must do to hold onto an empire acquired through force and coercive terror. Separately, each speech is a lie. Together, both speeches are true. Let him apply this lesson to the USA and see the mix of good and bad that makes some people hate us and others be fearful of our power.

If I were in his situation, I would explain to my American donors and friends of Nemea and Greece how complex is the history of relations between East and West and between superpowers and other nations. I would read Thucydides with them. I would ask them to pray that Thucydides' nightmare vision of civil war spreading to other countries during a time of superpower troubles is not realized in the land for which we share a strong love: Greece, itself birthplace of democracy and also transmitter of the word "tyranny" to Western culture.

God bless the people of Greece. God bless the people of America. God bless the people of Afghanistan. God bring us all justice and peace.

Thomas G. Palaima
Dickson Centennial
Professor of Classics,
Director, Program
in Aegean Scripts and
Prehistory
University of Texas at Austin

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