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PAST AND MEMORY IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE

**Proceedings of the 17th International Aegean Conference,
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Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Department of Humanities,
17-21 April 2018**

Edited by Elisabetta BORGNA, Ilaria CALOI, Filippo Maria CARINCI and Robert LAFFINEUR

PEETERS
LEUVEN - LIÈGE
2019

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LINEAR B VE Vd 2018 A MEMORIAL SĒMA: REMEMBERING LIFE, WORK, LOVE AND DEATH IN VENICE*

“I may speak of
thee as the traveler doth of Venice;
Venetia, Venetia,
Chi non ti vede, non ti pretia
Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* 4.2.114-117¹

These are the lines, as they are now edited in Shakespeare’s play *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, that Holofernes, who is appropriately described – and the description might apply to many or all of us participants at the 17th International *Aegaeum* Conference – as, ‘the PEDANT, or schoolmaster’, speaks about Venice. But if we go back more than a century to *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, we see, as we usually see in Aegean studies, that there is more than meets the eye, that there are many pairs of eyes that are looking upon the data, and that our visions and our memories of them change over time.² What was then given as ACT IV, SC. ii, 109- read:

Ah, good old *Mantuan*, I
May speake of thee as the trauciler doth of *Venice*, *vem-*
chie, vencha, que non te vnde, que non te perreche.

Furness explains: “To THEOBALD belongs the signal credit of discerning an Italian proverb beneath this gibberish: Our author is applying the praises of Mantuanus to a common proverbial sentence, said of Venice, ‘Vinegia, Vinegia! Qui non te vedi, ei non te pregiā.’ O Venice, Venice, he who has never seen thee, hast thee not in esteem.” He then goes on to discuss other variants on this theme:

1. *Venetia, Venetia, chi non te vede, non te pregiā, Ma chi t’ ha troppo veduto te dispregia.*
‘Venice, Venice, none thee unseen can prize; Who thee has seen too much, will thee despise.’
2. *Venetia, chi non ti vede, non ti pretia, ma chi ti vede, ben gli costa.*
‘Venise, woo seeth thee not, praiseth thee not, but who seeth thee, it costeth hym wel.’

Pondering over these variants as I flew towards Venice, I was therefore full of anticipation, consternation, hesitation, and trepidation that only compounded my normal scholarly vacillation. What a situation! My soul was gripped with perturbation. My mind absorbed with speculation.

It sounded like a good thing to see Venice. I *did* want to be able to praise this venerable city. But it seemed that timing was all. Would the *Mneme* conference last too long and thereby ‘costeth’ me, or all of us, ‘wel’? Would I see too much and grow to despise the very home of scholars who are treating us so well? Would I see, but not remember, as Eleni Hatzaki warns, like some mute ashlar block from Knossos? Or get caught within monuments and memories, wandering through the smoke rings of my mind, as Antonis Kotsonas warns? Would my prizing this grand city turn to despising? Or would I be

* Special thanks to Giulio Simeoni, web editor, who kept us accurately informed electronically across the miles as we prepared for, attended, and worked on our final papers for the conference. My own thanks to Malcolm Wiener, Jan Driessen, Jim and Mary Wright, Vassilis Aravantinos, Margherita Bonanno and Helena Tomas for making my stay in Venice more humanly rewarding. Jan was literally willing to give me the shirt off his back! And as always more than just a drop of good feeling for Robert Laffineur and his warm and kind wife Marylène.

¹ W. Shakespeare, *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, edited by B.A. MOWAT and P. WERSTINE, New Folger Edition digital. <<http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/LLL.html>>.

² H.H. FURNESS (ed.), *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare Volume 14* *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 2nd ed. (1906) 148-150.

eternally beset with the utter confusion most of us felt after Evangelos Kyriakidis's and Sandy MacGillivray's philosophically abstruse papers?

Truman Capote, according to that unimpeachable source the Hotel Aaron booking site,³ is supposed to have observed in 1961 that "Venice is like eating an entire box of chocolate liqueurs in one go." That, too, sounded like a problem of timing and pacing. I had much rather grapple with eating too many bonbons than with wrestling Jean Cocteau's siren mermaid in a morass: "Venise, moitié-femme, moitié-poisson, est une sirène qui se défait dans un marécage de l'Adriatique."

When I arrived in Venice on Monday, April 16, suitcase-less, sitting in my room at the Hotel Al Sole, and operating without the benefit of Jim Wright's Dream Quest Memory Foam Mattress, I searched back in my memory for expectations of Venice that I had when I received an invitation to participate in the 17th International Aegaeum Conference on Μνήμη. You might have had the same. What does any of us know or remember about this magnificent and venerable city?

My visions of Venice consisted of snippets and fragments and feelings about the overall atmosphere of the city as projected by a collective social memory of a highly selective sort, not unlike what Katerina Kopaka was talking about at Gavdos.

First, Thomas Mann's classic 1912 novella *Der Tod in Venedig* came to mind. It intersected thematically with the design of my paper, as I planned it, beginning as I did with a similar memorial to man-youth love, in my case dedicated by Pyrrichus to Mnasitheios, a *sēma* or *mnēma* or grave-marker associated with death and with a love affair that took place more than 2400 years before Mann's depressing story. All of us old stalwart *Aegaeumites* are of a certain age in life that we can sympathize with Mann's Gustav von Aschenbach, a moderately successful author in advanced middle age, ascetic and modestly famous. *Mutatis mutandis*, we can even empathize with his desperate impulse to get 'just a drop' more out of life, and how, as he ponders his age and the irreversible loss of all the sterile days of his prime of life, he is captivated by Tadzio, the fourteen-year-old son of an aristocratic Polish family in his hotel, a young Polish Mnasitheios.

I assure you I had no such longings prompted by breakfasts in the courtyard of the Al Sole. I did, however, have breakfast with a captivating Polish woman and old friend named Olga Kryszkowska and spoke with her on several other occasions with great pleasure. I speak of and for myself. How things looked from Tadzio's, Mnasitheios's and Olga's perspectives we will never know, unless Olga violates what in my experience is her admirable social discretion. I can, however, swear that I did not take to stalking her, à la von Aschenbach, along the canals, even when I needed information about Minoan and Mycenaean seals and sealings.

No, it was the timing that troubled me and my classically educated thoughts. And John McEnroe's abstract instilled fear in me, too. I did not want to go forward repeating the past, like those Gortynian town-planners caught in a kind of architecturally solipsistic do loop. So I thought and I thought and I thought. As Shakespeare also has Holofernes say in the selfsame act of the selfsame play:

This is a gift that I have, simple, simple –
a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms,
figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions,
revolutions. These are begot in the ventricle
of memory, nourished in the womb of *pia mater*.

As with the aphorisms that lie behind Shakespeare's thoughts on Venice, von Aschenbach's unrequited love for the boy leads him to stay too long in Venice – I believe his conference was supposed to last only five days like ours. He lingers on. He contracts cholera – you won't get *that* from chocolate liqueurs or the fine coffees and pastries that are bestowed on us during our breaks! – and collapses sideways into a kind of soft-seated white Venetian beach *thronos* where he dies.⁴

Such a morbid tale had me predisposed to being anxious, especially at my ultra-von Aschenbachian age, about my entire stay. I wished then that I had spent more time when younger

³ <<http://www.hotelaaron.com/en/venice-aphorisms/>>.

⁴ <www.youtube.com/watch?v=36QBU474nM>. *Morte a Venezia* - scena finale.

reading lively fun stuff like *The Tale of Wen-Amun*, especially as Assaf Yasur-Landau tells it. A lot of good comedy depends on the delivery and he delivered it well, bringing even three millennia-old punch lines to life! Still *Death in Venice* primed me for paper after morbid paper on skeletal remains, skulls kept as souvenirs, mortuary rituals, burial practices, τόπια μνήμης τῶν προγόνων – to borrow a phrase from Metaxia Tsiopoulou and David Rupp – but in the end, I found them all too depressing and just forgot about them.

What else did I know about Venice anyway? More associations with love and passion: Federico Fellini's *Casanova* (1976). This memory started better.⁵ The first 6 minutes of the film give us a *carnevale* in Venice as only Fellini could imagine, stage and film it. Plenty of ritual action and festival participants and even a full-blown attempt at theophoric revelation. The massive crowd celebrating the lifting of a gigantic goddess's head rising out of 'un marécage de l'Adriatique' and looking like a cross between the head of New York's Statue of Liberty decapitated and Martin Sheen, as Captain Willard in Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, rising with green face paint out of a swamp near Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on his final mission to 'terminate' Colonel Kurtz 'with extreme prejudice', while the natives celebrate a festival requiring the ritual slaying of a water buffalo.⁶ The goddess's colossal head slips from the ropes raising it and sinks silently in the water. An utter failure and an ill omen. The attendant and theretofore reveling crowd is shocked and dismayed. So in the end also a memory best forgotten. As one critic writes, "Venice as imagined through the surreal prison of Federico Fellini's twisted vision" and "the excess and debauchery for which the carnival is legendary amplified to an outrageous extent"⁷ might not be the kind of approaches to reconstructing Aegean prehistory that *ra-pi-ne-u*, Filippo, Elisabetta and Ilaria had in mind.

My third vision of Venice had me looking through the dark rooms of my mind to *Don't Look Now*, Nicholas Roeg's soul-wrenching 1973 film treatment of Daphne DuMaurier's short story. It was actually filmed in Venice in locations like the Church of San Nicolo dei Mendicoli, the Calle di Mezzo, the Palazzo Grimani at Santa Maria Formosa and the Church of San Stae. So I had some sense in advance of the Venice I was to see.

Again, however, as a reviewer reminds us,⁸ *Don't Look Now* "offers a Venice that is empty, cold and lifeless. The individual alley ways that give the city its charm seem more like mausoleum avenues, the holy work of restoring a church more like a punishment of the damned, and the dark-looking canal water seems far more terrifying than the serial killer victims it hides." So, as you see, for a city of incomparable beauty inhabited by a people with a *gioia de vivere* matched only by the citizens of New Orleans and LM I Knossos, Venice has a reputation only one step removed from the Black Death.

Why not then make new memories? Staying in place to remember was giving me what Bob Dylan describes as a "restless hungry feeling that don't mean no one no good" from his song aptly titled "One Too Many Mornings."⁹ So I decided that a change of places might tweak my involuntary memory and consciousness. I also recalled once reading one hypothesis that the priestess of Apollo at Delphi could see visions when seated uncomfortably, obviously, on a tripod. So inspired by the true fact that Christos Maggidis had been able to find an extremely uncomfortable hard stone throne seat way down in a steep ravine at Mycenae, I planned to walk from the Hotel al Sole the same distance of two cataracts along the canal. Lacking a compass, I borrowed the sun disk the hotel uses as its symbol. And I set out.

Some passersby mumbling about Nicoletta Momigliano made me think that it might be a good idea on such a memory quest to have a few backups. So I grabbed a cookie from the coffee break supply, hoping, if things got desperate, that it might provide me with the same tasty inspiration about

⁵ <www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCW8A6SA6U>. Watch from the start to the 6:30 mark. Film Complet Le *Casanova* de Fellini.

⁶ <www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSWtc01BlqM>. The Horror - *Apocalypse Now* (8/8) Movie CLIP (1979).

⁷ Thomas Storey <<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/italy/articles/la-serenissima-ten-of-the-best-films-set-in-venice/>>.

⁸ <<http://www.oddtthingsiveseen.com/2011/05/venice-and-dont-look-now-church.html>>.

⁹ <<https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/one-too-many-mornings/>>.

memory in Aegean studies that the famous *madeleine* had provided to Proust about memories from his childhood.

I knew, however, from Simona Todaro's paper about living with the past, or we might call it messing around in the Mesara, that only the Venetians had violated sacred space and with colossal irreverence at a site called 'Holy Trinity' (Ayia Triadha), no longer ancient *da-wo*. I would have to be wary and alert. I did not want to be like the sorry Venetians who suffered for unsuccessful ritual practices in Fellini's *Casanova* or like all those poor Minoan hard-stone seal carvers put out of work forever. Maud Devolder's talk on the dungeon of Mallia also scared the bejesus out of me. I thought of the dungeon into which the Venetians threw Casanova. Not me. Not there. So I was alert, wary and mindful in search of memory. By this point, however, Tom Brogan's emphasis on the "importance of forgetting" seemed awfully convincing and alluring.

Out I set, careful to follow Louise Hitchcock's advice, walking backwards into the future.

I thought, as I retro-strolled, that perhaps I was setting the bar too high by listening to people quoting Edmund Burke about 'posterity': that if you don't look back into the past, you will not look forward into posterity. What authority does he have to make such a potentially tendentious claim? After all, my past reminds me, whenever I dare to look at it, of Houston Fifth Ward blues poet Juke Boy Bonner's ultra-Hobbesian and hyper-Hesiodic claim: "Life is a nightmare / At least that's the way it seems / full of bad luck and trouble / just a valley of shattered dreams."

Who wants to look back upon the LM IB destructions on Crete or the depredations of the Sea Peoples? These things happen. Get over it. Take a lesson from the ever-happy, peace-loving, Oxbridgian, matriarchal Minoans – or are those Minoans just a nightmare from my youth? You would not think that we would have a hard time remembering Johnny Mercer's sage oral poetical advice:¹⁰

Accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Hold on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mr. In-Between.

Our tetrad of organizers *ra-pi-ne-u*, *qo-ni-ja*, *ka-ro-i*, *ka-ri-si* (aka Laffineur, Borgna, Caloi and Carinci) certainly follow those *dicta* and Mercer's follow-up advice:

You gotta spread joy up to the maximum
Bring pain down to the minimum
Have faith or pandemonium's
Liable to walk upon the scene.

We had no pandemonium thanks to the careful mother-goddess-like attention of Robert, Elisabetta, Ilaria and Filippo to the needs of all us children.

Whether I reckon the past I see behind me (or straight ahead rather as I walk backwards) by high or low chronology, it seems like posterity is coming upon us all like a Lamborghini on the Autostrade.

Still common folks like the *u-po-te-qa-jo*, whom Vassilis Aravantinos put in their place – we might call them the "down-low Thebans," just might have some common sense or folk wisdom, I thought. So I headed for the lower part of Venice.

Big mistake. Finding myself knee deep in canal water, sinking fast, and no ashlar harbor blocks, magoulas or spiky-helmeted rowers on boats to save me, I luckily recalled Iphiyenia Tournavitou's lessons in ritual breakage and looked for conical cups, cooking ware, plates, tableware, almost anything to smash and thereby support myself. I even poured a ritual libation of coffee on the sacred pavement near the podium in our lecture hall.

¹⁰ Listen to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yikUzXt9TQ>.

The gods heard my prayers and instructed me, in return for my own return to *terra firma*, to offer as a permanent votive the kind of memorial *sēma* Mercurios Georgiadis has described for us in the South-Eastern Aegean (fig. below).



VE Vd 2018

Inscribed stone *sēma*. Venice. Dredged from a canal in a rescue effort to save a migrant scholar who walked backward into the waters, and not by accident. A votive thanks dedication on behalf of all attendees for being kept safe and treated with great honor and courtesy and hospitality and friendship by the organizers of the 17th International *Aegaeum* conference and all their specialist helpers and support staff.

Its text reads:

VE Vd 2018	.1	qo-ni-ja , ka-ro-i-qe
	.2	ka-ri-si-qe, ra-pi-ne-we-qe
	.3	KA ¹¹
	.4	ra-wo-ki-ne-te-si , po-u-da-ta-o
	.5	ka-wo-i ,
	.6	we-ne-ti-ja , a-pu-ru-jo-me-no
	.7	u-di-ne-i jo
	.1	Γ ^w όρνjai , Καλόjt κ ^{wε}
	.2	Καρίστ κ ^{wε} , Λαφινέ ^{wε} ει κ ^{wε}
	.3	KA
	.4	Λ ^w οκινίταρσι ¹² , σπουδαστάων
	.5	καλφοίηι ,
	.6	Φενετιάι , Απρόjo μινός
	.7	Υδίνει jo
	.1	To Borgna and Caloi
	.2	and Carinci and Laffineur
	.3	KA
	.4	people-movers of scholars
	.5	splendid
	.6	in Venice , within the month of Apru
	.7	in Udine

¹¹ KA = *kharin* ‘thanks’, with an understood verb of giving.

¹² The scribe of this votive *sēma*, happy to have been spared a tragic fate, accidentally wrote the sign with the value *te* instead of the sign with value *ta*. We correct it here in translation into Greek.

Having accomplished this pious act, I went and sat and brooded over coffee in a piazza trying to see Venice as Bob Dylan must see it in his memories and in my memory about his, one of Victoria's not-so-secrets, and with very different memory-objects than Thomas Mann or Pyrrichus had.¹³

Thomas G. PALAIMA

¹³ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBq7SyGtG8Y>>.<<http://sites.utexas.edu/pasp/files/2017/11/LookingPast.pdf>>.