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PHYSIS

L'ENVIRONNEMENT NATUREL ET LA RELATION HOMME-MILIEU DANS LE MONDE ÉGÉEN PROTOHISTORIQUE

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Edités par Gilles TOUCHAIS,
Robert LAFFINEUR
et Françoise ROUGEMONT

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I. En guise de conclusion ...

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THE LINEAR-B-INSCRIBED TRITON PAR Ph 2012 AND ITS LESSONS ABOUT *PHUSIS*

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky.
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

William Wordsworth (the Mycenaeans would know him as *a-ki-si-jo-ro-ko*, later Greek *Aksiologos*) wrote these now rightly famous words 210 years ago on March 26, 1802, when Napoleon was *lāwāgetās* (first consul) of France and two years before the French *ke-ro-si-ja* proclaimed *na-po-re-wo wanaks*.

Wordsworth's poem, as Harold Bloom puts it, speaks to maintaining or recovering a youthful exuberant spirit about being a creature in the natural world. It is also about *phusis*, the process of natural growth in all living organisms and the natural growth of human beings, and about the qualities that make human beings *deinos*, awesome and awful in the Sophoclean sense. *deinos* is an ambivalent adjective that captures our abilities to think, to remember, to reason, to wish for things, and then collectively to take steps, as a great individual like Napoleon or great senior scholars like Gilles Touchais, Stelios Andreou, Robert Laffineur and Malcolm Wiener have done, to force some parts of the world, natural, man-made, even scholarly, to their own visions.

Great rulers conceive of themselves as *poimenes lāwōn*, a metaphor taken from a human relationship with the natural world. They present themselves as tending, like devoted and trusty herders, to the needs of their peoples, their metaphorical flocks or herds. *poimenes* and *lāwoi* are bound together by developed natural pieties and certainly by natural necessity, to protect, nurture and ensure their mutual survival.

Nancy Thomas' paper points out, among other things, that human beings do not have a monopoly on attachments or feeling for others of their kind and that human beings can be mistaken about how prevalent such emotions, or their equivalents, are in the realm of nature. Powerful, fierce and threateningly predatory lions can and do have affections for one another and for their children. At least some Minoan artists and Minoan and Mycenaean audiences understood that lions were not 'killing machines', living evils that humans have a natural right to destroy. This makes figures like Teddy Roosevelt and Ernest Hemingway, who viewed lion hunting as a justifiable sport to prove their masculinity, problematical.

There are ironies in modern bravado about lion hunting. Hemingway and Roosevelt and their kind partook of adventures much different from the kind of hunts of lions and boars found in Homeric similes, epic tales and even in Herodotus' account of the life-changing bad luck that befell the pious Croesus. You may remember that the Lydian king purified and guest-befriended a Phrygian young man named Adrastus who was polluted by having accidentally killed his brother. Later Adrastus killed Croesus's only healthy and sound son Atys accidentally with a misguided cast of a spear while out hunting a dangerous boar that had been ravaging the territory of the Mysians.

What tales must we imagine having been told about the poor dead soul on the inlaid "Lion Hunt" dagger from Shaft Grave IV, or rather what tales might have inspired the images on the dagger?

Lions and boars hardly fight with human beings on even terms any more. The ironies of modern 'lion hunts' are contained in a simple Beatles song written by John Lennon during the Beatles' eastern mystic phase (February and March 1968), and inspired, we are told by Lennon, by a peculiar interaction between a human being and *physis*:

'Bungalow Bill' was written about a guy in Maharishi's meditation camp who took a short break to go shoot a few poor tigers, and then came back to commune with God. There used to be a character called Jungle Jim, and I combined him with Buffalo Bill. It's sort of a teenage social-comment song and a bit of a joke."¹

The song goes like this:

He went out tiger hunting with his elephant and gun
In case of accidents he always took his mom (pronounced "mum")
He's the all American bullet-headed Saxon mother's son.
All the children sing

Hey Bungalow Bill
What did you kill
Bungalow Bill? (2x)

The children asked him if to kill was not a sin
"Not when he looked so fierce", his mummy butted in
"If looks could kill it would have been us instead of him"
All the children sing

Hey, Bungalow Bill
What did you kill
Bungalow Bill?

Still, human desires can be used in constructive and not destructive ways, as the conference organizers Gilles Touchais, Robert Laffineur, Stelios Andreou, Françoise Rougemont, Hara Procopiou and Eric Fouache, in their roles as *poimenes lāwōn sophistāōn*, have shown. They have guided us safely to Paris. They have shepherded us on the RER. They have fed us and given us drink amply in a sacred space where the Sun King once communed with a supreme divine being in a transaction he may have considered a kind of peer polity interaction. Our caring human shepherds have protected us from the three *thēres agrioi*, hostile 'wild beasts', that scholars at Aegaeum conferences fear most: PowerPoint failure, microphone malfunction and ceaseless questions from *rapineu*'s foil, *paraima*.

Let us really think about the 14^e Rencontre égéenne internationale on the topic of "*Physis. L'environnement naturel et la relation homme-milieu dans le monde égéen protohistorique*". It has given us four days to study examples of the species *homo protohistoricus aegaeus* in their natural environs in Paris. We saw clearly manifested the natural French revolutionary identifying characteristics of the species: liberté de parole, égalité intellectuelle hommes-femmes, fraternité (c'est-à-dire, liens amicaux et solidaires), et les échanges honnêtes et francs concernant nos idées savantes et spécialisées.

These attributes are all well and good and in many ways have come to be expected no matter where the noteworthy *rapineu* is inspired to hold an *Aegaeum* conference. But I also wish to tell you about the *metamorphosis* I underwent two nights ago when in the thrall of the wonders of Mother Earth that we have seen here at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art and those that we investigated at the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale in Saint-Germain.

¹ <http://www.thebeatlesrarity.com/2011/10/17/beatles-rarity-of-the-week-bungalow-bill-acoustic-demo-may-1968/> (last accessed January 27, 2013). The quotation does not actually appear in any of Lennon's *Playboy* interviews, but in D. SHEFF, *All We Are Saying: The Last Major Interview With John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (2000) 199.

Coming out of the chapel of Louis Quatorze, I was pondering the vicissitudes of fate that had brought us to the miserable palatial center that the Sun King put up with for thirty-four years until he could take such difficult living no longer. I was also meditating upon the whole topic of Mother Nature. We can never fool her, but she sure makes fools out of us whenever she can.

I began humming to myself a tune by the great bard known as Memphis Slim. This itinerant singer was so called because he was born in Memphis in 1915. Based on his name and his song style, he must have been as much a master of Egyptian blues as any decent Egyptian artist from the 4th Dynasty onward. But Memphis Slim, like us, eventually made it to Paris, where he passed away in 1988.

It is my hypothesis, to be treated with the same skeptical caution as most of my ideas, that *rapineu*, perhaps tapping into the mantic powers from the French-excavated sanctuary that Apollo stole from *Gê* at Delphi, foresaw the notable death of Memphis Slim when he held the 1^{ère} Rencontre égéenne internationale two years before, 1986, on the topic of *Thanatos*. I am sure that Memphis Slim himself read the first *Aegaeum* conference volume and that his transition to l'au-delà was eased by *rapineu*'s thoughts on Schliemann's grave circle and even those that *rapineu* was having on the sea and l'au-delà that appeared in *Thalassa* (2^e Rencontre) in 1991.

And Memphis Slim's words helped me to see my place and ours in the grand plan of Nature as surely as Wordsworth's do:

don't care how great you are
don't care what you worth
when it all ends up you got to
go back to mother earth

As Bob Dylan summed up on his radio program, Memphis Slim's idea in this song is that "Mother Earth is laying for you." Indeed she is. As all the papers we have read and heard have proved.

Things come and go, even when we are not speaking of Michelangelo, despite the fact he's right on display in the Louvre. We grow old, we grow old, repeat phrases a bit, and wear our trousers rolled. Life's question become not "to be or not to be", but do we dare to eat a peach, or a fig or, as with the cave-dwellers we have heard about, a water chestnut or some lentils, but only after proper soaking.

Marcel Proust, who lived in his own kind of cork-lined cave (reconstructed at le Musée Carnavalet) at 102 Boulevard Hausmann here in Paris, had to eat a *madeleine* to be taken out of the now and back into the then. But he went back in time to the comforts and psychologically devastating anxieties of his childhood and his mother tucking him into bed.

We have been forced during this 14th Aegaeum conference back with neanderthals and 'almost human beings'. We have experienced what it is like to tough it out in caves and on wild Einkorn and juniper berries at Theopetra, where multiple hearths are the latest thing and sedges mean water. But things didn't get much better when we swung over to Kephallonia and the Drakaina cave, a small platform on a steep slope. Admittedly there they had an inventive menu, including Spanish vetchlings, *pistacia terebinthus* nuts and a 'mystery' wheat and a bulgur-like 'fast food'.

It was then I saw how diabolically clever the infamous *hierophant rapineu* had been. I wandered back into Louis Quatorze's old house or was it, in my mentally mystical time travel, Napoleon's cavalry officers' training school already. It may be both, since at this conference on *phusis*, the very nature of time blurs and bends and the mind wanders. Seas go down 120 meters. A Black and Friendly Sea is born. A lake is there at Phaistos and then it's not there.

Other water isn't there, except when it is! Take Myrtos-Pyrgos, for example. This site is ahead of the pack in MM II B by building two cisterns to hold 90 tons of water. Still, with all that water, the site ends with destruction by fire!

Things are so surreal it takes a scholar named Flood to explain all the measures (dams at Pseira, gutters or water conduits at Mochlos, cisterns at Zakro, and high-cost-investment wells) taken to circumvent a drought, i.e., to preserve precious and scarce water. And we may know now just about everything there is to know about the elaborate water engineering installations at Choiromandres, but we don't know whether pigs ever hung out there.

Meanwhile we were finding out many things that make the heads even of Aegean prehistorians spin.

Imaginary landscapes were real.

The highly refined elites of Akrotiri decorated their walls like modern Greek tavernas and even like hotel lobbies.

Animals are happy unpopulated, but not depopulated, because depopulated is really populated—and, and, and then, then....

Many of us were seized by sudden irresistible cravings for thorny oysters, molluscs, bitter vetch, acorns, triton meat, chickpeas, Celtic beans, lentils, and all manner of Cyperaceae. These appetites were awakened while we were sitting in a conference hall that shares its building front with the Grand Colbert, an eating establishment named after a minister of Louis Quatorze. Colbert was well versed in French cuisine and probably would have turned up his nose at the menus for elite banquets we find on Linear B tablets in Mycenaean times—despite the honey we find mentioned upon them. He would have given cave-dwelling chefs of the protohistoric Aegean no stars at all.

As I have said, I was looking for a place to get some perspective, where I could conserve my waning energies, so I took a least cost path on the RER—we had been given a free ticket after all—and transported myself back to the fantastic landscape of Kalamianos. When I arrived I found myself in an environment that looked as if it were one giant step for mankind short of being on the moon.

No water worries at Kalamianos. The inhabitants chose to live rather antisocially in areas that are described as 'low concentration of EBA, in EB II completely cut off.' They reduced the anxieties of living with Mother Nature to a simple formula. Play with rocks all day. They hauled huge stones to build elliptical enclosures and then took the easiest paths to points where they could build cairns of stones with hollow vaulted interiors—like chocolate-covered cherries without the cherries. Why did they do all this? So that they could see other such cairns as soon as they worked up the energy to build them.

No wonder the inhabitants of such environs thought they saw griffins and genii floating through space—and *daimones*, too. Such disorientation even had us thinking, for a short time, that it was peculiar that the palatial Minoans do not choose to depict interior pillar crypts in seal and wall painting iconography. Then we remembered that a 'crypt' by definition is a place you want to keep hidden.

None of these things are matters of great concern either if we live the Kalamianian way. Handle and move nature's stones and boulders long enough and we learn things about them. We pass what we have learned down in local traditions, as we learn from quarriescapes. And master stone workers can identify the best raw materials and polish them to be suitable to the touch, persuading *phusis* by means of *tekhne*.

Well, who can blame me or us for having negative thoughts about the old days, when human beings in the Aegean lived in close connection with the natural world.

William Blake in fact took strong issue with Wordsworth's use of the phrase "natural piety". Blake believed that man was naturally impious and therefore that Wordsworth's phrase contradicted itself oxymoronically. But knowing what we know now about *phusis*:

how hard it is to make use of those things the all-giving Earth begrudgingly gives us;
 how hard it is to build and maintain shelters;
 how hard it is to harvest and process grains and fruits and legumes;

how hard it is to hunt wild animals, net fish from the sea, breed and care for domesticated animals;
 how hard it is to organize ourselves into settled communities;
 how hard it is to travel by land or sea;

we might wonder whether the oxymoron does not work the other way. Is nature still mean-spiritedly punishing us for Prometheus's theft of fire, for his tricking Zeus about cuts of meat at Mekone, and for Epimetheus's lack of foresight? Are all of those κήδεα λυγρὰ that Pandora let out of the big pithos still out there?

Seeing no way to resolve such thoughts, I went back into the museum at Saint-Germain and asked if, among their spectacular displays of world archaeology through time, they had a triton shell. I needed to soothe my troubled soul, like Achilles in *Iliad* Book 9. I felt that I could console myself by playing on it the kind of soulful melancholy bluesy jazz Bertrand Tavernier memorialized in his exquisite film *Round Midnight*, in the very year that *rapineu* held the first *Aegeum* conference on *Thanatos*.

They handed me a triton (see fig. below), masterfully perforated into a wonderful kind of bronze Age trumpet. It is decorated with a Linear B inscription, as it turns out a song poem. On its spirals are delicately inscribed the following words in Mycenaean Greek:



Pu-si ka-ra-ma ka-wo
pa-to e-do a-pa-re
Pu-sa-e a-ta-ro-ta-ta
Pu-ra-o ke-ne-ha ke-ne-ha
a-do-ro ku-na-ko-qe
o-da-ha i-ri wi-de
zo-wa o-u ma-ka-ra
te-ro te-ro
pu-si 14 qa-si-re-wi-ja

Φύσις χράμα καλφᾶόν
 παντῶν ἔδος ἀσφαλές
 φύσαι ἀταλώτατα
 φυλλᾶων γένεχα γένεχα
 ἀνδρῶν γυναικῶν γ^{we}
 hō d(e)aha² ἱρὶν ριδέ
 ζωῆα οὐ μακρᾶ
 τέλος τέλος
 Φύσις 14 γωασίλεια

"Nature a thing beautiful,
 immovable seat of all things."
 Blow as nimbly as you can!
 "Of leaves families, families
 of men and of women."
 And so gaze upon the rainbow!
 Life is not long.
 The end is the end.
 Nature is the 14th queen.

2 The exact reconstruction of this phrase into historical Greek forms is uncertain, although its meaning, from context and what we can identify, is clear.

The idea of the poet of the triton shell is clearly that the holder (and reader of the inscription) is to play on the triton a delicate, and no doubt emotionally moving, tune that captures the ideas quoted: the beauty of nature, its unchanging everlastingness, and the ephemeral generations of men and women who pass by like leaves blown on the wind. See such famous adjurations to song as “Play Misty for Me!” and “Play it, Sam!” and “Play Me Like a Violin!”

So the poet-singer bids the holder and each and every reader and beholder to look out upon such natural wonders as the rainbow and contemplate how short life is, how irreversible life’s end, and all that we learned about triumphant queenly nature at the 14th Aegeum conference.

Let us forever be bound by natural piety to what makes us human and be grateful for the time we spend together, bound each to each by our interests in discovering how our brothers and sisters in the prehistoric and protohistoric Aegean made it through the lives that Nature graciously let them live.

Thomas G. PALAIMA