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BEYOND SOCRATES'

DIA-LOGOS



- 2017 -

*written by Luigi Giannachi,
translated by Francesca
Framontana*

THE LOCATIONS OF MIND

Luigi Giannachi

Beyond Socrates' Dia-Logos

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Luigi Giannachi
Beyond Socrates' Dia-Logos
The locations of mind
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In the time crystal, by which our present existence is characterized, where each of us tends to draw on knowledge through inner reflections and light refraction around us, in a society where real and virtual boundaries are continually lost and confused, it's on you, my dear reader, to establish how false or true is the document signed by the great Socrates that my friend Ghignos Kairn sent me with his memories and his philosophical scenes. I, for one, merely wrote the letter for him, which you'll find at the end of philosophical scenes, right after index.

You and I believe that knowledge belongs to everybody, irrespective of race, color or creed. Plato does not address himself to one ethnic group alone, nor does Shakespeare appeal to one religion only. The teachings of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. do not apply just to Indians or African-Americans. Like cognitive science, theoretical physics or algebra, the creations and philosophical ideas of the ages are part of our collective heritage and human memory. We all learn from the same masters. (E. Wiesel)

I don't exist...

I realized, sailing up the time, what you could do without your body. Nevertheless, I don't want to say that the spirit can live in a vacuum, standing on ideas fantasies, without any toil of everyday living. It might look good, but it isn't feasible.

I can do without my body's needs...

The endless passing of time could suggest that body's needs tend to run out with age, but it isn't. Until the last moment of our existence, we strive to satisfy even the smallest desire appeared in our mind trails (htor), not to say in our entrails (htron). There must be some kind of connection between these two body parts. Whenever our ego requires attention and concentration, for an act of will (thum's) dictated by thought (fren) to mind (noos), is necessary an act of inner purification, which involves every part of our body. Thereby, frenes can contain emotions, the kradie can give them its rhythm and the thum's can give the required energy to flow freely, without leaving anything to chance. Even the waste disposal from our body seems a precondition to idea formation in our mind. Over and over, I consider how the body's needs should be combined with soul, before I joined a banquet to which I was invited, so that the needs didn't confuse soul in its flourishing.

I can distract my personal need to give myself to other's fulfilment...

! for other I mean who is beside me in silence, or who is going to confront myself with dialogue, or even a community of people looking for a way to coexist without stepping on anybody's toes. Such research can only rely on a solid base, stronger than the base of a column, the truth.

SOCRATES

Letter from Ghāgnos Kairā²n

Dear friend,

You passed near my small town lying on sea in 1980. You maybe wouldn't even had slept over for a week in my town if you only had known what would be happened during your stay, but fate wouldn't have had it any other way. Is fate perhaps the king of the world, the god of all time? I sometimes think so, but I know that this goes beyond your rational thought.

However, you and your family slept over in my house. You were about to finish classical studies, which allowed you to know classical Greek, my ancestors language. Your curiosity for any archaeological finding, though small and futile, was unlimited, so I was happy to guide you in Olympia archaeological site. For me, it was the home where my ancestors have celebrated competitions between the most important athletes and poets of the time. Do you remember? I pointed out to you, how that was a place where not only bodies' strength and agility to win a competition were celebrated, but even musicians' memory and art in creating and reviving emotions.

We talked in English between us, because school taught us this language to speak with strangers. After all, we were nothing more than strangers when we met, before started playing beach soccer. English was the language that allowed us to communicate without gesticulating. You were disappointed to see your knowledge of Greek vanished when you discovered that the language spoken now is very different to that of Homer! On your visit to the museum, you were still looking for any trace of a distant meaning or any particular sign to connect with the myth. Just you, coming from another country, wondered how philosophy was born among the temples of Acropolis and the Ionian colonies, among oracles places and competitions in the name of the gods, among Delphi, Olympia, Miletus and Athens.

I must admit, your questions seemed to me meaningless in those days. I don't know what happened since then. I had a family, as everyone else, I had children, a beautiful wife, a job that gave everything for my family. Those questions were still unanswered. Technology has made huge footsteps since then, so that I don't know how those gadgets, with which children and grandchildren spend most of their time without a moment of respite, work. Ten years ago, I started looking for some of those answers on Internet, but, to my surprise, there wasn't solution to those questions.

Will you ask why ten years ago?

Perhaps, you remember that while we were playing soccer in our home yard, at some point you smashed a column chalk base belonged to my family from many generations. That episode was a cataclysm for our families' relations, because within 24 hours everyone ended up arguing, my parents with yours, your parents' friends with mine, even my older brothers argued among themselves because they blamed on who had allowed us to play in the backyard, where even they never could play. Only we were able to say goodbye as friends. Actually, we have been able to keep an epistolary relationship over the years, sometimes without writing for a long time.

Everyone had sent the episode into time oblivion, not time of eternity, Plotinus' *Aiā²n* so to speak, not the time of opportunity, the *Kairā²n* of my name, but rather in *Xronos*, the time that leaves inexorably without memories.

Instead, the fate has played another dirty trick on us. Ten years ago, someone from the cemetery called me to let me know that, within a few days, should destroyed the grave of my distant ancestor. I started to ask various cousins who was this distant relative, whose existence I didn't even remember. At last, my fourth degree cousin let me know, after discussing with her still-living grandmother, that the ancestor had been present in the works on Acropolis made by British people during Turkish rule, when they had stolen a caryatid from Erechtheum with some parts of Parthenon's pediments. In the end, it seems that he had taken as dowry the chalk base for the participation in those works, which he had then lodged in his home yard. Of course, it can't be

said that the base was there in accordance with the law, but maybe was it right that parts of our old constructions would come out of Greece? According to my ancestor obviously no. Therefore, that self-commissioned theft was an act of protest towards who was heading the works.

This is where you come in. Yes, because you destroyed with a ball, like Franco Causio¹, that chalk base which was in our backyard, in a kind of remembrance of yesteryear. Do you remember? We had given you that nickname while playing beach soccer in front of the sea at sunset, when the heat gave us a break. Only that we wanted to keep doing our goal kicks even when the game on beach was finished. The base was just one of the goal posts in our two players' game. What we ever care about what could have represented that copy exported from Acropolis at night time by an ancestor who, moreover, I haven't even had the pleasure of meeting? However, he was one of my distant relatives, part of the family. You know how much is sacred the family for us.

I remember it as if it were yesterday. I assist reluctantly my ancestor's tomb opening, because they had converged the remains into a common grave. They make me sign a document to consent the opening and the remains' transfer, then they ask me if I can prove the full right to be a direct descendant of that archaeologist, so they ask me if I want bring with me some kind of memento. I wasn't in my right mind. I can't understand where they were going with this. I was just leaving when a small bag appeared next to the skeleton, similar to those used for maps and rifle bullets. They asked me if he was a hunter. I said that he was rather a strange archaeologist, for all I knew. They give me reluctantly the bag, from which I realized that they are bound to do so, but whatever. They are funeral company workers, authorized by Local Administration to legalize ancient disused graves. They could never have imagined what they were to deliver.

Surprise, surprise! Do you want to know what was inside? Two paper things, very darkened and wasted by sand. One was an artistic drawing represented a column base. A copy in chalk to be kept in the museum, almost a perpetual memory of Greece greatness. I recognized immediately the base, which in that case wouldn't be in a museum, but in my home yard, until you destroyed it with the ball. All this stuff was for them only ancient papers left besides a skeleton for trivial and indeterminable reasons. It was for me a memory lane of a life lived many years ago, when two kids played soccer as if they were two players in the stadium. Moreover, you didn't scoring, that shot had badly ended up in goalpost, pushed there by your destructive power.

As I learned in philosophy, any destructive power can be solved in a creative power, if well directed and managed in its explosive power. The other sheet, extracted from the bag, was even more interesting, so that I was crossed by a shiver just seeing the signature at the bottom of the time wasted sheet, older than the first one. I kept that moment of epiphany hidden for me, because I could feel funeral workers' eyes on me, so I tried to divert my interest from that sheet and acted as if nothing had happened. I shook my head as for communicate my indifference for those old papers and they didn't notice anything in my behaviour. I thus resolved to verify the accuracy of that signature and the authenticity of that written text when I was in my home, maybe with someone who knew classical Greek more than me.

It took me 10 years to realize if it was true or not what I had glimpsed that afternoon. I did evaluate that old paper by not one, but at least twenty professors from the best European and American universities, until their judgement was unanimous. Their translation is the one I sent to you. The signature at the bottom of that single page is in fact the only original text with that signature. I couldn't believe in this fortune. I had become the owner of an original writing of the greatest philosopher of the ancient world! It was he who, according to the knowledge so far, had left nothing written! That little sheet darkened by time could maybe change the history of philosophy, but certainly not the flourishing of ideas in the coming time.

So I imagined to do a personal journey in the history of philosophy, beginning with my land and philosophers who here started to ride with their minds the space and time around them, without ever losing sight of the minds of those surrounding them and after them. However, you told me of

other philosophers, who in some way had continued the work of Greek philosophers. I have thus been looking for the characters you told. I remembered the divine poet who lived in your born region, to whom some Greek philosophy's text had come through Arab masters. Then, in the mist of my memories, laid a philosopher unfairly punished by the Church for his free thought. On the same way, another philosopher died in 1900 when the most modern philosophy intertwined with psychoanalysis. I spent the last 10 years of my life searching for the characters you told me about, like a kind of personal initiation in the complex world of philosophy, changing house in the meantime, sometimes forgetting what I was discovering and rediscovering from time to time.

Then, I magically found some comments, amongst thousand notes strewn on the house floor during a removal, which seemed appropriate to explain why these surreal dialogues were born. I don't know when I wrote them, but they were there, ready to be used, written, who knows how long, with a typewriter, to deliver an apparent meaningless jumble of ideas.

It may be important getting something useful to achieve own objectives (and sometimes it is), as well as learning a method to be used in that activity, but this can't be the only hope. It needs to be accompanied by the intention of transmit knowledge to a multitude of people or possibly even to one, in order to have a result from our efforts.

It isn't enough that the best works came from authors inner depths, it's necessary that from the beginning they are surrounded by an universal breath, in terms of accepting whole population's ambitions or at least the people who try to live retracing own roots or looking for a developmental point of view for tomorrow's humanity, rather than to be simply satisfied to survive for the money.

I think that, rediscovering man's universal and biological history, we can face a new future, defining new foundations for a less opportunistic and more universally decent life. Ultimately, I don't think that we are made for licking devil's excrements (money was so defined in medieval times). Power and money, like everything else, should be used for acting in the name of all living beings.

It wasn't the first time I went into a whirl of considerations about a society that increasingly disregarded my expectations, but it was maybe the first time that I saw a glint of light at the end of the path. That magic allows you to not give up, my friend, it gives you the strength to keep looking ahead, to search, to try, to create a new begin.

Fear is the first thought that covers mind in a so nagging manner as to envelop it as it was inside a gloomy wood. About what? Of not to be able to express our potential once we understand we weren't invincible. If we all, sooner or later, understand that we are vulnerable, everyone reacts to this fear in a different way: some people prefer to escape from their destiny, others think to be able to control the world and others set out on self-discovery journey. Yes, I know, but it's useless to say it, we are constantly afraid of death.

Worldly repute is but a breath of wind.

When we think on our body, we are afraid of losing it and, at the same time, we can't advance it, to make it evolve. Death really permeates us conceptually, just because we attach an exaggerated relevance to our physical body, without thinking about our invisible part, even less about the invisible part of an entire population. If thought is the beating heart of a person, culture is the beating heart of a population. Thus, if you used thinking only for the purpose to support your ego instead of contribute to universal culture enrichment, we have lost another opportunity to pulse humanity.

On the contrary, if we expand our point of view to the Earth we live in, death becomes one of the smallest phenomena that have ever existed on this planet, I should say that the planet survives precisely because of beings' death and rebirth whose live in its surface.

Fear and death are the two thoughts that have always influenced human work. How do we make sure they don't influence us again?

Homo liber de nulla re minus, quam de morte cogitat, et eius sapientia non mortis, sed vitae meditatio est.²

In our society impoverished of contents, where appearance is more important than being, become immortal is now a biological need, as if we can't leave our mark in some other way than preserve our body. Actually, there are potentially endless ways to become immortal, which have more to do with psyche and memory, or even the soul of a person. Immortality results from fulfilment capacity during our mortal existence. Paradoxically, we could become immortal during our mortal life, even if we see the effect of what we did only at a later stage.

Death isn't something to be ashamed of, but rather a limit in our possibility to learn. Our possibility to teach in distance doesn't end with death, to people we will never know, but inevitably they will keep us in their heart, if they have seen sincerity and passion in our teaching.

However, I think that has never been taken into account how great is the man's ability to learn and evolve, and how much this ability depends on the relationship with the other, with those around us, with those who make us feel good, but even with those who try to oppose us. In trying to survive to himself and to the world, the individual suffers constant metamorphosis to which he's exposed, because he intentionally agrees to participate in the research of a motor and spiritual equilibrium. Body gradually ceases, wastes away over the years, but the spiritual growth should, at the same time, be able to proceed indefinitely. However, if man made so much progress in technology, his adaptability and learning ability from every situation deserves credit, regardless how he came to find out something.

It isn't new that some discoveries were made by necessity during war periods or that discoveries can happen randomly, pursuing other objectives considered ex-post less worthy. This doesn't mean that war or serendipity are useful in that connection, it's rather remarkable that man can sometimes make a virtue of necessity.

Lost in the whirlwind of the huge and frightening amount of information that daily comes from every planet corner, man risks to lose his ability, unique in animal world, to select information, from every source, and to make them useful for the common good and for his knowledge application. If it's true that every individual has infinite potential at birth to prune during lifetime, with the choices that have been made during his personal evolution, what outcome can ever have choices no longer dictated by his own experience or social logic but conditioned from the mass media grapevine visited without a constructive criticism? In a kind of existential impasse the fake news, the wickedness from an already determined fate, the selfish actions of overbearing people are going to prevail in the collective imagination, as if there wasn't any alternative.

The greatest danger, in which we may end up, is to arouse fears towards the other and the different, increasing conflicts between schools of thought and between religions, giving more importance to errors and sins' negative valence, forgetting virtues' enrichment capacity and the potential of living beings.

A little magic light, found in the whirl of thoughts, spurred me to start a journey to plumb the multiple learning capacity that humanity has produced in activities sometimes distant between them, but with a focal common ground: human mind.

Like every good traveller, I also have a fear that I could get lost without your help. I would even say: after the terror of death, the fear of getting lost, without any reference point, ends up becoming the greater anguish able to oppress our ambitions. There is no son, in his destiny realization, who may forget to thank at least once his father, the one who saw him born or grow up. There is no poet, musician or painter who, in the childhood of their being artists, can forget the emotion of the first time at reading that poem, listening that music or viewing that painting. Contingent references of our mortal life render immortal the memory transmitted to others.

The family, that I'm going to surround myself to make this journey, are the adventure companions you have shown me, at times they will get lost with me in the windings of the human mind, at other times they will be the propitiators of concepts and philosophical figures intended to be developed in the future, perhaps by readers who are still waiting to born.

They will lead me through these secrets, in the turning point of these dialogues, to know characters who have given a push for humanity with their actions and their writings. The unexpected look of these encounters will be the simplicity with which I have discovered their invention of the world and the dullness with which the world has noticed them.

Just as illness sometimes arises from the inability of mind to clean up the past dejections and troubles getting the knowledge up the streets of experience, so we can maybe find solutions for social malaise accepting the inheritance of philosophical discoveries left behind but still available for getting up the social development.

N1 Heâ##s an Italian, World Cup winning former footballer who played for Juventus for many years in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Regarded as one of Italy's greatest ever wingers, throughout his career, he was give the nickname "The Baron", because of his stylish moves on the pitch, as well as his well-educate

N2 A free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life. B. Spinoza, The Ethics, Part IV, Prop. LXVII.

1. Open-mindedness

Even this, like every journey, started without any notice or forewarning.

«Maybe we would like to get some help at birth, but the awareness of living, in that moment, is so far away that be able to breathe is more important, crying and yelling» I heard his voice, which I had never heard, whispering to me like a brotherly friend.

At 49 years old, just when I would have been, in a handful of months, in the half way through the journey of our life (even supposing that life ended at 100 years old) I found that I was in a wood of thoughts, so confused was the way to take for the knowledge of myself and for the depth human cognition. I couldn't tell when the poet stood before me to cheer me up, but he was there in a moment without being requested...

...Then quieted a little was the fear, which in the lake-depths of my heart had lasted...

I didn't immediately realize who I had by my side
so full of slumber was I at the moment,

but in the escape from barbarism, that it is usual nowadays, I looked back for a moment realizing what I feared, what I was leaving behind,

to look again upon the step which was never permitted anyone alive.

I, only then, had the awareness that, if I hadn't broke step, I would have risk to die: not physical death, but the spiritual one, surely worst and, however, often prior to body's death. I realized inside myself, at the same time, how important was life. You don't know it until facing fear and labours are going to become bigger, until you almost have the feelings it gets out of hand, that you can't control it, but that you can get inside like a tiny little element of nature, like a canoe on the river.

Some time had now from early morn elapsed, and with those very stars, that in his escort were, the sun was rising, when Love Divine in the beginning moved those beautiful things.

It was spring when God gave the first movement to sun and stars, it was the right season to start a never done journey.

The wild beasts that I had to beat not far from where the ascent began weren't any easier as the Leopard, the Lion and the she-Wolf, if they were transferred in today's time. They were the fake profit, the petty cunning and the exploitation of media and laws brought to such a vile acts, that I lost the hope I had of winning to the top.

However, after the poet appeared in front of me in all his splendour, I didn't dare ask him, for modesty, the question that my curiosity pushed forward into my soul: who was the Hound of the prophecy?

Until the Hound shall come, and bring her to a painful death, the wild beast alloweth none to pass along her way ... that never doth she sate her greedy lust, but after food is hungrier than before.

If the beast to slay was already an allegorical character interpretable as the greed (in fact it is never satisfied), who was the Hound able to defeat it? The Poet answered me thus:

«You need to consider that, being a Hound, it is a hunter and has a good sense of smell, like a dog or a greyhound in sum, than consider that it is a faithful friend of man and has an unmatched speed when he is ready for jerk. If you happen to see its action in rapid succession, you will barely glimpse its figure, but know that its work will be recognizable in the more distant future».

I objected that I would have its name so that I could recognize it, but he said to me:

«Knowing its name won't help you, maybe you miss what it will do so important for humanity».

I confessed to him that I didn't understand anything until then, maybe that was why I had the courage to ask him a question to which it would be impossible to answer in a few words. Yet, from there started the most beautiful journey of my life.

«You who gained wisdom with such a long journey, how do you think the wide and profound science called philosophy has begun?», I dared ask him.

«Be careful to what I'm now saying to you, because no one understood well that open-mindedness which gave life to infinite movements of thought like an explosion of billion of stars in the sky, some identifying the only possible happiness with the vision of God, others conceiving reason with the help of divine light as the only means to reach God, others still entrusting on reason the duty to lead man to happiness, the latter considering the death as the end of soul.

Yet if philosophy is an expression of one thing, can't forget its origin from something that goes beyond death, indeed it could be said that it is born from the breath of life, as the sweet sound of the Greek letter phi repeated twice suggests, as a kind of whistle that gives the A (or the F) to the music, like the classical proportion with which Phidias gave harmony to his works, following the golden ratio.

When man began to replace natural elements with physical realities, that tried to overcome on each other, in the representation of the world, the concept of origin and continuation of life (physis in Greek, natura in Latin) broke into the human mind in all its splendour, giving life to the thousand whys of philosophy. Physis is the origin, the progress, the fulfilment of life, is the vital soul of man and universe. When you pronounce it, you can clearly feel the sound of the universe.

It may seem strange that man, considering the physical component of his being, has ended up falling in love with his own thought, but there it is, man is circular.

Embark you now, take the sea to the Ionian coast of Mileto and from there you can continue to Athens, the cradle of democracy and the arts, in the period when Pericles and his circle did culture flourish in the Aegean Sea.»

For never yet have I sailed by ship over the wide sea,
but only to Euboea from Aulis where the Achaeans
once stayed through much storm when they had gathered a great host from divine Hellas for
Troy, the land of fair women.

Then I crossed over to Chalcis, to the games of wise Amphidamas
where the sons of the great-hearted hero
proclaimed and appointed prizes. And there I boast
that I gained the victory with a song and carried off an handled tripod
which I dedicated to the Muses of Helicon, in the place where
they first set me in the way of clear song.
Such is all my experience of many-pegged ships...
(Hesiod, Works and Days, 650-660)

2. The flow of the mind

Sailing had been heavy and constant, even at night, when the stars seemed to drive the ship, driven by gusts of winds, which from time to time made it go ahead with some headway. The waves followed one another at such regular rhythm to induce their eyes to close, as if this natural music enchanted them. The first lights of dawn were appearing.

Suddenly the wind changed direction and intensity in a twinkling, the ship began to oscillate heavily forward, pitching like a big water bird. The ship's master, seeing land on the horizon, didn't think it twice and decided to aim at the island that he saw in the distance. The protests of the old Alcibiades, quivering to return to his Athens, were worthless. Ten years earlier, he had to leave it for a political exile: he was looking forward to come back. He went along with two women of intriguing beauty, he kept explaining to them all they could have done in his city, all the places that he would like to show them, as if those years hadn't elapsed.

The master's decision was firm: «We'll let pass the storm before we resume sailing to Athens». The two girls seemed to comprehend the art of mariners and understand what the master was doing. The old Alcibiades, instead, regretted the master's lack of courage in facing an upcoming storm. At the time, he had faced far more serious political storms than that simple whirl of wind. Everything went worse: as soon as it was possible, the anchor had been cast and the master arranged to evacuate the ship, fitting out the boats. The two women gave immediately order to their slaves to fit out a boat after requesting permission from the ship's master. Once on the ground, Alcibiades continued to speak with the master under an improvised roof at the quayside, where the sailors had tied the boats together.

We were landed in the island of Delos, where until four years earlier the treasury of the confederation between Athens and the allied islands was located, at least until Pericles had brought it to Athens.

Of the two girls, one was standing next to Alcibiades ready to satisfy all his wishes, even those that might have seemed unattainable. The other one had fun to feel the wind coming into her clothes and the rain wetting her hair, unconcerned to get sick. I didn't know her name, but talking to her was as sweet as fall in love with her. In an improvised dance move the veil had fallen, in which gathered her hair, that in a moment were released as skittish horses. I pleased to my curiosity, by giving her the veil back:

«Are you travelling to Athens?»

«Yes, my sister's husband comes back to Athens after a 10-year exile. He's so anxious to see his city again, that he's really excited».

«What will you do in Athens?»

«It is the city where I have always dreamed of living, for its richness and for its politics, where art and architecture meet with poetry and philosophy, where love for the sea blends with the curiosity and knowledge. What could I have more? I'm 20, I want to live in the centre of the world and Athens is the centre of the world».

«Where do you come from? Usually the girls who can boast a beauty like yours think about how to marry instead of seeking the centre of the world».

«Not for me, stranger. My family is of ancient Pelasgic origin, the sea's sailors. They are called Etruscan in the Tyrrhenian, Ionians in the Aegean. You'll find the Ionian Sea wherever the Tyrrhenian seems to be interrupted and reappear as Aegean».

«I'm from the Ionian Sea too, I'm from the Beautiful City, Kali-polis, but my name seems to be originating of the island of Crete».

«What is your name?»

«Ghignos Kairn, there is in my name the imperative of ghnomai...recognize!»

«...And where are you headed?»

«In search of truth».

«It isn't easy your research, I have to admit. Even Miletos, my hometown, seems to be originating of the island of Crete. Legend has it that Miletus, its founder, was born there by the god Apollo, but once he grew up, was exiled by King Minos (just like my brother-in-law Alcibiades), only that Miletus didn't return on his island home again: first, he had arrived on Samos island, then founded the city that was named after him».

«The story you told me resembles that of Ion. It is said that he too was born by god Apollo, but then was accepted by his father Xuthus, who became the progenitor of the Ionians».

«You have read the Catalogue of Women of Hesiod. Perhaps you know from Euripides how much, for Ion, it wasn't so important to know who his father was, all he cared about was if his mother, Creusa, was Athenian, because only then he would have been able to speak publicly in Athens. Anyway, Ionic Greek is the travellers' dialect. In the period when the heroes of the mythical Troy War had returned to their islands and to their cities, it spread along the coasts of Asia Minor. Not always the heroes who had come home were welcome, they didn't always acted like heroes on their return journey, in 10 years they had gotten used to acting as pirates and to realize that they had to provide for themselves without expecting great favours from gods».

She spoke stroking her neck in a sensual manner, she seemed to lose herself in her thoughts, let speak and then hit target.

I let myself go thinking about a dialogue with a friend some time before:

«Actually, gods were picking on them because they had taken Troy without their permission, thanks to Ulysses' guile. Did men now have the luxury of deciding their actions without waiting for the result of the sacrifices to offer to them? If the gods described by Hesiod and Homer have the worst defects of men, enough to deceive each other, steal and commit adultery, maybe they aren't able to impart a true knowledge to men. Yet, despite being vindictive, they are the depositaries of an order in the world. My friend Herodotus has an idea of the origin of the word 'gods': they are so called (theoi) because they establish (thentes) an order, give some rules that men must take as reference of their actions».

«The reference you talk about is important, otherwise each of us risks getting lost in transit or in the sea or even in the sea of feelings. In our city, we have at long last begun to draw geographic maps to which refer to during navigation. Both Hecataeus and Anaximander have located all known people and territories on a map. The ship's master uses their maps: he's from Miletos, I know him well. Our people make reference to the myth of Theseus, he's like a god for us, so much that his name comes from the same word (Thes-) as the gods are called. Do you know his story?»

«I know it only in part; he's the hero who defeated the Minotaur in the labyrinth of Knossos, succeeding then in getting out of the labyrinth thanks to the thread of Ariadne and return to Athens becoming king of that city and ruler of the Aegean Sea».

«So you don't know that he was born and raised on the Island of Samos, he's officially Ionian, though he was the son of an ancient king of Athens, named Aegean, who had buried a sandal and his sword under a huge rock, before returning to Athens. Once he became a strong and brave boy, Theseus moved the rock and recovered his father's sword, demonstrating that he was the son of Aegean. He had to follow a dangerous path, in order to reach Athens, in the world of the dead, where some subterranean deities, in the guise of thieves and bandits, unsuccessfully tried to kill him. Arrived in Athens and recognized by his father Aegean, he faced a monstrous bull in the Marathon's plain, succeeding in defeating it. He then convinced his father to get sent among the young men to sacrifice on the island of Crete, in order to kill the Minotaur».

«Now I realize that I knew only a small part of his story: I can say now that I know everything about this hero».

«You don't know anything yet: during the Battle of Marathon, Theseus' ghost appeared, as a warrior of prodigious stature, to the Greek soldiers led by Miltiades. The Greeks were fighting against the Persians and incited by him turned more ardently against the enemy, thus gaining the victory. This was the battle that revenged for us because the Persians had destroyed Mileto some years earlier».

Her deep eyes seemed to take flight to heaven in saying these words. Then I remembered some of the things I had heard about Theseus' ship, impossible to understand rationally, but now those ones meant plenty while I saw the emotion in her eyes.

«That battle allowed Athens to control Aegean Sea's poleis - I said to her - Theseus isn't just an Ionian hero, but a hero for the whole Hellas. I knew a curious detail on his ship: however his ship had done a lot of travel, it was always the same. Although the various parts were changed from time to time, the ship never lost its identity, inviolable in cutting through the waves».

«The whole thing works better than the set of individual elements; Theseus was the first to think that the union of individual cities could give rise to a much greater economic and political power than the simple local domain. Athens put into effect this policy along with the Ionian cities from which I come. According to my brother-in-law Alcibiades at this time, the biggest supporter of this policy is Pericles: I hope to know this so brave man who is pursuing Theseus' original goal».

«Your knowledge doesn't look like those of a woman so young. Can I ask who your preceptor was?»

«My family boast of descending from Neleus and therefore to have originated from the god Poseidon, as well as the legend would like of Theseus. I can't ignore such an important hero. He became something like a god for my people. If you want to know, however, from whom I have received the teachings that have brought me to philosophy, you must know the tradition of Ionian philosophers. Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes were the first to seek a principle of reality as the principle of all living beings. Do you know the philosopher Anaxagoras, friend of Pericles, he also Ionian?»

«I know Xenophanes of Colophon, an Ionian poet and philosopher who lived in Zancle and Elea. According to him, men are able to garner the best with time; he was sceptical that gods could have revealed everything to the mortals. As you see, I also know something about Ionian philosophers, although I know more about those who have approached my peninsula, closer to the heart of Hellas».

She smiled perhaps hurt in the pride of her proud Ionian origin.

«They call us barbarians because we have been under the control of governors not refined by the fervour of Hellas' art, politics and knowledge, but we were the only ones to have the courage to say 'No' to Persians, the only ones to create a merchant network to make other peoples jealous, the only ones to allow men's natural love for free women».

She had stopped to make the dance moves, walked determined along lines that formed regular squares. The tiger inside her had found free vent. I dared say to her:

«Democracy, in Athens, indulges in the love between old politicians and young chap who are approaching political and social life. You will not have there an easy life if you only will venture to propose such arguments».

«You are wrong if you think I want to mess up Athens' society as well as you described it, but you underestimate what is new there, where the good use of the word will enable the realization of the true and the beautiful».

«... and you think you are the priestess who knows the true and the beautiful?»

«Stranger, if useful, I will be the one to advocate love as the ideal instrument for soul's elevation while respecting the gods. Only by scaling the peaks of love man can think of achieving his perfection, but in doing so he needs to be reciprocated in the realization of his pleasure and aspirations».

«Tell me then how will I recognize you in Athens, since our paths will diverge: you may be in Pericles' circle, while I'll be looking for a truth, but I don't know if I could recognize you».

«You will then recognize me as you said. As a priestess, expert in divination art and respectful of the will of gods, I will be available to those who will wonder the properties of Eros to achieve the perfection of the soul. I will be Diotima of Mantinea or Aspasia of Mileto or even Pericles' concubine if he will love me, but I will always be a woman coming from barbaric Ionia. My only joy will perhaps be to let Theseus' heirs this gift: the thread that one day Ariadne gave him to get out of the labyrinth wasn't just a thread, it was much more».

So she greeted me as we resumed the journey from Delos to Athens, without giving me the opportunity to exchange other words with her, while the veil I had given her back, in the constant attempt to keep her hair united, was fighting hard against the worst of Etesian winds.

«Bard! thou who art my guide,
Consider well, if virtue be in me Sufficient,
ere to this high enterprise thou trust me.

(Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, II vv. 11-14)

«Thy soul is by vile fear assailed,
which oft So overcasts a man,
that he recoils From noblest resolution,
like a beast At some false semblance in the twilight gloom»

(Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, II vv.46-49)

3. The divine mind

I got back with my tail in the legs lost inside my head, because not only I didn't understand how philosophy was born just coming from Mileto, but I didn't even know a way to go to the truth, much less to democracy.

Hm, was there something wrong in the city where Aspasia was heading? Was perhaps the city of Athens incapable of welcoming her message? Or was Aspasia the first between the greatest Utopian in history? Perhaps the mind sometimes fails to understand all the knowledgeable? Or is the world in which we live too limited for the abilities of the human mind? But there was another alternative: maybe I wasn't able to understand and transmit such a deep message.

I was plagued by doubts, the fear of not being up made my body shiver to the backbone. I wouldn't know which of these hypotheses would be more likely, but the Poet urged me to move on, he insisted so that I didn't beat around the bush too much about my thoughts, because fear wasn't an excuse of my eventual failure, because fear weakens legs, because I didn't have anything to prove, neither to him nor to myself, and finally because the energy was stronger in me to move forward rather than giving up.

So I set out to continue the journey that I had taken in the light of that advice from the distant space-time, intended I would go back to consult my guide when the moment was closer to his time. Once I arrived at the port of Piraeus, my eyes opened to what Aspasia had tried to tell me. That wasn't just a port, that was Piraeus. The most important market in the world. Egyptian and Phoenician vessels were alternating with Greek ships without causing astonishment, there were even some ships coming from territories controlled by Persians, which until a few years ago thought that they could make Hellas a land of conquest, while now they gladly went to trade there.

Oil, wine, tableware and tissues were widely traded with other populations, among the first Ionian colonies, which made a great demand of it. Some potters had put their workshops near the harbour enticing leaving people to do the last purchases. Clay became ceramic in Keramikos workshops, the famous area in the north-west of Athens, where clay was in large quantities. What better place than Piraeus or Agora to sell pots? Imaging the city of Athens, I was impressed by how many things came there from the rest of the world: grain, copper, leathers and, not least, slaves. So much was the grain brought to the city that begs the question of how many people lived there and how much food they would consume on parties or simply for their nourishment. The slaves from Ionia were cheap, so the aristocrats gladly bartered their oil or their wine with a free labour force. The wives would have been happy to have more people for the housework without asking to their husbands.

As I walked along the piers of Piraeus, I heard the coins of Athens tinkle from one corner to the other of the small and large inns, where the owners were contending for the merchants to gladden their breaks after long journeys. Small and round, they didn't fear the comparison with other coins minted in that period: Athena's head on one side and the owl with olive branch on the other were so characteristic that they couldn't be confused. That coin was the symbol of a city built to honour the goddess of wisdom, who protected both art and science at the same time. A question began to form inside me, without a reply that could satisfy my curiosity: was the songs of the Muses or the intuition of philosophers to have more importance for this city and for what would have been the future of the world?

I was forgetting, wandering among my thoughts lost in the smells of merchandise for sale, to visit a friend of mine who tried to make both ends meet between Piraeus and Athens. The day for him never ended. He now unloaded the goods from the ships, and then obtained to pack the wool to be sold to the wealthy Etruscan traders, so he managed the mules and packhorses that were loaded with grain and leathers almost nearby the Acropolis. His name was Timofilo; he didn't have a family, but he hoped one day his energy and improvisation would have got on him in the world.

«Ghignos, finally you came, I thought you wouldn't find the right ship».

«You already know that my journey doesn't have a port of arrival decided before departure, I don't know if this is good or bad. Ever since I started my journey, I have left my ship with loose sails just being cautious to where the wind takes me, always looking around».

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