



# Olive Press

Newsletter of the Kefi Club



Kalanda, Athens 1953

## Meeting of 24 November 2017

Julia Elkington gave us a fascinating and highly entertaining talk on the way ancient Greek myths have been represented in the painting and sculpture of the last two and a half millennia. Rather than show us paintings we all know, such as Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus', Julia used examples that we were most unlikely ever to have seen (including the replica Parthenon in Nashville!), to show how different artists in different periods have interpreted the same story. For example, in the myth of Zeus sending an eagle to carry off the handsome boy, Ganymede, and bring him to Olympus to serve as his 'wine waiter', one painter shows Ganymede as a pretty youth with blond curls, while another (Rembrandt) makes him look like a small child, terrified and rather ugly, with the eagle hardly visible in contrast to the highlighted Ganymede. The latter artist, in his 'anti-classical' mode, did the same hatchet job on Diana/Artemis, usually portrayed as a paragon of beauty (indeed, resembling a Barbie doll in one sculpture we saw), and made her into a plain woman of no pretensions to traditional ideas of beauty. Sometimes the story itself was varied (just as myths were by the ancient Greeks themselves). Clytemnestra is regularly the killer of her husband, Agamemnon: in the 'Odyssey' she and Aegisthus,

her lover, kill her at a feast; but in the painting we saw, she is about to kill him as he lies in bed asleep, but is clearly hesitating by the bedroom door, and being pushed into the deed by Aegisthus. Many artists use myth to illustrate a contemporary theme. Joshua Reynolds, among others, painted portraits of various ladies as mythical goddesses, for example Mrs Hale as Euphrosyne (one of the Graces) and Mrs Siddons as Melpomene (Muse of Tragedy). And the nearby Hanbury Hall is covered with Sir James Thornhill's paintings of myth, which include allegories of current goings-on in the court of Queen Anne. Not all such attempts are entirely successful, however. A picture of the Amazons (mythical female warriors) fighting Greeks, painted by a 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet artist, was more notable for its political message than for any artistic quality! The examples ranged from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC - from which we saw a pot-painting of Odysseus and his men blinding the Cyclops, where three events of different times are combined in the same moment (the Cyclops drinking wine, his vomiting the half-digested men, and the blinding) - right up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD. Here Picasso was given a star role. A calm bull's head appears in the otherwise frantic 'Guernica' - apparently a favourite motif of his from the Minotaur myth - and at the beginning and end of the show we saw his picture of Dionysus having a fine time with various maenads: a no-holds-barred illustration of sensual pleasure! So the range of Julia's presentation was huge, and this account only scratches the surface of what was a scholarly talk, as well as tremendous fun. We all emerged more enlightened connoisseurs of art than we had been before!  
(Bob Stone)

## **Father Christmas traced to tomb at Turkish church**

Archaeologists in Turkey have made a discovery that could settle a century old debate and disappoint millions of children around the world. They have unearthed what they believe to be the tomb of the original Father Christmas - St Nicholas - beneath a church in Demre, Antalya, birthplace of the fourth century bishop. At the time of his death in AD343, St Nicholas was interred at the church in Demre, where he lay undisturbed until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was previously thought his remains were smuggled to Bari, Italy by merchants in 1087. Christians still visit the site of what was thought to be his final resting place in Bari's Basilica di San Nicola. However Turkish experts are now claiming the wrong bones were removed and those taken abroad belong to another local priest than the legendary bishop.

St Nicholas of Myra was known for his generosity towards children. He had a reputation for secret gift-giving, such as putting coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him. He famously said: "The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic God's giving, by grace, through faith and this is not of ourselves". He was popularised in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe as Father Christmas, who gave presents to young children. (By Josie Ensor, The Daily Telegraph)

## **The Greek-British Symposium**

Greece and Britain have been tied together from the war of independence to today. Brits fought on the side of Greeks in 1821 and Britain played a decisive role in the establishment of the Greek state. The two countries were allies in both world wars. Since 1952 they have been allies in NATO and since 1981 partners in the European Union. Until recently, we could say that bilateral relations (which were heavily in Britain's favour) had been absorbed by the transnational structures in which the two countries participated. Today, though, great change is sweeping Britain, Greece, the European Union and the world.



Britain is moving toward the EU exit whereas Greece is trying to remain in the Eurozone, Europe's hard core. With Brexit, it is certain that Britain's relationship with the EU and with the bloc's members will change. With regard to Greece, relations are so strong and at so many levels that even if the divorce between Britain and the EU goes through the two will continue their close cooperation. The question of how this new relationship will be shaped was the subject of a Greek-British symposium organized by the British Embassy, the British Council and the Delphi Economic Forum in Nafplio last Friday and Saturday.

The beautiful city on the Peloponnese coast is rich in references and symbols regarding the country's history and its relations with others. The symposium's opening took place in the Vouleftiko, a former mosque that became Greece's first parliament. This was where Ioannis Capodistrias, the new state's first governor, presented his reformist program. He was murdered, the program failed, and the fledgling state's "protector powers" - Britain among them - chose a king for the Greeks and kept a close watch on the country for the greatest part of its history.

The world is different now. The United States, the last century's superpower, appears increasingly indifferent to Europe; in Britain, economic and social insecurity (some of it in response to immigration) seem to have played a large role in the vote for Brexit, and this disenchantment exists in many other countries, too; the European Union is seeking its way between narrow national interests and the need for grand narratives of union; China is acting with ever greater self-confidence, in the political as well as the economic sphere; Russia is testing the will of the Western alliance; everywhere new dangers arise with international terrorism and cross-border crime; we are all vulnerable to technology giants, foreign powers or hackers violating our privacy, stealing our data, our savings, our identities even.

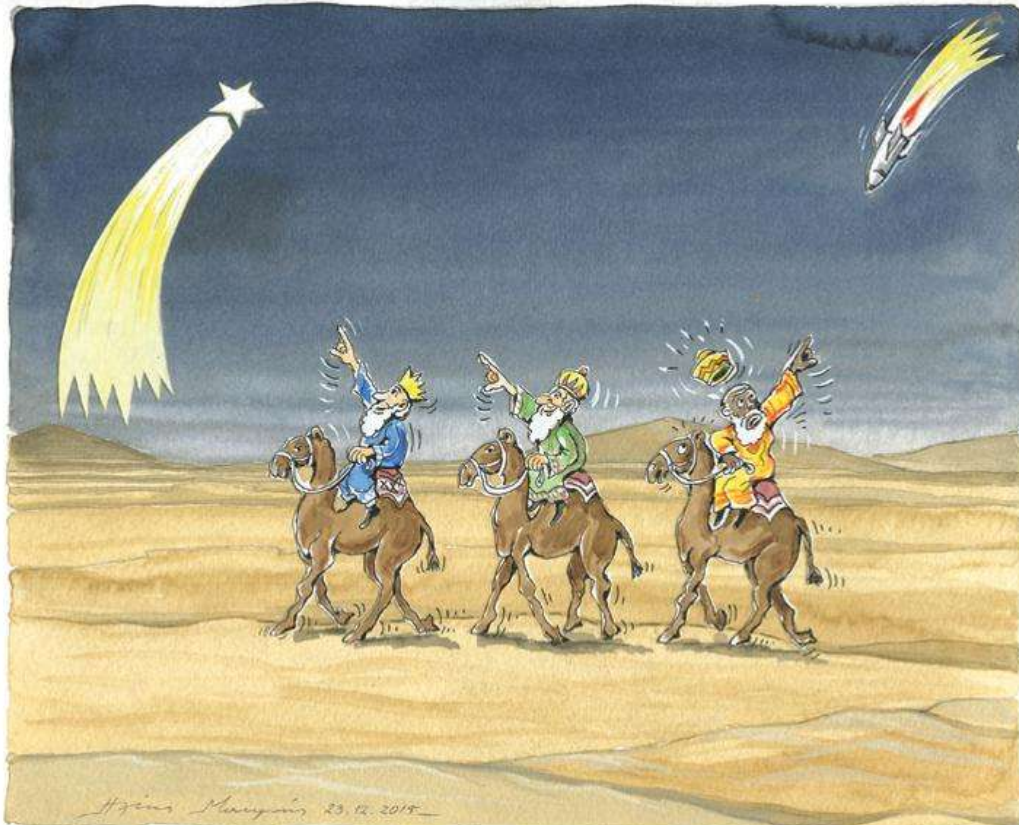
Speeches and panels at the symposium included an exploration of the changing relationship between Britain and the EU as well as between Europe and the rest of the world; how the EU is handling, or should be handling, Greece's problems and Britain's departure; how Greece and Britain need reforms so as to meet their challenges; how bilateral trade and cooperation in fields such as tourism and education will be affected and what opportunities may arise. A major question was how Europe will change under the pressure exerted by Donald Trump's presidency, Brexit, an aggressive Russia, an unpredictable Turkey, and China's grand global strategy of opening up a new Silk Road. Will the EU move toward closer integration? Will it change into a hard core surrounded by clusters of countries in various types of relationship? Will it fall apart? Indicatively, one panel brought together experts in defense and security,



academia and politics to discuss how Britain and Greece could continue cooperating, through NATO and nascent European frameworks as well as on a bilateral level.

Speakers were well chosen from Greece and Britain. All of the participants were experts in their fields, able to provide each other with invaluable insights and, together, to create crosscurrents of knowledge and ideas. The symposium was able to establish where each country stands, the challenges it faces in the changing environment. It suggested solutions to current challenges but also created a ferment of new questions and ideas. The organizers can be very happy with what they achieved.

The second Greek-British Symposium is expected to be held in Britain. Whether it is in one year's time or two, many of the questions that we ask today will have been answered, for better or for worse. New interpretations of events and new ideas on how to preserve Greek-British ties and to develop them further will be more necessary than ever. (NIKOS KONSTANDARAS 23/10/2017).



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