



Message from Olympia: Speaking stones

by Cleanthis Paleologos

I am sitting on the enormous vertebra of a broken column from the temple of Zeus. It is a single block, two metres across and one metre thick. Next to it, lying on their sides, are other vertebrae which look as though they have been cut in slices by huge swords in the hands of a Titan. Or maybe a Vriareos, with his hundred hands. Overhead, the enormous pine trees cast their dense shadow offering the shelter of their freshness against the unbearable heat rising from the ground. All day long, Pheobus with his golden arms has been searing this serene landscape. Now that the magnificent sun is sinking towards its nocturnal palace, the inflamed earth returns the incandescent flame which it has accumulated during the day.

Dense clusters of visitors, men, women, boys and girls, pass here and there among the ruins, unconcerned and hastily, sometimes without even paying any attention whatsoever. They glance superficially at the blocks of stone, kick pebbles as they walk along, the young people chattering like chirpy little birds. Others carry a small book and read a passage from it, explaining something to their companions. Two thousand people, perhaps even more, make this daily visit to the broken marbles between the brown-grey stones lying on the site of Altis, in ancient Olympia.

These people pass with the superficial haste of our time, with the indifferent look of ignorance, or even with a lack of knowledge of the glorious history of the country and the place. If only they could imagine the indescribable grandeur of Olympia at the time when it was alive !

I thought of standing up, gathering them around me and opening their minds by opening my heart to them and telling them...

"... These stones, lying here in pieces, these little pebbles which we can kick along, all have a voice, they can all speak. They express ideas whose values are ageless, and relate to us a series of stories of vital interest about the men, the Olympic victors, the half-gods and the gods, who lived in this same place 2500 years ago, on this same grass which alone casts its own new seed each year on its old roots, renewing itself and holding fast.

Walk in silence among all these reclining stones, pay attention with your ears and you will be able to hear them talking to you, telling you the story of the tireless Theagenes, of the invincible Glaucos, of Eudaimonas, Milo and Python. They talk clearly in all the tongues of the people of this world, their ideals find echo in every soul, and charm the minds of all mankind in the universe. For when they were alive they served an idea common to all mankind ; the same Olympic ideology that they still support today, as they lie there, broken, on the ground, is common to all mankind.

These stones are not stones. It is a spirit which breathes on a plane above transience and belongs to eternity. It is a reality which lives on without end in this life and will continue to live on despite the passage of the years. These stones will always have something to say..."

When the sound of the watchman's bell was heard, the sun was already hidden. The time had come, as it does every evening, to leave Altis in its solitude, alone with its temples, its altars, its Olympic victors and its gods.

C. P.

