

The perpetual return of the living-dead (languages): Spectres of (dis)continuity

Akis Gavriilidis*

In September 2013, for the umpteenth time, a large and heated discussion was fuelled in the Greek-speaking public (and cyber-) space, after Maria Repoussi, an MP belonging to the small DIMAR [Democratic Left] party, stated at Parliament that “ancient Greek [in the original: “*ta arkhaia*”, literally “the ancient ones”] is a dead language” and should not be taught throughout the educational system, but only to specialized students.

This statement produced many negative reactions, with various sexist epithets and hate speech being used against the MP. For example, right underneath the publication of the story in a large Athens daily (TA NEA 2013), a space for comments opened, where –until the time this article is being written- a total of 331 comments has been published, one of which goes:

“He, who feels dead as a Greek, considers dead the ancient Greek language as well. (...) What has been mortified is the ideology of the communist left. From the dead we can not expect living words since they experience everything as dead”¹.

But the accusations against her were not only based on this anti-communist premise. Other people opposed her views, quite the contrary, as diverging from, even betraying the true values of the left, which has always cherished national and popular traditions (To Vima 2013), or, more specifically, as directly serving the austerity/ neoliberal politics of the “Memorandum” through their “parochial functionalism” (Sevastàkis 2013).

When different people draw the same conclusions departing from different, even contradictory premises, we must suspect that these are not real premises but just pretexts, and that this alleged conclusion was a decision already taken beforehand for other reasons, not present in the discourse. In what follows I would like to discuss this presence/ absence of these reasons, and the mechanism constantly producing this rationalization. Keeping of course in mind that no claim and no public position can possibly contain in itself the totality of the grounds which led to it.

A cyber-discourse formation

As is known, questions concerning the status of the Greek language (GL) have always been very central in the public debate in Greece. But during the past years, I believe we witness the development of a new phenomenon: the large diffusion of a “lay” discourse about the status of the Greek language, or of different versions of it –and the relationship and hierarchy between them. The space for this diffusion, and the instrument that made it possible, is of course the Internet. In and through it, a practically infinite number of posts are circulating, which contain a variable set of celebratory and glorifying, not always coherent, assertions about presumed qualities of this language. I believe that we already have a large corpus of Internet posts in the Greek language –occasionally also in English- *about* the Greek language, and that this corpus constitutes a sort of a “discourse formation” –to use a term introduced by Michel Foucault (1987). Studying this valuable material could reveal new elements in the way in which people give sense to language, to what the GL is, and what it means to be a speaker of it.

The novelty of this phenomenon could be expressed as follows. In the great debates of the 19th and the 20th century, it was mainly academicians and intellectuals who took the floor.

* PhD in Law Philosophy, writer and translator. Last publication: *Εμείς οι Έποικοι. Ο νομαδισμός των ονομάτων και το ψευδοκράτος του Πόντου* [We Settlers. The nomadism of names and the pseudo-state of Pontus], Ιωάννινα, Ισνάφι 2014. cr33396@telenet.be, <https://nomadicuniversality.wordpress.com>

¹ The comment is signed by the author’s name accompanied by the mention “Λεμεσός” [Limassol, the city in Cyprus].

Hence, any positions expressed had to be coded in a “scientific” vocabulary, where the affective content was only indirectly present –translated into the language of detached objectivity. The presence of a universally accessible means of publication gave the possibility of speech to new people who do not always feel bound by the conventions of scholarship. On occasions, we have a lay discourse which presents itself as scientific, or vice versa; or a *strange hybrid* between lay and allegedly scientific discourse.

"According to researchers ..."

This could be seen more clearly with some practical examples. The one that follows is taken from the abstract of a paper presented at the Second International Conference of the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI), which took place in Athens in September 2014.

According to researchers the formation of the Greek language follows patterns and functions attributed to the formation of nature and the cosmos. The key to decipher these patterns is the Greek Alphabet. Its letters bear a univocal meaning-interpretation and their shape is also connected to their meaning and inner symbolism. This univocal meaning is apparent in every single Greek word (Fourioti 2014).

In terms of scientific methodology, it is obviously a disgrace that papers such as this get accepted in conferences. But in terms of the information it contains, this is an extremely rich source for us to see these argumentation strategies in action.

This sample follows what we could call a *pseudo-scientific* style. We have here the imitation of formal aspects of scholarly discourse such as the reference to (non-identified) “researchers”, and the author’s CV and credentials²; at the same time, this simulation of science is mobilized to serve a totally irrational-mysticist content.

We can also see a reference to the ability of the Greek language to influence foreign ones (since its “hidden symbolism” can be seen “in Greek words people use today either as native speakers or in many different languages worldwide”).

This reference is very common in many other electronic samples from this discourse formation. Not only electronic: recently, a book came out as well, entitled *You Speak Greek, you Just don’t Know it* (Stefanides 2010). Annie Stefanides, according to an online CV of hers, has studied electrical engineering and piano, and currently works as a Creative Director in advertisement. In its own self-description, this sample is more honest, as it admits it “is not a scientific lexicon. It is a selection of more than 6.000 Greek words that probably all of you, dear English speaking friends, use quite often in your everyday vocabulary”.

² According to which "Maya Fourioti is a Greek freelancer living permanently in Greece. She first studied English-French Translation in the Department of Foreign Applied Languages of LYON 2-Louis Pasteur University, France and specialized in Semiology. She also studied History of Art in the same University and specialized in National Heritage Conservation and Museum Organization". Two more paragraphs follow, informing about the speaker's "own freelance business in Corinth, Greece" and her capacities as the "Secretary General of the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing" and as "a social and civil rights activist and a volunteer in pressure groups".

You speak Greek You just don't know it

More than 6.000 Greek words that are used in English

academy, air, airplane, anatomy, angel, architect, aroma, astronaut, athlete, atmosphere, atom, base, bible, biology, box, centre, chair, chaos, character, chorus, church, cinema, climate, clinic, comedy, cosmos, cube, cycle, decade, democracy, devil, diagram, dialogue, diet, diplomat, disc, drama, dynasty, echo, ecology, economy, ecstasy, electric, electronic, energy, enthusiasm, episode, erotic, ethics, euro, Europe, fantasy, galaxy, genetic, geography, geometry, giant, guitar, harmony, helicopter, hero, history, horizon, hormone, horoscope, hour, hymn, idea, idol, irony, jealous, kilogram, kilometer, kinetic, lion, logic, lyrics, machine, magic, magnet, mania, marathon, mathematics, melody, metaphor, meter, method, microphone, microscope, museum, music, mystery, myth, neon, Nike, ocean, Olympic, orchestra, organism, orgasm, oxygen, panic, panther, paper, paradise, patriot, pause, pepper, period, phase, philosophy, photography, physic, planet, poem, pole, police, program, psychology, rhapsody, rhythm, sarcasm, scene, school, sphere, stereo, strategy, syllable, symbol, symmetry, sympathy, symphony, system, tactic, talent, technology, telephone, telescope, theatre, theme, theory, therapy, thermometer, tone, tragedy, triumph, type, utopia, zone, zoology...

by Annie Stefanides



ΙΑΝΟΣ ΕΚΑΘΕΞΗΣ

Indeed the book seems to serve a public relations goal, already from its cover which tries to capture the clients' attention through the use of colors and visual effects. The problem is that, despite this waiver from scientific ambitions, the very enunciation of this goal takes for granted certain points that would need some theoretical discussion before being accepted.

Exceptionalities

On the back cover, the author addresses the prospective reader using the first person, with the following words:

Let me guide you through a wonderful journey into the magic of an *exceptional* language, the Greek language.

In every respect, the Greek language is *one of the richest, most accurately structured and logical languages* of all times. It is a language where every word has a reason for its existence.

There is a direct connection between the "word" and the "meaning" of the word (my italics).

To begin with, it is remarkable that this address adopts not only a commercial but, more specifically, a *travel agency* vocabulary. The GL is presented as an *exhibition item*, to be visited in a museum or an archaeological site –preferably with the assistance of a guide. The invitation destined to arouse the interest of the “English speaking friends” for this language seems to be modeled on the successful precedent of tourist brochures.

This goes for the first phrase of the above passage. The second, on the other hand, introduces a new theme, which also abounds in the literature we are examining. The term “rich” serves both rhetorical schemes; sets of exhibits can be described – and compared- in terms of their “richness”. Languages can as well, and are quite often. However, here is where problems start: there is no common measure for the "wealth" of languages, and it takes a degree of arbitrariness in order to decide if one is richer than others.

In this particular case, it is clear what this measure of wealth consists in: *numbers*. Numbers of *words*, more precisely. Possessing “many” words, so many that you can even lend some to other languages, is construed as a sign of “richness”. Here, the counting stops at “6.000 words”, a simple and clear number, multiple of one thousand, easy to be impressed on the clients' memory. Elsewhere, in posts willing to give a more “scientific” appearance to this quantification, more complex figures appear. E.g. a really viral text published on innumerable blogs and sites, starts with the phrase:

The English language has 490,000 words, out of which 41.615 words are from the Greek language ... Guinness Book) [sic]³.

What these numbers are intended to show is the *potency* of the GL, understood as its ability to influence other languages and produce new results on (in) them. Apart from the *economic* vocabulary (words as possessions and loans), a *sexual* imagery is also mobilized to describe the traveling of terms across languages. In these discourses, a *seminal* character is attributed to the Greek language, indeed a *fertilization* of other languages.



In this phallic metaphor, the GL is posited as the absolute *origin*, the starting point of any linguistic traveling. The point of arrival is to be found in other Western European languages, and most of all English, which is the privileged target of this procreation/ borrowing narrative. This targeting is also served by translating –or directly drafting- many of these texts in this very language. Not only that: another urban legend trafficked by similar discourses claims that the Britons themselves (and not just any Britons, but business leaders among them – whose identity however is typically never revealed), appreciate the strength of GL and its potential as a magical potion. This absurd claim even found its way into the pages of *TO VIMA*, one of the oldest and most respected Greek dailies, through an article signed by a "philologist [who] holds a degree in Philosophy, Education, Psychology from the University of Athens and [is] a Master's student in Psychology program at the same University". This article, using as its title a much cited verse by the poet Odysseas Elytis, asserts its readers that

British entrepreneurs urge their senior officials to learn ancient Greek, because this language contains a philosophy with a special significance in the areas of organization and management that enhances business logic, while stimulating leadership skills (Karambali 2012).

Picking up specifically *English* as the direct competitor of GL, and underlining the respective "leadership skills" of each language, testifies for no less than an ambition –or a nostalgia- for *world domination* (as one should naturally expect from "the most perfect language"). Everybody who believes in the existence of a global hierarchy of languages, accepts English as occupying the top position in it; if it comes out that English is *inferior* (indebted to/ penetrated by) Greek, then obviously a rearrangement in the classification is imposed.

From the "non arbitrary language sign" to sign language

³ I took this specific quotation from a post entitled "Η Ελληνική Γλώσσα είναι η Αρχαιότερη στον Κόσμο!" [The Greek language is the most ancient in the world!], published at a blog with the very telling name *Secret Real Truth* (in English in the original). http://thesecretrealtruth.blogspot.com/2014/10/blog-post_949.html.

The obscure reference to the “Guinness Book”, with quotation marks closing without having ever opened before, is not the only false quotation in the "41.615 words" post. Another one follows suit, attributed to nobody less than Bill Gates, who is supposed to have declared:

Greek with its *mathematical structure* is the language of information technology and the new generation of sophisticated computers, because only in this [language] there are no limits (my italics).

Mathematics is always invoked as an important basis for the richness/ superiority of GL, not only in terms of counting the large quantity of its words, but also in terms of constituting an inherent quality, indeed its very nature. In the previous example we already saw the claim that GL is "one of the most accurately structured and logical languages of all times"; here, we see another, much diffused short expression of this accuracy: the *mathematical* structure of GL.

What exactly do people mean by this expression?

First of all, they mean that it has a necessary, non accidental existence.

The Greek language is not random [τυχαία] ... it was built on mathematics, and still what few people know is that every word in Greek has a mathematical background (ΞΥΠΙΝΗΣΤΕ PE 2014).

More specifically, the “mathematical structure” also means that the GL is not a social construction based on mutual agreement, which makes for its exceptionality:

The Ancient Greek language is *the only one* that is not based on the fact that some people just sat down and agreed to call an object 'x' or 'y' as *all the other sterile world languages*. The Greek language is a mathematical masterpiece (ΞΥΠΙΝΗΣΤΕ PE, *ibid.*)

So it is another way to say that, in the seminal (ancient) GL, as opposed to other impotent conventional languages, there is a univocal correspondence “between the ‘word’ and the ‘meaning’ of the word”, as Stephanides put it.

Other (cyber)authors opt for more scientific-sounding terminology here as well.

In the language we have the signifier (the word) and the signified (the concept). In the Greek language the two have a primary relationship, as, unlike in other languages, the signifier is not a random sequence of letters. In a conventional language such as English we can all agree to call the cloud car and the car cloud, and once we agree, this will apply. In Greek this is impossible. For this reason, many single out Greek as a "conceptual" language as opposed to the other "semantic" languages⁴.

Accordingly, the "arbitrariness of the language sign", as proclaimed by Ferdinand de Saussure, is valid for all other languages, except Greek; in it, signs are fixed and one-dimensional: every signifier has only one signified, and vice versa.

Needless to say, these pseudo-scientific assertions are pure nonsense as well; most of all, the supposed distinction between "conceptual" and "semantic" languages is not only unheard of, but even ridiculous, since the term νοηματική γλώσσα used in the original, which I rendered here as *conceptual* following the author's (presumed) intention, already has a use and a meaning in Greek, which is very clear and simple but totally irrelevant: it denotes the *sign language* used for the deaf (νόημα meaning both "meaning, sense" and "gesture, sign").

What is arguably even more incoherent is that this "necessary/ non-accidental" nature of GL is not only combined and co-existing with its supposed procreative activity, but is also *causally linked* to it.

⁴ This is also a "viral" passage. I found it at a multilingual site called "A better Greece", created mainly for tourist purposes, whose Greek version –written in very poor Greek indeed- present itself as «ΕΝΑΣ ΠΛΗΡΕΣ [sic] ΟΔΗΓΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ», including a section about «Η ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΓΛΩΣΣΑ» (<http://www.abettergreece.com/Greek%20the%20Greek%20language.html>).

foreign dialects were defined by agreement, that is some people agreed that such and such object they will call "X", *which makes languages sterile*, so they can not give birth to new words (from same post).

But the “mathematical structure” of the GL, in the sense it is understood within this discourse formation, is incompatible with "richness" and "fertility". A univocal language where only literal meanings and no metaphors are possible may indeed be suitable for mechanical operations, as the quotation attributed to Bill Gates claims, but leaves no space at all for poems, or for jokes, or for any activity we usually conceive under the term "culture". Not to mention that it also goes counter to the very rhetoric and narrative techniques of this discourse formation, which as we already saw is practically premised upon allegories, equivocal utterances, and loose or plainly inaccurate use of theoretical and other terms.

Language as God

But there is an additional, "deeper" meaning of the mathematics of language.

This is introduced in a larger passage I will quote, which recapitulates almost all of the motifs identified up to now and, towards its end, provides their "crowning" as an apotheosis – figuratively and literally. This too is taken from the "ksipnistere" post.

That the Alphabet cannot possibly have been copied from somewhere else, appears clearly from the fact that in the year 2300 BC. Homer already has access to 6,500,000 primary words (first person singular & present tense), which, if you multiply by 72 (the number of declinations), you get a huge number which is not yet the final, because, remember, the Greek language is not sterile –IT BEARS.

Now if we compare e.g. the English language that has 80,000 words –of which 80% are Greek, as we are informed by the University of Wales-, and if we measure that this sterile language evolves for 1000 years, we can naturally draw the conclusion that Homer receives a language whose temporal depth must be placed at 100,000 BC? 500,000 BC? Who knows ... But the ultimate proof is its mathematical character itself, which exists in no other language on the planet. Do not forget also that *the Creator used mathematics for his creation*, so our language is necessarily related to the source (root-0/1). (my italics)

In other words: in this discourse formation we can identify a clear tendency towards the *deification* of the Greek language, through the attribution to it of such divine qualities as *perfection* (omniscience/ omnipotence), *necessity*, and *eternity*.

The GL is eternal in that it was never created, or in any case its existence is much older than any other existing language; it was not born at any specific point in time, but on the contrary it is she⁵ who practically gave birth to all other languages, and to civilization at large. And also in that it is immortal, it can never die; even in specific historical periods when this seemed to be the case, when it was in bad shape, it miraculously resurrected. And, of course, it has its own elect people.

These ideas are expressed, directly or implicitly, in several other posts, such as the following:

The Greek language is perfect, it is the creation of the divine word, it is the miracle of miracles, it is a language of Harmony and has Mathematical structure. Nobody can question all these.

Our language is sacred, since it overcame the barrier of time. It is Holy because if people consider saints those who served the Creator, our Language has served mankind from the depths of time. It is the key to the book of knowledge; without this key we could not be taught culture and even the existence of our God Almighty (e-rodios 2013).

Actually, in this delirious and, in religious terms, clearly blasphemous passage, GL is declared *mightier* than this “God Almighty”; even if this latter does exist, he still depends on

⁵ Nouns in Greek are gendered, and the word for language (γλώσσα) is feminine.

GL in order for his existence to be known to humans, without which his existence would be pointless.

The petrification of culture

... *because* there can be no counterfeit where there is no original, does it in any manner follow that any undemonstrated original exists? In seeing a spurious coin we know it to be such by comparison with coins *admitted* to be genuine; but were *no* coin admitted to be genuine, how should we establish the counterfeit, and what right should we have to talk of counterfeits at all? (...) A man, for instance, may feign himself a sphynx or a griffin, but it would never do to regard as thus demonstrated the actual existence of either griffins or sphynxes.

Edgar Allan Poe (1846), 247; also quoted (partially) in Derrida (1991), 139

At this point, I would like to remind the reader that the expression *ta arkhaia*, i.e. the neutral adjective in the plural, without a noun, used colloquially to describe Ancient Greek in Modern Greek, does not have only this meaning; disproving in practice the theory about the univocal correspondence between signifier and signified in "every Greek word", this very adjective is also used to connote *ancient (material) monuments*. It practically means "antiquities".

I would also like, in this respect, to invoke the key thesis put forward by Hamilakis (2009), that, in modern Greece, the relationship with ancient monuments has developed into a kind of a *secular religion*.

According to this interpretation, these *arkhaia*, these "ancient things", are seen as remnants that permit us to communicate with the dead ancestors. They are turned into objects with a *borderline status*, at the same time dead and living.

I claim that the same happened with language and culture in general. I think we can expand this consideration onto the relationship not only with material monuments, but with immaterial ones as well. And notably with this immaterial monument constituted by the ancient Greek language seen as one big material monument, a stone.

I can find no better expression for this *petrification of culture* than a phrase used by the scholar Evànghelos Kofòs in 1993, when speaking to a US daily. Kofòs, who has served as a senior expert advisor to the Greek Foreign Ministry for decades in matters of Balkan history and policy, compared the use of the name *Republic of Macedonia* by the "Slavs" to a *burglary* and went on to affirm:

It is as if a robber came into my house and stole my *most precious jewels –my history, my culture, my identity* (Danforth (1997) 35).

In a phrase consisting in only 22 words, five out of them are the first person singular possessive pronoun. Not bad: this obsessive-possessive repetition installs a treatment of words, in particular of names, as *stones*, hence as fetishes, as objects with magical-mystical qualities. The Name, as a fetish, is *possessed*. This possession must be understood in at least two senses: Kofòs –and the nation on behalf of which he is speaking- are the masters, the legitimate owners of the fetish/ jewel/ Name (of the fathers). But also, the jewel is *haunted by spirits*, by the ghosts of the dead fathers. The jewels –material or linguistic remainders, marbles or words- permit us to communicate with our ancestors. The latter may be dead, but what they left behind is not only alive, but also still bearing offspring. This is why the language fetishists refuse to tolerate any thought of these remainders being "dead" and insist on keeping open this intermediate zone between life and death.

We are of course here totally in the element of *spectrality*, as Jacques Derrida defined it in his *Specters of Marx*.

As is well known, Marx always described money, and more precisely the monetary sign, in the figure of appearance or simulacrum, more exactly of the ghost. (...) The *Critique of Political Economy* explains to us how the existence (*Dasein*) of money, metallic *Dasein*, gold or silver, produces a remainder. This remainder is –it remains, precisely- but *the shadow of a great name* [my emphasis]: "*Was übrigbleibt ist magni nominis umbra*". (...) Later he will compare

this spectral virtue of money with that which, in the desire to hoard, speculates on the use of money after death, in the other world (*nach dem Tode in der andern Welt*) (Derrida (1994) 55-56).

No wonder, then, if the Name, and the culture for which it stands as a synecdoche, are an asset, a possession; but an invaluable asset that money cannot buy. At the same time they are outside any possible exchange or alienation; on the contrary, the Name is that which renders every exchange possible, since it is an absolute value, hence a measure for all (relative) values. Its jewel-like nature turns it into a *treasure*, into something we (must) keep away from the gaze and touch of others –and from commerce and business.

The metamorphosis of commodities (*die Metamorphose der Waren*) was already a process of transfiguring idealization that one may legitimately call spectropoetic. When the State emits paper money at a fixed rate, its intervention is compared to "magic" (*Magie*) that transmutes paper into gold. The State appears then, for it is an appearance, indeed an apparition; "seems now to transform paper into gold by the magic of its imprint [*scheint jetzt durch die Magie seines Stempels Papier in Gold zu verwandeln*; Marx is referring to the imprint that stamps gold and prints paper money]." This magic always busies itself with ghosts, it does business with them, it manipulates or busies itself, it becomes a business, the business it does in the very element of haunting. And this business attracts the undertakers, those who deal with cadavers but so as to steal them, to make the departed disappear, which remains the condition of their apparition. Commerce and theater of gravediggers. In periods of social crisis, when the social "nervus rerum" is, says Marx, "buried [*bestattet*] alongside the body whose sinew it is", the speculative burying of the treasure inters only a useless metal, deprived of its monetary soul (*Geldseele*). This burial scene recalls not only the great scene of the cemetery and gravediggers in Hamlet, when one of them suggests that the work of the "grave-maker" lasts longer than any other: until Judgment Day. This scene of burying gold also evokes more than once, and still more exactly, Timon of Athens. In Marx's funerary rhetoric, the "useless metal" of the treasure once buried becomes like the burnt-out ashes (*ausgebrannte Asche*) of circulation, like its *caput mortuum*, its chemical residue. In his wild imaginings, in his nocturnal delirium (*Hirngespinnst*), the miser, the hoarder, the speculator becomes a martyr to exchange-value. He now refrains from exchange because he dreams of a pure exchange (p. 56-57)

Indeed, the nexus *treasure/ burial/ inheritance/ cultural (and other) values* seems to have a particular relevance not only for Timon, but also for Athens in general. It may be no coincidence that, in this period of social (and also financial) crisis, in the summer and fall of 2014, arguably the most popular and respected person in Greece is a *gravedigger*⁶: Mrs Peristeri, the archaeologist who is excavating a tomb in Amphipolis, northern Greece, looking forward impatiently to finding a cadaver, or some ashes or other chemical residues testifying for the identity of the buried person –the "inhabitant" [énoikos] of the grave, as everybody in Greece calls him/ her. Practically everybody –including mass and social media and the Prime Minister himself- nurture the Messianic expectation for something "big" to be found in this respect. "Big" here meaning nothing less than the corpse of Alexander the Great.

The reason why they do not give up this irrational hope, in the absence of any scientific backing, is, as with any Messianism, a feeling of *redemption* they expect to obtain in the event that Alexander's cadaver –or at least some "national treasure" of comparable value- be found⁷. Such a finding, they believe, will silence once and for all the claims of the "robbers": if remains of Alexander are found on Greek territory, the subtext goes, this will leave no doubt as to the Greekness of both modern and ancient Macedonia(ns) and disprove the "falsification of history" by the Republic of Macedonia. So once more we have to do here with the "magic that transmutes paper into gold": in Greek propaganda, the people who claim

⁶ On this, I permit myself to refer the reader to Gavriilidis (2014).

⁷ This is why Hamilakis (2014) spoke in this connection of "ethnikì thisavrothiria" [national treasure-hunting].

to belong to the Macedonian nation are typically accused as “plastogràfoi”⁸ [forgers], or, even more clearly, as “paraharàktes” [counterfeiters]⁹. The latter term, in its literal sense, is used exclusively in relation to faking currency, to producing coins or banknotes without the relevant (State) authorization –without an “entitlement”, as Derrida (1991:109 and passim) would note¹⁰.

Speaking of entitlements, it is interesting to note that Mrs Peristeri’s supervising minister, Mr Tasoulas, stated that the findings at Amphipolis are “the good news [ta kalà néa] the Greek people are entitled to” (Athens Voice 2014).

It is a rather bizarre choice, almost an antinomy, to call the results of a scientific research operation “news”, whether good or bad. In any field, but even more so in archaeology, which by definition deals with the past, with “the ancient ones”, not “*ta néa*” –the new ones. This is an expression we would normally use for an open question on which we have an affective investment, a hope or a fear. But also, why declare that “the Greek people” are “entitled” to these *néa* about the *arkhaía*? There is a missing part in the message, that the listener/ reader is expected to fill in as follows: “in these times of crisis, the Greek people have gone through a lot of hardship, so it was about time for them to hear something uplifting”. Note that the gain expected from the findings is not material, at least according to the explicit content of the ministerial statement, but moral: the very next sentence reminds us that “The ancient Greek culture and history are a source of *pride* for the Greeks” (ibid.; my emphasis).

What is more relevant to our point, is that this official discourse faithfully reproduces the double structure of “economical theology” (Agamben 2011) in its reading of the relationship between modern and ancient Greek culture: the remnants of the past are construed as an *evangelism* (*Evangélion* meaning literally “good news”), and simultaneously as a *reward* for one’s sacrifices, a compensation/ consolation in the world of the dead for suffering in the real one.

This “double bind” is, I believe, linked to what we could call, in Derrida’s terms, *the ambiguity of inheriting*. Ancient Greek cultural heritage is indeed a source of pride for modern Greeks, but at the same time it is a *burden*, a source of awkwardness, embarrassment, superegotic anxiety. Culture is primarily immaterial, abstract; after one has raised his status by affirming “my ancestors created a great civilization”, he/she is faced with the question –put by others or, most probably, by himself-: “well, why is this civilization so great? Why is this practically relevant today to our lives, how does it help us?”. This question opens an unbearable *gap*: asserting that “ancient Greeks invented democracy, drama, philosophy etc. some thousand years ago”, produces a rather faint enjoyment in the lives of today’s people. But by adopting and advertising tangible, material things: marbles, statues, stones, or words and ideas turned into stones, one is at last capable of *putting something* rather than nothing in the place of this void, of blocking the leakage of enjoyment and fixing its fluidity. “You see? we are important because you still use our words today! Here they are, we can even count them”.

In this sense, the quantification/ petrification and the language cult I tried to analyze in what precedes serve as means to block the deleterious effects of this gift/ pharmakon constituted by the “glorious ancestors” narrative.

Bibliography

⁸ See e.g. Martis (1983).

⁹ See on this: «Ο Μεγαλέξανδρος “χαστουκίζει” τους Σκοπιανούς παραχαράκτες της ιστορίας, από τον τάφο του!» [Alexander the Great ‘slaps in the face’ the Skopjean counterfeiters of history from his grave!], <http://www.makeleio.gr/?p=151198>. “His grave” in this context meaning Amphipolis.

¹⁰ Additionally, some useful remarks on the *linguistic* dimension of the State guaranteeing for the authenticity of money, and more particularly on the performative nature of this “speech act”, are to be found in Marazzi (2013), esp. p. 189. This approaching is no surprise, as performativity is linked to the *magical* aspect of language, to what permits one to “do things with words”.

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