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Marina Antonopoulou

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## *Rethinking mythology in Greek museums through contemporary culture*

Marina Antonopoulou

### ***Abstract***

This thesis investigates the character with which Greek mythology, one of the most durable manifestations of ancient Greek heritage, survives in the perception of contemporary Greeks, and the role that Greek museums do and could play in this.

The starting point for this investigation is the appraisal of Greek mythology as an ideological creation of ancient Greece that bears pan-human and diachronic intellectual and cultural potency and, as such, constitutes a significant interpretative tool for the contemporary Greek individual. More specifically, this thesis reconsiders the relationships between Greek mythology, Greek museums and Greek people, using as a bridge contemporary Greek art. It does so in three main chapters, which investigate and analyze different parameters of this nexus of relationships. Greek mythology's adaptations by contemporary Greek society are also explored in an attempt to establish the dominant contemporary meanings of Greek mythology. Then, the relation of a specific cultural manifestation of contemporary Greek society, that of contemporary art, to Greek mythology is extensively analyzed through a series of interviews that were conducted exclusively for this thesis. In these interviews, contemporary Greek musicians, authors and visual artists speak of the position that Greek mythology possess (or does not possess) in their artistic expression, and discuss the intellectual and cultural significance that Greek myths retain for contemporary society and people.

From these investigations, two antithetic poles emerge. On the one hand, there is the trivializing way in which Greek society deals with its myths, through their exploitation, for example, for commercial or nationalist purposes. On the other hand, there is the sensitivity with which my interviewees pored over Greek myths, enabling them to emerge full of dynamism, and illuminating them as ever-active negotiators of life and human nature. Thus, contemporary art is identified as a powerful conveyor of mythology's potency for the contemporary individual.

Next, the position of Greek archaeological museums, as major official institutions that do, or could, represent and safeguard Greek mythology is explored and critically assessed. It emerges that Greek museums are rather unconcerned with Greek mythology's representation and communication and, thus, confirm that Greek mythology is a dead and irrelevant representative of a glorious, yet remote and strange, ancient civilization.

One proposed solution to this museological malfunction is provided by the museological representation of mythology through contemporary art. The value of artists as mythology's interpreters is explored and their general benefits as communicators in the museum are also evaluated. Finally, this thesis looks at the downsides of such a project, identifying and presenting some of the potential pitfalls and constraints that are entailed in the collaboration between Greek archaeological museums and contemporary Greek artists in practice.

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*Overall, it's been a great, educative - in the broadest sense - mythical journey to participate in, with all its ups and downs, the frightful creatures that lurked in the dark and the brave heroes that ran for help when I needed them.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Toynbee claims, with reference to the catalytic ability of the past to shape and determine the present and the future, that ‘heritage is karma’<sup>1</sup>. This claim lies at the heart of this thesis. More specifically, this thesis is concerned with Greek mythology’s museological past, present and future. It focuses on the building of a fruitful future relationship between Greek mythology and Greek archaeological museums. More specifically, it examines Greek mythology’s existent museological status and seeks to identify the factors that have determined it, as well as the impact that this status has both on the operation of Greek archaeological museums, and on the representation of Greek mythology in them. Ultimately, this thesis suggests that Greek mythology’s relation to Greek archaeological museums needs to undergo a radical change. The goal is to enable Greek mythology to be revitalized and for its inherent dynamic to be revealed. Greek mythology needs to exist, in the museum, in a dialogue with the contemporary Greek individual. Greek contemporary artists offer the potential to serve as a bridge between Greek mythology, Greek archaeological museums and contemporary people. More specifically, contemporary artists are called to participate in museum practice, as interpreters of Greek mythology.

The topic of this thesis is an unploughed field. Greek mythology, and mythology in general, in the form of a museological subject matter, is not represented in the relevant academic literature. Despite the fact that the representation of ancient Greek heritage in Greek museums is a topic that has been, to some extent, explored by scholars<sup>2</sup>, Greek mythology, as part of this heritage, has not been included in its museological dimension. This thesis aims to fill part of this gap in the cultural and museological literature. Attention is drawn to the absence of Greek mythology from the spectrum of museum studies for a number of reasons. First, Greek mythology is a standard feature of the collections of Greek archaeological museums, as Greek myths are frequent motifs in the iconography of ancient Greek material culture. Second, Greek mythology is a museological subject matter of a particular nature, in the sense that, as an intangible form of cultural heritage, it differs from the traditional type of museum exhibit. The third reason is that Greek mythology is probably the most durable

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<sup>1</sup> Toynbee, A., *The Greeks and their heritages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> For example: Mouliou, M., *Classical Archaeology and Museum Constructions of the Past*, London: Ashgate, 2006; Mouliou, M., ‘The Classical past, the modern Greeks and their national self; projecting identity through museum exhibitions’, *Museological Review*, 1, 1, 1994, pp. 70-88; Gazi, A., ‘Archaeological museums and displays in Greece 1829-1909: a first approach’, *Museological Review*, 1, 1, 1994, pp. 50-69.

and most 'straight-forward' element of ancient Greek culture used by contemporary Greek society.

Examples include the contemporary use of mythical figures by commerce and 'static' and 'drastic' advertisement<sup>3</sup>. In this context, mythical figures appear on tableaus on the façade of shops, or participate latently in the everyday routine of Greek people, as trademarks, on a modern kitchen or bathroom, for example (Figure 1). Another example is the naming of the streets of Greek cities after the gods and heroes of Greek mythology (Figure 2). For example, many Greek cities, including Athens and Thessaloniki, have their main commercial street named after the ancient Greek god of commerce, Hermes. The contemporary Greek individual also comes in contact with Greek mythology through the name of a friend or a family member. The naming of Greek people after their mythical ancestors is a practice that originated in the period of the Greek War of Independence, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and has remained popular since then. So, today Greek people frequently have the names of famous gods and heroes such as Aphrodite, Artemis, Heracles, Odysseus, Athena, Orestes, as well as of 'secondary' mythical figures, such as Circe, Perseus, Io, Nepheli, etc. Another dimension of Greek mythology's contemporary existence is in the ancient monuments that form part of the urban landscape. The most profound example of this may be the Parthenon in Athens, however, less striking monuments can be encountered in almost every city, town and village of Greece. Apart from the ancient monuments with a mythological theme, there are also monuments of modern architecture, which make use of Greek mythology. Such examples are the Academy of Athens and the oldest building of the Aristotle University campus in Thessaloniki. The courtyard of the former is adorned by one statue of Athena and another of Apollo, erected on two Ionian columns, while its main part depicts the birth of Athena (Figure 3). The oldest building of the Aristotle University campus has an ancient Greek inscription on its façade, which reads, in the form of an exhortation that summarizes the essence of academic studies: 'offer sacrifice to the Muses and the Graces' («Μούσαις χάρισι θύε») (Figure 4). Finally, a significant contemporary dimension of Greek mythology is its use in art. Mythical gods and heroes frequently protagonist in contemporary artworks, and mythical incidents are employed, in order for a new, contemporary, tale to be narrated.

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<sup>3</sup> Μπουλιώτης, Χ. (Bouliotis, Ch.), «Η αρχαιότητα στη διαφήμιση» ('Antiquity in advertisement'), *Αρχαιολογία (Archaeology)*, 27, 1988, pp. 22-29, (p. 24).



Figure 1. Greek mythology as a trademark. 'Hermes' soap (on the left), 'Hera' table salt on the right.



Figure 2. Greek mythology in the urban landscape: Part of Thessaloniki's city centre. The streets with mythological names are marked in black.



Figure 3. The Academy of Athens. Athena (on the left) and Apollo (on the right) overlook the courtyard.



Figure 4. The first building of the Aristotle University campus. The inscription, which refers to the Muses and the Graces, is the first thing to be noticed on its façade.

Greek mythology constitutes, then, an exceptional case of living cultural heritage. This makes Greek mythology, on the one hand, a potentially powerful link between museums and society. On the other hand, Greek mythology's constant re-

invention means that its identity is open to all sorts of misinterpretation, abuse and degradation. This renders Greek mythology a cultural element that is in need of safeguarding and creative representation.

### **The research questions**

So, the main question of this thesis is 'Do the relationships between Greek mythology, Greek museums and the Greek people require a radical re-think, using the bridge of contemporary artists? '. The ten research questions, through which this main research question is investigated, are the following:

1. **What is Greek mythology?**

This question is examined in Chapter Three. It calls for an introduction to the cultural phenomenon that this thesis is concerned with, and provides the basis for the understanding of the thesis' topic.

2. **What is Greek mythology's, intellectual and cultural potency? What meanings and significations have been attributed to it diachronically?**

This question is also discussed in Chapter Three. It attempts to explain the Greek peoples' preoccupation with Greek mythology, by demonstrating that Greek mythology is a cultural creation that concerns as much contemporary Greek society, as it does the ancient one. It calls for a presentation of Greek mythology's diachronism, its flexibility of meaning, and its ability to be a repository of meaningful messages for different peoples at different times and in the context of various systems of thought. In short, this question highlights the significance of Greek mythology and justifies its significance both for museums and for Greek people. At the same time, it opens the way for the following question.

3. **How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?**

This question puts my thesis' main argument into a Greek context. It is dealt with in Chapters One, Four and Five. Through this question, I seek to investigate what aspects of Greek mythology reach contemporary Greeks, and to establish through this whether Greek people's relationship with Greek mythology needs to be re-thought.

4. **What are Greek mythology's dynamics in contemporary Greek art?**

This question dominates the Fourth Chapter of the thesis and deals with one of the main components of the main research question, that of contemporary art. It focuses on the field of Greek mythology's use by contemporary Greek society, where Greek mythology's dynamics are maintained, utilized and developed. In other words, this question focuses on that contemporary manifestation of Greek mythology which could constitute by which a meaningful relationship between Greek people and their myths could be cultivated.

5. How do Greek museums, as official institutions, deal with Greek mythology and its dynamics?

This question is investigated in Chapter Five and concerns the other main component of my main research question, i.e. museums. It aims to explore how Greek museums – and, in particular, Greek archaeological museums - perceive themselves in relation to Greek mythology and how they make use of their role as official communicators of Greek myths' substance and dynamics.

6. What are the consequences of Greek mythology's museological status?

This question examines how Greek museums contribute to Greek people's understanding of Greek mythology and to mythology's safeguarding. It is explored in Chapter Five. With reference to my main research question, this question aims to establish whether Greek archaeological museums' relationship with Greek mythology needs rethinking.

7. How could Greek museums enhance their relationship with Greek mythology and contribute to the development of a meaningful relationship between Greek mythology and Greek people?

This question is answered in Chapter Five. It is intended to establish the prism through which Greek mythology could be dealt with in museums, given its particular nature, first as culture that is intangible and second as a cultural element that is constantly developed and reinvented. This question draws on the findings of question four and focuses on the investigation of a museological presentation of Greek mythology that is based on a dialogue with Greek mythology's contemporary interpretations, thus opening the way for the following question.

8. What role could contemporary Greek art play in this dialogue?

This question is essentially a specification of question seven and is also covered in Chapter Five. After having established that Greek mythology retains its

dynamics in contemporary art and that Greek mythology, as an intangible and ever-evolving form of heritage, is in need of a museological discussion that draws on contemporary reality, this question seeks to explore what the museological use of contemporary artists could be, with specific reference to the needs of Greek mythology.

9. How could the dynamics of Greek mythology in contemporary art be transferred into a museum context?

This question is a practical demonstration of question eight. In other words, it serves to reinforce the main argument of my thesis on the usefulness of contemporary art as a bridge that enables Greek mythology's re-thinking in museums. This question is addressed in Chapter Five.

10. What difficulties are entailed in the interpretation of Greek mythology in a museum through contemporary art?

This last question seeks to address the downsides of my main argument. Its purpose is to raise awareness of the difficulties that the proposed re-think of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums through contemporary art might entail, and thus shed some light on a relatively new and largely unexplored museological practice.

The answers to these questions are developed, then, in one introductory chapter (Chapter 1), four main chapters (Chapters 2 - 5), and one concluding chapter (Chapter 6). Below, I briefly summarize these chapters.

## **Chapter 2 – Data sources and methodology**

Chapter 2 covers the methodology that was employed in this research, including the preliminary preparations for the formation of the subject matter of the thesis. The investigation of the meanings that contemporary Greek artists make of Greek mythology was realized by means of a series of interviews. The presentation of the rationale behind the preparation, conducting and analysis of these interviews occupies the main part of Chapter 2. More specifically, Chapter 2 considers the rationale behind the selection of interviews as the main source of primary data, the selection of the specific sample of contemporary artists as the thesis' informants, and the selection of the interview method. Additionally, the issues that emerged along the interview process, the difficulties encountered, and the ways in which they were dealt with, are discussed. Finally, the methodology that was used in transcribing and analysing of the

interviews is presented. Chapter 2 closes with a brief discussion of other data sources and research methods.

### **Chapter 3 – Myths and meaning**

Chapter 3 explores the presence of Greek myths in scholarship. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the multifaceted and ever-active topic that mythology is. It aims to give a taste of the variety of meanings that can stem from mythology and of the variety of thoughts that are triggered and sustained by mythology. In other words, this chapter is a demonstration of Greek mythology's great dynamics. It is essentially divided in two parts. In the first part, the theoretical schemes, wherein mythology has been diachronically studied and interpreted, are examined. The chronological span of this examination is intentionally broad: it begins with the first attempts to understand myths and to critically evaluate them in the sixth century B.C, and extends to the modern theoretical school of post-structuralism and its suggestions for the reading of mythology. A critical evaluation of these theories of mythology closes the first section of Chapter 3. The second part of the chapter focuses on the example myth of Medusa and examines its various interpretative adaptations in mythological scholarship, in art and in philosophy. The chronological span of this presentation is again quite extensive, extending from antiquity and Homer to the modern day Madonna. Through the demonstration of mythology's dynamics, then, this chapter identifies the main principle that underlies the perception and elaboration of Greek mythology in this thesis. This principle is that mythology's interpretation is an 'open field' and that mythology's value does not lie exclusively in the academic 'facts' that its deciphering can reveal, but also - and perhaps even more - in the food for thought that it can offer to the individual.

### **Chapter 4 – Contemporary artists and Greek mythology**

In Chapter 4, the outcomes of the interviews are presented and discussed. This chapter is also divided into two parts. In the first part, the interviewees' profiles are presented, with the intention of personifying these key participants in my research. This presentation refers both to the career course of the artists and to their personality and attitudes, as outlined in the Greek and international press. The second part concerns the discussion of the five mythological themes that resulted from the interviews' analysis. The aim here is not to evaluate and criticize the accuracy of the artists' perceptions of mythology, but rather to illuminate and understand the meanings that these artists make of Greek myths. In other words, Chapter 4 is mainly concerned with exploring the interpretations that artistic imagination, insight and ideology attribute to

ancient myths. The purpose of this exploration is to 'update' and revitalize the ancient myths, and to enable them to become an intellectually accessible subject matter for the contemporary individual: the potential museum visitor. The illumination of the meanings that the interviewees make of Greek mythology is attempted, whenever this is possible and necessary, through their juxtaposition with scholarly interpretations of mythology.

## **Chapter 5 – Greek mythology and Greek archaeological museums**

Chapter 5 covers the issues that emerge from the examination of Greek mythology as a museum subject matter. This chapter is also divided into two parts. In the first part, the current status of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums is presented. Here, light is shed on the factors that have led to the shaping of the current museological reality, through a discussion of the general ideological foundations of museological practice in Greece, and of the impact that this reality has on the operation of museums as social and educational institutions and on the well-being of mythology within them. Next, the change of the current status of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums is considered. A key role is played by the intangible nature of mythology, both in the evaluation of Greek mythology's status in Greek archaeological museums, and in the nature of the suggested change of this status. From this perspective, a key challenge for this thesis has been to incorporate of Greek mythology in the concept of 'intangible cultural heritage' and its museological evaluation within the notional parameters of this concept.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

In Chapter 6 a summary of the thesis' findings is provided and the most interesting points of the research are briefly discussed. Additionally, a short prediction on the developments in the interaction between Greek mythology, Greek archaeological museums and contemporary Greek society is outlined.

### **2. New approaches to Greek mythology**

Greek mythology was approached on new light in this thesis, through the, introduced by my interviewees, concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology' and through its examination in the context of UNESCO's concept of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage'. The presentation of the concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology' and the discussion of Greek mythology as intangible heritage follow next.

## 2.1 'Contemporary Greek mythology'

The idea of the existence of a mythology other than the ancient one has been discussed before, both on a Greek and on an international level, but in a different way to that of my interviewees. On a Greek level, the folklore scholar Nikolaos Politis, the so-called 'father of the Greek folklore', published in 1871 a treatise entitled 'modern Greek mythology'<sup>4</sup>. In this, the various traditions, mainly of the agricultural populations of nineteenth century Greece, as well as their superstitions and beliefs regarding natural and supernatural phenomena, are described. Imaginary creatures, such as the Lamias - creatures that killed babies -, the Striggles (the equivalent of Vixens), Charos, i.e the personification of death, Kalikantzaroi, Neraides (the Greek word for fairies), and imaginary places, such as the Underworld, are accounted in Politis' study. Overall, distinctive features of what Politis considers to be the modern Greeks' mythology are the supernatural and the otherworldly.

On an international level, the term 'New Mythology' is used by scholars with reference to the myth-making and myth-deciphering endeavours that took root in the Middle Ages (for the Western world) and the Byzantine period (for the Eastern world) and survived all the way through to the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>. The distinctive feature of 'New Mythology' was the construction of new mythical figures and plots that were in accordance with Christian morals<sup>6</sup>. Typical tales of 'New Mythology' are the story of Arthur and the Holy Grail and hagiologic tales, such as 'Varlaam and Ioasaph', that is attributed to Ioannis Damaskinos (or John Damascinus), and which, in reality, is the Christianized version of the legend of Buddha. Metta emphasizes that 'New Mythology' was a 'conscious and personal [instead of collective] creation, a literary product that placed itself at the disposal of the authority'<sup>7</sup>.

My interviewees' concept of 'contemporary mythology' is different both from 'modern Greek mythology' and from 'New Mythology'. 'Contemporary Greek mythology', refers to a new version of myth-making, at the heart of which lies the idea that the distinction between 'ancient Greek mythology' and 'contemporary Greek mythology' is of a chronological and not of an essential nature. This idea develops in two directions.

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<sup>4</sup> Πολίτης, Ν. (Politis, N.), *Μελέτη περί του βίου των νεωτέρων Ελλήνων - Νεοελληνική μυθολογία (Study on the life of the modern Greeks – modern Greek mythology) I*, Αθήναι (Athens): Σακελλαρίου (Sakellariou), 1871; Πολίτης, Ν., *Μελέτη περί του βίου των νεωτέρων Ελλήνων - Νεοελληνική μυθολογία (Study on the life of the modern Greeks – modern Greek mythology) II*, Αθήναι (Athens): Σακελλαρίου (Sakellariou), 1874.

<sup>5</sup> Μήττα, Δ. (Metta, D.), *Απολογία για το μύθο (An apology for myth)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): University Studio Press, 1997, pp. 135-161.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

The first concerns the belief that the ancient Greek mythical tales have, in reality, never been completed and that the ancient Greek mythical figures have never been crystallized in one version. They are, instead, being constantly re-invented and new information is being added to them. Art is considered to be a major conveyor and developer of this process. Yet, contrary to 'New Mythology', in 'contemporary Greek mythology', the artist's goal is not to catechize the audience, but rather to offer it an impetus for thought. The goal of the ancient myths' elaboration is personal development. Thus, in 'contemporary Greek mythology', the artist does not send out a fixed and 'non-negotiable' mythical message, but rather lets the receiver of the artwork invest their own meanings in the myth. The ancient mythical tales and figures constitute a fertile ground for speculation, as they are already laden with set meanings and values. The artist can experiment with provocation, challenging the established notions that have traditionally accompanied these myths, thus taking these ancient tales a bit further. So, this direction of contemporary myth-making represents the idea that the well-known stories and figures of Greek mythology can only fulfill their purpose by being rethought in perpetuity. Yet that the myth that results each time from the rethinking of an old mythical story is not considered to be a mere adaptation of the old story, but a whole new myth, as it negotiates affairs of contemporary life and deals with issues that refer to the 'here and now' of the individual.

The second direction concerns the creation of myths, which do not relate to familiar stories from ancient Greek mythology. Art plays a central role in this process too. However, the artist does not always trigger the myth-making process consciously, nor does the artwork always bear references to ancient mythology. These artworks - be they moving pictures, paintings, songs, or anything else - mostly refer to things that the individual has no personal experience of, such as foreign places or historical events. In any case, these things are taken from real life, and not from the realm of the imaginary and the supernatural. The poetics of these artworks and the feelings that they arouse lead to the investment of the artworks' subject matters with specific values and notions, and eventually to the creation of a certain image on them, which may or may not correspond to reality. Thus, a vision, a myth, is constructed of the foreign place, the historical event, or anything else that the artwork represents. In this type of myth-making the mythologizing individual essentially projects their own wishes, fears - anything that determines and defines their existence - on the artwork's subject matter. However, in this case, unlike in ancient or modern mythology, the individual does not have to invent the 'surface' of this projection, i.e. to construct figures and tales, usually of a supernatural character. Now, this 'surface' is real, it exists, or has existed, and it becomes the canvas of the contemporary myth. The 'mythicized' place, historical event, etc, though, can eventually also be imaginary and unreal, since, as mentioned above,

mythical images may not correspond to real ones. In 'contemporary Greek mythology', the objects of mythification can also be individuals, living or recently deceased. In fact the word 'myth' is frequently used in modern Greek for the characterization of special individuals. These are charismatic individuals, who, in one or the other way, reveal new ways of experiencing humanness, by revealing, for instance, the experience of new emotions. In this case, the mythification process does not have as its target this individual's existence holistically, but rather the specific deeds that make this individual distinguishable. So, essentially, behind every mythical individual, a cherished idea is to be detected. So, refreshed mythical tales and figures are considered to belong to contemporary Greek mythology. The main idea behind this is that old myths have not drawn a closed circle, but are rather unfolded in perpetuity, like a spiral, and pass from one generation to another, being constantly invested with meanings. Contemporary Greek mythology, then, constitutes one solid body with the ancient one.

## 2.2 Greek myths as 'intangible cultural heritage'

Intangible cultural heritage is a relatively new dimension of cultural and heritage studies, and therefore not particularly well represented in the relevant literature. For example, three of the most up-to-date texts on cultural heritage, those of Corsane<sup>8</sup>, Marstine<sup>9</sup> and Carbonell<sup>10</sup>, consider intangible heritage together with the material and traditional aspects of cultural heritage. In Corsane's anthology, Mason mentions intangible heritage, as a separate and particular type of heritage, identifying that established communication theories are problematic in their application to cultural resources that are not material. However, Mason does not focus specifically on the analysis of the issues that intangible heritage has to deal with<sup>11</sup>. Intangible cultural heritage has been given greater scholarly exposure since 2007, in its own journal, the 'International Journal of Intangible Heritage' (IJHI), which is published by the National Folk Museum of Korea.<sup>12</sup> Here, discussions of intangible cultural heritage are frequently of a museological nature and, moreover, touch on a variety of cultures and manifestations of intangible cultural heritage.

However, Greek mythology is strikingly absent from the topics that have so far been discussed in the IJHI. Similarly, Greek mythology is absent from any mention by

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<sup>8</sup> Corsane, G. ed., *Heritage, museums and galleries: an introductory reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Marstine, J. ed., *New museum theory and practice: an introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Carbonell, B. ed., *Museum Studies: an anthology of contexts*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Mason, R., 'Museums, galleries and heritage', Corsane, G. ed, *Heritage, museums and galleries: an introductory reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 200-214, (p. 201).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ijih.org/>, [accessed 18<sup>th</sup> December 2007].

UNESCO of intangible cultural heritage, including their 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'<sup>13</sup>, although Greece has ratified the relevant Convention<sup>14</sup>, whose main points will be explored below. Likewise, Greek mythology was also absent from the papers and discussions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cambridge Heritage Seminar entitled 'Intangible-Tangible Cultural Heritage: A Sustainable Dichotomy?'.<sup>15</sup> I would argue that Greek mythology's exclusion from the discussions of intangible cultural heritage is not coincidental. It is, rather, the result of a well-rooted, yet not always conscious, misapprehension, which mainly stems from the somewhat narrow spectrum of criteria used to define this form of heritage.

The roots of this misapprehension can be traced as deeply as the circumstances that led to the original conceptualization of 'intangible cultural heritage'. Central to these circumstances was an increasing concern over the marginalization of non-Western cultures in the context of fast-moving and ever-assimilating globalization. This, in turn, led to a reaction against the typically Western, monument- and object-centered, perception of cultural heritage, which has traditionally dominated the definition of cultural heritage and its interpretation.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the concept of intangible cultural heritage was born with reference to non-Western societies, and was, above all, conceived in contradistinction to the heritage of the Western world. So, the majority of case studies presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Cambridge Heritage Seminar concerned non-Western societies, such as, Morocco, Papua New Guinea and Mali, while the IJH has so far discussed the intangible cultural heritage of New Zealand, Vietnam, Mexico, Iziko in South Africa, the Tagabawa Bagobos of Davao, Mindanao, the Philippines, the Ababda Nomads in the Egyptian desert, and Romania. So, I would argue that a dichotomy between the Western and Non-Western world has always been integral to the concept of intangible cultural heritage, with intangible cultural heritage being identified with the cultural expressions of non-Western indigenous societies. As a consequence, Greek mythology appears, by definition, incompatible with the focus of this dichotomy, as it constitutes not only a cultural expression of the Western world, but also a cultural hallmark of it. It even appears irrelevant to the concern that gave the initial impetus for the conceptualization of intangible cultural heritage, i.e the threat of its degradation and loss, as it constitutes to be a widespread and highly celebrated intellectual creation.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007].

<sup>14</sup> Here, I am referring to the 2003 'Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage'

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/heritage-seminar/programme.html>, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007].

<sup>16</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> round table of Ministers of Culture, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage – a mirror for cultural diversity', Istanbul, 16-17 September 2002, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00073-EN.pdf>, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007].

However, in order for one to conceive the relation of Greek mythology to the concept of intangible cultural heritage, in its real dimensions, one should first pay attention to the key features that render the non-Western cultural creations fragile and susceptible to degradation and loss - and therefore, in need of safeguarding - and subsequently examine Greek mythology's affinity to these features.

Intangible cultural heritage is defined by UNESCO in the context of the 2003 'Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage' as

'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.'<sup>17</sup>.

Myths, legends, and epic songs (together with proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dramatic performances and so on) are termed intangible cultural heritage, and regarded as part of the domain of oral traditions and expressions.<sup>18</sup> This convention states that intangible cultural heritage, and in particular oral traditions and expressions, are transmitted as a popular pastime, as a means of entertainment - frequently by professional storytellers -, as well as through communally organized ceremonies. It also notes that:

'oral traditions and expressions are typically passed on by word of mouth, which usually entails variation, in lesser or greater degree. Their enactment involves a combination - differing from genre to genre, from context to context and from performer to performer- of reproduction, improvisation and creation. This combination renders oral traditions and expressions particularly vibrant and attractive but also sometimes fragile, as their survival depends on an uninterrupted chain of transmission'.<sup>19</sup>

So, there are three key points in this convention that describe the distinctive features of intangible cultural heritage (and more specifically of myths, legends and epic songs) that render it a living heritage, but also fragile and endangered. 1) Myths, legends and epics are attributed the status of 'intangible cultural heritage', under the assumption that they are transmitted orally. 2) Intangible *living* cultural heritage

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>, [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

<sup>18</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>, [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

entails, by definition, some amount of improvisation and variation. 3) Myths, legends and epics, in communities with intangible cultural heritage, are actively involved in the life of the community, either as a means of pastime and entertainment, or even as a means of supporting the community's function, by transmitting information on the institutions and distinctive characteristics of the community.

Here is a selection of some of UNESCO's characteristic cases of intangible cultural heritage. One example is the *Olonkho*, a heroic epic that reflects the beliefs and customs of the Yakut people of Siberia, their shamanic practices, as well as their history and their values. The *Olonkho* is performed by skilled storytellers that are allowed to contribute their own improvisation to the epic. Another example is the Palestinian *Hikaye*, which is a women's tale that describes the world through the eyes of women and is passed between women and children. Another case constitutes the *Hudhud* chants of the *Ifugao*, which are sung in the Philippines during the sowing season, during the rice harvest and at funeral wakes. These chants are recited by an elderly woman who acts as the community's historian and preacher, and their performance can go on for many days.

As far the affinity of Greek myths, (legends and epics) to the three key features of myths, legends and epics that UNESCO terms intangible cultural heritage is concerned, I would make the following remarks.

First, Greek myths may be well-recorded, well-studied and extensively published, but their transmission in contemporary Greek society takes place mainly orally. The majority of contemporary Greeks neither possess nor read academic books on Greek mythology. Popular books on Greek mythology are mostly addressed to children and are occasionally also used to accompany the teaching of Greek mythology at school. As my interviews indicated, the reading of mythology storybooks has not been a practice with a wide impact on the population's familiarization with Greek myths. Among my interviewees, it was only those who pursued a career in the field of culture - in museology and archaeology - who first came into contact with Greek mythology through storybooks.

Greek mythology is only superficially covered in official education. The teaching of ancient myths begins in the third grade of the elementary school in Greece (i.e at the age of eight years), and the next opportunity for the Greek student to come into contact with Greek mythology is through the '*Odyssey*' and the '*Iliad*', which are taught in the first and second grades of junior high school respectively (i.e at the ages of twelve and thirteen years). In the third grade of the elementary schools mythology does not constitute a separately taught subject, but is examined as an element of the history curriculum. As far as the teaching of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in Greek schools is concerned, emphasis is laid on their syntax, their grammar and their literary

characteristics, rather than on the mythical tales and their significance. The interviews that I conducted for this thesis confirm this impression. None of the interviewed artists claimed that their schooling played a decisive role in their relationship with mythology. In fact, a number of them claimed that the teaching of mythology at school had a negative impact on their attitude towards mythology. Aggelakas, for example, claimed that contemporary Greeks are ignorant of Greek mythology, '*precisely because Greek mythology is taught at school*', and attributed this to the dry, unimaginative and boring way that mythology and the classics in general are handled by official Greek education.

So, I would argue that publications have only a limited impact on the way in which the contemporary Greek individual is familiarized with Greek mythology and makes meanings of it. Instead, I would maintain that contemporary Greeks come primarily into contact with Greek mythology through its adoption by, and participation in, the affairs of contemporary Greek society, such as those presented at the beginning of this chapter. So, word-of-mouth is, I would argue, a great factor in Greek mythology's transmission and signification.

Second, improvisation and variation are indeed features of Greek mythology, however in a more latent way than in myths, legends and epics of indigenous societies. In other words, no one thinks today of narrating a personal version of the *Odyssey*, changing parts of the plot, and still claiming them to be the *Odyssey*. However, I would argue that Greek mythology is essentially transformed and re-interpreted through all of its contemporary social occurrences, despite the fact that the plot and the structure of ancient myths are not altered. Moreover - as observed in the previous discussion of the concept of contemporary Greek mythology -, I would argue that art is a prominent factor in Greek mythology's systematic transformation, updating and enrichment. In fact, I would claim contemporary artists to be the professional storytellers of contemporary Greece. So, Greek myths are actually re-invented and developed, in the one way or another, along with the society whose heritage they constitute a part of.

Third, Greek myths and epics may not be associated with ongoing occurrences in the community, such as death, or with fundamental parameters of the community's survival, like sowing and harvesting, but they do function as repositories of the community's identity. Greece's ancient myths, and ancient heritage in general, has always constituted a core feature of Greek national identity. In this light, figures of Greek mythology are used by the Greek state as initials of Greek culture and Greekness. One characteristic example of this practice is the issuing, by the Greek post office, of stamps depicting gods and goddesses of Greek mythology (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Stamps with Greek mythical gods.

In the same spirit, Greek mythology was also honoured especially in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games of 2004 that took place in Athens, particularly in the section that was entitled 'Clepsydra'<sup>20</sup>, where the history of Greece, from the beginnings of Greek civilization until the present time was reenacted in the form of a parade. The countdown began with the Cretan mythical goddess of the snakes, as the first leap of the Greek intellect (Figure 6). A flying Eros, the ancient god of yearning and desire, was hovering over the actors, as the ruling power that triggers the processes of life, throughout the ceremony (Figure 7). A centaur, Heracles and the Hydra, Oedipus and the Sphinx, Dionysus and the Meanads, the Dodecatheon also paraded, among other myths, as distinctive elements of Greece's history and heritage (Figure 7).

<sup>20</sup> Clepsydra is the name of a water clock. This was a type of timekeeper used in antiquity, which operated by means of a regulated flow of liquid into, or out from, a vessel where it is measured. It is similar to the modern hourglass.



**Figure 6. The goddess with the snakes open the parade of Greek history and heritage in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games of 2004.**



**Figure 7. Centaur, the Dodecatheon, Eros, Heracles and the Hydra and Oedipus with the Sphinx as part of Greek heritage. From the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games 2004.**

In addition, Greek mythology is reenacted today in festivals, in the numerous performances of ancient dramas, such as 'Iphigenia in Tauris', 'Iphigenia in Avlis' and

'Antigone', most of which have a mythological topic (Figure 8). These performances are popular with Greek audiences and constitute a standard feature of the programmes of Greek theatres. They mostly take place in the summer, in open theatres, such as the one of Epidaurus. These performances may not be communally and officially organized ceremonies. However, I would argue that this annual reenactment of Greek mythology does resemble an informal ritual, in which the myths and the messages they encompass for the community and the individual are brought to the recollection of the community's members.

So, overall, Greek mythology is characterized by the same qualities as the myths, legends and epic stories that are defined by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage and are put under the protection of UNESCO's Convention. Greek mythology is characterized by oral transmission, by fluidity of meaning, and by a lively relation to Greek society. Therefore, it also faces the same problems and shares the same needs as the established manifestations of intangible cultural heritage.

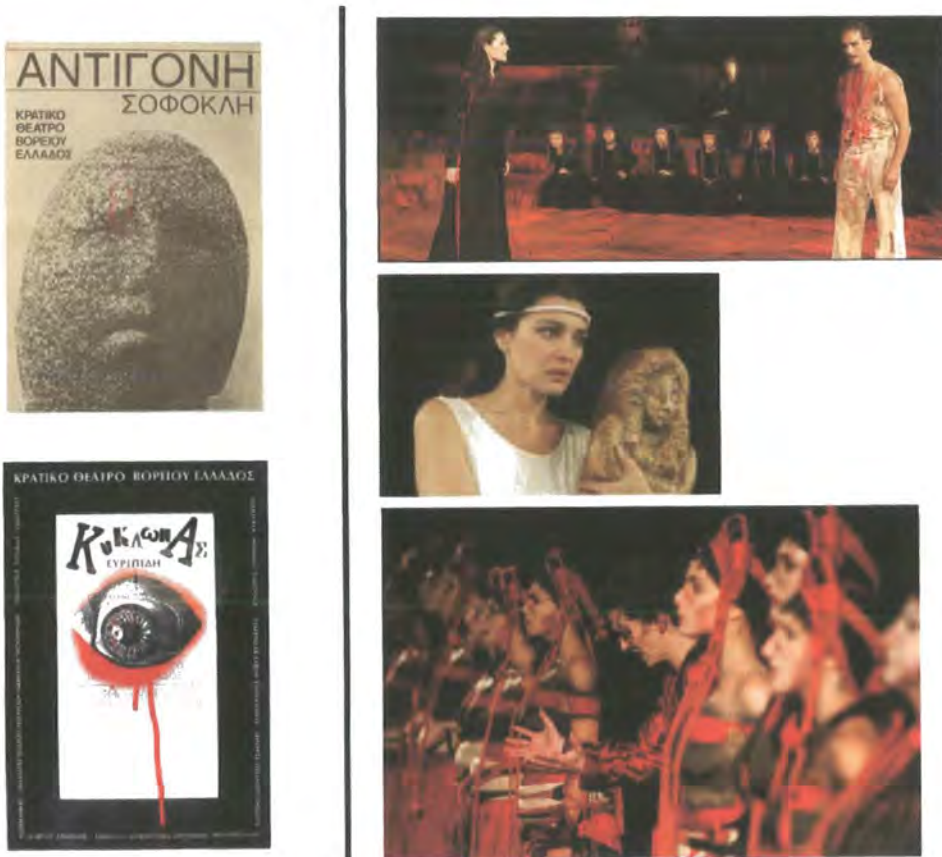


Figure 8. Posters from performances of Greek drama ('Antigone' above, and 'Cyclops' below) and snapshots from ancient drama performances.

## 2. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

### 1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the nature of the research that was undertaken for this thesis, and the methodology, upon which this research was based. In particular, I discuss my use of interviews to explore contemporary artists' perceptions of Greek mythology, as well as my sample of interviewees and the geographical parameters of my research.

### 2. The Interviewees

#### 2.1 Selection criteria of the interviewees

The sample was restricted to the fields of music - and more precisely song, literature and visual arts. These fields were selected since they stand out as the most creative or innovative regarding the use of Greek mythology, in contrast to theatre, whose preoccupation with mythology relies mostly on performances of ancient drama. The selection of the interviewed artists was based on three main criteria. The first criterion concerns the artistic and, in relation to this, ideological qualities of my interviewees. This criterion is associated with the fact that in my thesis the investigation of Greek mythology's position in the works and cosmology of these artists does not constitute an end in itself, but rather a medium for the study of Greek mythology's museological representation. Thus, the focal point of my interviews was the extraction of mythological meanings that could be of use in a museum context. So, artists, who, for example, approach Greek mythology in a nationalist spirit, were not excluded from my research. In this spirit, further selection occurred within the artistic realms of music, literature and visual art.

Kadushin's scholarly theory of 'intellectual circles' provided me with a useful guideline for this process. In his article on 'Networks and Circles in the production of culture', Kadushin writes: 'circles which emphasize values, aesthetics, ideology, and religion generally take the form of "intellectual circles"'<sup>1</sup> ... 'intellectuals of the kind we are talking about, produce ideas about values, morals, politics, and aesthetics, not for specialists but for so-called educated laymen and, of course, for each other.'<sup>2</sup> He emphasizes that, in most European countries, writers, professors, editors, and free-lance intellectuals of one kind or another mingle with

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<sup>1</sup> Kadushin, Ch., 'Networks and Circles in the production of culture', Peterson, P. ed., *The production of culture*, Beverly Hills; London: Sage, 1976, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

artists, theatre and cinema professionals and musicians to form this kind of intellectual circle.<sup>3</sup> The application of Kadushin's theory to the Greek artistic reality was considerably hindered by the fact that the discussion of contemporary Greek culture and its ideological and conceptual profile is in general absent from academic literature. Thus, the identification of a theoretical framework, within which the selection of my interviewees could take place, was problematic.

The sociologist and professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Nikos Intzesiloglou, suggested to me, during a meeting we had to discuss my research, that I could adopt the term 'researched culture' for the type of contemporary artists that would be best-suited to participate in this research. According to Intzesiloglou, the artists of 'researched culture' are oriented towards the production of culture. Their foremost objective is not financial benefit, but the creation of art 'from within'. They produce work, not because and when the commercial industry demands them to do so, but rather because and when they feel inspired by something. Their fundamental need is not to sell their work, but to express themselves through it. Intzesiloglou pointed out that a distinctive feature of the musicians that belong to this category of artistic production is the frequent use of poetry in their songs. The 'researched culture' artists' career is characterized by consistency and persistence and by a stable and diachronic appeal to the public, rather than by sudden and short bursts of popularity. Overall, Intzesiloglou concluded, the work of a 'researched culture' artist is ruled by genuine artistic criteria.

Kadushin's theory of 'intellectual circles' in combination with Intzesiloglou's 'researched culture' shed considerable light on the cultural identity of my interviewees and, by extension, on the process and the criteria that led to their selection. With reference to Kadushin's theory, my interviewees share the same artistic ethos, in the sense that they choose to emphasize in their work what Kadushin describes as values, ideology, morals, politics, or, in Bourdieu's terms, they choose to emphasize in their work the meaning they make of things. With reference to 'researched culture', which focuses on the painstaking endeavour that leads to the production of artworks, the works of my interviewees, are meaning-laden crystallizations of experiences, introspection, social and personal criticism and reflection on the affairs and meaning of life. In contemporary Greece, this sort of 'researched culture' appeals to a wide audience, which includes Kadushin's 'educated laymen', but demonstrates considerable diversity, across the educational spectrum. In practice, this can be observed in the diverse audience of concerts, in the appeal that the same author has for diverse individuals, as well as in general, by acquaintance with the contemporary Greek society and the 'cultural groups' that it encompasses.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

As far as the social identity of my interviewees, as artists of 'researched culture', is concerned, I would claim that 'researched culture' does not exist in contradistinction to 'popular culture', nor is it identified with 'high culture', but rather lies somewhere in between of these two types of cultures. 'Researched culture' is not equal with 'popular culture', in the sense of 'mass culture'<sup>4</sup>, as it is embraced by a wide audience, but not quite by the masses. 'Researched culture' is also different to 'high culture', in the sense of 'high art', or the art of the ruling class<sup>5</sup>, as it is a culture, whose perception does not require from the audience to possess a specific artistic perceptual apparatus, which is, according to Bourdieu, tied to a cultural capital, and its resulting *habitus*, that goes hand in hand with the economical capital, i.e. with education and wealth<sup>6</sup>. As a matter of fact, and in accordance with Kadushin's theory, my interviewees, as representatives of the 'researched culture', are often themselves members of the working class and are addressed, through their art, to this class (for example the rock n roll musicians Aggelakas and Pavlidis and the Marxist author and poet Markoglou). Among my 'researched culture' interviewees there are also individuals of the middle or high class, yet, their works are preoccupied with topics that are easily identified by a wide audience and are expressed in conversational language (for instance the works of the author Alaveras, which often derive their topics from the life routine of the lay neighborhoods of Thessaloniki). It should also be emphasized that, in addition to the above, many of my interviewees have practiced, or still practice, another profession, in combination to their preoccupation with art.

The characterization of my interviewees as representatives of the 'researched culture' is less uniformly applicable to the interviewed visual artists. This is relevant to the second criterion that was set on the selection of my interviewees and therefore, these two issues will be discussed together.

The second criterion has to do with the high public profile of the participant artists. This was also set with the museological use of the interviews in mind and, and with special reference to the idea that widely identifiable artists could serve as a pole of attraction in the museum. In this spirit, I endeavoured to interview a set of widely recognizable contemporary artists. This was achieved to a maximum

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<sup>4</sup> Storey, J., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006.

Popular culture and its definition is a multifaceted, widely discussed and largely unresolved topic. For a discussion of popular culture and its various undertones, see: Williams, R., *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; Hassabian, A., 'Popular', Horner, B., and Swiss, Th. eds., *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, Malden: Blackwell, 1999; Eliot, T. S., *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, New York: Harcourt, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> The content and definition of 'high culture' is also a much-debated issue, which touches on various theoretical fields, including Sociology, Cultural Studies, Critical Theory, Mass Media Studies, Marxism, etc. The topic is discussed in work of eminent theorists, such as Theodor Adorno, Ernest Gellner, Ernest Renan, Richard Hoggart, Harold Bloom and Pierre Bourdieu.

<sup>6</sup> Goodall, P., *High culture, Popular culture: the long debate*, St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995, p.71; Bourdieu, P., *Distinction*, London: Routledge, 1984; Pearce, M., *Archaeological curatorship*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996, pp.133-134.

level with reference to the musicians and, on a secondary level, with reference to the authors. The latter remark is associated with the third criterion that determined the selection of my interviewees, that of the geographical focus of my research on the city of Thessaloniki. This criterion will be discussed later on. The second criterion, now, was less applicable to the selection of visual artists, as, I would argue, visual art has by default a more limited outreach to the wide audience, than music and literature. This happens, in my opinion, mainly for three reasons. First, the acquisition of a painting, sculpture, etc, is much more costly than the acquisition of a book or a CD. Second, visual art works do not come in multiple copies, like books and songs and are not sold by hundreds in bookshops and music stores; therefore, they are not easily encountered in a random visit to the shops. Third, visual art works do not reach the individual, without the individual having pursued this, as can happen with songs, which can be selected by a radio producer and be heard in random places and times through the radio.

The inclusion of visual arts in this research was decided under the assumption that the interviewed contemporary artists have produced interesting works on Greek mythology, whose discussion appeared - and truly was - promising. Close to that, it should be mentioned that the selected visual artists are individuals, which come into contact with the public in a variety of ways. For instance, they are involved in the common affairs of Thessaloniki (Lachas is an elected member of Thessaloniki's prefecture committee), they perform in central streets of the city (Zachariadis), they teach in schools and universities (Panagiotakis), etc.

The third factor that influenced my selection of interviewees was their relation to the city of Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki is the second largest city of Greece and the capital of the department of Macedonia. It holds a population of 1,057,825, according to the 2001 census. It is located in the north part of the country, in the cove of Thermaikos Gulf (Figure 9). Thessaloniki was founded in 315 B.C. by King Cassander of Macedon, an ambiguous general of Alexander



**Figure 9. Map of Greece. Thessaloniki is marked with a red dot.**

the Great's court, and was named after Alexander the Great's half-sister and Cassander's wife. It was founded and developed on, or near, the site of the ancient town of Therma and of twenty-six other local villages. Thessaloniki grew to be an important trade-hub in the Roman era, as Via Egnatia passed through the city. In the

Byzantine period it became the second most important city of the Empire, next to Constantinople, and it retained this status also in the Ottoman period.

Thessaloniki has had a rich and eventful history and its society has been remarkably multicultural throughout its history's course. It has been homeland to various ethnicities (Franks, Dutch, Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Italians, English, Slavs, etc) and from the end of the sixteenth century until the World War II it sustained one of the largest, if not the largest, Sephardic Jew community in Europe and was for this reason attributed the title of 'Mother of Israel'. Today the Jewish community is comprised by approximately 2000 members. A vivid discussion of Thessaloniki's multicultural history is presented in the works of Lwon Sciaky and Mark Mazower<sup>7</sup>. Thessaloniki fell under the Ottomans in 1420 and regained its freedom only in 1912, i.e. less than a century ago. The cultural character of the city has also been significantly influenced by the Greek immigrants, who came to Greece from Asia Minor, after the disaster of Smyrna, in 1922, and the 'Population Exchange Treaty' between Greece and Turkey in the following year. Significant has also been the contribution of the Greeks of the Pontus (Black Sea) to the physiognomy of the city. In the last decade, many immigrants from the Balkans and from the former Soviet Union have been added to the composition of the city's population. Thessaloniki's urban landscape is filled with monuments from all the phases of its history.

Thessaloniki is often commonly characterized as a 'Byzantine' city. The importance that Thessaloniki places on its Byzantine cultural history is evident in the logo of the city's university, the Aristotle University, where one can observe an interesting oxymoron. Although the university derives its name from the famous Greek philosopher, its logo is the Byzantine



Figure 10. St Demetrius is the 'face' of the Aristotle University.

Saint Demetrius - Thessaloniki's patron saint -, instead of Aristotle (Figure 10). The characterization of 'Byzantine' has also the sense of the 'heavy', introvert and 'reserved'. This refers mainly to the strong influence that Mount Athos, a self-governed monastic state within the sovereignty of the Hellenic Republic, founded in the early Byzantine years, has on the city, from a financial and ideological perspective. Indicative of the conservative morals of the city's authorities is that in March 2008 the director of the Secondary Education Department of Thessaloniki, banned the city's schools from participating in the educational programmes of the 'Suite 347' exhibition with Picasso's etchings, as some of the works were regarded as

<sup>7</sup> Sciaky, L., *Farewell to Salonica*, Philadelphia: Paul Dry books, 2003; Mazower, M., *Salonica the city of ghosts*, London: Harper Collins, 2006.

unsuitable for the under - age<sup>8</sup>. In the field of politics, factors such as the unresolved Macedonian Issue, the influx of a large number of financial immigrants into the city, the rise of unemployment and a sense of marginalization for the benefit of Athens, have resulted to Thessaloniki being the bastion of outer right, nationalist and xenophobic political discourses.

On the other side, Thessaloniki is a vivid, contemporary European urban centre (Figure 11). It hosts an annual commercial International Fair, the Thessaloniki Film Festival and the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival. Key for Thessaloniki's identity and life is the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the largest university in the Balkans. In Thessaloniki there are thirty one museums, among which is included the Museum of Byzantine Culture, which was nominated in 2005 with the 'Council of European Museum' prize. In the city

there are also located numerous theatres, including the State Theatre of Northern Greece, as well as a Concert Hall (Μέγαρο Μουσικής) and an Opera.

In terms of artistic production, Thessaloniki has always been active, however, I would claim, in a rather introvert way, as Thessalonian artists rarely became icons of a national range. The striking exception to this is the series of musicians, which, from the mid eighties and until the beginning of this decade, radically changed the map of contemporary Greek song and even became a kind of patrons of artistic popular song. An indicative sample of these musicians was interviewed for my thesis.

The significance of Thessaloniki as a criterion for the interviewees' selection was mainly practical, since the presence of all my interviewees in or around the same city significantly facilitated the interviewing process. I made two exceptions, travelling to Thessaly and to Athens to meet and interview Thanassis Papakonstantinou and Dionysis Savvopoulos, both of whom are major representatives of 'popular artistic song' in contemporary Greece. Actually, this particular type of song has traditionally been associated with the city of Thessaloniki, and more specifically with the so-called 'School of Thessaloniki', a term established by Savvopoulos to characterize the artistic qualities of Thessaloniki's music and song-writers.



Figure 11. Contemporary Thessaloniki as part of the 'absolute cities' advertisement series of a famous alcoholic drink.

<sup>8</sup> « 'Άσεμνος' ο Πικάσσο για τους μαθητές» ("Indecent" Picasso for the students'), *Καθημερινή* (*Kathimerini*), 3 March 2008, p. 43.

The main artistic qualities of this School are 'introspection', 'internal monologue' and 'experiential narrative'. Introspection refers to the tendency of the artist to imprint in his/her songs the findings of soul-searching and not a mere observation of things and life affairs. Internal monologue is used to characterize the artistic expression in which the artist is essentially thinking in words. In the case of music, experiential narrative indicates that the plot of the lyrics is based on real, experienced by the artist situations. It essentially indicates the need of the musician to transmit messages that are honest, as they stem from experiences and from things that have been tested in practice and are not merely theories.

However, the existence of this School is questioned by the very musicians that are believed to belong to it. As Periklis Sfyridis, a Greek art critic, clarified in a meeting we had, the existence of an artistic school presupposes that its participants have agreed in advance on its establishment and on the commitment to certain artistic attributes. This is something that has not happened with the 'School of Thessaloniki'.

The personal and career profiles of my sixteen interviewed artists will be presented analytically in Chapter four. The majority of the interviewed artists were approached using the established method of 'snowball sampling', i.e via other interviewees, upon my request, or even without my requesting it.<sup>9</sup> Three interviewees were approached directly by myself (Pavlos Pavlidis) and one is a family friend (Fani Melfou-Grammatikou). The overwhelming majority of the interviewed artists are male, with only two exceptions (Fani Melfou-Grammatikou and Stephania Gardikioti). This was not planned in advance, nor is it based on a specific rationale. However, a number of underlying patterns can be detected in the male-dominated sample of my informants, the most important of them being that Greek artistic production is male-dominated, like most professional arenas in Greece. Two artists declined my invitation to participate in the research, pleading practical obstacles, such as lack of time.

By contrast, for my museum-related interviews, this gender imbalance was overturned: two, out of my three interviewees, being female. Again, this was not planned, as the interviewees were approached on the grounds of their professional knowledge and positions, rather than their gender. Details of these interviewees are presented analytically in Chapter five. Here, I shall simply clarify the rationale behind their selection. To begin with, their number is significantly smaller than that of the interviewed artists, as the focus of my research is the investigation of Greek mythology's museological potentials, through Greek mythology's vivid presence in contemporary Greece's art. When it comes to their relation to museums, these three interviewees represent three different strands of opinion. Dr Evaggelos Venizelos, the former Minister of Culture, represents the official perspective - the view of the State on the character and operation of

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<sup>9</sup> Burns, W., *Introduction to research methods*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000, pp. 465-466.

museums. Dr Matoula Skaltsa, director of the Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Course in Museology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, represents the theoretical and academic aspect of museology. Dr Polyxeni Veleni, archaeologist and director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, represents the applied and practical aspect of museology. The fact the latter two interviewees are permanently based in Thessaloniki and Dr Venizelos has Thessaloniki as his political basis, was fortuitous (e.g. the Course in Museology of the Aristotle University is the only one in Greece), but also fortunate, and did help to keeping research geographical focus.

### 3. The qualitative interview method

Understanding the meanings that contemporary Greek artists make of Greek mythology lies at the heart of this thesis. I sought to achieve this by conducting a series of interviews with a representative sample of artists. My approach to these interviews was informed by social studies research methods, even though my goal was not sociological. As a consequence, my intention was not to explore in depth the artists' use of mythological images nor, their biographies, or socio-political and educational backgrounds. Essentially, I approached these contemporary artists as individuals who could help to construct an alternative framework for the discussion of mythology in museums, through the meanings they make of mythology in their works and their interviews.

More specifically, I chose the qualitative research method as the best suited to organize and conduct the interviews (as opposed to the quantitative research method). The quantitative research method has been traditionally used by scientists studying the social world. Its intellectual and philosophical framework is that of positivism and empiricism and it is based on measurement, strong confirmation, singularity of truth, replication and hypothesis testing.<sup>10</sup> Statistical analysis and comparison of the data are its major tools. Essentially, the quantitative approach works through deduction. In other words, the scientist initially accepts a generalization and a hypothesis and predicts the conclusion of the research. If the prediction is compatible with what actually occurs, then the hypothesis is confirmed. However, the ideas have to be tested to destruction and only then can the confirmed hypothesis be regarded as currently supported, but not as 'true' and fixed.<sup>11</sup> The qualitative method, which my research was based on, became widely applied from the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> The qualitative research method works through observation, interpretation and induction. As Burns states, 'qualitative research places stress on the validity of multiple meaning structures and holistic analysis, as opposed to the

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<sup>10</sup> Burns, R., *Introduction to research methods*, pp. 45-62.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

criteria of reliability and statistical compartmentalization of the quantitative research'.<sup>13</sup>

Burns in his *Introduction to research methods*<sup>14</sup> provides a table, which effectively summarizes and juxtaposes the main points of the two research methods. With this table as a starting point, I shall attempt to define more precisely the key features of the qualitative interview method used in this research.

<b>Comparison of qualitative and quantitative methods</b>	
<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>
<b>Assumptions</b>	
Reality socially constructed	Facts and data have an objective reality
Variables complex and interwoven; difficult to measure	Variables can be measured and identified
Events viewed from informant's perspective	Events viewed from outsider's perspective
Dynamic quality to life	Static reality to life
<b>Purpose</b>	
Interpretation	Prediction
Contextualization	Generalization
Understanding the perspectives of others	Causal explanation
<b>Method</b>	
Data collection using participant observation, unconstructed interviews	Testing and measuring
Concludes with hypothesis and grounded theory	Commences with hypothesis and theory
Emergence and portrayal inductive and naturalistic	Manipulation and control
Data analysis by themes from informants' descriptions	Deductive and experimental
Data reported in language of informant	Statistical analysis
	Statistical reporting

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391-392.

Descriptive write - up	Abstract, impersonal write – up
<b>Role of researcher</b>	
Researcher as instrument	Researcher applies formal instruments
Personal involvement	Detachment
Empathetic understanding	Objective

**Table 1. A juxtaposition of the qualitative and quantitative methods' features, as provided by Burns in *Introduction to research methods*.**

To begin with, the dynamic perception of life and its phenomena is integral to this thesis. Greek mythology's meaning is believed to be dynamic and fluid and, in this light, contemporary artists are called to contribute their opinions, with final target the construction of an effective representation of Greek mythology in museums. Emphasis on the informants is, therefore, fundamental. Unlike the quantitative method, which works through deduction, and seeks to prove a hypothesis and predict the conclusion of the research, prediction is neither useful for, nor applicable to, my research, as the ideas of contemporary artists about mythology cannot be pinned down and explained on a cause-and-effect basis. Also, my research does not seek to prove a pre-determined estimation of the meanings that contemporary Greek artists make of mythology. On the contrary, based on induction, my research starts from point zero and relies thoroughly on the interviews for the investigation of the artists' ideas, without pre-determined anticipations.

So, the investigation is realized through conversation, through emphasis on the context of the conversation and on the informant as individual. This can be best achieved through unstructured interviewing, which is the main research tool of the qualitative approach. More specifically, my research employed the 'Interview Guide' method of unstructured interviewing. The analysis of the interviews is presented in a descriptive way, in the form of an extensive narrative, which occupies the entire Chapter four of the thesis. In this narrative, the language of the informants was maintained, whenever this was feasible and meaningful. More precisely, quotations from the interviews are used in the presentation of the data analysis. The language and the particular expressions used by the interviewees are valuable for the understanding of the interviewees' comments and therefore they are maintained in the presentation of the analysis of the interviews, whenever this is meaningful and feasible. Finally, my involvement in both the interviewing and the interpretation process was direct and personal. I was the main research instrument and the observations that emerged from the research data were shaped significantly by my understanding and interpretation of my interviewees' sayings.

## 4. The interviews

### 4.1 The main interview process

Nineteen interviews in total were conducted in the context of this research. Sixteen of them were with Greek contemporary artists and three were with museum professionals. The interviews were organized on the basis of an adapted 'Interview Guide' model.<sup>15</sup> According to this model, the interviewer has an outline of topics or issues to be covered, but the communication of these issues and their order can vary from one interview to the other. Thus, the interviewer has the opportunity to adjust the questions to the circumstances, such as the personality of the interviewee and the answers provided by them. The 'Interview Guide' model produces more systematized data than interviewing that resembles an open conversation, but at the same time the tone of the interview remains informal, relaxed and conversational. One possible disadvantage of the 'Interview Guide' method is its limited flexibility, as the method commits the interviewee to a pre-determined list of discussion topics, which could potentially prevent the discussion of unpredicted, but interesting, topics that might emerge during the interview. For this reason, I allowed more freedom in my interviewing method, and so, despite drawing on a list of topics to be covered, the exploration of responses that fell outside the list of topics, but which seemed promising was allowed. Also, by keeping the list of discussion topics flexible, the unexpected yet interesting ideas that emerged during the interviewing procedure could be added to the list, so that other interviewees could have the opportunity to comment on them. In this way, I did not have to reject these responses of the interviewees that did not fit into my list of topics. The adaptation of this approach of this approach in my research led, for example, to the revelation of the concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology'. In the same spirit, some of the listed discussion topics could be passed over, once it became obvious that their questioning would be, for the one reason or another, inappropriate in the context of a certain interview. For example, when mythology was not among the expressive means of a certain interviewee, then the question that investigates the response of the audience to artworks with a mythological theme was omitted (see Table 2, point 7). Also, flexibility was especially required in the case of my research, as some of the interviewed artists had produced artworks with a mythological theme, whereas others had not. In those cases where an interviewee was the creator of a song, a painting, or a novel, in which mythology is present, part of the conversation was dedicated to this artwork.

Finally, I would like to add that artists do not make interviewees that are easy to be controlled. The artists I interviewed are individuals with strong

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<sup>15</sup> Patton, M. Q., *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, Newbury Park: Sage, 1990, pp. 343-344; 347-348; 349.

personalities, imaginative, talkative and often also opinionated. I found that they often express their thoughts in an abstract way and provide disguised hints of their ideas, rather than express them in a straight-forward way. So, in these circumstances, I sometimes needed to 'play along' with an interviewee, in order to attempt to extract the meaning of what they were saying through discussion, rather than by interrupting the flow of their thoughts and insisting on a direct answer to the pre-determined point of discussion. On the negative side, however, the more flexible and loose an interviewing scheme is, the more data it produces, which in turn means that it is more complex and time-consuming to decode and analyse. Indeed, it is worth emphasizing that the decoding and analysis of my interviews proved extremely time-consuming. The decoding and analysis of each interview lasted, an average twenty five days, so, the whole process lasted a year and a hundred and ten days. I would suggest that although the decoding of open ended interviews is by its nature a time-consuming process, there are indeed ways to make it less confusing and more effective. The best of these ways is, according to my experience, the interviewer to possess a very solid knowledge of the topic under investigation (Greek mythology in my case). Only in this way the researcher could be able to grasp the latent meaning of seemingly random words and pinpoint the links between seemingly unrelated words across the interviews (for instance, names of mythical heroes that may appear in the same myth), without resorting to endless readings of the interviews.

In practice, a 'storytelling technique' can be used to break the ice of the initial contact and to give an impetus for the interview to begin.<sup>16</sup> In this, the interviewee is encouraged to narrate an event in response to some questions. A storytelling question can stem from the present reality and relate to the topic. For instance, 'I have heard of this contemporary art exhibition with topics from Greek mythology. Are you aware of it? What do you think about it?' Effective methods to keep the conversation going are the so-called 'parroting', or 'mirroring' techniques, where the interviewer repeats the last few words of the interviewee, as well as the use of minimal encouragers comprising single words like 'I see', 'Yes', or 'What happened next?', that demonstrate the interviewer's interest in the conversation.<sup>17</sup>

Twenty one of the twenty two interviews conducted for this research were tape-recorded. On the one hand, this can help to ensure the active participation of the interviewer in the conversation. On the other hand, the tape recorder does have to be placed somewhere discreetly, if a more relaxed environment is to be maintained. Yiannis Zikas did not wish his interview to be tape-recorded. Instead, he gave me a text with his comments on mythology. Zikas' text is a very interesting surrealist poetic vision of mythology. However, it does not correspond to the standards of my research and does not relate directly to any of

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<sup>16</sup> Burns, R., *Introduction to research methods*, pp. 426-427.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 426-427.

the discussion topics. Therefore, it was not included in the final analysis of the artists' interviews.

As far as the structure of the interviews is concerned, the discussion topics were divided into themes with sub-questions, and were ordered from the more general to the more specific. The discussion topics were defined with the purpose of the research topic in mind.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the discussion topics were defined so as to address what Kvale described as the 'what' and 'why' of the research, which in this case the meanings that contemporary artists make of mythology, on the one hand, and their relevance to the museological presentation of mythology, on the other hand. The interviews started with questions that concern the childhood mythological memories of the interviewees, in order to add a personal touch to the discussion. This also helped establish, right from the start, that the aim of the interview was not to test the artists' academic knowledge, but to investigate their personal ideas. Moreover, the introduction to the conversation was made intentionally informal ('What is the first thing that comes to mind, when hearing the words 'Greek mythology'?), in an attempt to emphasize the informal character of the interview. Other techniques were also employed during the interviews. For instance, when an interviewee expressed a specific opinion on an issue, the level of information or knowledge that they possessed on that issue was investigated, since, as social scientists maintain, people's convictions do not always equal their possession of relative knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Another point, where emphasis was put on, concerns the method followed for the investigation of the rationale behind the interviewees' decisions, or actions, with reference to mythology. As Lazarsfeld points out, asking 'why' is not always the indicated for the interviewee's motivations to be investigated.<sup>20</sup> In fact, as the scholar maintains, the interviewees themselves are often not aware of the rationale that underlies their decisions and actions and, thus, by asking 'why', the interviewer might actually listen to the justification of the interviewee's decisions or actions, rather than to their analysis.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the scholar suggests, the interviewer needs to come up with sub-questions that can help the interviewee pinpoint the rationale behind the facts.

Lazarsfeld's remark was of considerable significance for my thesis mainly because my interviewees were called to discuss a topic (i.e. Greek mythology), with no direct relevance to their field of expertise, without prior preparation and

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<sup>18</sup> Kvale, S., *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996, p.88; Φίλιας, Β. (Filias, V.) ed., *Εισαγωγή στη μεθοδολογία και τις τεχνικές των κοινωνικών ερευνών (Introduction to the methodology and the techniques of social research)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Gutenberg, 1996, p.131.

<sup>19</sup> Φίλιας, Β. (Filias, V.) ed., *Εισαγωγή στη μεθοδολογία και τις τεχνικές των κοινωνικών ερευνών (Introduction to the methodology and the techniques of social research)*, p. 152.

<sup>20</sup> Bartos, R., and Lazarsfeld, P. F., *Qualitative research what it is and where it came from. The art of asking why*, New York: Advertising Res Found, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

reflection on it. Therefore, they frequently needed a thrust, in order to develop their thoughts further and analyze their remarks. For instance, the interviewees who had not used mythology in their art, were often not in place to justify this in a straight-forward way. Thus, a typical answer to the question 'Did mythology reoccur, as a thought, at some point in your life?' was '*For some reason* it didn't occupy my mind' (Yiannis Aggelakas). In this case, then, the mere question of 'why' was proved inadequate and the conversation had to broaden up, in order for the interviewee to investigate what lies behind his indifference for Greek mythology. This method led to the establishment of two of the five mythological themes that are discussed in Chapter Four, that of Pre-Hellenic myths' relation to religion and the human psyche.

The precise discussion topics, or 'Interview Guide', that I used for my research are as follows:

**1. Initial relationship with mythology**

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'Greek mythology'?
2. How did you first come into contact with Greek mythology? Did your family play any role in that?
3. What did you think of Greek mythology then? Did you have a favorite myth? Why? What did this myth mean to you?

**2. Relationship with mythology as an adult**

1. When you grew up, what kind of relationship did you develop with Greek myths?

**3. Mythology as part of the ancient Greek classical heritage**

1. How do the past and the present come together in your field of activities?
2. What is the classical past's impact, influence, effect, use, or relevance on your field?

**4. Relationship with mythology as an artist**

1. What has this relationship been on a professional level?
2. Have myths had any relevance to you? Do you use myths in your songs/visual art works/novels/poems?

**In case, the interviewee has used mythology in their art, the interview continues with points 5 and 6:**

**5. Uses/ Context**

1. Could you give me some examples and analyze them?
2. Why did you choose mythology as your expressive means?

**6. Audience and mythology**

1. What is the reaction of your audience toward myths? How do they perceive myths?

**If the interviewee has not used mythology in his/her art, the interview continues with point 7:**

**7. The exclusion of mythology from contemporary art's expressive means**

1. Why have you not used mythology in your art? Has this been a conscious decision?

**Mythology and meaning**

**8. Social relevance**

1. Do myths bear meanings regarding gender/ age/ race/ other active social agendas?

2. Do we tend to relate personally to myths, or to mythical figures? Do myths help us express ourselves?

**9. Durability**

1. Why do we still have Greek myths? How do they survive in the rational era we live in? Why do we still need them? Why are they so durable?

**10. Place/ region/era**

1. Have the same myths been used (socially/ politically/ artistically) in different places around Greece and especially in the two major cultural centers of the country, Thessaloniki and Athens? Could you give an example of that?

**If the interviewee has used myths in their art:**

2. Has the local factor influenced the use of myths in your art?

**11. Greek mythology in Greek museums**

1. Is Greek mythology present in Greek museums?

2. In what ways is Greek mythology present in Greek museums?

3. What do you learn about Greek mythology during a visit to a Greek museum?

4. How do you assess Greek mythology's position in Greek museums?

**12. Misconceptions**

1. How would you assess the relationship of contemporary Greek society to Greek mythology?

2. How does contemporary Greek society perceive Greek mythology?

3. How (and in what form) does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society?

4. How are Greek myths used by Greek society?

### 13. Conclusion

1. What are myths? Could you give me a definition?

Table 2. The main discussion point of the interviews.

Each one of these interview question was chosen in order to address the research questions upon which the main argument of my thesis is developed. The following table presents the connection between the interview questions and the ten research questions.

#### 1. Initial relationship with mythology

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'Greek mythology'?

Research Question 1. What is Greek mythology?

How did you first come into contact with Greek mythology? Did your family play any role in that?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

What did you think of Greek mythology then? Did you have a favourite myth? Why? What did this myth mean to you?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

#### 2. Relationship with mythology as an adult

1. When you grew up, what kind of relationship did you develop with Greek myths?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

#### 3. Mythology as part of the ancient Greek classical heritage

1. How do the past and the present come together in your field of activities?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

2. What is the classical past's impact, influence, effect, use, or relevance on your field?

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

#### **4. Relationship with mythology as an artist**

1. What has this relationship been on a professional level?

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

2. Have myths had any relevance to you? Do you use myths in your songs/visual art works/novels/poems?

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

**In case, the interviewee has used mythology in their art, the interview continues with points 5 and 6:**

#### **5. Uses/ Context**

1. Could you give me some examples and analyze them?

2. Why did you choose mythology as your expressive means?

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

#### **6. Audience and mythology**

1. What is the reaction of your audience toward myths? How do they perceive myths?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

**If the interviewee has not used mythology in his/her art, the interview continues with point 7:**

#### **7. The exclusion of mythology from contemporary art's expressive means**

1. Why have you not used mythology in your art? Has this been a conscious decision?

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

#### **Mythology and meaning**

#### **8. Social relevance**

1. Do myths bear meanings regarding gender/ age/ race/ other active social agendas?

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency? What meanings and significations have been attributed to it diachronically?

and

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

2. Do we tend to relate personally to myths, or to mythical figures? Do myths help us express ourselves?

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?  
What meanings and significations have been attributed to it diachronically?

and

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?  
?

### **9. Durability**

1. Why do we still have Greek myths? How do they survive in the rational era we live in? Why do we still need them? Why are they so durable?

Research Question 4. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art?

### **10. Place/ region/era**

1. Have the same myths been used (socially/ politically/ artistically) in different places around Greece and especially in the two major cultural centers of the country, Thessaloniki and Athens? Could you give an example of that?

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?

### **If the interviewee has used myths in their art:**

2. Has the local factor influenced the use of myths in your art?

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?

### **11. Greek mythology in Greek museums**

1. Is Greek mythology present in Greek museums?

2. In what ways is Greek mythology present in Greek museums?

Research Question 5. How do Greek museums, as official institutions deal with Greek mythology and its dynamics?

3. What do you learn about Greek mythology during a visit to a Greek museum?

Research Question 6. What are the consequences of Greek mythology's museological status?

4. How do you assess Greek mythology's position in Greek museums?

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?

### **12. Misconceptions**

1. How would you assess the relationship of contemporary Greek society to Greek mythology?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek

mythology?

and

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?

2. How does contemporary Greek society perceive Greek mythology?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

3. How (and in what form) does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

4. How are Greek myths used by Greek society?

Research Question 3. How does Greek mythology survive in contemporary Greek society? How are contemporary Greeks familiarized with Greek mythology?

and

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?

### 13. Conclusion

1. What are myths? Could you give me a definition?

Research Question 1. What is Greek mythology?

and

Research Question 2. What is its notional, intellectual and cultural potency?

**Table 3. Interview Guide and research questions.**

In addition to ensuring the effective management of the conversation, many other practicalities and technicalities were involved in the interviewing process (ranging from making sure that the tape recorder worked effectively, to considering the safety risks entailed in face-to-face encounters with unknown individuals). The latter parameter was dealt with by meeting my interviewees in public, busy places, such as hotel lobbies (Malamas), taverns (Aggelakas) and cafés (Simotas and Zikas). However, that was not always feasible, or up to me to decide, and thus six interviews were realized at the interviewees' homes (Meflou-Grammatikou, Pavlidis, Zervoudakis, Papakonstantinou, Markoglou, Gardikiotis), five at the artists' workshops (Lachas, Zachariadis, Panagiotakis, Mavridis, Vasileiadis) and five

interviewees were met at their offices (Savvopoulos, Alaveras, Skaltsa, Veleni, Venizelos). All the interviews ran smoothly without contingencies, with the exception of one incident, where the interviewee got drunk during the interview, which took place in his basement workshop. However, this caused more problems in the transcribing of the interview, rather than threatened my safety. In general, the interviews were relaxed and the interviewed artists and museum professionals were patient, and eager to understand the point of my research and the role they were called to play in it, and focus on the conversation and spend time on it. Most interviews lasted many hours, with the longest one lasting approximately six and a half hours (Zervoudakis). The shortest interviews were those of the museum-related interviewees, as these interviewees were familiar with the topic of Greek mythology and its position in museums, and therefore, their opinions were more focused, than those of the interviewed artists, and their answers more straight forward.

#### 4.2 Transcribing and analysis of the interviews

Following their completion, interviews were transcribed. Fourteen out of nineteen interviews were transcribed by myself and five were given to a trustworthy typist. This was done partly for reasons of finance (as professional transcribing is very expensive) but also since, according to literature on social science interviewing, the transcribing of interviews constitutes the first step in their comprehension and analysis.<sup>22</sup> The transcribing of research interviews, from an oral to a written mode, can take many forms and can vary in precision. This depends on various factors, such as the purpose of the investigation and the context, within which the research is conducted. I chose to transcribe a relatively large proportion of each interview (instead of, for instance, just producing notes), as the ideas of my interviewees were often extracted from the sum of their statements, as well as from the specific vocabulary they used to express them. However, it should be mentioned that passages in which my interviewees strayed off the topic or expatiated extensively, were not transcribed.

In addition, all of the transcribed interviews were translated from Greek into English by myself. The time that was dedicated to the translation of each interview was analogous to its duration, or to the number and the length of the passages that were evaluated as being worth of transcribing. In total, the translation of the interviews lasted forty days. It has to be taken into account that the translation from Greek into English was often considerably troublesome, as certain expressions that coloured the interviewees' comments were lost in translation. For example, the subtle messages that can be transmitted through Greek slang or exclamatory responses could not be reproduced in English.

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<sup>22</sup> Kvale, S., *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, pp. 168-169; Rubin, H., and Rubin, J., *Qualitative interviewing*, Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: Sage pp. 202-204.

When it comes to the precision of the transcriptions, grammatical errors, digressions, abrupt changes of focus, profanity, exclamations, indications of mood, stalling words, silences, pauses and their length, hesitations were included only when they indicated the flavour of the conversation. Events that interrupted each interview, such as telephone calls, are clearly stated in the transcripts. Additionally, lengthy sections, where the conversation moved considerably off the point were omitted, as they did not appear to add anything to the understanding of the topic. In general, as Rubin suggests, only the level of detail that was likely to be analyzed and only the information that influenced the interpretation were included in the transcripts.<sup>23</sup>

The analysis of the interviews was based on the interviews analysis model suggested by Rubin.<sup>24</sup> According to this model, the first task is to pinpoint the main concepts of the interviews. These concepts can emerge, Rubin suggests, either from the established 'Interview Guide' discussion topics, or from a search for specific keywords across the interviews, by using either a word processor, or qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo. Neither of these concept-detecting methods seemed suitable for my research, because the interviewees were not asked their opinion on specific mythological concepts; rather, they were given the freedom to comment on any aspect of Greek mythology they wished. The same also applied to the use of mythology in the interviewees' artworks: although the mythological topics of their artworks were known to me in advance, the meanings that the interviewees made of them could not be predicted. So, the concepts that were touched on in the interviews were rather unpredictable and often inexplicit. As a consequence, I identified the key concepts of my interviews through multiple readings of them, and by reading 'between the lines', and coded them, that is, created a brief descriptive title, in the form of a label. Thus, concepts such as 'pre-Hellenic myths' or 'contemporary Greek mythology' emerged from my elaboration of the interviews and my reflection on the meanings of what my interviewees said.

After such 'mythological concepts' were established, the comments of the interviewees were broken down into 'data units', in other words, blocks that contain information on the established concepts. Next, the 'data units' that concerned the same 'concept' (the same 'mythological concept' in our case), both within the same interview and across the entire set of interviews, were combined and juxtaposed. From this point onwards, the investigation of the meanings of the 'mythological concepts' began. More specifically, in order to pinpoint the meanings of the 'mythological concepts', the various definitions, keywords or examples that referred to a single 'mythological concept' were brought together in one computer file. Thus, the contained common patterns and linkages between the ideas that the

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<sup>23</sup> Rubin, H., and Rubin, J., *Qualitative interviewing*, pp. 202-204.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapters 10 and 11.

'data units', i.e the references of my interviewees to the same 'mythological concept', were investigated. An example of this procedure follows next.

**Mythological concept:**

myths that preceded the Homeric mythical tradition

**Label:**

pre-Hellenic mythology

**Common patterns and linkages:**

- Pre-Hellenic stand oppositely Classical myths, in the sense that they encompass qualities that are opposite to those of Classical myths.
- Pre-Hellenic myths are 'true' myths, whereas Classical myths are 'pretentious'.
- Pre-Hellenic myths derive their qualities from the fact that they are the first outcomes of man's response to the cosmos and life, and therefore, pre-Hellenic myths are instinctive, instead of calculated constructions (like Classical myths are).
- Pre-Hellenic myths are pantheist and monotheist myths.
- Pre-Hellenic myths are religious myths.

Table 4. An example of common patterns and linkages.

Separate themes, namely, 'summary statements, or explanations of what is going on',<sup>25</sup> emerged from the investigation of these common patterns. In the context of this research, such themes are 'Pre-Hellenic myths and the divine self', or, 'Pre-Hellenic myths and a pagan, pantheistic monotheism'.

Rubin's second stage of qualitative interviews data analysis is defined as the narrative and descriptive part of the study.<sup>26</sup> In this stage, the emergent concepts and themes are discussed and their meaning is explained, by weighing and combining the information gathered from the set of the interviews. This is done here in Chapter four, where the 'mythological themes' that emerged from an integrated examination of the interviews are discussed extensively and analytically. Normally, this second stage of analysis leads to the building and establishment of a theory, in other words, to a 'set of statements that brings together concepts and themes, to explain how things happen, or why they took place the way they did'<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

This theory, Rubin clarifies, does not have to correspond directly to the research question, but it can also create 'broader understandings about important societal issues'<sup>28</sup>.

However, the analysis of my interviews did not lead to the production of a theory, as the nature and the point of my research, neither required, nor allowed it. More specifically, the analysis of the interviews was aimed to speak, on a first level, to research question four, i.e. 'What are Greek mythology's dynamics in contemporary Greek art? So, a manifold answer was, by definition, required, instead of a holistic summary of my interviewees' attitude towards Greek mythology. This was further emphasized by the role of my interviews as an intermediate step towards the examination of Greek mythology in Greek museums, instead of a self-end. So, the analysis of my interviews additionally spoke to the eighth research question, i.e. 'What role could contemporary Greek art play in the dialogue (between Greek museums and Greek people)?' In this case, too, the answer was not intended to lead to the formation of a general theory on the influence of contemporary artists on Greek mythology's museological representation; I would claim that by contrast, the aim was a variety of suggestions on mythology's museological revitalization to be revealed. In addition, the establishment of a theory that creates broader understandings about important societal issues was also neither feasible, nor among the objectives of the interviewing process. With reference to this it should be also pointed out that the small sample of contemporary artists that participated in my research did not allow the extraction of generally applicable conclusions.

## **5. Additional sources of information**

Visits to archaeological museums of Greece were also made, for a close inspection of mythology's position in them. More specifically, I visited the archaeological museum of Aegio, in the Peloponnese, the archaeological site and museum of Mycenae, and the archaeological museum of Nafplio, also in Peloponnese, the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, and the archaeological museum of Pella. I compiled a collection of photographs of the displays in these museums with a mythological theme. However a computer crash, led to irretrievable loss of data, including most of these photographs.

My research in archaeological museums was restricted to archaeological museums that represented regions of Greece with a particular mythological interest, such as Mycenae, as well as museums that cover a wide geographical area, such as the National Archaeological Museum of Greece, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki and the Archaeological Museum of Nafplio, which is currently closed for

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 230.

refurbishment, but at the time of my visit housed findings from important sites of Argolis, in Peloponnese. A second criterion that determined the number and the identity of the museums that I visited was their up-to-date character. Thus, the new museum of Mycenae opened in 2003; the archaeological museum of Aegio was founded in 1994, closed in 1995, due to a severe earthquake, and reopened in 1999; the National Archaeological Museum and the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki reopened, after a long period of refurbishment, in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Given the fact that the permanent exhibitions of the majority of archaeological museums in Greece remain unchanged for many decades, a general overview of the position of mythology in the rest of Greek archaeological museums could be extracted from my past visits to them.

Despite the fact that the interviewing process ran smoothly, from every aspect, difficulties were also encountered during the course of my research for this thesis. ). The main of these difficulties concerns the absence of a scholarly review of Greek mythology's position in contemporary Greek art - be it music, literature or visual art. In fact, even general reviews of the social and ideological status of contemporary Greek art, are disappointingly scarce both in international and Greek scholarly literature and this is particularly striking in the realm of contemporary Greek music. The few popular publications on the latter (such as Dimatis' book on Greek rock music<sup>29</sup>) are simply characterized by a diachronic account of artists and their releases. Studies of contemporary Greek literature are likewise scarce, important exceptions being the studies by Sfyridis of the literary scene of Thessaloniki<sup>30</sup> and scattered essays in the literary magazines of Greece. With reference to the visual arts, Metta in her work *Myth and art (Μύθος και Τέχνη)*<sup>31</sup> briefly touches on the existence of mythology in contemporary Greek art and one should not fail to mention also Sfyridis' work of the visual arts of Thessaloniki<sup>32</sup> - one

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<sup>29</sup> Δηματάτης, Ντ. (Dematatis, D.), *25 χρόνια Ελληνικού ροκ (25 years of Greek rock)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Λιβάνης (Levanis), 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Εν Θεσσαλονίκη 13 σύγχρονοι πεζογράφοι (13 contemporary authors of Thessaloniki)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Ιανός (Ianos), 2001; Σφυρίδης, Π., *Εχεδώρου διηγήσεις. Ανθολογία διηγημάτων δεκαεπτά συγχρόνων πεζογράφων της Θεσσαλονίκης, Θεσσαλονίκη: Κοινότητα Καλοχωρίου, 1995* ( English edition: Sfyridis, P., *Echedorus tales. An anthology of tales by seventeen contemporary prose writers of Thessaloniki*, trans. by Lillie, W. J., Thessaloniki: Koinoteta Kalochoriou, 1997); Σφυρίδης, Π. και Αϊντενάιερ, Ν. (Sfyridis, P. and Eideneier, N.), *Ένδον πόλη: Ανθολογία μεταπολεμικών πεζογράφων της Θεσσαλονίκης (Inner city: anthology of post-war prose writers of Thessaloniki)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Κέντρο Ιστορίας Θεσσαλονίκης (History Centre of Thessaloniki), 1989; Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Επτά διηγηματογράφοι της Θεσσαλονίκης (Seven short tale writers of Thessaloniki)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Σχήμα και χρώμα (Schema kai chroma), 1993; Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Πεζογράφοι της Θεσσαλονίκης 1980-1990 (Prose writers of Thessaloniki 1980-1990)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki), Τραμάκια (Tramakia), 1992; Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Χριστιανόπουλος-Καθάφης: Αποκλίσεις σε βίους παράλληλους (Christianopoulos – Cavafis: Deviations in parallel lives)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki), Τραμάκια (Tramakia), 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Μήττα, Δ. (Metta, D.), *Μύθος και τέχνη (Myth and art)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): University Studio Press, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Εν Θεσσαλονίκη καλλιτέχνες και εκθέσεις. Τεχνοκριτικά κείμενα 1980-2000 (Artists and art exhibitions in Thessaloniki. Art critique scripts 1980-2000)*, Θεσσαλονίκη

of the few, if not only, visual art study that focuses exclusively on Thessaloniki. Useful for a general look at the diachronic development of Thessaloniki's culture, where one can also find scattered references to mythology and the classical past, are also the two volumes published by the Organization of Cultural Capital of Thessaloniki<sup>33</sup>, as well as the volume on Thessaloniki by the literary magazine 'Nea Hestia' (« Νέα Εστία»)<sup>34</sup>, which briefly refers to the literature and visual arts of the contemporary era, without, though, touching on contemporary music. However, these publications do not cover in any depth the conceptual parameters that the present research requires. Contemporary Greek culture, then, remains an underrepresented topic in scholarly literature and a serious study of its character and conceptual orientations is a gap that needs to be filled by future scholarship.

The existing published studies of mythology's position in art are mostly limited to projects that refer to the poetry and literature of the previous century and mostly to the work of artists that are regarded as cornerstones of Greek culture. So, in these studies the use of mythology in poetry and literature is not dealt with holistically, as a phenomenon of modern Greek poetry and literature, but rather as an expressional means in the work of specific artists. These include mostly Nobel Prize winners, like Seferis and Elytis, or internationally known authors, like Kazantzakis, or poets, whose works have influenced the political ethos of an era, like Ritsos<sup>35</sup>. However significant these may be, they only provide hints as to the artistic significance of Greek mythology. In other words, they do not really equip us with knowledge of the profile of Greek mythology in the artistic production of the present and shed light on its 'interpretations' or 'uses', within the field of contemporary artistic production. The realm of popular music is again excluded from these studies. Interesting are the short works of Tomanas on the artistic life of Thessaloniki of the

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(Thessaloniki): Ιανός (Ianos), 2002; Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Δώδεκα ζωγράφοι της Θεσσαλονίκης* (*Twelve painters of Thessaloniki*), Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki), Ρέκος (Rekos), 1998.

<sup>33</sup> Χασιώτης, Ι. Κ. (Hasiotes, I. K) ed., *Τοις αγαθοίς βασιλεύουσα Θεσσαλονίκη. Ιστορία και πολιτισμός* (*Queen of the good ones, Thessaloniki. History and culture*), Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Παρατηρητής (Paratiritis), 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Αφιέρωμα στη Θεσσαλονίκη. *Εικοσιτρείς αιώνες Θεσσαλονίκη* (Thessaloniki. *Twenty-three centuries Thessaloniki*), *Νέα Εστία* (Nea Hestia), Special edition, Αθήνα (Athens): Βιβλιοπωλείο της Εστίας (Bookshop of Hestia), 1985.

<sup>35</sup> Βαγενάς, Ν. (Vagenas, N.), *Ο ποιητής και ο χορευτής. Μια εξέταση της ποιητικής και της ποίησης του Σεφέρη* (*The poet and the dancer. An examination of the poetics and the poetry of Seferis*), Αθήνα (Athens): Κέδρος (Kedros), 1979; Νικολαού, Α. Ν. (Nikolaou, A. N.), *Μυθολογία Γ. Σεφέρη. Από τον Οδυσσέα στον Τεύκρο* (Mythology of G. Seferis. From Odysseus to Tevkros), Αθήνα (Athens): Ζαχαρόπουλος (Zacharopoulos), 2000; Keeley, E., *Modern Greek poetry. Voice and myth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983; Σαββίδης, Γ. Π. (Savvidis, G. P.), *Μεταμορφώσεις του Ελπίνορα. Από τον Pound στον Σινόπουλο* (*Transformations of Elpinor. From Pound to Siniroulos*), Αθήνα (Athens): Ζαχαρόπουλος (Zacharopoulos), 1981; Hart, L., 'Γ. Σεφέρης, Μυθολογικό και κοσμικό σύστημα' ('G. Seferis, Mythological and cosmic system'), *Ο λογοτεχνικός πολίτης* (*O logotechnikos politis*) 10, 1982, pp. 90-95; Σταματίου, Γ. (Stamatiou, G.), *Ο Καζαντζάκης και οι αρχαίοι* (*Kazantzakis and the ancients*), Αθήνα (Athens): Κάκτος (Kaktos), 1983.

past century<sup>36</sup>, where the author refers to the musical preferences of old Thessaloniki, as well as the work of the same author regarding the old taverns of the city<sup>37</sup>, where the songs of the laity and the light music of the nineteenth and the beginnings of the twentieth century are presented.

The existence of studies of the artistic profile of mythology in contemporary art would have been of great value, both in the preparation and organization of the interviews, as well as in their subsequent analysis, decoding and ordering. Instead, I had to draw on the above mentioned works on the literature of the past century, as well as on the previously mentioned scattered sources and additionally, I had to turn for information to academics and other experts. In this context, four sociologists and one art critic were approached. These were Dr Nikos Intzesiloglou, the sociologist and Professor in the Department of Law of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, whose contribution was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Dr Zisis Papadimitriou, Professor of Sociology in the Department of Law of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Dr Alexandros Baltzis, Lecturer at the Department of Sociology of Art and Music of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Dr Grigoris Paschalidis, another sociologist and Professor at the Department of Sociology of Art and Music of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Periklis Sfyridis, the previously mentioned art critic and art historian, but also a novelist. Dr Papadimitriou, apart from a distinguished sociologist also promotes the arts, through the art exhibitions that he and his wife organize every summer, in their resort house, in a village of Larisa. Dr Papadimitriou is a profound connoisseur of cultural production and provided me with a concise and valid overview of the conceptual orientations and preoccupations of contemporary visual art and the status of Greek mythology in it. Dr Baltzis and Dr Paschalidis greatly helped me to acquire a clear image of the social and ideological status of contemporary Greek art, and in this context, also of its relation to ancient heritage. Periklis Sfyridis, focused primarily on visual art and secondarily on Thessaloniki's literature and outlined their distinctive features and the influences that Thessaloniki's cultural history has had on them. Finally, I also approached the directors of two central art galleries of Thessaloniki, the gallery 'Antonopoulos' and the gallery 'Epsilon', in the pursuit of information on the position of Greek mythology in contemporary Greek visual art.

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<sup>36</sup> Τομανάς, Κ. (Tomanas, K.), *Η καλλιτεχνική κίνηση στην Θεσσαλονίκη (1885-1944)* (*The artistic production in Thessaloniki (1885-1944)*), Αθήνα (Athens): Νησίδες (Nesides), 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Τομανάς, Κ. (Tomanas, K.), *Οι ταβέρνες της παλιάς Θεσσαλονίκης* (*The old taverns of Thessaloniki*), Αθήνα (Athens): Εξάντας (Exantas), 1996.

## **6. Conclusion**

The presentation of the data sources and the methodology upon which the investigation of my thesis' main argument was based completed the introductory part of the thesis. The following chapter opens the thesis' main body and is entirely dedicated to the discussion of Greek mythology's position in contemporary Greek art.

### 3. MYTHS AND MEANING

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the discussion of myth. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader of this thesis with an indication of the multifaceted topic that mythology is, both in terms of the multitude of meanings it attracts, but also with reference to the impact it has on various and diverse schools of thought and on various means of human expression. Chapter Three addresses the second and third research questions, and considers Greek mythology's nature, how Greek mythology relates to life and the individual, as well as the ideological and cultural dynamics that render it a potent and worth-studying manifestation of ancient Greek culture.

Chapter Three is divided into two parts. The first part presents an historical overview of theories relating to the interpretation of myths. This overview begins with ancient Greek society's first critical reactions towards its gods and goddesses and closes with the recent post-structuralist attempt to decipher myths. In between are: euhemerism; allegoresis; primitivism; comparative mythology; ritualism; functionalism; psychoanalysis and structuralism. This account is not exhaustive. In fact, this chapter is occupied only with the most influential theories of mythology's interpretation and with mainly describing the key features of these theories. My discussion draws mainly on the comprehensive works of Karakantza and Graf.<sup>1</sup>

The second part of this chapter functions as an extension of the first. Here on one of the most meaning-laden stories of Greek mythology, the myth of Medusa, is examined as a more detailed example. Medusa's story is observed with reference to the versatility of significations that have been attributed to it over a long period of time, and in the context of a great diversity of schools of thought. More specifically, the meanings that have been attributed to Medusa in the theoretical schools of: rationalization, allegoresis, psychoanalysis, various schools of philosophy and feminist thought of various disciplines are presented. Mention is also made of the use of Medusa's myth in modern and contemporary art.

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<sup>1</sup> Graf, Fr., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Μεταίχμιο (Metaichmio), 2003.

## 2. Theories of mythology

### 2.1 Greek mythology: from religion to philosophy<sup>2</sup>

Mythology, according to Gourhan, emerged on a global level around 15,000 to 12,000 B.C, as part of Palaeolithic religion<sup>3</sup>. When it comes to Greece, the key mythologizing period is pinpointed by Papachadjis in the geometric and the early archaic eras, from around 1100 to 700 B.C.<sup>4</sup> A critical stance toward ancient Greek deities and their myths already existed in the pre-Homeric years, at least according to what Kirk concludes from his study on the Greek epic tradition.<sup>5</sup> In fact, as Kirk maintains, if we choose to believe that Greek myths were once an organic component of social and personal issues and enquiries, then this was the case far before Homer, Hesiod and the Achaean Kings, 'in the mists of pre-history'.<sup>6</sup> This early criticism of the ancient Greek deities was, in effect, directed to the plausibility and meaning of their crowd and scandalously 'anthropic' nature, rather than to the absurdity and 'true' meaning of their mythical tales. Protagonists in this religious debate were: the pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Xenophanes of Colophon;<sup>7</sup> the Eleatic philosophers; the Sophists, in the fifth century B.C,<sup>8</sup> with Protagoras, Gorgias<sup>9</sup> and Prodicus;<sup>10</sup> Socrates;<sup>11</sup> Plato, at the beginning of the fourth century B.C,<sup>12</sup> and Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC), who perceived myths as the primitive basis of philosophy, and thus, I would claim, inaugurated the era of a systematic approach to interpreting Greek myths.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Suggested further reading: Barnes, J., *The pre-Socratic philosophers II*, London: Routledge, 1982; Burnet, J., *Early Greek philosophy*, London: A&C Black, 1930; Buxton, R., *From myth to reason? Studies in the development of Greek thought*, Oxford: Clarendon press, 1999; Cornford Macdonald, F., *From religion to philosophy*, London: Arnold, 1912; Finley, J. H., *Four stages of Greek thought*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966; Brisson, L., *Plato the myth-maker*, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998; Morgan, K., *Myth and philosophy. From the presocratics to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000;

<sup>3</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, A. *Les religions de la préhistoire: Paléolithique (The religions of prehistory: Paleolithic)*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> Παπαχατζής, Ι. (Papachadjis, I.), «Αρχαία θρησκεία» ('Ancient religion'), *Ελληνική μυθολογία (Greek mythology) I*, Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.) ed., Αθήνα (Athens): Εκδοτική Αθηνών (Ekdotiki Athinon), 1985, pp. 225-239, p. 226.

<sup>5</sup> Kirk, G. S., 'Greek mythology: some new perspectives', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1972, 92, pp. 74-85, (p. 77).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Fairbanks, A., 'Xenophanes fragments and commentary', Fairbanks, A. (ed. and trans.), *The first philosophers of Greece*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1898, pp. 65-85, (p. 79).

<sup>8</sup> Graf, Fr., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 198.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-209.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

As Karakantza claims, the ancient world entered its post-mythic era in the Imperial Period, i.e from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C until the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>14</sup> This was the time when ‘mythology’ was born, with the systematized recording of myths by Apollodorus, Hyginus and Pausanias, together with the ‘Metamorphoses’ of Ovid. This interest in the collecting and recording of myths indicates, according to Karakantza, that Greek myths had by that time ceased to constitute an intrinsic component of ancient Greek cosmology, and had rather become to a topic for critical observation and study. This turn, I would add, holds true only for a very small percentage of the ancient Greek population, taking into account the limited extent of literacy in the era.

Modern Scholarly attempts to interpret Greek myths after mythology’s shift from its religious role, have mainly aimed to clarify three things: the myths’ theme, the myths’ origin and the myths’ function. Metta classifies mythological theories into eight groups: allegoresis and euhemerism; myth as ‘a disease of language’; myth as poetry; transcendental interpretation; symbolic/romantic interpretation; ritualist/ sociological interpretation, or ‘school of cult practice’; psychological interpretation; and structuralist interpretation.<sup>15</sup> Questions can be raised about Metta’s classification, as to the criteria on which the scholar bases her classification, as I would argue that, for instance, structuralism and post-structuralism could be classified as two separate interpretative approaches to Greek mythology. However, Metta’s classification does serve as a useful general indication of the character and diversity of perspectives.

## 2.2 Antiquity: euhemerism, mythography and allegoresis<sup>16</sup>

Three major approaches to Greek myths characterize the end of Antiquity: euhemerism, mythography and allegoresis<sup>17</sup> Euhemerism took its name from Euhemerus, an author from Messene who lived around the end of the fourth and beginning of the third century B.C. He considered gods to have been originally humans and, more specifically, early Greek rulers who were later deified. Euhemerus’ interpretation, Graf claims, is indicative of the influence of the concept

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<sup>14</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation)*, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Μήττα, Δ. (Metta, D.), *Απολογία για το μύθο (An apology for myth)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): University Studio Press, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Suggested further reading: Brillante, C., ‘History and the historical interpretation of myth’, Edmunds, L. ed., *Approaches to Greek myth*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1989; Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, (chapter A1); Kirk, G. S., *Homer and the epic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965; Lorimer, H. L., *Homer and the monuments*, London: Macmillan, 1950; Snodgrass, A., ‘An historical Homeric society?’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 94, 1974, pp. 114-125; West, M. L., ‘The rise of the Greek epic’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 108, 1988, pp. 155-172.

<sup>17</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 191; Detienne, M., *The creation of mythology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

of the deified Hellenistic ruler on the ethos of the era.<sup>18</sup> The term 'mythography' indicates the elaboration of myths by grammarians and philologists.<sup>19</sup> Allegoresis, or allegory, represents the belief that a disguised allegorical message is hidden underneath myths' literary surface.<sup>20</sup> Neoplatonism, which flourished in the second century A.D, also falls into this category. Neoplatonists perceived the allegory of myths from either a theological, or a psychological angle, and sought a monotheist meaning in myths. The Neoplatonist allegorical interpretation was also favored by the first Christians, who sought to explain the Greek and Roman texts that were used at the time for teaching and were also popular readings from a Christian perspective.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.3 From Antiquity to the 18<sup>th</sup> century: from allegoresis to early 'primitivism'

Allegoresis and euhemerism dominated the intellectual landscape throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.<sup>22</sup> In the eighteenth century, the study of myths was adjusted to the dominant discourse of the Enlightenment.<sup>23</sup> The rational and anti-religious spirit of the time sought myths' explanation in their origin<sup>24</sup>. The latter was, in turn, located in distant prehistory.<sup>25</sup> Models for the study of 'primitive mentality' were sought in children, in peasant populations and in the 'savages' of the time.<sup>26</sup> Fontenelle, Latifau, Fréret, Vico and Hume are some of the scholars who worked in this direction, basing their studies on observations of contemporary 'savages'.<sup>27</sup> Among them, Latifau and mainly Fontelle perceived myths as 'proto-scientific' creations, in other words, as results of an attempt to empirically explain the world.<sup>28</sup> Fontenelle and Latifau, on the other hand, interpreted their observations within the euhemerist tradition, while Fréret, Vico and Hume moved in other directions, to detect in myths religious tensions (Vico, Fréret, Hume) and a reflection of early theological systems (Fréret)<sup>29</sup>. Vico, also claimed that poetry is inherent in myth, believing that primitive people were by nature sensual and imaginative.<sup>30</sup>

In the Romantic era, i.e. the second half of the 18th century, Heyne, Herder and Moritz continued to develop this tradition explaining myth as a awe-laden reaction towards the divine and as a result of an attempt to explain the world

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<sup>18</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, pp. 16; 191-192.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13;197; Μήττα, Δ. (Metta, D.), *Μύθος και τέχνη (Myth and art)*, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14 .

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-19.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

whilst also promoting the appraisal of mythology from an aesthetic and poetic viewpoint.<sup>31</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century Creuzer argued that Indian myths pre-dated the Greek ones and that the Greek myths were created by Indian missionaries, who had come to Greece to teach its population. Creuzer also claimed that, as these missionaries had no other way of communicating with Greece's pre-Hellenic populations, they used symbols, which were later misunderstood and turned into myths.<sup>32</sup> Thus, as Graf points out, Creuzer considered myths as a language in its own right, as a symbolic expression. He did not, however, offer a tool for the interpretation of this language.<sup>33</sup>

#### 2.4 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century: from 'comparative mythology' and ritualism to functionalism and psychoanalysis<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Suggested further reading: Frazer, J. G., *The golden bough*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition., 12Vols, London: Macmillan, 1911-1915; Ackerman, R., 'Frazer on myth and ritual', *Journal of the history of ideas* 36, 1975, pp. 115-134; Ackerman, R., *The myth and the ritual school. J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*, New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1991; Arlen, S., *The Cambridge Ritualists: an annotated bibliography of the works by and about Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis, M. Cornford and Arthur Bernard Cook*, London; New Jersey: Metuchen, 1990; Brandon. S. G. F., 'The myth and ritual position critically examined', Hooke, S. H. ed., *Myth, ritual and kingship*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1958, pp. 261-291; Dowden, K., *Death and the maiden: girls' initiation rites in Greek mythology*, London; New York: Routledge, 1989; Burkert, W., 'Jason, Hypsipyle and new fire at Lemnos. A study in myth and ritual', *Classical Quarterly* 20, 1970, pp. 1-16; Burkert, W., *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979; Burkert, W., *Ancient mystery cults*, Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1987; Burkert, W., *The creation of the sacred: tracks of biology in early religions*, Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1996; Harrison, J. E., *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903; Harrison, J. E., *Themis. A study of the social origins of Greek religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912; Kluckhohn, C., 'Myths and rituals: a general theory', Segal, R. A. ed., *The myth and ritual theory, An anthology*, Oxford; Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 313-340; Tyrell, W. B. and Brown, F. S., *Athenian myths and institutions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; Versnel, H. S., *Faith, hope and worship: aspects of religious mentality in the ancient world*, Leiden: Brill, 1981; Bremmer, J., 'Oedipus and the Greek Oedipus complex', Bremmer, J. ed., *Interpretations of Greek mythology*, London: Routledge, 1988, pp. 41-59; Brown, N. O., 'Psychoanalysis and the classics', *Classical Journal* 52, 1957, pp. 241-145; Burkert, W., *Oedipus, oracles and meaning: from Sophocles to Umberto Eco*, Toronto: University College, 1991; Caldwell, R. S., 'Selected bibliography on psychoanalysis and classical studies', *Arethusa* 7, 1, 1974, pp. 115-134; Caldwell, R. S., 'Psychoanalysis, structuralism and Greek mythology', Garvin, H. R. ed., *Phenomenology, structuralism, semiology*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1976, pp. 209-230; Caldwell, H. R., *The origin of the gods. A psychoanalytic study of Greek theogonic myth*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; Caldwell, H. R., 'The psychoanalytic interpretation of Greek myth', Edmunds, L. ed., *Approaches to Greek myth*, Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, pp. 342-391; Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the irrational*, Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1951; Freud, S., *Die Traumdeutung*, Leipzig; Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1899 (English edition: *The interpretations of dreams*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lloyd-Jones, P. H. J., 'Psychoanalysis and the study of the ancient world', Hordern, P. ed., *Freud and the humanities*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1985, pp. 14-45; Padel, R., *In and out of the mind. Greek images of the tragic self*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992; Roazen, P., *Freud and his followers*, New York: Knoapf, 1975; Roberts, G., *The psychology of the tragic drama*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975; Segal, C., 'Pentheus on the couch and on the gird',

Herder's and Heyne's mythological research influenced the work of Karl Otfried Müller, who is characterized by Graf as perhaps the 'greatest mythographer of the nineteenth century'.<sup>35</sup> The key contribution of Müller is that he established the basis for future historicist and sociological interpretations of mythology, by pointing out the significance of the historical, social and regional circumstances in the formation of myth, mainly in his *Prolegomena to a scientific mythology*, published in 1825.<sup>36</sup> The next generation of mythology's researchers took a step backwards, towards natural allegoresis and considered the expression of human mind through myths as a 'disease of language', in other words, as a result of the primitive mind's inability to conceive abstract notions.<sup>37</sup> 'Comparative mythology', which remained popular for the rest of the nineteenth century was further elaborated by British ethnologists in the Victorian era,<sup>38</sup> who coming into contact with 'primitive' civilizations of their era detected similarities between their myths and the myths of the Western world. This observation was further reinforced by the groundbreaking evolution discourse, led by Darwin, which constituted the ideal theoretical tool for the explanation of the similarities between the myths of the primitive and the progressed civilizations.<sup>39</sup>

Important scholars of mythology, like Tylor and Frazer (who Karakantza describes as 'patriarch of modern mythological research'<sup>40</sup>) developed their work within this 'evolutionist' spirit. Frazer, who published his monumental 'Golden Bough' in two volumes in 1890, and then in twelve volumes in 1912-1915, perceived the creation of myth in the context of an evolutionary model and from a naturalist point of view, pinpointing the significance of myths in terms of their providing gateways to primordial stages of human thought. According to Frazer's theory, the human intellectual evolved from an initial stage of magic to a stage of religion and then to a stage of science, corresponding to the present stage of humanity.<sup>41</sup> Myths, Frazer claimed, are creations of the magical phase of humanity, when people sought to control personified natural phenomena, whose causality they misunderstood through magical rituals. Frazer maintained that these magical rituals were

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*Classical world* 72, 1974, pp. 9-44; Segal, C., *Euripides and the poetics of sorrow: art, gender and commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytos and Hecuba*, Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1993; Slater, F. E., *The glory of Hera. Greek mythology and the Greek family*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1968; Slater, F. E., 'The Greek family in history and myth', *Arethusa* 7, 1, 1974, pp. 5-8.

<sup>35</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27; Detienne, M., *The creation of mythology.*, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation)*, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, pp. 27-29.

characterized by the circular motif of nature's rebirth and decline, which constituted the major concern of primitive man.<sup>42</sup>

Frazer's association of myths with rituals had a direct impact on the mythological school of the so-called 'Cambridge ritualists', represented by scholars such as Harrison and Murray. The 'Cambridge ritualists' took Frazer's theory further and maintained that rituals pre-date the myths that are known to us today<sup>43</sup>. They argued that the myths that we know were invented mainly to justify old rituals that corresponded to the primitive stage of human thought, when life was thought to be controlled by dark demonic forces that had to be placated through rituals, which also had a fertility-provoking character.<sup>44</sup> Harrison's and Murray's claim on the existence of a primordial 'demonic' substratum under the luminous Olympian deities is of ambiguous validity as an interpretative tool. Myths are not static and therefore cannot be confined to one single interpretation. As Graf points out, myth passes from one generation to another, bearing and blending the intellectual mark, the aspirations, fantasies and beliefs of anyone who ever got involved in its transmission.<sup>45</sup> Barber and Barber also note that nothing can ever be remembered and transmitted for as long as myth, unless it has something important to tell us.<sup>46</sup> I would claim that, under this assumption, theories that interpret myth exclusively with reference to the past (in this case with old rituals or a primitive way of thought) are naturally impoverished. However, Harrison's and Murray's 'ritualism' is appealing because it could constitute the basis, in the museum, of an alternative viewing of the clichéd myths of the ancient Greek Dodecatheon. From a museological perspective, 'ritualism' is significant as it introduces visitors to the largely unknown pre-Olympian mythical and religious status and invites them to participate in the 'game' of 'reading between the lines' of familiar mythical tales and figures. Additionally, 'ritualism' seems promising, from a museological perspective, as it could bring the museum visitor face to face with a discussion of the primordial perception of the concept of 'divinity'. Burkert similarly favoured the antiquity of rituals over the antiquity of myths, although he maintained that myths do not derive exclusively from ritual, since they can also express incidents of human life, such as birth, that predate any ritual.<sup>47</sup>

A prominent mythological theory of the twentieth century is functionalism, associated in particular with Malinowski, Durkheim and Radcliffe-

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29; Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation)*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-88.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-88.

<sup>45</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Barber, E., and Barber, T. P., *When they severed earth from sky: how the human mind shapes myth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Burkert, W., *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, p. 57.

Brown. For functionalism, the process of myth-making has primarily a social origin.<sup>48</sup> As Karakantza notes, the publication in 1909 of van Gennep's work on rites of passage played an active role in shifting mythological research away from theology and metaphysics to sociology.<sup>49</sup> According to the functionalist mythological theory, myths have a functional significance, linking the individual to their social milieu.<sup>50</sup> On this light, myths, as Durkheim put it, are 'verbalized' rituals.<sup>51</sup> In other words, myths are the verbal part of an act that discusses issues of major significance for the function of the community, such as values and elements of social structure.<sup>52</sup> Malinowski believed that the creation of myths served the purpose of legitimizing institutions that were central to the existence of the community, such as marriage or kinship, or of reminding people of social rules and tribal traditions.<sup>53</sup> He wrote, for example: 'myths make their appearance when a religious ceremony, a rite, or a social, or moral rule, demand a justification and a confirmation of their old age, of their genuineness and of their sacredness'.<sup>54</sup> These myths were named 'charter myths' by Malinowski.<sup>55</sup>

Psychoanalysis represents another key interpretive school regarding mythology, which became prominent in the twentieth century. The 'Freudian'/psychoanalytical mythological theory proposes that the impetus for the creation of myths lies in the frustrated desires and thoughts of the community.<sup>56</sup> The mythical tales themselves, the 'Freudian' theory maintains, are composed from material that is extracted from the community's collective unconscious, namely from community's repository of 'archetypes'.<sup>57</sup> The psychoanalytical school associates myths with dreams and, more precisely, seeks the key to deciphering and understanding myths in the mechanism of dreams' creation and function.<sup>58</sup> From this perspective, myths, like dreams, have both overt and hidden content.

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<sup>48</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation), p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>51</sup> Cohen, P. S., 'Theories of myth', *Man* 4, 3, 1969, pp. 337-353, (p.343)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343; Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation), p. 86.

<sup>53</sup> Cohen, P. S., 'Theories of myth', *Man* 4, 3, 1969, pp. 337-353, (p. 344); Kirk, G., 'Greek mythology: some new perspectives', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 92, 1972, pp. 74-85, (p. 75).

<sup>54</sup> Malinowski, B., *Magic, Science, and Religion and other essays*, Garden City: Anchor Books, 1954, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation), p. 113.

<sup>56</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation), p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Moreover, a community uses myths to consciously represent frustrated desires and fears, in the same way that the individual uses dreams to relieve itself from the intensity of 'dangerous' thoughts.<sup>59</sup> In other words, members of a community use myths to come to terms with unconscious fantasies and situations that are associated in the one way or the other with acts that are forbidden on a social level.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.5 20<sup>th</sup> century: Structuralism and post-structuralism<sup>61</sup>

Structuralism, represented by scholars such as Lévi-Strauss, Greimas and Calame, seeks to understand myth by means of myth itself<sup>62</sup>, laying emphasis on the structure of myth, as opposed to its narrative.<sup>63</sup> Structuralism used Saussure's 'static linguistics' as the basis for its analysis of myths. According to this, the function of a given language at a given moment in time depends on the relationships that are established between the elements of this language<sup>64</sup>. The origin of myth was traced, according to structuralist thinking in the human mind. More specifically, it emerged from the binary discrimination, which, Lévi-Strauss claimed, the human mind

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>61</sup> Suggested further reading: Armstrong, I., *The radical aesthetic*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000; Culler, J., *Saussure*, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1976; Culler, J., *On deconstruction. Theory and criticism after structuralism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982; Culler, J., *Structuralist poetics: structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975; Detienne, M., *Les jardins d'Adonis: La mythologie des aromates en Grèce*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972 (English edition: *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Fisher, M., *Does deconstruction make any difference? Poststructuralism and the defense of poetry in modern criticism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985; Gordon, R. L. (ed.), *Myth, religion and society. Structuralist essays by M., Detienne, L., Gernet, J.-P., Vernant and P., Vidal-Naquet*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; Girard, R., 'Lévi-Strauss, Frye, Derrida and the Shakespearean criticism', *Diacritics* 3, 3, 1973, pp. 31-54; Gras, V. W., 'Myth and the reconciliation of the opposites: Jung and Lévi-Strauss', *Journal of the history of ideas* 42, 3, 1981, pp. 471-487; Hawkes, J., *Structuralism and semiotics*, London: Routledge, 1977; Lévi-Strauss, C., *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris: Plon, 1958 (English edition: *Structural anthropology*, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1963); Lévi-Strauss, C., *Myth and meaning: cracking the code of culture*, New York: Schocken Books, 1979; Mandelbaum, D., 'Myth and mythmakers: some anthropological appraisals in of the mythological studies of Lévi-Strauss', *Ethnology* 26, 1987, pp. 31-36; Segal, C., *Dionysian poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982; Segal, C., 'Greek tragedy and society: a structuralist perspective', Euben, J. P. (ed.), *Greek tragedy and political theory*, Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 43-75; Thomas, L. L., Kronenfeld, J. Z. and Kronenfeld, D. B., 'Asdiwal crumbs: a critique of Lévi-Straussian myth analysis', *American ethnologist* 3, 1976, pp. 147-173; Williams, G., *French discourse analysis: the method of poststructuralism*, London; New York: Routledge, 1999.

<sup>62</sup> Graf, F. *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Lévi-Strauss, C., *The raw and the cooked*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους (Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation)*, p. 148.

perceives the world through.<sup>65</sup> Myths, then, are the outcome of the attempt of human thought to relate these sets of contradictory notions systematically to each other, in the form of a solid and meaningful narrative.<sup>66</sup> In this light, myth is appraised as a device for 'mediating contradictions and oppositions, as experienced by men' with a focal point being the conflicting impositions of culture and nature.<sup>67</sup> Lévi-Strauss pointed out that this conflict is reflected by symmetrical antitheses that are hidden in myth's structure. In this way, Lévi-Strauss published a compelling analysis of Oedipus' myth, although he later rejected this as deficient.<sup>68</sup> Yet, as Karakantza points out, Lévi-Strauss' paradigm of Oedipus' interpretation has remained highly influential.<sup>69</sup> Lévi-Strauss' structuralist analysis of the myth of Oedipus, as Burkert puts it, 'showed the scientists what they can do with myth'<sup>70</sup>

Structuralism shares its interest in language with post-structuralism, its intellectual offspring.<sup>71</sup> For Barthes, one of the main representatives of this mythological theory, myth is a type of speech, a communicative system or message-bearing entity, whose study is part of 'semiotics'.<sup>72</sup> Barthes, like the structuralists, considered the most significant feature of myth to be its structure (rather than its narrative), which essentially defines the meaning of the myth.<sup>73</sup> Myth, viewed from the perspective of the signifier-signified-sign nexus that Barthes developed drawing on Saussurian linguistics, is, compared to language, a 'second-order semiological system'.<sup>74</sup> More analytically, language is a semiological system composed of a signifier and a signified, whose collaboration produces a sign, namely a word. Myth, on the other hand, contains the linguistic system (the language through which it is articulated), and myth itself, namely a non-linguistic semiological system with 'signifiers' and 'signifieds' that collaborate to produce a meaning or sign. So, myth is a 'metalangue', a 'language' in which language itself is being used. In other words,

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<sup>65</sup> Cohen, P., S. 'Theories of myth', *Man* 4, 3, 1969, pp. 337-353, (p. 347); Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (*Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation*), pp. 147-160.

<sup>66</sup> Cohen, P., S. 'Theories of myth', *Man* 4, 3, 1969, pp. 337-353, (p. 347).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 345-346; Edmunds, L., Introduction for Calame, C., 'Structuralism and Semiotics', Edmunds, Lowell (ed.), *Approaches to Greek myths*, p. 275 - 341, (p.275).

<sup>68</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (*Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on their nature and interpretation*), p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Tilley in his article 'Interpreting material culture' (In: Hodder, I. ed., *The meanings of things: material culture and symbolic expression*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, 185-194) defines post structuralism as 'a term not amendable to any rigid definition. It is simply a term applied to work without any unitary core that is temporally removed from a structuralist position'.

<sup>72</sup> Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, Paris: Seuil, 1957 (English edition: *Mythologies*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

the original linguistic sign becomes a signifier in the context of mythological speech, and thus is finally transformed to the new mythological sign.<sup>75</sup>

More specifically, the semiological theory perceives Greek mythology as a megatext, whose individual expressive units are comprised of the individual myths.<sup>76</sup> Semiotic studies claim, with reference to this, that each myth redirects us to a subcategory of myths that are relative to one another.<sup>77</sup> For example, the meaning of the mythical theme of the weaving of Laertes' shroud by Penelope can only be revealed, if combined with similar actions of other women in the Homeric epics, as well as with other women in Greek mythology in general, whose myths are in some way related to weaving, such as Athena, Arachne and Philomela.<sup>78</sup> These mythical themes, Karakantza suggests, 'constitute a distinctive sub-category with a distinctive semantic weight'.<sup>79</sup> The 'semiological' interpretation of myths also maintains that the mythological 'metalangue' has a social basis, in the sense that it is constructed around a core of historical data and values central to a culture<sup>80</sup>, and that, as such, it is only through an historically and culturally contextual reading that a given myth can be understood and deciphered.<sup>81</sup> This is the strongest difference between post-structuralism and structuralism, for the latter completely ignored the influence of the social and historical context in myths' creation.

## 2.6 Myth and meaning in the context of this thesis

These successive theories relating to mythology are characterized by diversity in terms of their points of departure and focus, in their ideological context, and in their interpretation of myths. In fact, the definition and very substance of the notion of 'myth' changes dramatically from one interpretative theory to the other. Despite (and because of) this, I have chosen not to understand myth through one particular mythological theory. In fact, like Vernant<sup>82</sup> and Kirk<sup>83</sup>, maintain, a holistic interpretation and definition of 'myth' is neither feasible nor desirable. In other words, 'myth' as a concept cannot be understood through a single interpretative scheme, nor can (nor should) individual myths be understood only through one mythological theory.

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*; Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*. p. 54.

<sup>76</sup> Καρακάντζα, Ε. (Karakantza, E.), *Αρχαίοι ελληνικοί μύθοι: ο θεωρητικός λόγος του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα για τη φύση και την ερμηνεία τους* (*Ancient Greek myths: the theoretical discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of their nature and interpretation*), p. 182.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>80</sup> Graf, Fr., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 55; Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> Graf, Fr., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 55.

<sup>82</sup> Vernant, P., *Μύθος και θρησκεία στην αρχαία Ελλάδα*, (*Myth and religion in ancient Greece*) Σμίλη (Smele), 2000, p. 44.

<sup>83</sup> Kirk, G. S., 'Greek mythology: some new perspectives', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, pp., 74-85; Kirk, G., *The Nature of Greek Myths*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.

Of course, these various theories of mythology vary in plausibility. Despite this, the theories of 'ritualism' and 'psychoanalysis' dominate the discussion of mythology in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis. This, it has to be noted, mainly reflects the mythological perceptions of the contemporary artists that I interviewed. It should also be clarified that my research did not set out to interpret myths; rather it interprets the interpretations of mythology that emerged from the interviews and considers their potential relevance to museums.

In other words, the main concern of this thesis is not with myth's 'true' meaning, but rather with what contemporary people can do with myth. More specifically, its key concern is with how museum visitors can interact with myth, for the benefit of both visitors and myth. More or less every mythological theory can bring myth to life in a museum, as it encourages the visitor to experience the myth, by detecting familiar and even first-hand experienced behaviours in ancient tales. This means that more or less all of the mythological theories can have, in a museum context, the double benefit of, first, teaching facts about ancient religion, or ancient culture in general, and, second, giving food for thought to visitors and providing an impetus for broader speculation. From this perspective, the diverse character of mythological theories can become an asset in the context of the museum.

As Kirk notes, all the holistic interpretations of mythology tend to isolate only one feature of myth and focus on it, overlooking all the others.<sup>84</sup> No mythological theory has ever succeeded in providing a persuasive interpretation of all myths, indeed, there will always be myths that do not fit a particular interpretative model.<sup>85</sup> The very existence of a host of mythological interpretations works against the assertion that myths can be interpreted in only one way.<sup>86</sup> The link that joins myths' past, present and future is cultural relevance<sup>87</sup>, and this ensures that myths can correspond to a variety of ways of thought and refer to a host of different things.

The definition of 'myth' is, then, linked to the variety of mythology's interpretative theories. As Metta puts it, 'the plurality of myth's definitions essentially points towards the inexistence of definition and, as a consequence, each time that one decides to pore over the topic of myth, one has to define it anew.'<sup>88</sup> Ultimately, I agree with Savvopoulos, one of my interviewees, who, in response to the question 'what is myth?' simply answered that 'myth is a lie that tells us the truth'.

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<sup>84</sup> Kirk, G., *The Nature of Greek Myths*, p.29.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>87</sup> Graf, F., *Greek mythology: an introduction*, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Μήττα, Δ. (Metta, D.), *Μύθος και τέχνη (Myth and art)*, p. 164.

### 3. The myth of Medusa

#### 3.1 Introducing Medusa

The most common version of Medusa's story is as follows: Medusa was one of the three Gorgons, the others being Euryali and Stheno, and the only mortal amongst them. She was the daughter of the sea gods Phorcys and Ceto. She lived with her sisters in a far away island in the Ocean. Medusa was once a beautiful maiden but was turned into a snake-haired monster under the spell of Athena, who punished her for being raped by Poseidon inside one of the goddesses' temples. In addition to this, Medusa was also cursed to turn into stone, with her lethal glance, whoever looked at her. Perseus, on his way to the garden of the Hesperides, killed Medusa by cutting off her head with a sickle. Perseus managed to find and confront the monster with Athena's help, who gave him a shield and advised him to look at Medusa's reflection in a shield, instead of looking directly at her. The disembodied head of Medusa, was given to Athena, who placed it in the center of her *aegis* (shield), as an apotropaic weapon, since the disembodied head maintained its petrifying potency.



Figure 12. Limestone pediment from the temple of Artemis in Corfu, c. 590 B.C. Archaeological Museum of Corfu.

Over time, Medusa (Figure 12) has attracted some of the most imaginative - even farfetched - interpretations. She has been explained as an octopus and a squid; as the sun; as a star; as a hallucinating mushroom; as an embodiment of fear; as a gorilla; as the man on the moon; and so on. More plausible interpretations are listed in the five volume work on Greek mythology edited by Kakridis.<sup>89</sup> According to this interpretation, the gorgoneion pre-existed the figure of Medusa and her myth. The origins of the gorgoneion can be located in the masks that condense every horrific feature of a wild animal, namely the fierce eyes, the sharp teeth, the screams and the merciless glance. Such masks, it is explained, are common among many traditional societies, and their creation is based upon the belief that the depiction of a fear can function to trap the fear itself. Let us now observe the influence that Medusa's myth has had, over the years, on various systems of thought.

<sup>89</sup> Ρούσσος, Ε. (Roussos, E.), «Περσέας» ('Perseus'), *Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Greek Mythology)* III, Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.) ed., pp. 182-188, (pp. 183-186).

### 3.2 Medusa in scholarship

#### Rationalization and allegoresis

Medusa's myth has attracted the interest of thinkers since Antiquity. Heraclitus (535-475 B.C), who has been accused by contemporary scholars of being obsessed with prostitutes, resorted to the idea that Medusa, together with other lethal female mythical monsters, such as Scylla, Charybdis and the beautiful sorceress Circe, were dangerous prostitutes, who 'devour' or 'petrify' unprotected men.<sup>90</sup> Palaephatus of Abydus, an ancient Greek historian, who lived in the time of Alexander the Great, in the tradition of Hellenistic rationalism, which sought an actual historical basis for myths, interpreted Medusa as a strong-willed queen and Perseus as an unscrupulous pirate.<sup>91</sup> Pausanias (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D), similarly portrayed Medusa as a charming Lybian warrior queen and suggested that, after she was killed by Perseus in a battle, she was decapitated because the Greek hero, who was bewitched by her beauty, wished to display her to his fellows.<sup>92</sup> Achilles Tatius, a Greek writer of the Roman era, also presented Medusa as a rich queen with a mischievous and cunning character and related her snaky hair to her bad reputation.<sup>93</sup> Diodorus Siculus (90 BC– ca. 27 BC), in his 'Library of History', subtly underlines the character of Medusa as being dangerous for the world's order, by relating the Gorgons to the Amazons.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he associates Medusa's fate to that of the Amazons and attributes her decapitation not to Perseus but to Heracles<sup>95</sup>, in an attempt, according to Garber and Vickers, to propagandize the potency of male power against the possibility of female domination.<sup>96</sup>

Medusa became a symbol of fallen morality for the Renaissance philosopher Leone Ebreo<sup>97</sup>, who, in the context of theological allegoresis, saw in Medusa the embodiment of earthliness and vice, which was defeated by the spiritual power of moral Perseus.<sup>98</sup> Natale Conti<sup>99</sup>, a Renaissance mythographer, also working within the tradition of allegoresis, presented Medusa as a metaphor of 'the triumph of the rationale over the uncontrollable', of the destructive human pleasures and desires, which are tamed by sobriety.<sup>100</sup> In the twentieth century, but again from a similar perspective, John Freccero, a contemporary literature analyst, regarded the

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<sup>90</sup> Palaephatus, *On unbelievable tales*, Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1996, p. 25.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, New York; London: Routledge, 2003, p.44.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>94</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935, 3, 52, 4.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 52, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, 2003., p.26.

<sup>97</sup> Ebreo, L., *The philosophy of love*, London: The Soncino Press, 1937.

<sup>98</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p.58.

<sup>99</sup> Conti, N., *Mythologies: a select translation*, New York: Garland, 1994.

<sup>100</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p.62.

hazard of petrification to be a result of lethal erotic attraction.<sup>101</sup> His outlook takes us to one of the most elaborate interpretations of Medusa, that of Sander Gilman, a cultural and literary historian, who incorporated the mythical hag in his studies on prostitution and syphilis, as a fatal feminine symbol.<sup>102</sup> In his own words, 'the infected female seductress maintains the "spiderlike hair" and "vampiric power" of the (sic) Medusa'.<sup>103</sup>

This persistent and diachronic perception of Medusa as the embodiment of the evils of promiscuous female is, I would argue, a typical example of how the myth can function outside its academic confines. More precisely, the previously presented theorists do not so much attempt to achieve a scientific interpretation of Medusa's absurd existence, as they speculate on her absurdity and on the appeal she has on the individual. The logical association here is quite straight forward. Medusa is something that you want to look at (otherwise Medusa would not be dangerous), but which is by default dangerous and deadly. Medusa could, in other words, be a metaphor for the sin.

### Psychoanalysis

Gilman's approach to the myth of Medusa recalls that of Freud, who also read in Medusa connotations of sexual tension. Freud articulated his insights on the topic in his essay entitled 'Medusa's head'.<sup>104</sup> For Freud, decapitation equals castration and the snakes play the leading role in this equation. Medusa's snaky hair and the fear it generates symbolizes the image that is responsible for the sexual terror of the boy, namely the fear of castration. More specifically, in Freud's words, Medusa is a metaphor 'of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother'.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, though, Freud claims, snakes work as a fear antidote, 'for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror'.<sup>106</sup> Erich Neumann, also writing from the perspective of psychoanalysis, examines Medusa in the context of the Jungian concept of the 'Terrible Mother'.<sup>107</sup> He parallels the open, hollow mouth of the monster to the 'devouring symbol of the uroboric mother', that is the open womb, and considers Medusa's protruding tongue to be a phallic connotation.<sup>108</sup> Overall, Neumann

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<sup>101</sup> Freccero, J., 'Medusa: the letter and the spirit', *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 2, 1972, pp. 1-18.

<sup>102</sup> Gilman, S., *The Jew's body*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

<sup>103</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p.261.

<sup>104</sup> Freud, S., *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, New York: Collier, 1963, pp.212-213.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>107</sup> Neumann, E., *The origins and history of consciousness*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1949, pp. 75;172.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

considers Medusa to be associated with the 'castrating' woman, as well as with the 'lower, maternal aspects of the feminine persona'.<sup>109</sup>

This aspect does not lie far from the previously presented perception of Medusa's figure. Medusa here is perceived again as the dangerous female, with the difference that in this case she is not a corrupting force but a despotic, tyrannical authority, which does not physically kill but metaphorically 'erases' the individual. Freud's and Neumann's interpretations are well known, but in my opinion they are not particularly convincing as interpretative attempts of Medusa's figure, as they both tend to isolate Medusa from her mythical context and do not consider issues, such as, if the provoked horror is eventually replaced by the sight of the snakes, then why and how did Medusa function as an apotropaic symbol? However, I would argue that these interpretations could be valuable, as speculation-provoking platforms on the co-existence in one creature of the major features of the female and male nature that are counter fighting and at the same time counterbalancing each other.

### Philosophy

The understanding of Medusa's myth by Jean-Paul Sartre, in the context of existentialism, is close to the spirit of psychoanalysis<sup>110</sup>. Sartre traces the meaning of Medusa to the very factors of her creation, which are in turn psychological. More specifically, Sartre claims that the 'profound meaning of the myth of Medusa' is the petrification of "Being-for-itself" in "Being-in-itself" by the other's look'.<sup>111</sup> Hazel Barnes, philosopher and translator of Sartre's work, provides, in 'The look of the Gorgon', an enlightening discussion of the existentialist philosopher's dense and at times unclear approach to Medusa's significance.<sup>112</sup> Barnes explains that the 'one-sentence interpretation of myth', as she accurately describes Sartre's analysis of Medusa, is essentially a comment on a universal psychological experience, which is triggered by the look that another person sets on us.<sup>113</sup> Sartre suggests that we are turned from 'conscious beings' into 'unconscious beings', becoming objects in the eyes of the onlooker, and becoming a 'thing in the midst of a world of things'.<sup>114</sup> So, the 'Medusa complex', as Barnes refers to Sartre's interpretation, refers to the individual's petrified subjectivity and to the fear that 'by denying my own freely

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<sup>109</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 96.

<sup>110</sup> Sartre, J. P., *From being to nothingness: a phenomenological essay on ontology*, Barnes, H. E., trans, New York: Washington Square Press, 1943.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Barnes, H., 'The look of the Gorgon', Barnes, H. ed., *The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974, pp. 3-51.

<sup>113</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 125.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

organized world with all of its connections and internal correlations, the Other's look may reduce me permanently to a hard stonelike object'.<sup>115</sup>

Although still working within in the field of philosophy, Nietzsche established a different perspective, through the inverted way in which he perceives Medusa's moral properties in. Nietzsche, in his 'Birth of tragedy', where his famous theory on the dichotomy between the spirits of Apollonian sobriety and Dionysiac frenzy is established, employs Medusa as a symbol of Apollo, which resists the orgiastic feeling of Dionysus, rather than the opposite, as one might have expected.<sup>116</sup>

Medusa also figures in Marx's 'Capital'. Marx, in his discussion of labour and alienation in production, draws on Medusa's myth to create a metaphor. In this metaphor, Medusa represents the 'evils' that hide within what appears to be a normal capital production process, while the exploited people are compared to Perseus, who is accused by Marx of closing his eyes to the evils of capitalism by hiding under 'magic caps', like the mythical hero did.<sup>117</sup>

Barthes also involves Medusa, or rather a version of Medusa that assimilates her properties both as a mythical Gorgon and as a jellyfish, in his discussion of 'doxa', namely 'belief', 'common belief', and more 'commonly accepted and constantly reproduced belief'.<sup>118</sup> Here, he emphasizes the 'stunning power' that is entailed in the uncritical, almost mechanical, acceptance of 'doxa'.<sup>119</sup>

The philosophers' interpretations of Medusa clearly move away from the detection of messages sexual tension, or sexual degeneration, in the monster's figure and myth. I would claim that the most innovative approaches, which, in my opinion, bear resemblances to each other, are those of Sartre and Barthes. They both employ Medusa and her petrifying power to discuss aspects of the individual's socialization, and more precisely, the effects that social living has on the individual. In Sartre's theory Medusa underpins the consideration of the two aspects of an individual's existence, i.e. the individual's self and the individual's self-perception through the eyes of the others. Barthes elaboration of Medusa has a more 'social' character, as he takes advantage of the synonymy between the mythical hag and the sea creature to emphasize the process in which the individual is 'stung' by common beliefs and eventually petrified by their uncritical acceptance.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>116</sup> Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy out of the spirit of music*, New York: Vintage Books, 1967, §3; §21.

<sup>117</sup> Marx, C. 'Preface.' In Marx, C. *Capital*, Vol I, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1867; Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 69.

<sup>118</sup> Barthes, R., *Ronald Barthes*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

## Feminism

Feminist discourse has made its own contribution to the interpretation of Medusa's figure and myth. For instance, Patricia Kleindienst Joplin in 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours'<sup>120</sup>, an essay on the 'gender-specific violence of rape and the politics of literary representation', conceives Medusa's myth in the light of sexual violence and subsequent silence, and declares it a typical example of women's oppression and of the way in which this oppression can be hushed up and perpetuated.<sup>121</sup> Emily Erwin Culpepper likewise contributes her personal encounter with Medusa.<sup>122</sup> As the writer states, she identified herself with Medusa in a physical attack that she experienced, and, gaining power from her mythical archetype, she repelled the violent intruder.<sup>123</sup> Culpepper elevated the snake-haired heroine to a symbol of transformative power, of self-empowering fury and, through all this, of survival.<sup>124</sup>

From the strand of archaeology, Gimbutas read in the conflict between Medusa and Perseus a prehistoric tension between the old pre-Hellenic, matriarchal cults and the new Indo-European patriarchal model of religion that strived to establish itself and emphasizes that in the old religion Medusa was not the appalling monster that we know, but rather a powerful and wise goddess (besides, as scholars<sup>125</sup> point out the name Medusa as well as the name Medea, Metis, Clytemnestra, etc, are commonly etymologized from 'metis', meaning 'sovereign female wisdom'), whose shrines and cult was violated by the Indo-European tribes<sup>126</sup>. Pratt, a feminist theorist, draws on this perspective in her discussion of the central role that gender identity plays in Greek mythology. With particular reference to the myth of Medusa, she states that one has to penetrate the surface of the classical myth and descend into its earlier layers to find the key to understanding the monster. Instead, Pratt suggests, the key is hidden in the distinctive features of Medusa, namely the snakes, the starring eyes and the severed head.<sup>127</sup> Pratt, bases her reasoning on the significance of snakes in Middle Eastern and Native American religions, as opposed to the European ones. She concludes that, in Medusa's myth, snakes, which for Western culture are an appalling symbol of horror, lend their

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<sup>120</sup> Kleindienst Joplin, P., 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours', *Stanford Literature Review* 1, 1984, pp. 25-53.

<sup>121</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 201.

<sup>122</sup> Culpepper, E. E., 'Ancient Gorgons: A Face for Contemporary Women's Rage', *Woman of Power* 3, p. 22-24; Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 238; Pratt, A., *Dancing with the goddesses: archetypes, poetry and empowerment*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 238.

<sup>125</sup> Ρούσσος, Ε. (Roussos, E.), «Περσέας» ('Perseus'), *Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Greek Mythology)* III, pp. 182-188, (p. 186).

<sup>126</sup> Gimbutas, M. *The language of the goddess*, San Francisco: Thames & Hudson, 1989; Gimbutas, M., *The Civilization of the Goddess*, San Francisco: Thames & Hudson, 1991; Graves, R., *The Greek myths*, London: Penguin books, 1955.

<sup>127</sup> Pratt, A., *Dancing with the goddesses: archetypes, poetry and empowerment*, p. 23.

repulsive properties to the entire female body, which thus also ends up appalling and horrific.<sup>128</sup> Molly Myerowitz Levine claims that Medusa's symbolic connotations are further reinforced by the association of snakes with hair, as the latter is a traditional symbol of female appearance.<sup>129</sup> In this context, the author detects in the myth of Medusa a powerful semiological association between the concept of patriarchal marriage and hair.<sup>130</sup> Patriarchal marriage, she argues, treats the woman as a means of procreation only, requiring from her female fertility, but not sexuality. Thus, it deprives the female of a will, a voice and the power of her nature. On a mythical level, sexuality can be banished with the radical removal of a woman's most prominent agent of femininity and seductive ability, her hair, and even more effectively her whole head, as in the case of Medusa.<sup>131</sup> Of key significance for Medusa's archetype is the fact that right after her decapitation, she gave birth to her children, Pegasus and Chrysaor. Thus, as Myerowitz Levine puts it, 'voiceless but fertile, the headless Medusa encodes the patriarchal ideal of maternity without sexuality'.<sup>132</sup> Doniger, in her work on mythical women, instead focuses on the power and significance of Medusa's gaze and points out that, for the ancient Greeks, the eyes were associated with the phallus and that blinding was traditionally a punishment for sexual crimes, as in the mythical example of Oedipus.<sup>133</sup>

The interpretations of the feminists constitute, in my opinion, interesting and plausible readings of Medusa's symbolisms, if not of the initial mechanism that led to the construction of Medusa's figure and myth. It is noteworthy that the element of sexual tension is here also dominant. Medusa is here again awe-provoking, similarly to the previously mentioned allegorical and psychological interpretations, only that in this case Medusa is awe-provoking in a positive way. Here, Medusa is punished by man, because she is feared instead of loathed by him.

### 3.3 Medusa in art

DaVinci, Caravaggio, Goethe, Dante Alighieri and Dante Gabriel Rossetti are just a few of the historic artists who have been occupied with Medusa in their art (Figures 13-20). In more recent times, Philip Wylie,<sup>134</sup> Ann Stanford<sup>135</sup> and Sylvia Plath have also engaged with Medusa's story. In their art, Medusa is represented in a similar

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>129</sup> Myerowitz Levine M., 'The gendered grammar of hair', Eilberg-Schwartz, H. and Doniger, W. eds., *Off with her head: the denial of women's identity in myth, religion and culture*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1995, pp. 76-130, (pp. 92-93).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>133</sup> Doniger, W., 'Put a bag over her head', Doniger, W. and Eilberg-Schwartz H. eds., *Off with her head: The denial of women's identity in myth, religion and culture*, pp. 15-31, (p. 26).

<sup>134</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 90.

<sup>135</sup> Stanford, A., 'The Women of Perseus', Stanford, A., *Mediterranean Air*, New York: Viking, 1977, pp. 34-48.

way in terms of fallen morality and the corrupting seduction of the female. The elaboration of Medusa by Sylvia Plath is probably the most innovative example: In her poem, Medusa is used as a metaphor for the poet's oppressive mother.



Figure 13. 'Medusa', Caravaggio. 1590. Uffizi Gallery. Florence.



Figure 14. *'The Head of Medusa'*. Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens. Circa 1617-1618. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemaldegalerie, Vienna.



Figure 15. *'Medusa'*. Originally attributed to Leonardo daVinci, most likely though painted by an unknown Flemish painter. Circa 1600. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Figure 16. *'Perseus beheads Medusa'*. Laurent Honoré Marqueste. 1902. Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark.



Figure 17. Detail of Marqueste's work.



Figure 18. 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa', Antonio Canova. circa 1800. Vatican Museum, Rome.



Figure 19. 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa'. Benvenuto Cellini. 1545-1554. Piazza della signora, Florence.



Figure 20. 'Aspecta Medusa'. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 1865. Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery.

In contemporary culture, there is one case involving Medusa's artistic interpretation that requires special mention, both for its novel perspective on the myth and for the wide impact it has had on contemporary popular culture. From a theoretical point of view, Stephen Heath, a film theorist and author of several important essays on film criticism, employs Medusa in the discussion of the effects of photography in the art of representation and the perception of illusion<sup>136</sup>, thus, turning Medusa into 'a metaphor for women's relationship to specularity'.<sup>137</sup> Graig Owens, another scholar working in the field of visual arts, places Heath's remark in a more specific context by considering Medusa's ability to freeze the onlooker to be a 'proto-photographic' effect, a primitive 'image capture' that later had a huge impact on contemporary Western culture.<sup>138</sup> Probably the most explicit transfer of Owens' remark is the pop star Madonna's re-introduction of 'voguing' on the dancefloors in 1990,<sup>139</sup> through which the artist and the dancing crowd repeated the story of their mythical ancestor: they charmed and lured the onlooker, by striking the pose (Figure 21).



*Gorgon, marble head of a Gorgon statue that formed the acroterion of a large temple in the Acropolis. Early 6th century B.C. Acropolis Museum, Athens.*

*Madonna in 'Vogue'.*

**Figure 21. Madonna takes over the role of Medusa.**

<sup>136</sup> Heath, St., 'Difference', 'Screen' Editorial Collective eds., *The Sexual Subject: A 'Screen' Reader in Sexuality*, London; New York: Routledge, 1992, pp.47-106.

<sup>137</sup> Garber, M. and Vickers, J. N. eds., *The Medusa Reader*, p. 163.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Medusa's story and her striking appearance have been interpreted in a variety of ways. The predominant significance attributed to Medusa overtime has been that of seduction and of moral decline. This seductive potency of Medusa works exclusively in association with her being female. Oddly enough, Medusa is perceived as sexually seductive, despite being appallingly ugly. This, in my opinion, refers to a duality that underlies the conception of the female by some of Medusa's commentators. So, like Medusa, who is profoundly ugly, but for some reason still seductive and dangerous, the female seems to be perceived as something whose beauty is to be mocked and thus exorcised.

Of great interest for this thesis, however, is the wide impact of Medusa's myth on a diversity of fields of thought. The myth has stimulated the development of various ideas, and has also provided a firm site within which abstract ideas can take shape, and be discussed. The myth of Medusa, rather than any other Greek myth, was presented as a case study in this chapter as, in my opinion, this myth exemplifies effectively how Greek myths can develop and change meanings and uses through time. In other words, the myth of Medusa illustrates the dynamism of Greek mythology and contributes to the main argument of this thesis by demonstrating that Greek mythology is a living organism, whose relation to Greek museums and Greek people is worthy of reconsideration and enhancement.

## 4. CONTEMPORARY GREEK ARTISTS AND GREEK MYTHOLOGY

### 1. Introduction

This chapter extends the analysis of Greek mythology into the field of contemporary Greek Culture. What are Greek mythology's dynamics specifically in contemporary Greek art? , is the research question, which this chapter endeavours to answer. More specifically, this chapter discusses the mythological themes that emerged from my interviews with a representative sample of contemporary Greek artists. The presentation of the meanings that contemporary Greek artists make of Greek mythology is structured in five main parts, some of which are further divided in subthemes.

This discussion of the interviewees' ideas concerning Greek mythology does not have a critical character, for reasons that were discussed in chapter one. I would like to repeat here that my research was not conducted for sociological, but for museological, purposes, and that Greece's contemporary cultural producers are the selected mediators in my investigation of mythology's contemporary character and not the primary research subject itself. In the same spirit, this chapter does not contain my own judgments and opinions on Greek mythology. This, then, is an intentionally descriptive chapter, which aims solely to present the way in which the producers of Culture in contemporary Greece interact with Greek mythology. Moreover, it does so by taking the opinions they contribute as given, without examining the factors that may lie behind their opinions. Museums do not enter into this discussion, at least not explicitly. Instead, they are discussed in chapter five.

The interviewees' mythological ideas are discussed in conjunction with, or even completely through, their artworks that have a mythological topic, whenever such works exist. Given that not all of the interviewees have been professionally occupied with mythology, the meanings that they make of mythology are, in many cases, deduced solely by what the artists state in the interviews. Prior to the presentation and discussion of the interviewed Cultural producers' mythological ideas, this chapter begins by providing a detailed biographical outline of those artists who participated in this research. This refers to the artists' careers, but also attempts to shed some light on the artists' personalities, as both of these are considered to be equally significant when dealing with what the artists have to say about Greek mythology. The order in which my interviewees are presented follows the order in which they were met and interviewed. The transcriptions of their interviews can be found in Appendices 1-16.

## 2. The interviewees

### Socratis Malamas

Socratis Malamas was born on 29 September 1957, in Sykia, Halkidhiki (Figure 22). He has so far released 11 albums and has participated in numerous works led by other musicians. He has written music for the theatre and for the cinema. Nowadays, he resides in a small village in the area of Trikala, Thessaly, with his wife and children.

Malamas has been characterized both by the Greek and the international press as a major personage of contemporary Greek music and more specifically as the most important representative of Greek underground culture.<sup>1</sup>

A German press article has baptized him 'the philosopher with the guitar', and describes him

as 'an anti-star, who makes his own music without compromising and without trading his personal freedom for commercial success'. 'None would give him a second look on the street', a German magazine claims, 'but in his concerts thousands sing along'<sup>2</sup> (Figure 23).

Socratis Malamas', it is stated in the Greek magazine 'E' magazine, 'is one of those artists that neither make video clips, nor are infatuated with listening to their songs being played continuously on the radio. He lives in a village outside Trikala and he measures his success by the response of the crowd in the crammed to suffocation halls, where he performs. This is a fanatic crowd, which follows him around Greece and sings along with him like a big, warm company, even when he makes music, which is considered by many to be 'against the odds', and which is based only on his voice and his guitar.'<sup>3</sup>



Figure 22. Socratis Malamas.

<sup>1</sup> [http://oasigr.5.forumer.com/a/\\_post534.html](http://oasigr.5.forumer.com/a/_post534.html), [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.malamas.tk/>, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].



Figure 23. Posters for Malamas' concerts.

Socratis Malamas combines the qualities of composer, lyricist, singer, orchestrator and musician and his songs are characterized by the element of 'internal monologue'<sup>4</sup> and by their autobiographical character.

Socratis Malamas was the first contemporary artists to participate in this research. Admittedly, there could have not been a better beginning, as Malamas is ebullient in his speech and prolific in his ideas. In my first interview, I encountered an inclusive, confident, interlocutor with strong opinions, and this provided me with a broad basis for thought, analysis, and criticism, which eventually helped me understand the unlimited potential of the subject matter that Greek mythology is. Socratis Malamas was effective in demonstrating how Greek myths and mythological figures reinvent themselves and manage to retain diachronically their relevance to the individual. His interview contributed to the pinpointing of Greek mythology's qualities that could be discussed in the museum and reach the Greek people. In addition, Malamas commented on the status of Greek mythology in contemporary Greek society, referring to its uses and abuses as a manifestation of ancient Greek heritage. Finally, he briefly discussed the place of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums, shedding light to the fifth research question, arguing that the relation of Greek archaeological museums to Greek mythology needs to be revised.

<sup>4</sup> 'Internal monologue' refers to thoughts that are consciously constructed and which usually aim at solving a problem or making a decision. It may also involve active recollection and reflectiveness.

## Yiannis Aggelakas

Yiannis Aggelakas was born in 1959 in Neapoli, Thessaloniki (Figure 24). He is a lyricist, singer and poet and he became known to the Greek public as the frontman - and as many claim, 'the soul' - of the post-punk band 'Trypes', which was formed in 1983 and split up in 2000 (Figures 25 and 26). Trypes are now considered to be a legend of the Greek rock'n'roll scene. Yiannis Aggelakas is consistently characterized as a living 'myth' of contemporary Greek music and of contemporary Greek culture in general<sup>5</sup>, a characterization that he himself obstinately declines. He also declines the title of 'artist', claiming instead that all he likes to do is to create worlds through music.<sup>6</sup> What is beyond dispute, though, is that Yiannis Aggelakas rightfully possesses the title of the great innovator of contemporary Greek popular music. MIC, a Greek on-line music magazine, describes Trypes and Aggelakas as 'that which popped up out of nowhere, an innovation that gave a voice and melody to an uncharted part of young Greek culture. And it did so', MIC continues, 'in an ingenious and at the same time unpretentious way, with directness but also with sensitivity towards the linguistic and musical metaphors.'<sup>7</sup> It has been also written that, in Aggelakas' lyrics, 'images, ideas, metaphors and folk myths of the urban youth of our era, are all uttered in black and white.



Figure 24. Yiannis Aggelakas.

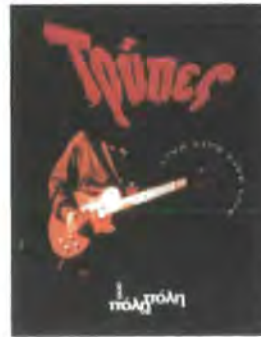


Figure 25. Posters for Trypes concerts

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.festivalbyrona.gr/show.php?cat=23>, [accessed 01<sup>st</sup> November 2007].

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.e-tipos.com/newsitem?id=3563>, [accessed 01<sup>st</sup> November 2007].

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mic.gr/cds.asp?id=11685>, [accessed 01<sup>st</sup> November 2007].

Aggelakas' musical quests and his intolerance towards the ills of contemporary Greek reality<sup>8</sup> led to two solo record-selling albums, both of which were released in 2005 and both of which have been ranked among the most prominent works of contemporary Greek music (Figures 27 and 28).



Figure 26. Poster from a concert of Trypes. The concert date was the 14<sup>th</sup> of February and the comment on the poster reads ‘a concert against the acolytes of St Valentine’.



Figure 27. Poster for Aggelakas' concert for the promotion of his first solo album.

Aggelakas' live performances are also legendary (Figure 29). They ‘resemble more a “feast”, rather than a concert with the “narrow” sense of the term’.<sup>9</sup> ‘Yiannis Aggelakas’, another source states, ‘must have been touched by the god Dionysus. These last four years that he is out of “Trypes”, he marches with “The Visitors” onto concerts that remind one of bacchanal feasts. And the followers that come to ecstasy with his dark melodies and his bloody lyrics are in their thousands...’.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.alltogethernow.gr/apodokepano.htm>, [accessed 01<sup>st</sup> November 2007].

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.festivalbyrona.gr/show.php?cat=23>, [accessed 01<sup>st</sup> November 2007].

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.e-tipos.com/newsitem?id=3563>, [accessed 01<sup>st</sup> November 2007].



Figure 28. Poster for Yiannis Aggelakas' and 'The visitors' concert for the promotion of his second solo album.



Figure 29. Aggelakas and 'The Visitors' on stage.

I was introduced to Yiannis Aggelakas by Socratis Malamas. Aggelakas immediately responded to my invitation, despite some family problems he was expressing at the time. On the night of our appointment, and right after we introduced ourselves, Aggelakas told me that we would listen to me for five minutes and if he felt that he was not interested in the topic, he would leave. 'Do not get me wrong', he said, 'I would do the same thing even if you were my sister'. Aggelakas did eventually stay and one of the most fruitful interviews of this research was realized. Numerous interesting reflections on mythology's relation to contemporary life emerged from Aggelakas' interview, the most significant of them being his analysis of pre-Hellenic mythology's value and his interpretation of the Kourites myth. Apart from analyzing Greek mythology's notional dynamics and its intellectual potency for the contemporary individual, Aggelakas also intensively criticized the way in which Greek people are today familiarized with Greek mythology and particularly Greek mythology's transmission through official education in Greece. Aggelakas also criticized the presence of Greek mythology in archaeological museums, claiming that it does not allow visitors to develop an imaginative and substantial relationship with Greek myths and be benefited by their dynamics.

## Pavlos Pavlidis

Pavlos Pavlidis is a musician, a lyricist, a composer and a singer (Figure 30). He was born on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1964 in Veroia (a town near Thessaloniki), and now lives in Thessaloniki. He spent part of his childhood in Germany, where his family had migrated. He was a student at the Law School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, yet he gave up his studies for the sake of music. He became known to the Greek public as a member of the rock-punk band 'Mora sti fotia' («Μωρά στη φωτιά»), which means 'Babies into the fire', and later as the frontman and lyricist



Figure 30. Pavlos Pavlidis

of the electro rock band 'Xylina Spathia' («Ξύλινα Σπαθιά»), which translates as 'Wooden Swords'. Both of those bands are now considered to be, together with Aggelakas' Trypes, emblematic names of the Greek rock scene. Pavlidis himself is regarded as 'a prime mover of Greek-speaking rock and a protagonist of the rock scene in Greece'<sup>11</sup>, a 'complete musician who has written some of the best Greek rock songs'<sup>12</sup> and 'the main reformer, together with Aggelakas, of the so-called Greek-speaking rock.'<sup>13</sup>

After the breakup of 'Xylina Spathia', Pavlidis released two solo albums, both of which have been acclaimed by critics as well as by the public (Figures 31 and 32). In these albums, Pavlidis distances himself from his rock, punk and electro musical past. Instead, he creates songs that 'give you the feeling that they were written in some corner of paradise, songs not melancholic, but peaceful' and 'illusive melodies, stories that transport you to the end of the earth and at the same time in the middle of your room'<sup>14</sup>; 'he transports you to strictly personal worlds, dreamy and melodic, full of images, colours and unique creatures of his imagination'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.fm-ekfrasi.gr/default.asp?pg=critic&c=55>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>12</sup> <http://agenda.pathfinder.gr/event/music/569612.html>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.rocking.gr/review357.php>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.atraktos.net/article.asp?cat=5&article=7637>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>15</sup> <http://lavantis.com/article595.html>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

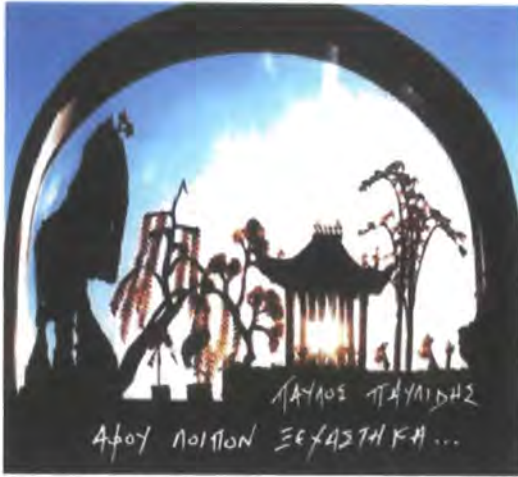


Figure 31. Cover of the album 'Afou loipon xehastika', 2003.



Figure 32. Cover of the album 'Alli mia mera', 2005.

I approached Pavlidis during one of his concerts in a small, cozy, bar in Thessaloniki and asked him to become one of my interviewees. He accepted enthusiastically, despite being hesitant as to his efficiency as a commentator on Greek mythology. Eventually, Pavlidis produced probably the most concise interviews out of all of them. Pavlidis' main contribution to my research was the introduction of the concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology', through which he associated Greek mythology to the contemporary Greek individual. In this way, Pavlidis shed light on one more factor that makes Greek mythology a topic, whose status in Greek museums and its relation to Greek people is in need of a more careful and sensitive approach, thus amplifying the main argument of my thesis. In addition, Pavlidis provided many examples of the vibrant and thoughtful way in which contemporary art perceives Greek mythology, through the discussion of mythology's position in his music.

#### **Dimitris Zervoudakis**

Dimitris Zervoudakis was born (1959) and raised in Epanomi in Thessaloniki, and today he lives with his family in Mesimeri, a village outside Thessaloniki (Figures 33 and 34). In 1985, while a student in the department of Financial Studies of the Law School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Zervoudakis founded, with some fellow students,

the group 'Neoi Epivates' («Νέοι Επιβάτες»), named after one of Thessaloniki's suburbs. The success of the group soon led to the release of an independent album with the title 'Shetika Paranoi' («Σχετικά Παράνομοι»), which translates as 'Rather Illegal'. Three years later, in 1989, Dimitris Zervoudakis had his first solo album 'Acrobat' released. The album was warmly received both by the public and by critics and, with it, the new artist established himself in the field of the so-called 'qualitative modern sound'. Seven more solo albums followed, as well as numerous participations in the works of some of the most significant Greek composers and singers.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 33. Dimitris Zervoudakis.

'The course of Zervoudakis' career has been remarkable and he remains a 'master (and connoisseur) of Greek music. Let alone the fact that he has written some of the best popular songs in the history of Greek discography', the web community, 'MY.aegean.gr Community' reports.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 34. Dimitris Zervoudakis, backstage.

In general, Dimitris Zervoudakis is portrayed by the Greek press as an 'eminent artist, who resists time; a serious and robust presence'<sup>18</sup>; 'one of the most beloved and substantial song-makers of his generation'<sup>19</sup>; and even 'one of the three or four most important song writers of the last twenty years'<sup>20</sup>. His music is in the broader spirit of contemporary 'artistic' songs, and it contains rock elements, but also elements from the Greek folk and Byzantine musical traditions.<sup>21</sup> In terms of his

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.libramusic.gr/zervoudakis\\_en.html](http://www.libramusic.gr/zervoudakis_en.html), [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>17</sup> <http://my.aegean.gr/web/article-print-2604.html>, [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>18</sup> <http://air-waves.blogspot.com/2007/11/2005.html>, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.koyinta.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=402&Itemid=33](http://www.koyinta.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=402&Itemid=33), [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>20</sup> <http://my.aegean.gr/web/article-print-2604.html>, [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.mic.gr/Artist.asp?ID=10016>, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

lyrics, Zervoudakis is a self-confessed experiential artist. 'I would say that I belong to the field of experiential song. I often like to say that I consider myself to be something like a traditional musician', Zervoudakis himself says.<sup>22</sup>

My interview with Zervoudakis lasted more than six hours and although its transcription proved exhausting, it gave me the opportunity to listen to the thoughts of a socially sensitive and very introspective artist. Dimitris Zervoudakis contributed his own 'ethereal', sentimental, 'intuitive', - rather than rationally grounded, arguments. His main concern was, similarly to Pavlidis, with contemporary Greek mythology. Zervoudakis primarily focused on the presence of myth in the everyday life of the contemporary individual, thus illuminating one more aspect of the concept of Greek mythology, of its relevance to the contemporary individual. Zervoudakis, despite not having used myths in his art, managed to shed considerable light on the status of Greek mythology in contemporary art, by commenting on and evaluating the work of other artists, who have included Greek myths among their expressional means. Zervoudakis also commented in a quite critical manner on the way in which contemporary Greeks are familiarized with Greek mythology, thus supporting the main argument of my thesis.

#### **Thanassis Papakonstantinou**

Thanassis Papakonstantinou was born on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1959 in Tyrnavos, Larissa (Figure 35). He graduated from the Mechanical Engineering Department of the Polytechnion of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and until 2003 his main professional occupation was as an engineer. He is married and a father to two twin sons. He lives with his family in Ayia, a village in the mountains between the cities of Larissa and Volos. He started his career in music by writing lyrics. Papakonstantinou's first steps in the field of music were realized, through the contest 'Music Contest of Corfu', organized by Manos Chadjidakis in 1982.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 35. Thanassis Papakonstantinou.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.enet.gr/online/online\\_text/c=113,dt=02.11.2007,id=68754632](http://www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=113,dt=02.11.2007,id=68754632), [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2007].

Today, twenty four years after his first step in his musical career, Papakonstantinou is regarded as one of the most - if not the most - accomplished and mature musicians of contemporary Greek music. The Greek media speak of 'musical works that leave very little space for any further innovation'<sup>24</sup>, of 'the most important creator in the field of Greek song and the only one who could revitalize this song'<sup>25</sup>. They even declare Papakonstantinou to be the only enlightened artist who is capable of resolving the eternal cultural dilemma of Greece, namely its swing between the West and the Orient, through his talent to combine creatively musical idioms that are seemingly unlinked to each other.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, his music is an amalgam of traditional Greek sounds, rebetiko music, Greek folk music, jazz, rock and sounds of the Orient. Clarinets, bagpipes, little baglamas, together with electric guitars and forgotten instruments from Africa, Persia and Turkey, or even his grandmother's and his sons' singing, construct Papakonstantinou's idiomatic sound.

Notoriously reserved, he is completely absent from television shows, he rarely gives interviews, and he does not like having his photograph taken. He is described as a highly cultivated, humourous, melancholy - but also optimistic - and dreamy individual<sup>27</sup>.

His audience claims that he has got the talent to 'trace buried under time paths, travelling until the remotest areas of dreams, and coming back with songs for us'<sup>28</sup> (Figures 36 and 37). Papakonstantinou's lyrics are characterized as 'meaningful, literary, occasionally cryptographic,<sup>29</sup> full of images of life as if is in its most beautiful and enchanting version'.<sup>30</sup> In his lyrics, his fans maintain to find 'magic - much magic - , fairytale, poetry, travel and dream - much dream'<sup>31</sup>. As well as writing his own lyrics, Papakonstantinou also often sets Greek and foreign poetry into music in his songs.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.koiladatwntempwn.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=40](http://www.koiladatwntempwn.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=40), [accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.mic.gr/cds.asp?id=20859>, [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.mic.gr/cds.asp?id=29233>, [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.mic.gr/cds.asp?id=20859>, [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.koiladatwntempwn.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=189&Itemid=220](http://www.koiladatwntempwn.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=189&Itemid=220), [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.koiladatwntempwn.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=191&Itemid=222](http://www.koiladatwntempwn.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=191&Itemid=222), [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.mic.gr/cds.asp?id=20859>, [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.fig.gr/content/view/148/>, [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].



Figures 36 - 37. Papakonstantinou on stage.

The lyrics he writes himself are often, as he confesses, a result of “automatic writing”<sup>32</sup>. His goal, as an artist, is to ‘detect new sentiments, to approach the paradox, to focus the attention on things that most people pass over, unsuspecting the tension that these things hide’.<sup>33</sup>

‘There are many concerts’, Papakonstantinou says, ‘where you simply go, pay, listen and leave without anything magical having occurred. I want and I try to approach the unthinkable even for a tiny, passing, moment in my concerts. I felt this yesterday’, he says, referring to a concert at the time of the interview, ‘when we were singing “Pehlivanis” («Πεχλιβάνης»)<sup>34</sup> and a little breeze blew. It was an enchanted moment.’<sup>35</sup>

I had to travel for many hours in pouring rain to meet Thanassis Papakonstantinou in his place in Ayia. I experienced myself his legendary low-profile and reserved character, but I also experienced Papakonstantinou’s clear-cut certainty about mythology’s blending in contemporary people’s life, to the point that the isolation of mythology as a phenomenon outside life and its discussion as a separate topic

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.galera.gr/magazine/modules/articles/article.php?id=298>, [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>33</sup> Παπακωνσταντίνου, Θ. (Papakonstantinou, Th.), Booklet of the CD *Η βροχή από κάτω* (*The rain from underneath*), Η πύλη της άμμου (I pyli tis ammu), 2007.

<sup>34</sup> «Πεχλιβάνης » (transliterated Pehlivanis): it is a hellinized Turkish word that literally means ‘wrestler’. In Greek it is used to characterize a big, strong man. in Papakonstantinou’s song, ‘pehlivanis’ is a wind that blows from the snowy mountains’ tops into the people’s houses and stirs people’s lethargic lives and minds up.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.galera.gr/magazine/modules/articles/article.php?id=298>, [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

appeared as an oxymoron. From this perspective, Papakonstantinou's interview served the reinforcement of Greek mythology's perception as *living* heritage and as a manifestation of ancient heritage that has much to reveal to contemporary Greek people, if approached and assessed in an insightful way.

### Dionysis Savvopoulos

Dionysis Savvopoulos was born in Thessaloniki, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1944 (Figure 38). He is a musician, composer, lyricist and singer. In 1963 he moved to Athens, terminating his law studies in favour of a career in music. He met great success in his early days as a musician and soon became very popular, both in Greece and abroad. Savvopoulos has been noted for being highly and openly politicized, on both a personal and an artistic level. Indeed, in 1967, he was imprisoned for his political convictions by the Greek military junta.<sup>36</sup> He has released



Figure 38. Dionysis Savvopoulos.

twenty two solo albums (Figures 39 and 40), he has participated in countless works of other artists. He also hosted his own television show called 'Long live the Greek song' between 1986 and 1987, on ERT (one of the two state channels). He has written music for the theatre as well as for performances in Epidaurus, and has also produced works for the cinema. He was awarded the state music prize, for the soundtrack of Pantelis Voulgaris' movie 'Happy Day'. However, he refused to receive this, as a protest against the nomination procedure. He has published four books with lyrics, scores, and scripts. He is married and has two sons.

Savvopoulos, I would claim, is truly one of the most controversial personages of contemporary Greek culture. He does not cease to cause a stir either with the swings of his political ideology, or with his conservative Neo-orthodox discourse, or with his positive attitude towards talent shows, so widely condemned as products of subculture. 'We believed you, we hated you, we forgave you, we loved you like we love our higher self. I do not know whether we did correctly or not, because you are still professing!',<sup>37</sup> a fan of Savvopoulos writes. Theodorakis, an iconic persona of

<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysis\\_Savvopoulos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysis_Savvopoulos), [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007].

<sup>37</sup> <http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.apn.gr/musiczone/images/sav2a.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.apn.gr/musiczone/savvopoulos.htm&h=163&w=221&sz=11&hl=en&start=185&tbnid=ZOA9PKjaiHZ4cM:&tbnh=79&tbnw=107&prev>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007].

contemporary Greek culture, has described Savvopoulos as ‘the favourite of the intellectuals and of the chosen ones’<sup>38</sup>. In any case, as the journalist writes, ‘whether one has disagreed or agreed with Savvopoulos’ ideas, his song-making and his personality - without them hiding their cracks, and despite their occasional instability - have remained a standard value.’<sup>39</sup>



Figure 39. Cover of Savvopoulos’ first emblematic – album.



Figure 40. Cover of Savvopoulos’ latest album.

My experience of Savvopoulos lived up to his contradictory reputation. His behavior developed - throughout the many hours that the interview lasted - from an extremely cautious stance towards the objectives of our conversation to an open, warm and even friendly attitude. Savvopoulos has not used myths in his art and thus our conversation was revealing mostly as far as the exploration of the meaning of the word ‘myth’ is concerned. More specifically, Savvopoulos contributed an interesting analysis of the myth-making process that, he claimed, is still in progress. In other words, he claimed that contemporary Greeks still create myths and furthermore reflected on the nature and the qualities of the myths that emerge from the contemporary Greek social milieu. In this way, Savvopoulos added to the broadening my understanding of the concept of Greek mythology. Overall, the interview of Savvopoulos was substantial for the investigation of my thesis’ main argument, as it further emphasized Greek mythology’s dynamism and its relevance to contemporary people.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.klik.gr/205/nionios/default4.asp>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.enet.gr/online/online\\_text/c=113,dt=15.12.2006](http://www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=113,dt=15.12.2006), [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

## Takis Simotas

Takis Simotas is a novelist, an essayist and a lyricist. He was born in Thessaloniki in 1945. He studied Law at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and he was a practicing lawyer until fairly recently. He lives in Thessaloniki with his family. As a lyricist, Takis Simotas has created some of the best loved and enduring songs of contemporary Greek popular song. Being a very unassuming individual, Simotas has never been in the limelight and his name is largely unknown to the general public. Yet, established artists of contemporary Greek popular song rank Simotas among the few individuals who work with integrity and talent in the Greek music industry.<sup>40</sup> As an author, Simotas has also produced novels and critical essays, such as 'The crisis of epical thought'<sup>41</sup> (Figure 41)

Simotas approached the topic of Greek mythology indirectly, focussing more on the stories of the Bible, rather than on Greek myths themselves. Nevertheless, his remarks have been valuable to me in constructing a broader conceptual framework within to perceive the topic of Greek mythology. In addition to this, Simotas speculated on the way in which Greek mythology survives in contemporary Greek society and more specifically on its contribution to the construction and determination of the national identity of modern Greeks. In this context, Simotas also commented on the current status of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums, maintain that Greek mythology's museological representation is outdated and in need of reconsideration.



Figure 41. Cover of Simotas' novel 'Ο Λακκος' ('The pit').

## Tilemachos Alaveras

Tilemachos Alaveras was born on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1926 in Philippole, East Romylia, and passed away on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007 in Thessaloniki (Figure 42). Alaveras' family moved to Thessaloniki in 1927, where he spent his entire life. He was married to the poet Roula Alavera, and his son is the visual artist Christos Alaveras. Alaveras himself was a

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.hri.org/E/1999/99-03-26.dir/keimena/art/art1.htm>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007].

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.spaniavivlia.gr/bookdetails.aspx?bookid=92115>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

distinguished essayist and author, the director of *'Nea Poreia'* («Νέα Πορεία»), which translates as 'New Route', the most long-lived literature magazine of Thessaloniki, and the president of the 'Association of Northern Greece Authors'. His first published work appeared in 1947, and up until his death he published sixteen short stories, as well as compilations, novels, essays and one theatre play. Alaveras' works are translated into many languages. In 1976, he received the State Short Story Prize, and in 1985 he won the 'Kostas Ouranis' literary prize for his work 'Corners and aspects' («Γωνιές και Όψεις»). In 2007 he was awarded the Grand Literature Award, for his overall contribution to Greek literature. 'With this state award', Alaveras commented, 'I feel as though I am being symbolically rewarded by the entire country, by my homeland.'<sup>42</sup> Sadly, he passed away before receiving his prize.



Figure 42. Tilemachos Alaveras.

Tilemachos Alaveras, in the numerous obituaries that the press has paid to him, is described as 'the nobleman of literature'<sup>43</sup>, as 'a gentle, low profile, unassuming man of letters'. As an author, he is considered to be one of the most important figures of Thessaloniki's intellectual life<sup>44</sup>, who decisively determined the city's literary façade<sup>45</sup>. His works are ranked among the most significant of Greece's post-war literature.<sup>46</sup>

Literary criticism presents Alaveras' writing as being distinctively characterized by an 'objectified subjectivity', a combination of 'the seemingly cold fact with the subjectivity'<sup>47</sup>. His works are believed to be imbued with a polemic against sentiments and, on a social level, by a criticism and condemnation of neo-capitalism and

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.makthes.gr/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4095>, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.magikokouti.gr/alaveras\\_arxeio.htm](http://www.magikokouti.gr/alaveras_arxeio.htm), [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007].

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.greece2001.gr/writers/TilemachosAlaveras.html>, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.makthes.gr/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4095>, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

its methods and of the ethos of the now bankrupt pre-war bourgeoisie.<sup>48</sup> The main topics of Alaveras' works are old age and the gradual passage of the individual towards death, which is presented through an almost macabre outline of a person's physical decay. Love, not in a sentimental way, but as a 'technically studied mechanism', is also present as a subject matter in his works<sup>49</sup>, as is the concept of time.<sup>50</sup> 'There is something of the psychological climate of Hitchcock and of "film noirs" in Alaveras', a literary critic writes, 'as well as something of the protest and the questioning of "Nouvelle vague"'<sup>51</sup> Alaveras' literary influences are identified, by critics, in Proust, Kafka, Laurens, and Poe, but also Dostoyevsky, Chantal and Faulkner. In overall, Alaveras was a *plus triste et plus sage* author, who elaborated his thoughts with the techniques of bitter humor, sarcasm and critical analysis.

Alaveras, in his interview, was primarily concerned with Greek mythology as a museological subject matter. He supported my main argument, claiming that there is plenty of room for improvement and change in the way in which Greek mythology is presented in Greek museums. Interestingly, Alaveras was also preoccupied with the last of my research questions, which deals with the potential difficulties that are entailed in the representation of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums through contemporary art. His mainly focused on the difficulties that emerge from mythology's intangible nature as well as on the interpretative mechanisms that the museum would have to employ in order to incorporate intangible art genres (such as music) in its discourse. Alaveras also discussed mythology's ever-active nature and referred especially to the mechanism that lies behind ancient myths' rejuvenation by contemporary art. His comments were particularly enlightening as far as the way in which contemporary people (museum visitors included) think through ancient myths. In this way, Alaveras helped me investigate the way in which Greek museums could reinvent Greek mythology for their visitors.

### **Kostas Lachas**

Kostas Lachas was born in May 1936 in Kato Theodoraki, Kilkis (Figure 43). He is a visual artist, author, actor, lyricist and poet. Lachas spent his adolescence in Kilkis, and in 1955 he came to Thessaloniki for his studies at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in the Department of Financial and Social Sciences. In the same period Lachas' involvement with the theatre took off. Over the following years, Lachas went to Athens to continue

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.greece2001.gr/writers/TilemachosAlaveras.html>, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.magikokouti.gr/alaveras\\_arxeio.htm](http://www.magikokouti.gr/alaveras_arxeio.htm), [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.greece2001.gr/writers/TilemachosAlaveras.html>, [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007].

his theatrical studies in the historic 'Art Theatre' («Θέατρο Τέχνης»). Upon the completion of his theatrical studies, he returned permanently to Thessaloniki, where he was occasionally involved with the theatre. Lachas has worked for various artistic organizations and institutions, such as the 'Macedonian Artistic Company', for the State Theatre of Northern Greece (ΚΟΒΕ), for the Cinema Festival, as well as for the bookshop 'Themelio'. In 1972, Lachas founded 'Cochlias' («Κοχλιάς»), the first professionally organized art gallery in Thessaloniki, which he directed until 1986. He has also worked also worked as an arts editor for newspapers in Thessaloniki and Athens, he has been twice elected municipal counsellor of Thessaloniki, he has directed the Vellideio Cultural Centre, and, since 1999, he has held the position of arts counsellor of the State Museum of Contemporary Art. In 1995, he was unanimously honoured with the State Short-Story Prize, while his lyrics have been set to music and performed by major singers of contemporary Greek artistic popular song.



Figure 43. Kostas Lachas.

Lachas has been involved in painting and writing since 1960. As a painter, Lachas is a member of the Chamber of Visual Arts and, as an author, is a member of the Association of Authors of Thessaloniki and of the Association of Authors of Athens. Since 1962, he has presented his works in twenty four solo exhibitions, both in Greece and abroad and has also participated in more than thirty collective exhibitions (Figure 44).<sup>52</sup> Lachas has also published numerous novels and essays, including an autobiography.<sup>53</sup>

The critic of art, Periklis Sfyridis, comments that Lachas cultivates in his novels the kind of prose, known as 'literature of associative flow', 'flow of consciousness', or 'internal monologue'.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Lachas' authorship is personal, introverted and

<sup>52</sup> [http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%9A%CF%8E%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%82\\_%CE%9B%CE%B1%CF%87%CE%AC%CF%82](http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%9A%CF%8E%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%82_%CE%9B%CE%B1%CF%87%CE%AC%CF%82), [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2007].

<sup>53</sup> Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Εν Θεσσαλονίκη 13 σύγχρονοι πεζογράφοι (13 contemporary prose writers of Thessaloniki)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Ιανός (Ianos), 2001, p. 245.

<sup>54</sup> The trend of 'internal monologue', Sfyridis explains, first appeared in Thessaloniki in the 30s and was intensively cultivated there, stirring up the stagnant waters of traditional 'bourgeois' novel.<sup>54</sup> The works that belong to the literary tradition of 'internal monologue', such as Lachas' works, do not narrate a

'cryptic'.<sup>55</sup> His writing style is dense, imbued with an intense musical rhythm, and the use of associative word plays.<sup>56</sup> Lachas is thought to have not only continued the tradition of 'internal monologue', but also to have developed it, thus influencing the literature of not only Thessaloniki but also Greece as a whole.<sup>57</sup>

Lachas' visual art works are characterized by the schematization of figures and the filling of large surfaces with uniform earthen colour tones<sup>58</sup> (Figures 45 and 46). The history of art professor, Christou,



Figure 44. Kostas Lachas in front of his works in an art gallery.

is distinguished by its robust and rich voice, for the sensitivity of colour, for the completeness of the forms, as well as for its external clarity and for its internal balance. It is also characterized by a tendency towards the monumental that not only makes it suitable for large surfaces, but also holds many promises...'<sup>59</sup>

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specific story, nor have plot, nor fully constructed characters. Instead, they interweave associations of ideas, which are elaborated and juxtaposed randomly.<sup>54</sup> These associations describe ideas, experiences, knowledge and observations.<sup>54</sup> The use of expressive means is imbued with freedom: the author can jump from the past to the present and even to the future and he/she can incorporate into the text words of his/her friends who are unknown to the reader. All this, Sfyridis emphasizes, aims to project the author's idiosyncrasy and his/her internal adventure.

<sup>55</sup> Σφυρίδης, Π. (Sfyridis, P.), *Εν Θεσσαλονίκη 13 σύγχρονοι πεζογράφοι (13 contemporary prose writers of Thessaloniki)*, p. 245.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>58</sup> Σφυρίδης, Π. *Εν Θεσσαλονίκη καλλιτέχνες και εκθέσεις. Τεχνοκριτικά κείμενα 1980-2000 (Artists and art exhibitions in Thessaloniki. Art critique scripts 1980-2000)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Ιανός (Ianos), 2002, p. 45.

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.xan.gr/index.php?tmp=2&pg=2&id=202433&>, [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007].



Figure 45. Untitled. Oil on canvas.



Figure 46. Untitled. Oil on canvas.

Overall, Lachas is presented by his friends as an active and multifaceted intellectual. 'Pick up any stone and you will find Lachas under it', Skabardonis says chatting about the fun-loving, hyper-active, artist, who has adopted the round hat as his trademark.<sup>60</sup> Yet, none of Lachas countless occupations is at the expense of the other, Skabardonis continues, and characterizes Lachas as 'the ideal citizen, the citizen who chooses active participation rather than passive withdrawal.'<sup>61</sup>

Lachas' interview was one of the most difficult to interpret. His speech is quite abstract and the meanings are latent, rather than explicitly expressed. For Lachas, mythology is something much broader than merely the myths of ancient Greece and therefore the latter were not discussed at all in his interview. For Lachas, a 'myth' is a 'complete' meaning; this can either refer to a concept, or institution (such as religion), or to the completion of human substance, as this is fulfilled by extraordinary individuals, who, according to Lachas, are the contemporary myths. Lachas, with his peculiar outlook, helped me to broaden up my comprehension of mythology and develop a transcendental approach to 'myth' that expands beyond definitions and interpretative theories.

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<sup>60</sup> [http://mesokosmos.blogspot.com/2006/12/blog-post\\_27.html](http://mesokosmos.blogspot.com/2006/12/blog-post_27.html), [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007].

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007].

## Fani Melfou-Grammatikou

Fani Melfou-Grammatikou was born in Thessaloniki in 1940 (Figure 47). She is married and has five children. She studied microbiology in Thessaloniki and London, and has been a practicing microbiologist until her retirement in 2000. Following this, she pursued her lifetime's dream to become a novelist. She has so far published three novels, and has featured in television shows on literature and letters. Grammatikou-Melfou's novels combine autobiographical elements and family memoirs with fiction. Her first novel, which is based on an old diary of her grandmother, is essentially the annals of a period of turmoil in Greek history, the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through the eyes of her family. Her subsequent works have also taken the form of a lively portrayal of past eras, within which her the personal memories are also blended. In them, key turning points in Greece's political and financial history are presented in a convincing, concise and dispassionate manner, through the adventures of the novels' heroes. Her first novel, 'Thessaloniki-Crete: Meeting at Erigonas' won positive praise from major personalities of Greek literature (Figure 48). In general, Melfou's works are redolent with a sense of nostalgia for past life and its ethics. They are imbued with an aura of romanticism, which is, however, combined with a realistic perspective on the circumstances of the described, era and often speak of the high values and ideals that move peoples' lives. Romantic love and family relationships constitute a recurrent theme in her novels.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Melfou-Grammatikou perceived Greek mythology's dynamism from a more conservative angle and maintained that Greek mythology's ultimate value for the contemporary individual stems from the fact that Greek myths are an element of Greek heritage and a means of the Greek national identity's perpetuation and reinforcement. Close to that, the author also underlined the moralistic value of certain myths and their ability to negotiate important ethical issues in an



Figure 47. Fani Melfou-Grammatikou.



Figure 48. Cover of the novel 'Thessaloniki-Crete: Meeting at Erigonas'.

entertaining way. Melfou-Grammatikou's approach to Greek mythology was significant in that it was focused and straight forward, putting the relation of Greek mythology to Greek people on a simple basis. In other words, it helped me read the more complex and abstract analyses of my other interviewees, the core significance of Greek myths as tools for the negotiation of one's stance towards life, towards other people and towards his/herself. This, in turn, helped me clarify the core of Greek mythology's significance as a museological subject matter.

### **Prodromos Markoglou**

Prodromos Markoglou was born in Kavala in 1935 to parents who were immigrants from the regions of Cappadocia and Pontus (Figure 49). In October 1944, he lost his left arm to a German grenade. He studied finance in the Supreme Commercial School of Athens and, in 1971, moved permanently to Thessaloniki, where he has been professionally occupied as an employee in both the private and state sector. His first publication appeared in 1962, and he has so far published eight volumes of poems and three works of prose. His works have also been published in newspapers, journals and anthologies. Markoglou has been member of the editorial group of the literature magazines 'Argo' and 'Spartí Yli', which translates as 'Scattered Material', and his works of prose have been translated into German, English, French, Russian, Italian, Polish and Romanian. In 1988 he was awarded the State Short-Story Prize.<sup>62</sup>

Markoglou has, on many occasions, been characterized as a 'poet of social anguish' in whose poems one encounters 'the tragedy of a generation who finds itself facing a dead-end, incapable of fulfilling its human mission...(a generation) that has emerged out of the heavy depreciation that Man tasted in the period of World War II'.<sup>63</sup> His works, as Evaggelou comments, are 'records of our everyday alteration, dramatic and first-hand testimonies of the suppression, the psychological contortion and eventually of the denaturalization of the human substance amidst "cruel circumstances", but also documents – through their "knowledge" and "love" of



Figure 49. Prodromos Markoglou.

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.diapolitismos.gr/epilogi/about.php?id\\_atomo=11](http://www.diapolitismos.gr/epilogi/about.php?id_atomo=11), [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007].

<sup>63</sup> Λεοντάρης, Β. (Leontaris, V.), «Π. Χ., Μάρκογλου: «Έγκλειστοι» ('P. Ch., Markoglou: "Imprisoned")», *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης (Epitheorisi Technis)* 94 - 95, October - November 1962, pp. 55- 57, (p. 56).

a upright position amidst the catastrophe'. 'Markoglou's poems', Evaggelou concludes, 'have the warmth of the human yell, of the debilitation, through writing, of the poet's life itself.'<sup>64</sup>

Markoglou came across as a very down-to-earth analyst of Greek mythology and of the topics that relate to it. The angle from which he perceived Greek mythology is far from imaginative and symbolism-laden. On the contrary, he promoted a sober perception of mythology as an element of the ancient Greek civilization that is worth study and appraisal as such. Markoglou's most important contribution to my thesis' main argument was his discussion of the pitfalls that the viewing and understanding of ancient myths through a contemporary filter might entail. Thus, his remarks helped me investigate mainly the tenth research questions.

### Sotos Zachariadis

Sotos Zachariadis is a visual artist, poet and essayist (Figure 50). He was born on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1960 in Thessaloniki, where he lives permanently. He studied painting in Thessaloniki under the distinguished painter Kostas Loustas. Apart from painting, Zachariadis has also been involved in stage design. Zachariadis is a multifaceted and active cultural personality. He has organized a series of art symposiums entitled 'Art Village', he has worked as teacher of painting, photography and engraving in



Figure 50. Sotos Zachariadis.

numerous Cultural Centres in the wider region of Thessaloniki. Zachariadis is member of the 'Visual Artists Association of Northern Greece' (SKETBE), a cultural and non-profit union that was founded in 1983 and has as aim and objective the development and spread of visual arts in Northern Greece; the promotion of the artists that work in this

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<sup>64</sup> Ευαγγέλου, Α. (Evaggelou, A.), «Πρόδρομος Χ. Μάρκογλου. Ένας αυθεντικός ποιητής της 'κοινωνικής οδύνης'» ('Prodrimos H. Markoglou. An authentic poet of "social anguish"'), *Κατάθεση (Kathatesi)* 73, 1973, pp. 397-407, (p. 406).

field; the collaboration of these artists towards the solution of professional issues; the active participation of the visual artists in the cultural and social life; the artistic decentralization and the collaboration with respective associations in Greece and abroad. He is a permanent participant in the cultural programs of the Mental Institution of Stavroupoli, Thessaloniki and of the Eptapyrgio Prison, also in Thessaloniki, where he provides his services as an artist in residence.

Zachariadis' works have been presented in twelve solo and numerous collective exhibitions, both in Greece and abroad, as well as in live performances (Figures 51 and 52). His paintings are held in museums, private collections and cultural foundations. Zachariadis is an active and innovative cultural personality of the city of Thessaloniki, as well as an officially acknowledged artist. In 1985 Zachariadis won the first 'praise award' of the Ionian Centre in Athens for his painting and engraving. He has also received the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.) scholarship, as well as the Fulbright scholarship at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.<sup>65</sup>



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<sup>65</sup> [http://www.thessalonikicity.gr/politistika/politismos/politismos\\_old/politismos-01/geni\\_tzami\\_jan\\_jul\\_01.htm](http://www.thessalonikicity.gr/politistika/politismos/politismos_old/politismos-01/geni_tzami_jan_jul_01.htm), [accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> October 2007];  
[http://www.thessalonikicity.gr/Ekdiloseis/politismos/politismos\\_old/politismos-2004/pol\\_old\\_eth\\_aminis\\_04.htm](http://www.thessalonikicity.gr/Ekdiloseis/politismos/politismos_old/politismos-2004/pol_old_eth_aminis_04.htm), [accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].



**Figure 51. Sotos Zachariadis' works.**

Zachariadis' interview was realized in two parts, as he had to spend ten days at the camping of the Mental Institution of Stavroupoli in Chalkidiki, and conduct Art Therapy sessions with the Institution's patients. Zachariadis provided, in his interview, a quite 'artistic', and very abstractly articulated, discussion of Greek mythology. The most distinctive characteristic of his perception of Greek mythology is the construction of interplay between past and present, through the



**Figure 52. Zachariadis performing outside a central café of Thessaloniki.**

free imageries that Greek myths can provoke to the artist. Under these terms, Zachariadis' interview produced numerous and strong examples of how Greek mythology can be comprehended outside the narrow limits of the mythical narrative and rather become the general framework, in which the contemporary individual can reflect on things, and proceed to the construction of new narratives that explore the cosmos and life. So, his interview successfully addressed my fourth research question. At the same time and in relation to this, Zachariadis spoke of the cultural and ideological potency of Greek mythology and for its benefits for the contemporary individual, thus, reinforcing Greek mythology's significance as a museological subject matter.

## Stavros Panagiotakis

Stavros Panagiotakis is a visual artist and poet (Figure 53). He was born in 1963 in Chania, Crete, but he moved at a young age to Thessaloniki, where he still resides. He has worked as a teacher in continuing education and he also teaches painting in the Polytechnio of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He studied painting at the Higher School of Arts in Berlin, where he attended the workshops of lithography and zincography, as well as the sculpture workshop of Taigivi. Bergmann is among Panagiotakis' teachers. In 1991, Panagiotakis obtained the Masters Certificate *Meisterschuler* of the Higher School of Arts in Berlin. He participates in art teams such as the 'Élasma' team and is member of the 'Visual Artist Association of Northern Greece'.



Figure 53. Stavros Panagiotakis.

Panagiotakis has organized international art symposia in islands of the Greek borders, as well as workshops for students. He has presented papers at seminars on art education, and has participated in symposia on sculpture and painting, such as Sotos Zachariadis' 'Art Village' symposium, and in the 1<sup>st</sup> Inter-Balkan Symposium of Visual Arts in Thessaloniki. Panagiotakis' works have been presented in eight solo exhibitions in Greece and Germany, and in many collective exhibitions both in Greece and in numerous foreign countries (Figures 54, 55, 56). In 2001, he was awarded the first mixed technique prize in the 6<sup>th</sup> International Miniature Painting Biennale in Yugoslavia. Cultural foundations, both in Greece and in the European Union, museums and private collectors possess Panagiotakis' works.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of his expressive style, Panagiotakis is influenced by German expressionism. The contortion of the forms, the intense pure colour and the colour juxtapositions of Expressionism are dominant in Panagiotakis' works, where they remain free to exist independently. The themes of Panagiotakis' works are a combination of depiction and abstraction. Panagiotakis has also created three-dimensional works with mixed techniques, as well as artistic interventions in open space (Figure 57). 'Overall, Panagiotakis' work', Skaltsa comments, 'expresses the sensitive balance of the creative artistic act, which can tame contradictory and counterbalancing forces and

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.artprisma.gr/artist.asp?id=168&lang=gr>, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007]; <http://www.sketbe.com/panagiotakis1aGR.html>, [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

tendencies, without the elaboration that has previously become obvious. The almost always “minimum” result appears as though as it has come into being effortlessly, at the hands of a wizard-balancer and with the determinism of a natural phenomenon’.<sup>67</sup>



Figure 54. 'The whole world' («Ο κόσμος όλος»). Pigments, glues, pastel.

The day I met Panagiotakis for the interview, he was just back from China, where he participated in the Art Biennale of Beijing, with his performance 'Eden'. Thus, Panagiotakis, in his interview, dedicated much time to the discussion of this performance, which, as we shall observe later on in this thesis, had as its subject matter the Babylonian myth of Gilgamesh. Through this discussion, interesting and useful remarks on Greek mythology's internationality emerged. Panagiotakis, similarly to Zachariadis, is mainly concerned with the use of mythology as a conveyor of diachronic and ever-active messages. Moreover, Panagiotakis maintains, in his interview, that mythology can function as a repository of codified messages and, as such, he believes, it can constitute an effective means of communication between the artist and the public. Panagiotakis' works and observations provided the context for the generation of meanings of mythology and of its museological presentation and discussion. Furthermore, Panagiotakis contributed significantly to the discussion of Greek mythology's status in Greek museums and the way in which the latter deal with mythology's dynamics. In discussing this, Panagiotakis focused on the need for an elaboration of mythology in museums that relates mythology to its social milieu and

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<sup>67</sup> Σκαλτσά, Μ. (Skaltsa, M.) Ανακαλύπτοντας έναν λαό: Σύγχρονη τέχνη στα Βαλκάνια (*Discovering a nation: contemporary art in the Balkans*). Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Μακεδονικό Μουσείο Σύγχρονης Τέχνης (Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art), 1999, p. 12.

suggested that this could be succeeded through the creation of an environment of contradictions, where new with ancient readings of mythology are juxtaposed.



Figure 55. 'Composition with objects'.  
Mixed media.



Figure 56. 'Composition'. Mixed media.



Figure 57. 'Bottling of senses' (Εμφιαλώσεις αισθήσεων). Bottles, gels, liquids, bulbs.

## Ector Mavridis

Ector Mavridis is a visual artist. He was born in 1958 in Melbourne, Australia and moved to Greece in 1969. In 1979 he left Greece for Chicago, where he studied Linguistics and Ceramics at Northeastern Illinois University. He returned to Thessaloniki in 1988 to live permanently in the city. Mavridis has presented his works in a plethora of exhibitions and live performances in Greece, Germany, the U.S.A, Sweden, Budapest and Spain, and has participated in art symposia (for instance the 'Art Village' symposium, where Zachariadis and Panagiotakis were also present) and in art workshops (Figures 58 - 61).



Figure 58. Ector Mavridis. "In Awe of Solidity", 1994.

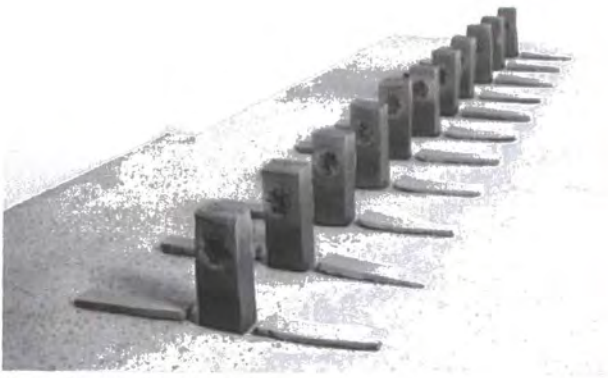


Figure 59. 'Untitled', 1994



Figure 60. 'Untitled', 1996.



Figure 61. 'Upside down, the way is the same', 2000. Ector Mavridis

Apart from being a prolific artist, Mavridis is an active citizen of Thessaloniki. He is the co-founder of the 'Amalgama' art Initiative and Co-op Gallery, and the co-founder of the art group 'Idia Poli' (translates as 'Same City'), which adapts its name according to each action/performance/ project - for instance: Box Office Hit /



Society for the Restoration of the Vustrofidon Writing System. In 1998, 'Idia Poli' ran for mayor of Thessaloniki.<sup>68</sup>

Ector Mavridis, despite confessing that he is not very familiar with Greek mythology, provided, in his interview, a very clear and concise discussion of it. Mavridis focuses on the diachronic significations of Greek mythical figures and tales and not on their external attributes. In this context, he invested, in his interview, the crux of ancient Greek mythical tales and figures in individuals of the contemporary world. Thus, he constructed his 'contemporary myths' and developed further the concept that Pavlos Pavlidis, the musician, first introduced to this research. Mavridis also indicated the ethnocentric and aesthetic context, within which Greek museums perceive mythology, and pointed out that this needs to be radically reconsidered, through the introduction of contemporary art in museums and the juxtaposition of contemporary works with ancient artefacts.

#### **Pavlos Vasileiadis**

Pavlos Vasileiadis is a visual artist and a practicing psychiatrist (Figure 62). He was born in 1946 in Thessaloniki, where he lives permanently. He studied medicine at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and specialized in psychiatry. His artistic activities are within the field of installations and 'environments', namely the artistic metamorphosis of natural landscapes. His first solo exhibition was held in 1997. More than seventeen individual exhibitions have followed since then, in Athens and Thessaloniki and elsewhere. He has participated in more than thirty group exhibitions. Notable among the latter have been the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1983, the Art 10 in Basel in 1979, and his exhibitions at the Demetria Art Festival, Thessaloniki in 1985, 1989, 1993, 1995 and 2001. His work is represented in galleries and museums all over Greece.



**Figure 62. Pavlos Vasileiadis.**

Although mythology is present in the work of the majority of my interviewees, Vasileiadis, together with Malamas, the musician, are the two artists, who have mostly drawn on it. In fact, Vasileiadis, in his first solo exhibition in 1971, presented themes from mythology and ancient coins. Later the artist's paintings were influenced by the artistic school of critical realism. His series of 'Reflections' in the early

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<sup>68</sup> <http://users.otenet.gr/~ektorasm/>, [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> November 2007].

80s marked Vasileiadis' transition to modes of expression akin to those of abstract Expressionism.

From 1995 until 2004 Vasileiadis has been occupied with his a set of works entitled 'Ultraviolet Spaces', the most impacting of which is probably the one entitled 'Moon' («Φεγγάρι», transliterated 'Feggari'), which was installed in the sea of Thessaloniki (Figure 63).



Figure 63. 'Feggari', from the series 'Ultraviolet Spaces'.

In 2004 and in the context of the 'Ultraviolet Spaces' series, Vasileiadis created a set of works entitled 'Mythography' (Figures 64 and 65). In this series, and as the critic of art, Dorothea Konteletzidou, comments, 'myths, such as those of Lado's, Uranus' Orpheus' and Ophiouchos', give the impetus for a dreamy narration, which is primarily based on the wish of the artist to represent a visual, we could say, fairytale ... [where] the symbols indicate a personal, esoteric idea and take the viewer deep into an unknown and mysterious world, where the light moulds lit surfaces and leads to supernatural encounters'.<sup>69</sup>

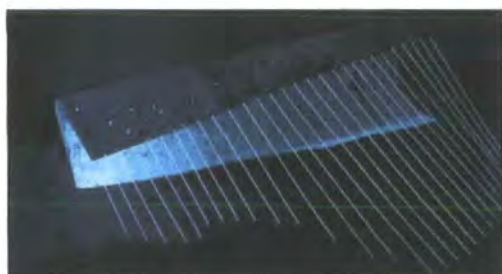


Figure 64. 'Orpheus'. From 'Mythography'. Painted canvas, polyurethane foam, metallic sticks.



Figure 65. 'Evrynome'. From 'Mythography'. Mixed media, Sand.

Pavlos Vasileiadis is a close friend of Kostas Lachas and they have on many occasions, exhibited their works jointly. The most recent collaboration of the two artists

<sup>69</sup> Βασιλειάδης, Π. *Μυθογραφία* (Vasileiadis, P., *Mythography*), Φυλλάδιο έκθεσης (Exhibition booklet).

was in 2006 in the '5+5=10 artists co-exhibition' in which five Thessalonian visual artists present their works collaboratively with five artists of the Unit of Cultural Communication of the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki. 'At the same time that the municipalities of Thessaloniki prefecture react against the installation of hostels for the rehabilitation of the psychiatrically ill, five Thessalonian visual artists exhibit their works jointly with five patients of the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki (ΨΝΘ)', the 'Eleftherotypia' newspaper comments.<sup>70</sup> The same article goes on to emphasize that this was the first time that such an exhibition had been organized in Greece. The aim of the organizers, it explains, 'is to state the acceptance on the part of art of every individual and the equal treatment and collaboration, in the field of arts, of artists independently to the presence or not of a certain psychological disorder. The message of the acceptance of every individual of the community, not only in the field of arts, but also in the everyday space of life, is sent through the exhibition.'<sup>71</sup> Vasileiadis, as the head of the Unit of Cultural Communication of the Psychiatric Hospital of Thessaloniki, also commented, with reference to this initiative, that the artist who has experienced the loss of contact with reality succeeds, through art, to bring it back and to reconstruct it. This procedure, he says, also constitutes an attempt at reconstruction not only of the external but also of the internal reality, an attempt for the Ego to be reconstructed.<sup>72</sup>

Vasileiadis contributed to my research his reflections on Greek mythology, both as an artist and as a psychiatrist. He was prolific in the meanings he made of Greek mythology and his comments shaped two of the mythological themes that my interviews produced: that of the religious outlook towards the cosmos, through the myths of the pre-Hellenic era, and that of Greek mythology as an ideation with apotropaic properties. Vasileiadis' interview amply shed illuminated the diachronic ideological potency of Greek myths, by exemplifying that they can refer to the core of human nature.

### **Dimitris and Stefania Gardikiotis**

Very few biographical data has been possible to be found for this couple of artists. Their lifestyle explains this: they live with their three children in Stratoni, a village of Chalkidiki, many hours away from Thessaloniki. Dimitris Gardikiotis was born in Thessaloniki, whereas his wife, Stefania Gardikioti, comes from Bulgaria. Their main

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<sup>70</sup> [http://www.enet.gr/online/online\\_text/c=113,dt=08.05.2006,id=74830124](http://www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=113,dt=08.05.2006,id=74830124), [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007].

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007].

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007].

artistic occupation is wood carving, with a special focus on hagiography, which is the artistic specialization of Stefania Gardikioti. Stefania Gardikioti is member of the 'Visual Artists Association of Northern Greece'. In terms of style, the artists' works are characterized by robust and coarse-cut forms and low-key and flat colours, which borrow their expressive means from folk art. In the context of this research, I approached the couple on the occasion of their participation in the set of events that were organized by the Cultural Centre of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki for the celebration of 'Alexander the Great, the Macedonian general', where they exhibited a group of woodcarvings that were dedicated to 'Thessaloniki, mermaid, sister of Alexander the Great' (Figure 66).

Stefania and Dimitris Gardikiotis' stated, in their interview, that their main interest is aesthetic, namely, that they mostly draw on Greek mythology in their part, because of the interesting and vivid images that can emerge from the mythical tales. However, a strong interest in mythology as the conveyor of metaphysical meanings was also revealed along the conversation. Yet, what proved to be the two artists' most significant quality, was their ability to bring Greek myths to life, by drawing vivid parallels between real life and the ancient Greek stories. In this way, the transcribing of their interview produced interesting and unexpected readings of mythical figures and tales, such as that of Phaethon. In general, this interview helped me reinforce my main argument that contemporary art could be an effective bridge between Greek mythology and the contemporary individual

#### Yiannis Zikas

Yiannis Zikas is primarily a painter, but has also published poems, essays and a novel entitled "'Pegasos" transports' («Μεταφορές ο Πήγασος»). Zikas was born in Thessaloniki in 1945 and has spent most of his life in the city, with the exception of a period at the beginning of his artistic career, which he spent in Athens. He is a self-taught painter and a very private individual. Zikas is ranked by the art critic Periklis Sfyridis among the new generation of Thessalonian painters, namely those that



**Figure 66. Work from the series 'Thessaloniki, mermaid, sister of Alexander the Great'.**

emerged after the beginning of the 70s – regardless their age – and more specifically those that explore various styles and take advantage of diverse media.<sup>73</sup> Zikas was introduced to me by Sfyridis himself, and as one of the most significant painters of the city, with paintings that bear strong folk-art elements. The ceramist Ector Mavridis defined Zikas’ style to me as ‘Byzantine’. Zikas’ painting is claimed, by Sfyridis and by Zikas himself, to have been highly influenced by the work of the legendary Thessalonian painter, Nikos Gabriil Pentzikis, with whom Zikas maintained a friendly relationship.<sup>74</sup>



Figures 67. Untitled paintings. Pigments on cardboard.

Zikas’ works draw on various themes: portraits (with a strikingly visible Byzantine element) (Figures 67 and 68); landscapes with elaborate plants and birds, which lean more towards traditional Japanese art; still-lives that bring to mind Cezanne’s work, as well as highly detailed syntheses with a heavy symbolic – often metaphysic – content. Zikas acknowledges his elements of Pentzikis’ painting style, such as ‘drawing delicacy,...a peculiar sense of emotion’ (Figure 69).<sup>75</sup> Like Pentzikis, Zikas ‘organizes and complies and plans carefully the surface of the canvas. The painting is built with little lyrical stones, branches and flowers, little waves, and it gives the impression that it is a nest, a resource of the affection of the psyche’s bird’.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Σφυριδης, Π. *Εν Θεσσαλονίκη καλλιτέχνες και εκθέσεις. Τεχνοκριτικά κείμενα 1980-2000 (Artists and art exhibitions in Thessaloniki. Art critique scripts 1980-2000)*, p. 46.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Zikas, despite Sfyridis doubts and despite his notoriously private personality, did accept to meet me and talk about my research. More than that, he truly pored over my topic, which he approached with exceptional sensitivity and painstaking penetration, taking myth outside academic rationale and highlighting its metaphysical poetics. However, Zikas preferred to keep our conversations off-the-record, instead choosing to articulate his thoughts on mythology in written form, rather than to give an interview, like the other informants of this thesis. This resulted in the production of a highly poetic script, dense in ideas and symbolisms, which, despite being an invaluable gift on the part of the artist, is less susceptible to rational analysis and deconstruction. So, Zikas' participation in my research was somewhat indirect: he coloured and moulded my attitude towards mythology, but his ideas are not directly presented in the discussion of the interviews in chapter Four and Five.



Figure 68. Untitled painting. Pigments on cardboard.



Figure 69. 'Couple'. Pigments on canvas.

### 3. Greek contemporary artists discuss Greek mythology

#### 3.1 'Pre-Hellenic' myths VS 'Classical myths'

##### 'Pre-Hellenic' myths and 'Classical' myths: the distinction

In contemporary Greece, 'Greek mythology' is commonly perceived to be synonymous with its 'Classical' tradition, which is largely comprised of the mythical cosmos, tales and figures left to us by the Homeric epics. The heroes and divinities of the epics are regarded as a set, which had its genesis at a set point in ancient Greece's history. According to scholars, however, the existence of a 'pre-Classical' stage in Greek myths, corresponding to the pre-Hellenic period of Greek civilization, is well established. Spetnak, in her book *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: a Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths*, states that 'the nature of gods in pre-Hellenic and Classical mythology was so different, that it is misleading to speak merely of Greek myths'.<sup>77</sup> This distinction between 'pre-Hellenic' and 'Hellenic', or 'pre-Classical' and 'Classical', myths was also identified and explored by some of my interviewees; notably Aggelakas, Vasileiadis and Lachas. They compared and contrasted pre-Hellenic mythology with its Classical counterpart, and identified the former as their most cherished part of Greek mythology.

Aggelakas, who has never drawn on Greek mythology in his art, seemed, at first, to exclude Greek mythology entirely from his intellectual horizon. But as our conversation proceeded, this impression was overturned as he confessed his fascination with figures of Greek mythology, such as Sisyphus and Prometheus, Demeter and Core, all of whom belong to the 'pre-Hellenic' tradition of Greek mythology. Aggelakas' comment that '*Greek mythology with the exception of a few moments does not excite me; pre-Classical civilizations and pre-Hellenic mythologies touch me more*' confirms that his apparent rejection of Greek mythology actually represents a conscious attitude towards Greek myths, moulded by his firm expectations of them.

Pavlos Vasileiadis' penchant for 'pre-Hellenic' mythology is particularly evident in the series of works that he has chosen to name 'Mythography', in which the widely recognizable and popular figures of the twelve gods of Olympus are entirely absent. Instead, Vasileiadis is concerned in 'Mythography' with relatively obscure pre-Hellenic divinities, such as Pasiphae, Phaethon, Hesperus, and others (Figures 70 - 73). '*I mostly liked the pre-Olympian Gods, that is Moires, Graies, etc.*', Vasileiadis said, commenting on his choices.

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<sup>77</sup> Spetnak, Ch., *Χαμένες θεές της πρώιμης Ελλάδας*, Αθήνα (Athens): Απόπειρα (Apopeira), 1998, p. 32. (Original English edition: *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: a collection of Pre-Hellenic myths*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).



Figure 70. 'Hesperus'. Pavlos Vasileiadis. Mixed media, soil. 'Mythography' series.



Figure 71. 'Pasiphae'. Pavlos Vasileiadis. Mixed media, soil. 'Mythography' series.



Figure 72. 'Orpheas'. Pavlos Vasileiadis. Mixed media, soil. 'Mythography' series.



Figure 73. 'Phaethon'. Pavlos Vasileiadis. Mixed media, soil. 'Mythography' series.

### Pre-Hellenic myths and the divine self

'Classical', or 'Olympian' mythology - to use my interviewees' terms - was subjected by them to sever criticism. 'Olympian' myths were represented by the artists as cerebral creations of the social order of the Indo-European Hellenes, who left their homeland around 1800 B.C and occupied the Greek territory. Upon their arrival and over time, the Hellenes supplanted and assimilated the old, pre-Hellenic, or 'Pelagian', populations and imposed on them their Hellenic cosmology, religion and mythology. Aggelakas and Vasileiadis value pre-Hellenic myths precisely in the context of this upheaval. For them, pre-Hellenic myths are symbols of an old, 'authentic', world, which resists, defends its interests, and strives to keep out the new order - represented by the 'Hellenic' mythology.

More specifically, Prometheus and Sisyphus were identified by my interviewees as the main mythical representatives of this conflict. Sisyphus, according to the myth, was a king of Korinthos, who cunningly managed to fool death. He also audaciously ignored Zeus and attempted to rape Hera, Zeus' wife. For all this, he was

condemned by the gods of Olympus to suffer in Tartara, the ancient Greek equivalent of hell, by rolling a huge boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll down again, and to repeat this for eternity (Figure 74). Interpretatively, Sisyphus is thought to be a figure of the pre-Hellenic mythical universe, as is indicated by the pre-Hellenic etymology of his name.<sup>78</sup> Kakridis, a major Greek classicist, places the myth of Sisyphus among those that have as their theme the projection of humans' cunning against the Gods' simple minds.<sup>79</sup>



**Figure 74. The punishment of Sisyphus, Black figured amphora. Achelous Painter. Late 6th century BC. State Collections of Classical Art, Munich**

Prometheus was the brave Titan who defied the will of Zeus and stole fire from the gods in order to give it to the defenceless human race. Some versions of the myth also say that he taught

the humans all the arts and sciences and thus armed them with knowledge and self-confidence against Zeus' tyrannical authority. This enraged Zeus who chained Prometheus to a mountain peak in the Caucasus, where an eagle or vulture came every day to peck his liver, which overnight grew whole again (Figure 75). This continued for 30 years. Some versions say that Heracles slew the bird, ending Prometheus's torment; in other versions of the myth it is Zeus who restores Prometheus' freedom



**Figure 75. Prometheus bound and his brother Atlas. Laconic, black-figured kylix. 550 BC. Vatican Museum.**

when the later revealed to Zeus the danger of him marrying Thetis, fated to bear a son, who would be more powerful than his father. Interpretatively, Prometheus is considered by scholars to be a spirit of fire or a solar<sup>80</sup>. With these qualities, Prometheus was the pre-Hellenic equivalent of Zeus and therefore also his natural rival.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.), «Κόρινθος» ('Corinth'), Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.) ed., *Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Greek Mythology)* III, Αθήνα (Athens): Εκδοτική Αθηνών (Ekdotiki Athinon), 1985, pp. 249-253, (p. 251).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p 251.

<sup>80</sup> Ρούσος, Ε. Ν. (Roussos, E., N.), «Θεογονία» ('Theogony'), Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.) ed., *Ελληνική Μυθολογία, (Greek Mythology)* II, pp. 15-65, (pp. 34-36).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.34-36.

Prometheus and Sisyphus, along with Tantalus, Tityos and Ixion, comprise, in the universe of classical Greek mythology, the group of so-called 'great hubrists'.<sup>82</sup> However, my interviewees read in the figures of Prometheus and Sisyphus positive qualities that surpass the confines of the mythical story and refer to a metaphorical, ideological, level. There, the conflict between the two mythical heroes with the Olympian divine order, and especially with Zeus, is upgraded to a symbol of the archetypical struggle between freedom and oppression, whether this be manifested on a political, social or even ethical level. Considerable emphasis was placed by Aggelakas on the latter type of conflict. Tyrannical authorities, he claimed, are not only externally imposed, but also stem from the inside, from one's very self. In this spirit, the tales of Sisyphus and Prometheus and their resistance to the oppressive will of the Olympian gods essentially narrate the eternal story of the 'dichotomized' individual, of the conflict between one's 'good' and 'bad' selves.

Commenting on the myth of Sisyphus and the symbolism of Sisyphus' punishment, Aggelakas said: *'I think that this is something we all do'. 'This', he continued referring to Sisyphus' persistent but doomed efforts, 'on the one hand, stimulates thoughts about vainness and on the other hand speaks of strength of character. I put myself in Sisyphus' position and this imposes on me a sense of futility...it does so, though, in such a nice way that it eventually fills me with courage, because, as someone said, "pessimism is optimism imbued with knowledge"'. Thanassis Papakonstantinou uses Prometheus in a similar way in one of his unreleased songs. Here, the artist takes Prometheus' place to declare his internal anguish: 'I appear in the song as Prometheus chained on the rock', he said, 'and two vultures come and tear my flesh apart; the one vulture is called pleasure and the other one is called weakness; because I frequently feel these two things. Sometimes I feel pleasure - which is also a vulture in my opinion - and someother times I feel unbelievably weak'.*

The perception of the pre-Hellenic myths as metaphors of the individual's internal ethical struggle relates to the perception of the individual as a unit that contains both the human and the divine elements. In this context, pre-Hellenic myths are regarded by my interviewees as the tools that support the individual's quest for their divine self. In fact, for Aggelakas, this is the main characteristic of 'real' myth. As he explicitly stated in his interview, he believes the affinity of myths to religion to be a prerequisite of their existence and function. 'Real' myths, he claimed, have to speak about religion. Otherwise, he maintained, they are not 'myths', but rather superficial creations of the human imagination or even cold-blooded creations of political (in the broadest sense of the term) interests. In other words, according to Aggelakas, a myth can only claim to be a myth when it unites its 'reader' with religion. At this point it is

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

essential to emphasize that, as Aggelakas himself explains, religion is not meant here in the sense of dogma, nor of theological doctrine, but rather as a life-interpreting tool, which has at its heart the concept of the 'god-containing individual'. And, for Aggelakas, the essence of life lies precisely in the completion of human substance, which comes through the individual's unification with their divine self.

My interviewees' detection of this quality, regarded as vital for the existence of a 'real' myth, in the myths of the pre-Hellenic age, is effectively illustrated by their juxtaposition of pre-Hellenic to classical era myths and, more specifically, to the stories of the Dodecatheon with which the classical period is mostly associated from a mythological point of view. The decisive factor that determines the 'religious' or 'non-religious' character of a myth was pinpointed by my interviewees in the circumstances of a myth's creation. More specifically, they believed a myth to be 'religious' if it stems directly from humanity's instinctive response towards the phenomena of life and the cosmos, and therefore - when decoded - can also arm its reader against life and the world; the creation of a 'non-religious' myth, on the other hand, was believed to involve rationale and to be constructed on firm foundations and with a specific goal in mind. In this spirit, Classical myths were characterized by my interviewees as 'irrelevant', in terms of helping to explain life. In this way, the interviewees essentially raised the issue of myths' 'authenticity', and proclaimed pre-Hellenic myths the winners. Scholarship sides with my interviewees' in this: as Spretnak states, the pre-Hellenic divinities were interwoven with the everyday experience of elementary powers in humans' life. The Olympian gods, on the contrary, were 'remote', 'withdrawn', and 'out there'.<sup>83</sup>

More analytically my interviewees regarded the primordial pre-Hellenic myths as humanity's first attempts to understand the cosmos, while they regarded the stories of the twelve Olympian gods as purpose-made creations that came into being through the need for the cosmos and its metaphysics to be arranged and organized to suit the particular circumstances of life on earth. According to my interviewees, then, Classical myths lack the significant quality of being esoteric. In this light, Aggelakas commented that, *'myths of the Classical era are dedicated to beauty and modesty, yet, this is not how life is'*. The trajectory of Man's life is a tragic matter, viewed both limited in time on an individual level, as well as with reference to humanity's trajectory in time. The stories of Sisyphus and Prometheus, through the inner rebellion they describe, are the ultimate symbols of life's *'intensity and pain'*, as well as of the pain that is entailed in the life-long struggle of Man to *'break his/her body, in order for Man to escape, to raise above his/her existence'*. Life is dedicated to the confrontation with the 'human' that lives inside us, which does not allow us to get a glimpse of God. It is

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<sup>83</sup> Spretnak, Ch., *Χαμένες θεές της πρώιμης Ελλάδας* (Original work: *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: a collection of Pre-Hellenic myths*), p. 20.

our 'fallen self' that seeks to break the shackles of our human existence, i.e. to overcome taboos, weakness, exiguity and vanity, and burst towards the ultimate level of existence, to 'divinity'. 'What I didn't like, what did not attract my interest anyway', Aggelakas stated, 'were the myths of the twelve gods, who fought with each other, who slept with each other'. 'I mean', he continued, 'they had a good time but whatever this represents does not thrill me ... classical myths were more attached to their "image", they were kind of coquettish', bringing to mind Jung's characterization of the stories of the Olympian gods, as 'vulgarized *chronique scandaleuse*'<sup>84</sup>.

According to scholars like Mazon, 'the truth is that there has never been a poem less religious than the "Iliad"'<sup>85</sup>. Murray also believes that the so-called Homeric religion 'was in fact no religion at all', as, 'true religion in Greece before the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C was never really associated with those luminous Olympic deities'.<sup>86</sup> Besides, scholars of mythology have maintained that, in order for the real religion of the ancient Greeks to be better understood, we should turn to cult and to the more ancient practices of worship.<sup>87</sup> 'Pre-Hellenic myths were more religious, they were closer to the sense of "divine"', Aggelakas says. 'They put Man inside God', in the sense that they refer to an esoteric experience of divinity rather than to a 'divinity' that comes from 'out there' and exists independently, according to Spetnak's claim<sup>88</sup>. Bowra remarks, in his inspiring treatise on epic, that 'this entirely anthropomorphic system *naturally* did not have anything to do with real religion or morality' and characterizes the Homeric gods of Olympus as 'a delectable, cheerful invention of the poets'.<sup>89</sup> In the same spirit, Nilsson reinforces the interviewees' 'suspiciousness' towards the Olympian gods' effectiveness, by arguing that they suffered from 'psychological instability' (psychische Labilität) and commenting on their sudden and violent mood swings that were supposedly caused by a daemon, as well as by their obsession with power and control.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Jung, C. G., *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Collected Works Vol 9, part I., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1981.

<sup>85</sup> Mazon, P., *Introduction à l'Illiade*, Paris: Societe d'Edition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1948, p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> Murray, G., *Rise of Greek epic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 295.

<sup>87</sup> Festugière, A.-J., 'La Grèce. La religion' ('Greece. Religion'), Gorce, M., and Mortier, R., (eds.), *Histoire générale des religions (General history of religions)* II, Librairie Aristide Quillet: Paris, 1944, pp. 27-197, (p. 350).

<sup>88</sup> Spetnak, Ch., *Χαμένες θεές της πρώιμης Ελλάδας (Original work: Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: a collection of Pre-Hellenic myths)*.

<sup>89</sup> Bowra, M. C., *Tradition and design in the Iliad*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958, p. 222.

<sup>90</sup> Nilsson, M., 'Götter und psychologie bei Homer' (Gods and psychology in Homer), *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 22, 1924, pp. 363-390, (p. 363).

## Summary

To sum up the opinions of my interviewees, then, the theme of 'pre-Hellenic' myths revolves mainly around the axis of a comparison and contrast between the myths of the pre-Hellenic age and their Hellenic or Classical counterparts. At the core of this conflict lies the effectiveness of each one of the aforementioned categories of myth as tools through which the individual can interpret and comprehend existence and consequently also better respond to existence's commands. In turn, the interviewees put at the heart of existence's demands the completion of the individual through their unification with the divinity that resides inside each one of us. Pre-Hellenic myths are believed to meet precisely these criteria, in contrast to the myths of the Classical age and especially to the myths of the twelve gods of Olympus. Pre-Hellenic myths, the interviewees maintain, retain the clarity of the first instinctive reactions of humanity toward cosmos and life. Therefore, they directly address core issues of existence, in a way that the ultra-elaborated and self-serving Classical myths cannot do. Pre-Hellenic myths are religious, as they speak precisely of the crux of human substance, that is the eternal struggle of the individual to rise higher, towards the ultimate level of existence, that is divinity. Overall, the interviewees praised pre-Hellenic myths for being concise and substantial, and declared them to be 'real' myths.

### 3.2 Pre-Hellenic myths and a pagan, pantheistic monotheism

#### Gaea

So, according to my interviewees, pre-Hellenic myths are products of instinct - the 'proto-creations' of human intellect and psyche. As Vasileiadis states, they are creations from the dawn of the world, when things were just beginning to take shape. The primitive, instinctive, myths of the pre-Hellenes were praised by my interviewees for their fullness of meaning. This 'primitive fullness' was nicely expressed by Kostas Lachas, the poet and visual artist, in his interview. Lachas chose to comment on his preference for pre-Hellenic mythology through an artistic metaphor. More specifically, he drew a parallel between this mythology and the well known prehistoric figurines of the islands of the Cyclades, which, he stated, remind him of the distant, prehistoric, age of humanity and of the stories that we have inherited from this age. Through this parallel, Lachas sheds light on Vasileiadis' characterization of pre-Hellenic myths as myths of the era that things were taking shape, namely as myths of the beginning. 'Beginning' here is not so much a point in time as a cosmos-containing womb. The Cycladic figures whose form, as Lachas commented is '*reduced to the minimum possible*' level are - as is explicitly visualized a poster for the Museum of Cycladic Art's exhibition on the shape of

the beginning - archetypical manifestations of the concept of 'shape' (Figure 76). In the same way, pre-Hellenic myths with their primitive austerity are self-contained archetypes of the concept of 'myth', according to the interviewees. The concept of 'primitive fullness', which repeatedly appeared, more or less explicitly, throughout Aggelakas' and Vasileiadis' interviews, with reference to pre-Hellenic myths, is associated not so much with the content of the myths themselves, as with pre-Hellenic religion. This ties in with what has been suggested by scholars.<sup>91</sup> This idea is explicitly stated in Vasileiadis' discussion of mythology, as well as through his works, whereas Aggelakas' viewpoints, although essentially related, head towards a different direction (see below). The theme that underlies both of their perspectives, and which consequently unifies them, is the acknowledgment of a monotheist spirit in pre-Hellenic myths and of the deep significance that this spirit has for the individual.



Figure 76. Poster from the exhibition 'Shaping the Beginning'. Museum of Cycladic Art.

So, Vasileiadis' 'primitive fullness' refers to the figure of the so-called 'Great Goddess', or 'Mother Terra', which, as has been suggested by some scholars, encapsulates the concept of 'divinity' throughout the prehistoric (or pre-Hellenic for Greece) era.<sup>92</sup> Here, I shall not dwell on the scholarly ideas concerning this great prehistoric female divinity, since these are presented in the following chapter. However, what I do wish to mention here is that, in the accounts of Greek mythology that have come down to us, the great Mother Terra is represented by Gaea (Γαία in Greek), namely Earth, or Terra, who in Hesiod's 'Cosmogony' is presented as the mother of everything, i.e. as a cosmic womb. Vasileiadis' fascination with this tremendously potent feminine divinity is evident in the paintings of his 'Mythography' series. In the three works entitled 'Oceanus and Gaea', 'Uranus and Gaea', and 'Gaea

<sup>91</sup> For example, Spretnak, Ch., *Lost goddesses of early Greece: a collection of pre-Hellenic myths*; Harrison, J, E., *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922.

<sup>92</sup> For example: Graves, R., *The Greek myths*; Gimbutas, M., *The language of the goddess*; Gimbutas, M. *The civilization of the goddess*; Gimbutas, M., *The goddesses and gods of old Europe: myths and cult images (6500-3500 B.C.)*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974; Neumann, E., and Manheim, R., *The great mother: an analysis of the archetype*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972; Leeming, D., and Page, J., *Goddess: myths of the female divine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; Nagar, S., *The universal mother*, Delhi: Atma Ram & Sons, 1988; Billington, S., and Green, M. eds., *The concept of the goddess*, London: Routledge 1996.

and Ether', it is precisely the three mythical copulations of goddess Gaea, as they survive in various mythological traditions, that are depicted.

In 'Oceanus and Gaea' (Figure 77), Gaea is examined from the perspective of Her breathtakingly imposing form. Gaea, the globe, is the undisputable mistress of the painting, in the same way that Gaea, the goddess, is the undisputable mistress of the cosmos. A massive sphere that is violently flaming, as if it were about to break into an explosion of fertility, occupies the whole surface of the painting. The universe is finite and stops at the borders of the painting, just as, in the mind of the mythologizing pre-Hellenes, Gaea pre-existed everything that is and ever has been.



Figure 77. Oceanus and Gaia, Mixed media, soil.

Examined from an historical point of view, 'Oceanus and Gaea' bears clear Pelasgian – i.e., pre-Hellenic – connotations. In fact, the title of the work is

thoroughly misleading, since despite promising a 'Hellenic' cosmogonic tradition, it essentially draws on and dramatically represents a forgotten pre-Hellenic version of the cosmos' creation. In brief, the Homeric tradition of the cosmos' creation claims that all living things came from the union of Gaea and Oceanus, when the latter's current encircled Gaea, namely earth, or the globe. In the Pelasgian cosmogonic tradition though, it is Ophion (Οφιων), meaning 'Snake', who sets off the cosmogonic mechanism. More precisely, as Graves states, the Goddess of Everything emerged naked from Chaos and, as there was nothing solid to walk on, she divided sea from sky by dancing alone on the waves. After days and days of mad dancing, the north wind blew, the Goddess rubbed it between her hands and the great snake, Ophion, her creation and her mate, was born.<sup>93</sup> In Vasileiadis' painting, then, the massive snake that encircles the cosmos-filling globe, and which at a first glance seems inexplicable, has in fact a hidden but strong symbolic character.

In 'Uranus and Gaea' (Figure 78), Vasileiadis, as he himself explained, depicts the very first moments of the cosmos' creation, as described in Hesiod's 'Cosmogony'. According to this, mother Gaea emerged self-existent and self-created from chaos, first among all the astral and terrestrial bodies, and gave birth to Uranus. Uranus

<sup>93</sup> Graves, R., *The Greek myths*, London: Penguin Books, (combined edition) 1992, pp. 27-30.

subsequently, sensing Gaea's loneliness, sent fertilizing rain and filled her cavities and holes with water and littered her empty and dry surface with grass and flowers, trees and animals. 'Uranus and Gaea', is essentially a metaphor for intercourse, as the artist himself explained. It represents the primordial life-creating union, and, as such, is another artistic ode to the cosmogonic omnipotence of the primordial all-inclusive



Figure 78. Uranus and Gaea. Mixed media, soil.

female pan-divinity that so fascinates Vasileiadis. The painting is a powerful depiction of the fertilizing agitation of Gaea, who herself had only just been fertilized. The entire surface of the painting is covered by a dark, stirring, mass of fluorescent waters that are blurred and blended with Uranus, the potent fertilizing force; Gaea is awakening and,

with her, the cosmos is also dawning. The third Gaea-related work in the 'Mythography' series is 'Gaea and Ether' (Figure 79). This essentially refers to the globe and to the atmosphere that surrounds it. A mythological parallel is once again present

and can be found in Hesiod's 'Theogony'. According to this, the union of Gaea with Ether produced Awe (Τρόμος), Deceit (Απάτη), Anger (Θυμός), Discord (Ερις), Lie (Ψεύδος), Oath (Όρκος), Revenge (Εκδίκηση), Cockiness (Θράσος), Dispute (Φιλονικεία), Concord (Συμφωνία), Oblivion (Λήθη), Fear (Φόβος), Arrogance (Αλαζονεία), Battle (Μάχη),

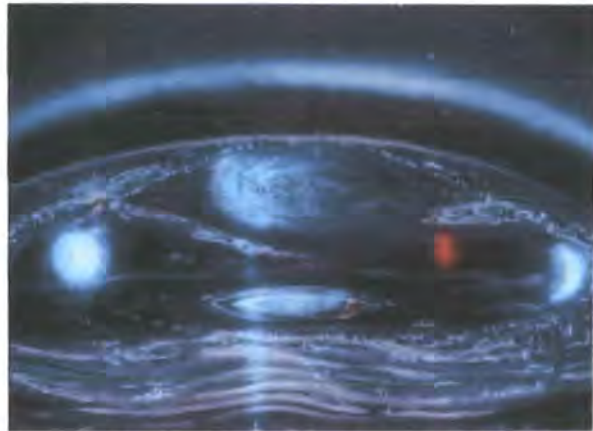


Figure 79. Gaea and Ether. Mixed media, soil.

Oceanus (Ωκεανός), Mitis (Μήτις), Tartarus (Τάρταρος), Erinyes (Ερινύες) or Keres Gaea's primordial children are, undoubtedly, awe-provoking and it is precisely this awe that Vasileiadis again transmits in his painting. Once more, the awe that the artist feels towards his subject matter is not a corollary of her fearsome offsprings, but rather of the calm omnipotence that led to their birth.

Overall, all of these works of Vasileiadis have as their main common feature the declaration of Gaea's inclusiveness: the one female pan-divinity's total inclusiveness. Gaea the womb of everything. She never moves and it is always others that come to her to touch and fertilize her.

### Eleusinian Mysteries

As stated earlier, Aggelakas places his 'pagan monotheism' in a different light to that of Vasileiadis. The protagonists are now the great ancient mystic traditions of Orphism and the Eleusinian mysteries, which Aggelakas mainly appreciates due to their monotheistic character. Orphism has previously been intensively compared to Christianity by scholars - both academic and popular<sup>94</sup>.

Aggelakas' references to the Eleusinian Mysteries are very close to the ideas which Vasileiadis wraps the figure of Gaea with. Demeter and Persephone, the two worshipped Goddesses of the Eleusinian Mysteries are essentially manifestations of the one, pre-Hellenic, female, pan-divinity. More precisely, in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Great Goddess was worshipped, through Demeter and Persephone, in her form as Mother Terra, as the life-giving and the life-regenerating earth. Consequently, Aggelakas projects the monotheism that he detects in the Eleusinian Mysteries onto the idea of an all-encompassing, life-giving and life-controlling, mother earth, who is the beginning and the end of everything.

As far as the Orphic Mysteries are concerned, Aggelakas passes into another interpretative dimension of 'pagan monotheism'. To make this comprehensible, a brief resume of the Orphic doctrine is essential. As Vernant describes it, Orphism's teaching essentially promotes a belief in the cosmos as a divine totality.<sup>95</sup> Vernant's enlightening remark leads to a comprehension of the type of 'pagan monotheism' that Aggelakas refers to, in terms of the concept of 'vulgar pantheism', which Pattison introduces and elaborates in his work on God and rock 'n' roll.<sup>96</sup> Pattison distinguishes 'vulgarity' from 'foulness' and defines it afresh as the opposite of 'esthet' and of 'untrue'. Rock 'n' roll musicians, the scholar explains, are prominent conveyors of this new 'vulgarity', as they perceive things through an emotional exuberance, which is interpreted as the 'spontaneous emotional process of the world and the Man, without

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<sup>94</sup> For example: Rahner, H., *Greek myths and Christian mystery*, New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1971; Boulanger, A., *Rapports de l'Orphisme et du Christianisme (Reports on Orphism and Christianity)*, Paris: Rieder, 1925; Τσομπάνης, Κ. (Tsobanis, K.), *Ορφισμός και Χριστιανισμός (Orphism and Christianity)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Ιάμβλιχος (Iamblichos), 2003.

<sup>95</sup> Vernant, P., *Μύθος και θρησκεία στην αρχαία Ελλάδα (Myth and religion in ancient Greece)*, pp. 115-121.

<sup>96</sup> Pattison, R., *The triumph of vulgarity; rock music in the mirror of romanticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

the interference of cultural, philosophical, ideological and critical morphemes. This emotionally exuberant envisaging of the world is eventually identified by Pattison with pantheism, namely with the deification of the world as a divine totality. The deeper meaning (of pantheism) is the ultimate unity between one's self and the World. The author finds a precise expression of his vulgarity in the vital pantheism of Whitman that takes every transcendental element in an inexpugnable sympathy that is equated with an entire acceptance of the world, and something even more than that: with an entire identification with the world'.

### **Summary**

Both Vasileiadis and Aggelakas highlighted and promoted in their interviews the idea of an underlying monotheism in Greek mythology, in particular in the pre-Hellenic part of it. Vasileiadis located the existence of what I term 'pagan monotheism' in the cosmogonic mythological traditions, and, precisely in the central role that Gaea, the mythical embodiment of earth, has on them. Aggelakas, following the same line of thought, spoke of a monotheism that is mainly met in the practice of the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' and in the theory of the 'Orphic Mysteries'. The 'Eleusinian Mysteries' monotheism that Aggelakas refers to is essentially identical to that of Vasileiadis, as it also refers to the omnipotent earth, which controls and dominates the phenomenon of life. In effect, both these monotheisms have at their core the idea of one, all-inclusive and omnipotent, Great Goddess that determined the concept of 'divinity' in prehistoric (i.e. pre-Hellenic) Greece. Aggelakas, with reference to the traces of monotheism that he detects in the teaching of the Orphic Mysteries, clearly transcribes to his monotheism pantheistic overtones that can be encapsulated in the perception of the world as one divine unity.

### **3.3 Myths and the human psyche**

#### **Myths as psychological tendencies**

We now turn from the realm of pre-Hellenic myths and their religious qualities to the appraisal of Greek mythology with reference to myths' expected function. Sokratis Malamas in particular referred to the properties of Greek mythology as a psyche-deciphering tool. The perception of myths as repositories for the tendencies that the human psyche hides within plays a central role in this discussion. *'Myths'*, Malamas maintains, *'are the subconscious powers and tendencies that coexist inside humans ... For every psychological tendency they [the ancient Greeks] created a deity; of course, by*

*sacrificing to these deities we aim to sooth our soul, to release it from lust, from passion, from jealousy, from any sort of misery’, Malamas explains. Aggelakas likewise noted that ‘myths are powers and tensions that still rule our lives and that will never cease to’. In addition, he referred to myths’ soul-deciphering role, stating that they are ‘keys to unlock unknown places and abilities within us.’*

Aggelakas described in his interview, that he had a first-hand experience of this aspect of Greek mythology one summer night in Crete, inside Idaion Andron, the cave where the new-born Zeus was raised (Figures 80 and 81). The myth has it that the Titaness Rhea, Zeus’ mother, secretly carried her infant son, right after his birth to Idaion Cave, to save him from his father Cronus, who was in the habit of devouring his children, out of fear of being overthrown by one by them, as an oracle had prophesized to him. Rhea appointed the cow Amaltheia, who others say was a nymph, for infant Zeus’ nourishment and (most importantly for our discussion) she also charged the Kourites, or the Coybantes, a company of divine musicians, with the responsibility to hide baby Zeus’ cries with their loud music, so that he would not be heard by the infanticide Cronus.



**Figure 80. The entrance to the Idaion Andron.**



**Figure 81. The Kourites, Amaltheia and infant Zeus. Relief of the first century A.D, Museum of Louvre.**

Aggelakas had never heard this story before, until that night, when one of his friends narrated it to him. So, Aggelakas encountered for the first time the mythical figures of the Kourites inside Idaion Andron, the actual seat of the ancient myth. Aggelakas, as he confessed, was completely taken by the Kourites’ story. *‘I experienced this story very intensely’, he says; ‘I could practically see these things taking place before me ... I am not particularly interested in mythology, ... (but) I heard the story and it was taken into my head.’* What struck Aggelakas most in the story, more than the baby-

eating Cronus or Amaltheia's cornucopia, was the Kourites, *'the noisy band'*, in his words. The Kourites, according to Aggelakas, represent the power of music. More specifically, they represent the liberating psychological impact of loud music and rhythm. *'A powerful music could prevent a negative thought from getting inside us'*, Aggelakas said; *'or music can make us blossom'*, he adds; *'it can make us come up with new, magical, ideas about the world, life and the like! Is this not a big thing?'*

This stance of Aggelakas towards music and rhythm is evident throughout his artistic work, which is characterized by powerful sounds and beats. Moreover, and despite the fact that Aggelakas' lyrics do not contain any explicit references to mythology, the Kourites, as metaphors for the power of music and rhythm, come into life particularly in his song, 'I won't cry':

**They tell me that if I get out of the circle I will get lost,  
that I should only roam around within its limits,  
and that the world is an untamed beast,  
and that when this bites I had better kept silent.**

**And when they fear I might go crazy,  
they tell me to go some place and cry secretly  
and to remember that I am small, too small,  
to change this scenery.**

**But I will fly, with a wild proud dance,  
like an eagle over the sorrows.  
Like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear,  
like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear.  
I will go and build a nest in the sky,  
I will only come down if I feel like laughing.  
Like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear,  
like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear.**

**They tell me that if I go higher I will get dizzy,  
that it is better to roll around in the mud, here, with them  
and that if I want to see more,  
I should gaze alone at myself in a mirror.  
And when they fear that I might go crazy,  
they tell me to go some place and cry secretly,  
and to remember that I am small, too small,**

to change this scenery.

But I will fly, with a wild proud dance,  
like an eagle over the sorrows.  
Like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear,  
like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear.  
I will go and build a nest in the sky,  
I will only come down if I feel like laughing.  
Like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear,  
like hell I will cry, like hell I will fear.<sup>97</sup>

In Aggelakas' song, and particularly in its chorus, the Kourites are transferred from the Cretan cave into the artist's psyche and play there their loud music, as they did in the myth for baby Zeus. I would argue that Aggelakas' song is an explicit example of the myth's eternal existence and transformation.

Aggelakas' discussion of the Kourites elegantly describes the psychological quality of myths, as *'subconscious powers and tendencies that coexist inside humans'*, to recall Malamas' words. The myth of the Kourites essentially helps Aggelakas pinpoint and comprehend the function that music has within his own psyche. In other words, in the mythical figures of the Kourites, he finds a crystallization of the processes that take place inside his mind: when he listens to music, when he writes, and when he performs music. With few words, Aggelakas 'usage' of the Kourites' myths is indicative of how an individual (as Malamas' observed) can find themselves in or through a myth. It is worth mentioning here, that Plato, in his Dialogues, detects in the face of the Kourites the archetype of the musician, and also claims that the Kourites are associated with trance, which only poets and musicians can put themselves into<sup>98</sup>.

Scholars have also discovered in Greek myths the same properties that Malamas mentions. Gods, Kerényi claims, are omnipresent; one should not think that gods appear only when we think about them, for instance, by worshipping them, because they are born with us and they live as long as we live through the peculiarities of our idiosyncrasy.<sup>99</sup> Like Kerényi, Mavridis comments that *'ancient Greek mythology is part of the contemporary Greeks' existence; we use its dynamics as a tool in order to find things that are beautiful, or silly, or even bad.'* In the same spirit, Aggelakas reckons

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<sup>97</sup> 'Like hell I will cry': music, Yiannis Aggelakas; lyrics, Yiannis Aggelakas; performed by Yiannis Aggelakas. The song features in the music album *Από δω και πάνω (Apo do kai pano)*, All together now, 2005. Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.

<sup>98</sup> Πλάτων (Plato), *Πολιτεία (Republic)* 3<sup>rd</sup> Book, Αθήνα (Athens): Φέξης (Fexis), 1911.

<sup>99</sup> Kerényi, K., *Geistiger Weg Europas (The spiritual way of Europe)*, Zürich: Rhein - Verlag, 1955, p. 39-40.

that, 'anyone can be Prometheus or Hermes and anyone can be Prometheus one day and Zeus the other. Or Hera ... every woman has Hera inside her, as well as Aphrodite and Athena'.

One aspect of my interviewees' detection of tendencies of the psyche in the figures of Greek myths is illuminated by the concept of 'archetypical psychology'. This concept examines only the pathological side of phenomena of the human psyche. In particular, attempts to give meaning to specific psychological pathologies through the archetypical sub-base that underlies certain myths and mythical figures. Hillman maintains that the psychological manifestations of the individual correspond to behavioural archetypes, whose most authentic expression can be found in myths.<sup>100</sup> He suggests that the individual can benefit from this by posing questions to themselves such as: 'which archetypical prototype is similar to my current behavior and fantasies?; Who do I resemble when I act and feel this way?'<sup>101</sup>.

My interviewees clearly did not relate the psychological extensions of myths exclusively to pathological situations. However, Hillman, from the perspective of psychopathology, does shed light on a subtle undertone of my interviewees' words, by explaining that the aim of associating psychopathology's phenomena to mythology is not to find a new classificatory system for these phenomena, but rather to find a new way to experience them.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the aim of the association between the powers and the tendencies that reside inside every one's psyche that my interviewees refer to, is not an end in itself. On the contrary, it functions on a very pragmatic level, effectively suggesting that the contemporary individual can refer to mythical stories to see their psyche mirrored and to better understand them self, their defense mechanisms (like Aggelakas does with music through the Kourites), or their disfunctions (as the science of psychopathology does).

### **Myths as behavioural *exempla***

Closely related to this discussion, and also emerging from my interviews, is the function of myths as behavioural *exempla*, namely as behavioural prototypes. In this function, myths retain their archetypical dimension and their association with real life. However this association goes one step further and surpasses the 'introvert' stage of one's self-discovery, expanding to the more 'extrovert' application of the individual's confrontation with life, through myth. My interviewees' comments help to clarify this rather blurred point.

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<sup>100</sup> Hillman, J., *Re-visioning psychology*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975, pp. 99-112.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-112.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

To begin with, Malamas provided an effective example of myths' practical function in the individual's life. *'In our lives', he said, 'we all play in a myth ... (A myth) tells you that somebody else has also walked this way before you. This means that if we step back and give it some thought, we will realize that a mythical figure has been in our place before'*. For Malamas then, observing a myth is like watching a play in the theatre. In the same way that we, as viewers, identify with a situation in a play, we can, he reckons, do the same with a myth. Furthermore, myths stand out as more effective, because even the best theatre play is the creation of its author's wisdom, while myths condense the wisdom of the whole of humanity. *'I believe', Malamas continued, 'that if we analyze a little the circumstances of our lives, if we examine our actions, even the actions of a short time period, say one year, we will see that we are playing in a myth ... And if we study the myths a little bit', he said, putting his theory in more practical terms, 'we will also find out in which myth we are playing'*. As Malamas confessed in our interview, he, himself, transcribed a mythical incident of his life, in his song 'Circe':

**You are a rock on the side of the street  
and I'm a child tired in your shadow.  
You look like a word that creates the world  
and I a drop that wets your lips.**

**Witch Circe where are you taking me,  
in which corner do you leave me and erase me.  
I forgot what I'm looking for.  
I live in your world and I wonder.**

**You play in cards my black happiness  
but I wait silent in your door.  
The night comes and you shine in front of me,  
like a survivor I swim in your sheet.**

**Witch Circe where are you taking me,  
in which corner do you leave me and erase me.  
I forgot what I'm looking for.  
I live in your world and I wonder.<sup>103</sup>**

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<sup>103</sup> 'Circe': music, Socratis Malamas; lyrics: Socratis Malamas; performed by Nikos Papazoglou. The song features in the music album *Παραμύθια (Paramythia)*, ΛΥΡΑ (LYRA), 1992.

'Circe', Malamas said, was written with reference to a real situation: it essentially describes his entrapment in a relationship that lasted for six years more than it should have done, according to Malamas. The selection of the mythical figure of Circe, the formidable sorceress, who metamorphosed all of Odysseus' companions into pigs, is well studied by Malamas. *'I realized', he said, 'that I had really gone to the island of Circe and got lost there; I was almost turned into a pig, I was that close'*. As soon as Malamas realized the situation, though, he decided to take action, and in this he drew again on the ancient story that is described in the 'Odyssey'. So, just as Odysseus managed to escape Circe's magic by listening to Hermes' advice, Malamas in real life, sought and found his personal Hermes in his conscience, which eventually made him get his act together and escape the Circe of the song. What Hermes said to Odysseus, and what Malamas' conscience said to him, are essentially the same thing, as the interviewee described: *'Do not give into her charms and to her offerings; be considerate, do not play in her act; hold yourself and eventually deny whatever she offers you'*.

The plot of the myth, Malamas stressed, remains the same in its function as a behavioural prototype, but its applications can be numerous and diverse in their external features. Thus, Circe can be all things that are alluring and deceitful - varying from an individual to the materialist pleasures of life, and Hermes is the sense of right and wrong that is inherent inside all of us. Circe, Hermes and Odysseus, Malamas concluded, reside inside each of us. All one has to do, he explained, is put them in the right context. Then, myths will play their role as behavioural *exempla* and will show one where to go and what to do.

One aspect of what Malamas described with reference to myths' behavioural function is highlighted in Papakonstantinou's song 'Plana Xenitia'. This song, which is one of the few explicit love songs of Papakonstantinou, also relies upon the 'Odyssey' to reflect on its protagonists' situations:

I cut the sea in two  
and open a path  
for you to come again into my arms  
from the map's depths.

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Translation: [http://www.stixoi.info/stixoi.php?info=Translations&act=details&t\\_id=2844](http://www.stixoi.info/stixoi.php?info=Translations&act=details&t_id=2844), [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

Stop lying  
that you want to come back  
but that supposedly the Cyclops  
raises objections.

I turn my head up  
toward the vault of heaven  
for you to see my eyes' sadness  
through a satellite.

Waiting in vain  
my memory has faded,  
these alluring foreign lands  
swallow thousands and thousands.<sup>104</sup>

The heroine of Papakonstantinou's song juxtaposes her failed relationship to the mythical couple of the 'Odyssey', Penelope and Odysseus. She takes Penelope's role and she essentially experiences her story through the Homeric myth (Figure 82); she is trying to view the situation through the eyes of Penelope, a woman who passed through the same torment of uncertainty.

I would argue that a close look at the song reveals much about how Papakonstantinou makes use of the 'mythical *exemplum*', through his heroine. The song's narrator is trying to guess how Penelope felt, as this is a point on which Homer is silent. Essentially, the heroine's bitterness and sorrow are directed primarily towards Odysseus and, through him, towards her own lover.

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<sup>104</sup> 'Plana Xenitia': music, Thanassis Papakonstantinou; lyrics, Thanassis Papakonstantinou; performed by Melina Kana. 'Plana Xenitia' features in the music album *Στην Ανδρομέδα και στη γη (Stin Andromeda kai sti gi)*, LYPA (LYRA), 1995. Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.



**Figure 82. Odysseus approaches Penelope upon his return. Greek Melian, 450 BC. NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art.**

In 'Plana Xenitia', the myth does not provide a straight-forward answer, as it did 'Circe' for Malamas. The way which the contemporary individual has to experience their mythical self is disguised and the way to be taken is debatable. Moreover, 'Plana Xenitia' is, I would maintain, a rather harsh transcription of the story that Homer narrates. In the song, Penelope is not the ever-enduring queen, nor is Odysseus the steel-willed male. From this point of view, 'Plana Xenitia' is an anti-heroic song, which emphasizes the human dimensions of Homer's protagonists. 'Penelope' is bitter, indignant and frustrated, and Odysseus is an average man, trapped in his reluctance, who invents monsters to justify to himself his weakness. However, none of this undermines the myth's function as a behavioural *exemplum*.

According to Homer, Penelope did stay with Odysseus. However, I would argue that this is not necessarily what the myth has to say to Papakonstantinou's heroine. The essence of it all is that she knows that someone else has been there before her, and this provides her with a frame of reference, within which she can measure her own behavior. The question to be answered is 'why did Penelope stay?'. And thus, according to myths' exemplary function, any decision will be correct, as it will represent a conscious stance towards life.

Savvopoulos likewise came up with an elegant metaphor of myths' 'directional' function, stemming from myths' property of direction-pointing behavioural *exempla*. Savvopoulos did so by experimenting with the acoustic and notional resemblances between the words *méthos* (myth), '*métos*' ('thread'), and '*méti*' ('nose'). '*What could the relationship between méthos, méti and métos be?*', Savvopoulos asked, and immediately replied: '*a thread leads us out of trouble ... The nose is a way of metaphorically sensing things! ... do not we often use "smell" to indicate that we sense something? Myth does the same thing, it makes you think clearly and it shows you the way out ... Myths*', he added, '*talk about us, they talk about everything. And the myth comes to the surface when things are hard in our life, when we are facing a difficulty*'.

Aggelakas also contributed his personal experience, revealing that, in his personal life, he often draws on the myth of Demeter and Persephone to philosophize on a situation and to find comfort. *'I believe'*, he said, *'that we too draw circles inside us. There are times when we sow, times when we blossom, times when we fade, times when we die and start all over again'*. Aggelakas comment is significant for two reasons. The first reason is that he essentially learns to accept that in life happiness and sorrow are complementary and that it is only the experience of each one of them that determines the other. It is indicative, with reference to this appraisal of life's circumstances, that Aggelakas claims to find this constant succession of blossoming comforting, instead of, for instance, depressing. So, myth, in this case, teaches the individual, not to endure misfortunes as a necessary evil, but rather to evaluate positively, as the other side of happiness and joy, as the basis upon which joy and happiness are possible to be felt and cherished. The second reason is that Aggelakas perceives, through Demeter's and Core's myth, this constant rotation of good and bad times in life, as a parallel to the function of the cosmos. In other words, Aggelakas appraises the pace of life as a reflection of the pace of the cosmos, and more specifically with nature. Aggelakas structures, through myth, a perception of humanity that is informed by the wisdom that imbues the unending operation of nature. Thus, human life and the life of nature emerge as relative to each other.

A work of Vasileiadis that discusses the association of mythology with the human psyche and life is 'Klotho', an ultraviolet installation (Figure 83). Klotho was in Greek mythology one of the three, dressed-in-white, Moirae, in other words the 'apportioners', the three sisters that determine the fate of the individual. The names of the other two Moirae are Lachesis and Atropos. Klotho (from «κλώθω», i.e.. 'spin') span the thread of life from the cosmic forces; Lachesis, the second in order (from «λαγχάνω», i.e. 'allotter') measured the tread of life and assigned each man his destiny. Atropos (which means 'inexorable' or 'inevitable', literally 'unturning', in Greek), the smallest in stature, but the most terrible, chose the moment and the manner of a person's death. They were the daughters of Erebus (meaning Darkness) and Nyx (i.e. Night), or of Zeus and Themis. There is also the tradition that the Moirae were the parthenogenetic daughters of Anagi, that is, Necessity. According to some myths, the Moirae were subjected to Zeus' will, but, most commonly, they were considered to be eternal and more powerful than any of the gods. In Delphi, they only worshipped Clotho and Atropos. When she cut the thread with 'her abhorred shears', someone on Earth died.

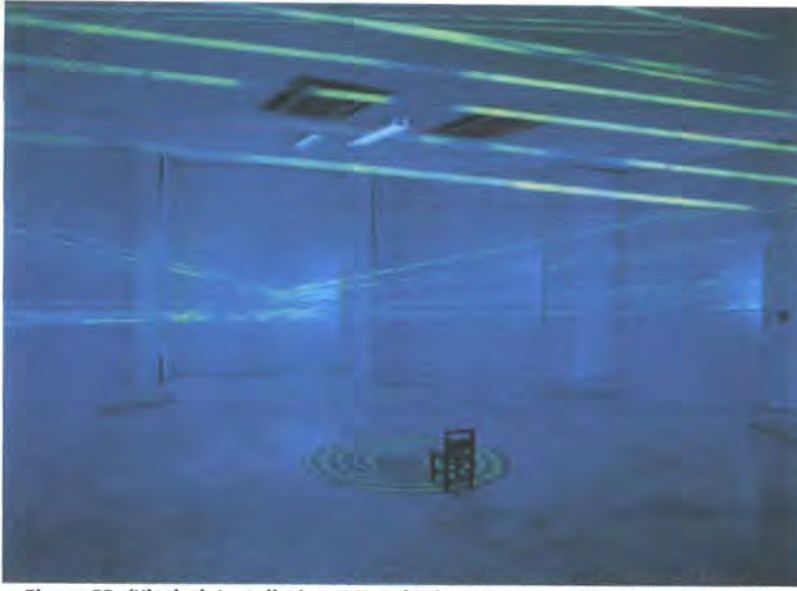


Figure 83. 'Klotho'. Installation. Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art.

Vasileiadis provides through his work an interesting, abstract, depiction of Klotho, the Moira, who in effect set off the individual's life. 'Klotho' is a natural size installation that occupies a whole room in the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, in Thessaloniki. On the floor, a thread painted with phosphatic paint is gathered in concentric circles. A little chair is placed on these circles. From there, the fluorescent thread unfolds, in random directions, just below the room's ceiling. The chair, he explained, is for the child, for the new-born, whose life begins with a spin in Klotho's distaff and this is why the starting point, where the coil's unfolding begins is this chair. 'Klotho', overall, represents the course of Man in life, my interviewee stated. It is worth mentioning that 'Klotho' was initially meant to constitute part of a trilogy, with the depiction of the other two Moirae. *'I presented "Klotho" as a spinning wheel ... I wanted to work by having as focal point the entire process of looming, so from Klotho we would move to a carpet'*, Vasileiadis said in his interview.

I would suggest that Vasileiadis, by inviting visitors to enter his installation and move in it, invites them to enter, metaphorically and literally, their own fate. The fluorescent life thread that tends from the new-born's chair towards every possible direction in the dark room is a parallel for real life: at the moment of the new person's birth, life is an open possibility for it. 'The title and the imposing winding that dominates makes the association with the life thread of each human and with the homonymous Moira of mythology inevitable', the Macedonian Museum of

Contemporary Art comments on Vasileiadis' installation<sup>105</sup>. I would add that Vasileiadis' abstract representation of Klotho succeeds in making the ancient goddess 'tangible', in the sense that it succeeds in providing the viewer of the installation the opportunity to experience her. Viewers have the opportunity to see before them the course of life and potentially also to reflect on the spin that sets life off and on life that progresses without a pause, leaving any possibility open. In 'Klotho', the mythical goddess gains substance and fills the room. So, by entering the installation, the viewer essentially enters Klotho. It is the mythical goddesses' thread, which, metaphorically, we all walk on. Vasileiadis' work is of major significance to the understanding of the mythical personification of fate, as through his installation, Klotho emerges as an experienced reality and as an exemplum of the countless possibilities that life withholds.

The naming of Vasileiadis' work after the ancient goddess, was a conscious choice. As he explained in his interview, *'If I named it "Fate", the connotations that would be followed, on the part of the viewer, would be very rational and I did not want that to happen'*. Most importantly, my interviewee stated that he consciously took a myth and put it in the present, as if the myth lived today.

#### **From myths to self-consciousness**

A theme that is closely related to the above discussion stems from the idea that myths' ultimate function is to push the individual towards self-fulfillment, through self-awareness. This idea was encountered in almost all of my interviews, and more-or-less explicitly stated, depending on the informant. One of the contemporary artists who supported this idea most strongly and explicitly was Pavlidis. *'This is exactly what they [myths] are about and maybe this alone says it all; there is no need to say anything more about myths' purpose'*, he stated. Malamas also explicitly agreed with Pavlidis' opinion, and added that myths are *'the story of humankind's evolution toward humankind's main aim, which is knowledge and wisdom'*. The 'Odyssey' was almost unanimously voted by the interviewees as the most complete mythical metaphor of Man's archetypical journey towards himself and ultimately towards self-fulfillment. The 'Odyssey' *'is about humankind's course towards absolute knowledge, towards self-knowledge'*, Malamas commented. Savvopoulos also indicated that the focal point around which the entire story of the 'Odyssey' revolves is essentially homeland and that, without this, the epic would not have existed in the first place. So, Ithaca is the topic of the 'Odyssey', Savvopoulos suggested, and the reason why the story was originally composed. The artist developed his speculation and shed light on the stirring symbolism that hides behind the 'Odyssey's' central point of reference. Ithaca, he said, symbolizes one's

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<sup>105</sup> <http://www.mmca.org.gr/el/collection.htm?m=1&l=2;389>, [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

'basis'. *'Your aim in life', he says, 'is to find our basis. Since your aim is to find out who you really are, you will come across all sorts of difficulties. If, on the other hand, you are not interested in finding who you are, what your basis is, and you are only interested in having a good time, not a single difficulty will come up.'*

So, in the same way that the 'Odyssey's' substance is homeland, without which this epic would not have existed and without which Odysseus would not have been who he was, the individual's substance is the meeting with himself. This meeting, Savvopoulos implied, is not at all given, as it may appear at first sight, just as Ithaca was not as close as the hero thought once he set off on his journey towards it. So, Savvopoulos concludes, the 'Odyssey', as the archetypal self-revealing myth, tells us two things: first, that the end of the individual's personal journey is the discovery of himself and, second, that, in order to achieve this, one has to endure and resist since self-knowledge is less than it may initially appear to be. Savvopoulos sings to his Ithaca in his homonymous song:

Captain, you who gaze your high destiny,  
I wonder, have you ever spared a look for the poor little sailor;  
you left refreshed from various harbors  
but this poor man's wife says that he is dead.

Ithaca, Ithaca, Ithaca, I want to go back home.  
Ithaca, Ithaca, Ithaca I want us to go to my little home.  
I am scared, I am scared, I am scared.

Your agonies even touched me,  
but to my sorrow it was the giggling woman who came to me.  
Captain, your death makes inheritors reach,  
but if I die, my people will die on the streets.

Ithaca, Ithaca, Ithaca, these are such howling storms that we are going through.  
Ithaca, Ithaca, Ithaca let us go to our home in the skies.  
We are coming back, we are coming back, we are coming back.

Master captain, it is the act that delivers you,  
but think of me too, since I am crashed under the weight of fear,  
a fear that makes me laugh and cry,  
but if the world still exists, I am ready for us to sail to it.

Ithaca, Ithaca, Ithaca, I want to go back.  
Ithaca, Ithaca, Ithaca, I want us to go back to my little home.

We are growing old, we are growing old...<sup>106</sup>

Another noteworthy idea that my interviewees brought forth, regarding myths' self-revealing value as seen in Odysseus' story, is the identification of the goal of self-knowledge with the course to it, namely the mythical journey. The man-eating Cyclopes and Laestrygonians, the dark sorceress Circe who turns men into swine, Calypso's smothering sexual desire, the blissfully oblivious Lotus-eaters, are all there to support the goal; they all are essentially stages towards self-discovery. My interviewees implied that the individual has got to put himself to the test to gain himself. Pavlidis visualized this through a vivid parallel: *'I always try to experience the journey and not only to visit cities'*, he said. *'I always try to understand what the way between two cities has to tell me, and I can therefore feel Odysseus better than any other mythological hero'*, he explained. One might add here a brief mention of Cavafis' renowned poem 'Ithaca' where, famously, Odysseus' adventures are compared to the individual's course towards completeness.<sup>107</sup> More precisely, there is one point that it is worth focusing on. Cavafis says in his 'Ithaca':

Laistrygonians, Cyclops,  
wild Poseidon - you won't encounter them  
unless you bring them along inside your soul,  
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

By contrast, for my interviewees, the Laestrygonians, the Cyclops' and the angry Poseidon are not to be condemned, as they constitute prerequisites of the goal's completion.

This view also appeared in my interviewees' analysis of other myths, besides the 'Odyssey', which they interpreted in the same light of a 'self-knowledge' mechanism. Their characteristic example of this is Theseus' confrontation with the Minotaur (Figure 84). Malamas has elaborated Theseus' figure in his song 'Labyrinth':

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<sup>106</sup> 'Ithaca': music, Lucio Dalla; lyrics, Dionyssi Savvopoulos; performed by Dionyssi Savvopoulos and choir. 'Ithaca' features in the music album *Ξενοδοχείο (Xenodocheio)*, Mercury, 1997. Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.

<sup>107</sup> For the complete poem: Appendix no 21.

I am touching your lips, Agnes  
and the dawn finds us awake  
when the rain falls.

A light sparkles inside your eyes,  
and the wind blows by,  
it laughs happy for your kisses.

I am leaning at the window to see  
the world's gold is tarnished,  
but your heart is breathing,  
and it brings me back to life, as it has done before.

I see you with eyes closed  
as though as you were here  
yet you are far.  
I remember you singing songs  
about empty moments,  
about lost hearts.

I am lost in the labyrinth.  
I am holding Theseus' thread  
but the hands hurt  
and the eyes forget

I am touching your hands Agnes  
my head drops  
and I fall asleep.  
I don't want to say a single word.  
The dream holds me shipwrecked  
in the open sea

I am leaning on the window to see  
the world's gold is tarnished

but your heart is breathing  
and it brings me back to life as it has done before.<sup>108</sup>

Malamas relives Theseus' myth in a dramatic way. The hero of his song is lost in the labyrinth, he knows the way out – he is holding the thread in his hands –, but he does not have the courage or the will to get himself out of there.

Malamas commented further on the myth of Theseus and the labyrinth in his interview. *'This story symbolizes the soul that marches in the real maze of life, and perhaps Ariadne's thread is precisely the subconscious connection of the individual with their spirit'*, Malamas speculated. Theseus, here, did not try to avoid the Minotaur; on the contrary, he pursued the encounter and the confrontation with him, descending

into the deep darkness of the labyrinth to find him. So, the course towards the discovery of one's soul, as depicted in Theseus' myth and as suggested by Malamas' interpretation, passes through darkness. One has to be determined to face one's soul-eating monsters, rather than bypass them. 'Myths inspire the realization of the potentials for our completion ... and the coming of the sunlight into the world. By killing monsters it means that we kill the dark

things', Campbell writes<sup>109</sup>. Myths, Campbell maintains throughout his work, are in general vast in what they reveal for the great adventure of life.<sup>110</sup>

Similar symbols are also detected by Malamas in the Labours' of Heracles: *'Take, for instance, Heracles and the Hydra'*, he suggested, *'where the hero would cut one head but then two new heads would sprout in its place'* (Figure 85). This again, Malamas claimed, is a symbol of the struggle for inner stability and of the constant strife of the individual to tame and manipulate their inner ordeals. The same symbolic qualities are also detected by Malamas in the myth of 'Augeias' Stables', where the hero



Figure 84. Theseus killing the Minotaur  
Athenian black-figure amphora. ca 550  
B.C. Museum of Louvre.

<sup>108</sup> 'Labyrinth': music: Sokratis Malamas; lyrics: Sokratis Malamas; performed by Sokratis Malamas. 'Labyrinth' features in the music album *Λαβύρινθος (Labyrinth)*, ΛΥΡΑ (LYRA), 1998. Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.

<sup>109</sup> Campbell, J. *The power of myth*, New York: Anchor books, 1991, p. 183.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*; Campbell, J., *Myths to live by*, London: Penguin books, 1972; Campbell, J., *Transformations of myth through time*, New York: Perennial, 1990.

'cleaned his life up, by cleaning the stables of the dung', as well as in the taming of Geryon's Horses by Hercules, which represents, according to Malamas, the struggle of the individual in taming of their impulses.

Papakonstantinou's approach to the ancient Greek mythical seer, Teiresias and the ancient Greek seeress Pythia, also falls into this category of myths'function. Teiresias shared in common with Phineas, another renowned seer of Greek mythology, the attribute of blindness. Scholars

regard Teiresias' handicap as a survival of an obscure old layer of the myth, associated either with the seer revealing the gods' secrets, or with the seer seeing a goddess naked.<sup>111</sup> Papakonstantinou, in his song 'Teiresias', provides his own interpretation of the blind seer:



Figure 85. Hercules slaying the Lernean Hydra. Caeretan hydria. c. 525 B.C. J. Paul Getty Museum.

You wake up and stir up the mirror's lake.

Surprised deers will startle.

They will leave for the forests and from your image  
they eyes and the fire will be missing.

You will look for your people, blind and scarred.

The time has come to find out who loves you,  
but the city is empty and seer Teiresias  
will leave his oracle on a foreign land.

Blind is he, who pretends that he does not know  
that he drinks from the dark well,  
who has turned what is eating him into need,  
or he is hiding it in his yard, so that it will be forgotten

At this time, mist falls on the plain,  
the scarecrows, the rags, he will be scared of.

<sup>111</sup> Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I), «Τειρεσίας» ('Teiresias'), Κακριδής, Ι. ed., *Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Greek Mythology)* III, p. 82.

Run to fumble the nature, my precious one.  
She is stretches her arm for you to hold on to.<sup>112</sup>

The protagonist of 'Teiresias' is metamorphosed into the ancient seer. Papakonstantinou, as he claimed in his interview, creates in his song a distinction between the seer Teiresias who could 'see' so many things, although he was blind, and those who, although entirely able-bodied, do not 'see' anything because they turn a blind eye to reality and prefer to ignore problems. Teiresias, in the hands of Papakonstantinou, becomes a symbol of the introspective individual, of the person who uses their 'internal eyes' to see the crux of things, and who dares to see the truth and accept it. Introspection and the quest for truth though, Papakonstantinou's song warns, are bold actions and there can be a high price to pay, as they may lead to unpleasant revelations; in other words, the individual may 'handicap' themselves, like Teiresias. The myth of Teiresias, then, as elaborated by Papakonstantinou, presents another path to self-knowledge and self-completion, another step in the individual's soul-searching journey.

Pythia, the second oracular figure of Greek mythology that Papakonstantinou is concerned with, was the arch-priestess of Apollo in Delphi. She used to chew bay leaves, seated on the Delphic easel, above a gas-emitting hollow in the earth and speak incomprehensible words in the name of Apollo, which were subsequently interpreted by a male priest of Apollo, who observed Pythia's hallucination. Pythia, her identity, her relation to the Delphi oracle, and her hallucinations, have provoked numerous interpretations. Some of them, like that of Graves, connect Pythia's delirium to the consumption of hallucinogenic substances<sup>113</sup>. More specifically, Graves relates Pythia and her supposed consumption of bay leaves to the figure of Daphne, a beautiful nymph, who, in order to save herself from the god's amorous mood, was metamorphosed by Hera (the major pre-Hellenic goddess, according to Graves) into a bay bush ['daphne' («δάφνη») in Greek]. This story, Graves says, is much less simplistic and naïve than it seems at first glance, and Daphne was anything but a scared virgin, for the name Daphne (or Daphnis) is an abbreviation of the adjective 'daphoene' (δαφαινική), or 'daphoenissa' (δαφοένισσα), which translate as 'the bloody one'<sup>114</sup>. Daphne, Graves maintains, was actually the Great Goddess in an orgiastic mood, whose priestesses streamed into the woods, chewing bay leaves, which contain Potassium cyanide, a

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<sup>112</sup> 'Teiresias': music, Thanassis Papakonstantinou; lyrics, Thanassis Papakonstantinou; performed by Sokratis Malamas. 'Teiresias' features in the music album *Αγρύπνια* (Agrypnia), ΛΥΡΑ (LYRA), 2004.

Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.

<sup>113</sup> Graves, R., *The Greek myths*, p. 181.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

deadly drug and hallucinogen, whenever the moon was full, to attack travellers and crush children or small animals.<sup>115</sup> The club of priestesses was cleared by the Hellenes and 'daphoene's' oracle was given to Apollo. As a distant memory, of the oracle's 'matriarchal' past, Graves claims, Pythia continued to chew hallucinogenic bay leaves to give her oracle<sup>116</sup>.

Papakonstantinou is his song 'Tuneless Oracle' presents a humorous, 'out of tune', portrait of a Pythia of dubious morals, who is similar, but at the same time, so different from the seeress we are familiar with:

Everything was going wrong in my life  
and just as I ran out of patience,  
the skies opened and, among the flashes,  
Pythia came tottering to me.  
She first asked for a cigarette  
and then she shouted: 'my poor stupid thing,  
why are you swimming in deep water?  
the gain in life is what we eat,  
what we drink, and what our ass makes hay of'

But before I got to ask her  
and solve her oracle's riddle,  
the guards of law surrounded us, yavrum<sup>117</sup>  
and they put bracelets on our hands,  
drum, drum – fancy that! – drum, drum

An while they violently drag her to the prison  
they turn to me and explain,  
she kept hidden inside a hollow tooth  
a pinch of hashish

In the headlines the next day  
I saw her eyes sleepless,  
'SUCCESS' with capital letters  
I guess you know how these things go

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>117</sup> 'Yavrum' is a Turkish word, which translates as 'my baby'.

**With this and with that she was sighed to confess  
instead of bay she too – fancy that! - hashish,  
and if this lady got away for centuries  
police always win in the end.<sup>118</sup>**

Papakonstantinou's Pythia, like Graves, hallucinates to reveal the truth, only that now the truth is not a sibyl riddle, but straight - forward raw advice on the meaning of life. The individual, however, is still puzzled and confused, as to the message that Pythia wants to transmit, and is left wondering what life is really about. So, Papakonstantinou's Pythia, however humorous, is not that different to Teiresias. She also expresses the same thing: the attempt of the individual to find their way through life. Both characters can be read as symbols of the same fundamental concern, that is, the route one has to take in one's life, the attitude one has to adopt towards things, and the agony of what is 'bad' and what is 'good'.

### **Summary**

Overall, the psychological qualities that the interviewees detect in the stories of ancient mythology can be divided into three separate, but interrelated, groups. The first group concerns the psychological correspondence of figures of Greek mythology to tendencies and powers that reside inside the human psyche and which come to the fore under specific circumstances. This idea is based, according to an academic point of view, on the assumption that mythical gods and heroes are manifestations of archetypical situations of the human substance. Thus, the interviewees maintain that all of us hide Hera, Aphrodite, Pan, Zeus, or the Kourites inside us, who wait for the right circumstances in order to come to the surface and make their presence evident. Myths, through this quality, can, the interviewees claim, help the contemporary individual see themselves more clearly, by providing a mirror image of the contemporary individual's behavior. The second group relates to the function of myths as behavioural *exempla*. This interpretation of myths' meaning suggests that the mythological stories are essentially archetypical prototypes of circumstances, which people are confronted with diachronically. So, my interviewees believe that we all have played, play and will play in disguised myths. If the contemporary individual managed to decode the mythical core of each experienced situation, then they would find in the corresponding myth a

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<sup>118</sup> 'Tuneless Oracle': music: Thanassis Papakontantinou; lyrics: Thanassis Papakonstantinou; performed by Socratis Malamas. 'Tuneless Oracle' features in the music album *Παραμύθια* (Paramythia), LYRA (LYRA), 1992. Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.

behavioral guide. The third group essentially combines the first two groups and regards self-fulfillment through self-knowledge as being the ultimate value of myths. In this group, the course that the contemporary individual - and humanity in general - has to chart, in order to achieve self-discovery is examined through the mythical parallels of the 'Odyssey' and of myths that contain an element of 'exploit', such as Theseus' and Heracles' Labours.

### 3.4 Greek myths spread over place and time

This section takes the discussion of Greek mythology into a totally different context. It focuses on what my interviewees regard to be the relations between Greek myths and myths from foreign civilizations and cultures, and, by extension, the significance of the national identity of Greek mythology. More specifically, this section examines the various aspects of the mythology-related meaning-making process that is based on the understanding of myths as ideas whose constitutive material is global and trans-cultural in scope, both on a synchronic and on a diachronic level.

Malamas, for example, took a renowned theme of Greek mythology, the Symblagades, and penetrated its meaning, by using as a tool a story from the Toltec Indians. The Symblagade were the two massive rocks that, according to Greek mythology, stood in the entrance to Euxine Pontus (the Black Sea) (Figure 86) and unpre-



Figure 86. The location of the Symblagades.

dictably clashed together, shattering any ship that attempted to sail through them. This myth is juxtaposed and compared by Malamas to the Native American story of the 'Bird of Freedom'. In Greek mythology, Iason (or Jason) with the crew of Argo were the only people who managed to sail through the rocks successfully and to continue their journey, exploring Pontus' unknown waters and visiting exotic lands (Figure 87). The 'Bird of Freedom', on the other hand, as Malamas narrated, *'flies always straight ahead and passes through one's life only once'*. Although there is no clear interrelation between the two stories, Malamas reckoned that they are indeed similar. He also took his argument further by explaining that both stories, in essence, speak of the 'ultimate chance'. *'If you can jump on the bird's wings, it is fine; but the bird won't wait, nor will it ever return'*. He added that, likewise, the Symblagades do not wait for the ship to pass,

nor will they offer a warning before clashing again.

In both cases, I would suggest, elaborating Malamas' interpretation further, the motto is 'now or never'. However, what is particularly interesting is that the two tales become one in Malamas perception. More specifically, my interviewee drew on the Toltec story to understand the Greek myth, thus identifying

a mythology that is a-historical and a-geographical. Besides, Malamas himself stated that he refuses '*to be committed to one interpretation*', and to put geographical and historical limitations upon his comprehension of the mythical stories.

This latter remark also applies to the work of Sotos Zachariadis. In Autumn 1991, as part of the 'Art Village' series of symposia, he organized an art symposium, entitled 'Doureios Ippos', (i.e. 'Trojan Horse'). The symposia of this series took place in Halkidiki, in a purpose-built camp. Zachariadis himself participated in the 'Doureios Ippos' symposium, by producing an interactive installation on Troy's fall. His work was installed inside his *in situ* workshop, whose interior was accordingly converted for this purpose (Figure 88). More specifically, the floor of Zachariadis' workshop was filled with sand, a practice reminiscent of Greek orthodox churches, where the worshippers stick their lit candles into large containers filled with sand (Figure 89).



Figure 87. 'Argo before the Symplegades', photo taken from 'The living heritage' website.

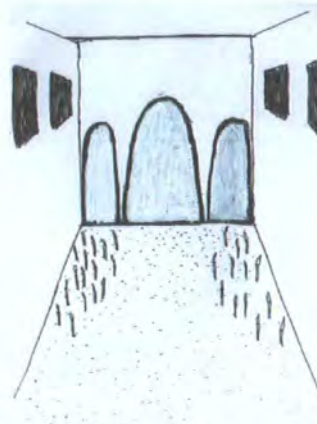


Figure 88. Sketch of the converted workshop of Zachariadis.



Figure 89. Container with sand in a Greek Orthodox church.



Figure 90. A typical templum of a Greek Orthodox church with the three gates (on the far left, the far right in the middle).

Three vaulted gates were constructed on the end wall of the workshop, a scheme that directly referred to the interior of Orthodox churches, as Zachariadis admitted (Figure 90). On the surface of the middle 'gate', Zachariadis' version of Troy's fall was narrated by means of slide projections. The middle 'gate', which corresponded to the 'avaton' of the Byzantine church, was, as the artist explained, a metaphor for Troy's gate. The focal point of Zachariadis' presentation of Troy's capture by the Greeks, *'was the story of Doureios Ippos and some snapshots from the history of humanity'*. More specifically, Zachariadis' 'Troy's fall' started with the genesis of the universe from the 'cosmic egg' and moved to the explosions that resulted in earth's creation. Next, the narrative was transferred, over time, to Homer's epic. There, the story revolved around the fatal gate, which represents the Greeks' object of desire. The repeated attempts of the Greeks to attack the gate were interpreted by Zachariadis as mathematical equations that had to be solved for the entry to be achieved. Eventually, as in the Homeric epic, the wooden horse, Doureios Ippos, provided the solution and opened Troy's gate for the Greeks.

The aspects of Zachariadis' narrative that are of specific interest for this discussion are, first, the architectural - and semiological - environment within which he presents Troy's history and, second, his choice to incorporate the Homeric epic myth in a general narrative on the history of humanity. These two aspects place Troy's myth in a pragmatic relation to time, which, on the one hand, evolves from the past to the present, and, on the other hand, on a conceptual level that leads in the opposite direction. With reference to the latter, Zachariadis explained that the myth of 'Doureios Ippos' in his project *'functions in conjunction to ancient Greece, but through the present time and not the other way round'*. Zachariadis went on to say that his aim was to approach the distant tradition through an approximate one and to pass smoothly from one to the other. He added, *'you see, the gates in the projections resemble Byzantine*

*arches in the one case and the gates of Troy in the other, and this happens in a way that makes you think that it could actually be true. This is what I mean when I say “smooth passage”.* So, what Zachariadis does essentially through his work is to take Greek mythology out of its mythical context and re-present it as an event experienced in the course of humanity, thus suggesting an alternative perspective on the myth.

An interesting approach to Greek mythology is represented by the performance 'Eden' by the visual artist Stavros Panagiotakis. 'Eden' was presented for the first time in 2004 in Constantinople, inside Cistern Yerebatan, which was built by Justinian as an aqueduct in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It was subsequently presented in Thessaloniki, in a new form and with the title 'Eden, the Illusion of Immortality', inside the Ottoman hammam 'Paradise' (Figures 91 and 92), which was built in 1444 A.D, as well as in the 'Forest theatre' («Θέατρο Δάσους») (Figure 93). Finally, 'Eden' was performed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Art Biennale of Beijing, in various public spaces, with the title 'Eden-Time'. 'Eden' is a multidimensional and highly interactive performance. Dancers and actors are the main performers, but it also involves live music, singing and poetry reading. The unfolding of the plot is dynamic, since when the performers move across the space of the performance the audience is invited to move along with them.



Figure 91. 'Eden'. From the performance in 'Paradise Bath', Thessaloniki.

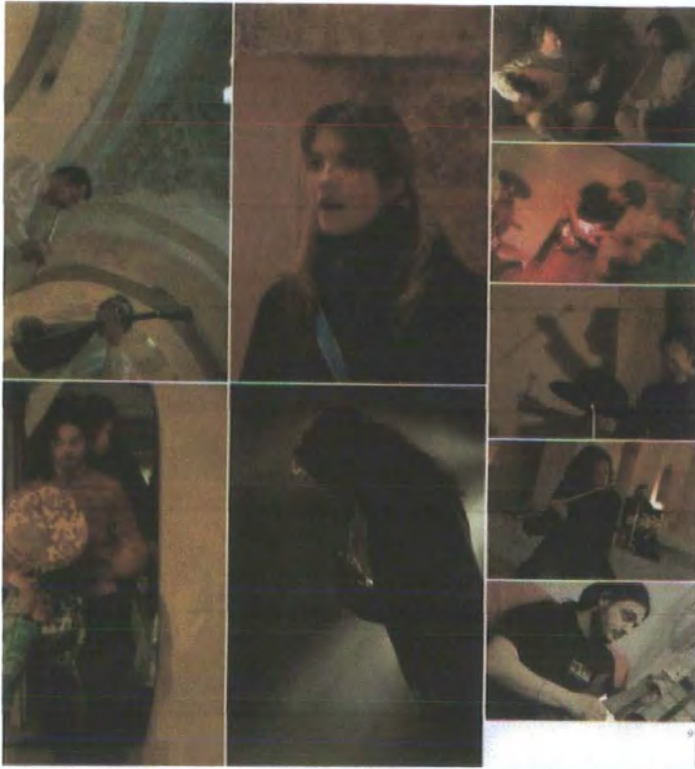


Figure 92. 'Eden'. From the performance in 'Paradise Bath', Thessaloniki.



Figure 93. 'Eden'. From the performance in 'Forest Theatre'.

'Eden's' topic, in all three versions, is certainly mythological, but not Greek. More specifically, 'Eden' is built around the Babylonian 'epic of Gilgamesh', namely the

story of the king of Uruk and his quest for immortality. As Panagiotakis explained in his interview, the story of Gilgamesh, and the references to the illusionary quest for immortality that it contains, is used in the context of 'Eden' as an opportunity to speculate on the process of immigration and their wanderings in the quest of a better life. Given this, I would suggest that the long and eventful journey of Gilgamesh provides a clear parallel for the Greek story of the 'Odyssey'. The 'Odyssey', on the other hand, provides a well-established archetype for the wanderings and their hardships. Indeed in spoken Greek, the word 'Odyssey' almost stereotypically accompanies any reference to immigration and immigrants.

So, Panagiotakis, a Greek painter, interestingly chose to bypass this widely-held parallel and to suggest in his performance a framework for the discussion of the phenomenon of immigration through the myth of Gilgamesh. It is also interesting that, as Panagiotakis confessed in the interview, this differentiation was not deliberate, since he never faced the dilemma of choosing between the myth of Odyssey and the myth of Gilgamesh in his 'Eden' project. I would argue, then, that one can detect two levels of significance in Panagiotakis' use of Gilgamesh's story. On a first level, a Greek artist chooses a non-Greek myth in order to present and elaborate a topic that is commonly associated with probably the most renowned of all Greek myths, the Odyssey. On a second level, a Greek individual operates outside established mythical stereotypes and effortlessly perceives a 'mythically stereotyped' social issue through a different prism. *'My goal is not to take a myth and turn it into something beautiful, or into something Greek'*, Panagiotakis stated, adding that myths' character is universal.

Thanassis Papakonstantinou added to this discussion of Greek myths as spiritual creations that flow in time and space. He declared the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha to be his long-lasting favourite myth, instead of other, more famous, tales of Greek mythology. His fascination with this myth, he explained, started when he realized that parallels for Deucalion and Pyrrha's myth exist in the mythological record of many other civilizations. Amongst these is the biblical story of Noah and the flood, which is almost identical to the Greek Jewish version of the pious couple who are saved by the god's anger, thanks to their piety, and become the ancestors of the human race. As Papakonstantinou clarified, what he finds exciting in this nexus of trans-cultural mythological similarities is that they can be interpreted as an indication of a possible common biological origin for humanity. So, Papakonstantinou put the trans-cultural parameters of Greek myths into a very pragmatic context, seeking to identify in them a common starting-point for humanity's intellectual function.

## Summary

In these ways, a number of my interviewees essentially discussed the universality of Greek myths. They did not perceive this universality, however, as having Greek myths at its core. Indeed, they felt quite the opposite: that it functions against any sort of Hellenocentric exaltation. Greek myths, compared to their foreign counterparts, my interviewees claimed, do not necessarily constitute either the most authentic, or the most significant mythical expression. Indeed, artists like Malamas and Panagiotakis, regarded Greek myths to be as effective and didactic as their Toltec and the Babylonian counterparts. Moreover, in the case of Malamas, Greek and Toltec myths could be regarded as complementary to each other's meaning. Furthermore, Zachariadis takes Greek myths out of focus by placing them among other 'snapshots of human history', instead of referring to them as extraordinarily moments of human history. Papakonstantinou, however, places the discussion in a more pragmatic context, by reading in the trans-culturally similar mythological motifs an indication of all peoples', common biological origin. The ideological character of Greek mythology is illuminated in this section, as Greek myths are perceived as part of the mechanism that humanity has come up with in order to express its thoughts and to philosophize on life. In addition, Greek mythology emerges from this section as a bridge between Greek culture and other cultures, with features completely different to that of Greece and other peoples.

### 3.5 Contemporary Greek mythology

#### Contemporary Greek mythology: 'myth or truth'?

One of the most unexpected and intriguing themes to emerge from my interviews was that of 'contemporary Greek mythology'. The musician Pavlos Pavlidis was the first of my interviewees to mention this. Our point of entry to this concept was provided by 'Atlantis', one of Pavlidis' songs that contains references to Greek mythology. 'Atlantis' is the mythical submerged island, whose story was narrated by Plato in his dialogue 'Timaios'. The island of Atlantis was said to be big enough to be called a continent and its people were sublime in every way: they were tall and imposing, they had a magnificent civilization, and a much advanced technology. They ruled many islands in the area and they maintained a booming economy. Then, in tumultuous geographically times, disaster came from the sea and a massive earthquake sunk the island into the deep blue. Over time, Atlantis has become a symbol of the unattainable target, of the unreachable object of one's desire. The story of Atlantis has also been used in various

forms of popular culture, such as cinema, theatre, literature, animation and music. Pavlidis, in his song, provides his own version of Atlantis' mythical motif:

The blue nights on the island  
the old scum goblins in the bars.  
You said you were coming and you did come.  
Atlantis, lit chariots in the bottom of the sea...

they pass before my eyes  
they phosphoresce and they are gone...

The blue nights on the island  
the kids look at you unsuspecting.  
They ask me where you might have come from.  
I will never tell a thing.

They pass before my eyes  
they phosphoresce and they are gone...

In the shop windows that make me dizzy  
in the screens where computer fonts are typed  
you are mirrored before me again.  
Atlantis, lit chariots in the bottom of the sea...<sup>119</sup>

Pavlidis' song essentially presents snapshots of a love affair on a crowded and loud Greek island, with all that this can imply. In the trance that Pavlidis' hero is in, everything is otherworldly, dazzling, and what he experiences resembles more a vision than reality. Amongst all this, Atlantis, lit-up and phosphorescent, appears before the eyes of the song's hero only for a moment and then disappears again.

Atlantis, in Pavlidis' homonymous song, is deprived of all the symbolic connotations that usually accompany it. '*Atlantis is a tourist hotel*', Pavlidis himself said, referring to his song. '*Do you know how many hotels have the name "Atlantis"?*' The

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<sup>119</sup> 'Atlantis': music, 'Xylina Spathia'; lyrics, Pavlos Pavlidis; performed by Pavlos Pavlidis; 'Atlantis' features in the music album *Πέρα από τις πόλεις της ασφάλτου* (*Pera apo tis poleis tis asfaltou*), Virgin, 1997; Translation: Marina Antonopoulou.

name 'Atlantis' is indeed popular with commonplace, tourist, lodgings on Greek islands, such as Santorini, Paros, Kos and Corfu, which quite frankly exhale nothing grand and mysterious, as their reference to the lost and magnificent island of the myth implies (Figure 94).



Atlantis Hotel

Κεντρική Σελίδα | Διομνή | Υπηρεσίες | Τιμοκατάλογος | Χάρτης & Τοποθεσία | Επικοινωνία & Κρατήσεις

**Atlantis Hotel**  
 Επικοινωνίας Σπυριγγίου 48  
 77100, Κερκυρα, Ελλάδα  
 Τηλ: 26610 35560  
 Fax: 26610 46490

- Home
- Επικοινωνία
- Προσθήκη στη συλλογή

english - ελληνικά

Figure 94. Hotels with the name 'Atlantis' on the islands of Santorini, Paros, Kos and Corfu.

The existence of this 'notional game' in Pavlidis' song is not by chance. As Pavlidis explained, his purpose was to help his listeners think beyond the established and limiting stereotypes that the word 'Atlantis' entails. I 'did not want the listener of the song to think automatically of the myth', he said, but instead to 'let their mind drift

away'. In his song, Pavlidis provides an alternative, mundane, context for 'Atlantis' mythical theme: a context well known to most Greeks. Pavlidis asks his listeners to experience Atlantis as part of the daze of a Greek island summer night. Eventually the tourist hotel, the contemporary Greek island and the mythical sunken island become synonymous with one another. Noticeably, Pavlidis does not proceed to a re-interpretation of Atlantis' mythical motif; he merely provides the coordinates and lets the listener make their own meaning of it.

This is closely related to Pavlidis' perception of mythology in general and to the concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology' in particular. As he said, with reference to his use of Atlantis' myth in his song: *'I wanted to deconstruct the myth and thus let it be born again'*. Pavlidis believes that ancient myths *can* and *have* to be re-interpreted. Moreover, he maintains that the significance of mythology is not in the past, but in the present. Myths really matter, Pavlidis claims, only if they are placed under a contemporary light and understood with reference to contemporary life and experience. Myths should not be exiled to the past, Pavlidis stated in his interview, for in this way they will be condemned to end up empty of meaning and as useless relics. Nor, he added, should they be left only in the hands of academics, as *'the less academically you approach mythology and the less you exile it to the past and antiquity, the more you realize what the purpose of its existence is'*. Ultimately, according to Pavlidis (and this is essentially what he aimed to achieve through his song 'Atlantis') what really matters in relation to mythology are all the new things that an 'old' myth can give birth to, within a contemporary mind.

Myths, then, are contemporary affairs, according to Pavlidis; they are moulded here and now. *'Orpheus made his trip, but now we have the obligation to light it up'*, he said. Myth-making is as much an affair of the present as it is of the past. He concluded with the statement that, *'Greek mythology is being written now'*. Vasileiadis, speaking this time from his perspective as a psychiatrist, supported Pavlidis' theory and confirmed that contemporary people do indeed construct myths and that, moreover, myth-making today constitutes a psychological necessity, as much as it did in the past. Below, I present several types and practices of such 'contemporary mythology' that were also referred to in the interviews.

### **Ancient gods in contemporary art**

'Contemporary Greek mythology', as revealed by my interviews, often has two often overlapping aspects: it can shed new light on the experience of myths of the ancient Greek tradition, as Pavlidis indicated, and it can refer to the creation of new, original, myths. Here, I shall focus on the first dimension, whereas the second will be discussed

in the following section. Amongst my interviewees, Zachariadis presents an interesting case of this aspect of contemporary myth-making in his work entitled 'Offering to the temple of Artemis' (Figure 95).

Zachariadis' offering to Artemis' temple is the brazier, which he uses as a surface upon which to make coffee and work on metallic parts for his artistic creations. More precisely, he offers to the ancient Greek goddess his brazier in its used state: with metallic parts, a coffee pot, a spoon and other objects spread on it. This obscure offering was illuminated by Zachariadis in his interview. As he explained, the work is informed by an extract from the writing of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, which reads: «αἰὼν παις ἐστὶ παίζων πεσσεύων, παιδὸς ἡ βασιλείη»; this translates as: 'time is a child that plays with dice; it is a child's kingdom'. This dictum comes from Heraclitus' treatise 'About Nature' («Περὶ Φύσεως»), which was dedicated by the ancient philosopher to the temple of Ephesian Artemis.



Figure 95. 'Offering to the temple of Artemis'. Sotos Zachariadis.

In his work Zachariadis' repeats the act of his predecessor, or rather he appropriates his predecessor's role and 'mimics' his act. Zachariadis 'pretends' to be a contemporary Heraclitus and, from this perspective, he offers his interpretation of time to the great goddess. Christodoulou, Heraclitus' translator, claims that Heraclitus' dictum is

‘the reserved despair for the indifference with which fate orders the cosmos that finds an expression in the, perhaps, nightmarish image of a child that plays innocently and unsuspectingly with peoples’ lives ... A bad premonition is of course not being expressed explicitly, but the unplanned, the “unforeshaped”, and, in the end, the thoughtlessness of fate’s intervention often inspires more uneasiness than assurance’<sup>120</sup>.

He also refers to another dictum of Heraclitus, which says that ‘the human convictions are a child’s game’<sup>121</sup>, to underline that ‘this is why whatever man thinks of his life, his fate and his future seem, in the eyes of Time, the great child, to be a child’s game.’<sup>122</sup> So, Heraclitus claims that time and all that it brings with it is a chance thing it is the outcome of a game and he gifts this verdict of him, along with others, to Artemis, the patron goddess of Ephesus, the throne which Heraclitus, who was part of the royal family, willingly vested to his brother.

In Zachariadis’ ‘Offering’, Time is presented, as in Heraclitus’ work, as random and wise. All the objects on Zachariadis’ brazier are utilitarian and they all had good reason for being on the brazier at that specific moment in time. Thus, the parallel between the brazier and Time that emerges from Zachariadis’ art work implies that Time and the events that it brings may appear random (like the objects on the brazier and their position), but that in reality it functions to perfection. The throw of the dice may be random, but Time and the events it brings (i.e. what dice represent) shape and determine our character and our existence. So, Time is essentially us. Time is responsible for who we are, as ‘man is made of time’, according to Shakespeare’s words.

The title which Zachariadis gave to his work indicates a conscious reference to Artemis as the eligible receiver of Zachariadis’ work. However, I would argue that, through this work, Artemis escapes her conventional image as the golden-haired virgin of the woods, and that she is instead reduced to the force of the cosmos. Zachariadis worships, in the face of Artemis, life’s fortuity. He celebrates life’s ‘effortless’ effectiveness and celebrates the beauty of the unpredictable that contributes to our identity. So, Zachariadis deconstructs and subsequently reconstructs the mythical goddess in an up-to-date temporal and topical form. By retaining the archetypical theme of Time, and by drawing on Heraclitus’ diachronic elaboration of it, Zachariadis

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<sup>120</sup> Χριστοδούλου, Ι. Σ. (Christodoulou, I. S.), «Επίμετρο» (‘Addendum’), Φάλκος-Αρβανιτάκης, Τ. (Falkos – Arvanitakis, T.) ed., *Ηράκλειτος, Άπαντα (Heraclitus, Complete works)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Ζήτρος (Zetros), 1999, pp. 325-339, (p. 336).

<sup>121</sup> «παιδων αθύρματα νενόμικεν είναι τα ανθρώπινα δοξάσματα»

<sup>122</sup> Χριστοδούλου, Ι. Σ. (Christodoulou, I. S.), «Επίμετρο» (‘Addendum’), Φάλκος-Αρβανιτάκης, Τ. (Falkos – Arvanitakis, T.) ed., *Ηράκλειτος, Άπαντα (Heraclitus, Complete works)*, p. 336.

experiences Artemis in the present day and, moreover, he experiences her so vividly that he addresses to her his depiction of Time.

### **Old myths with a new face**

Such contemporary 'transformations' of ancient myths and their figures do not necessarily preserve the characteristic external attributes of their ancient counterparts, such as the name. This means that Demeter, in her contemporary experience, does not necessarily have to be referred to as Demeter, and the same applies to Artemis, or to any other mythical figure. Finally, and most importantly, in 'contemporary Greek mythology' ancient divinities can be experienced through mortal human beings. So, it is essentially the archetype that exists in the kernel of ancient Greek mythical figures that are re-interpreted and re-experienced within a contemporary context, although they are 'camouflaged'. My interviewees mentioned and discussed the existence and significance of such disguised forms of ancient Greek mythology in the contemporary world and in contemporary Greek society.

Prometheus and Sisyphus, as we have previously observed, are regarded by my interviewees as embodiments of situations that are archetypal for human substance, as defenders of the values that lead human nature to its completion, and as determined and steadfast pursuers of the human substance's highest level. Prometheus and, to a lesser extent Sisyphus, are characterized as the mythical parallels of contemporary pioneer intellectuals, ideologists and visionaries, be they poets or radical politicians. *'Che Guevara'*, Aggelakas said, *'would be a contemporary Prometheus ... so would be Commandant Marcos'*. Gardikiotis, likewise, attributed the qualities that Prometheus embodies to Aris Velouchiotis, an ambiguous, yet famously brave, communist officer of the Greek civil war (Figure 96).

What can take the role of the conveyor of the essence of figures from ancient Greek mythology is not only famous personages of Greek or global contemporary culture. As Aggelakas stated, *'anyone can be Prometheus one day and Zeus the other'*. In other words, literally anyone is a potential embodiment of the archetypes that are encountered in ancient Greek mythology.



Prometheus



Ernesto 'Che' Guevara



Comandant Marcos



Aris Velouchiotis

Figure 96. The ancient Prometheus and his contemporary 'reincarnations'.

Vasileiadis, as a psychiatrist, claimed to have witnessed this manifestation of 'contemporary Greek mythology' everyday in his sessions with his patients. In addition, he provided an elegant 'depiction' of the way in which mythology can function in the

routine of contemporary life, drawing on Bruegel's painting, 'The fall of Icarus' (Figure 97).



Figure 97. 'The fall of Icarus', Peter Bruegel.

In the foreground of the painting, a ship, a shepherd, and a man who is plowing are depicted. As Vasileiadis commented, in a clearly unorthodox manner, considering the central place of Icarus in the painting's title,

*'somewhere in the background, in a distance and in the corner of the painting, there is a tiny falling Icarus. The fall is incorporated into the painting; it is represented as a natural incident of human affairs; it is an everyday story. Bruegel's Icarus is the contemporary Icarus. It is the individual, who has gone off the rails, or it could be the individual who has lost his/her life in a car accident, or it could be the frustrated individual, who fails to reach the longed-for goal'.*

So, I would argue that, just like the tiny falling figure in the painting, who dies while life around him continues uninterrupted, the contemporary Icarus does not have to be someone who causes a stir with their presence.

Interestingly, and in accordance with Pavlidis' plea for us to distance ourselves from the established interpretations of the constitution of a 'contemporary Greek mythology', Vasileiadis' elaboration of the mythical Icarus completely departs from the interpretations that have been traditionally attributed to the figure of Icarus.

For instance, the ancient Icarus has been considered to be a symbol of a 'free spirit', since he died while pursuing his freedom. Icarus, as the first human who ever flew, has also been celebrated as the first aviator. Tellingly, the Greek State Air Academy is named 'School of Icaroi' («Σχολή Ικάρων») (Figure 98). For Vasileiadis, though, the key point in Icarus' myth is that Icarus' father, Daedalus, continued his flight even without his son and went on to appear in other stories of Greek mythology, which metaphorically refers to other incidents of life. W. H. Auden, in his poem 'Musée des Beaux Arts', comments on Bruegel's painting:



Figure 98. Badge of 'Scholi Icaron'.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the plowman may  
 Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
 But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
 As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
 Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
 Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.<sup>123</sup>

I would argue that Auden's words accurately summarize Vasileiadis' interpretation of the myth and mythical figure of Icarus.

It is also worth mentioning that at the port of Icaria, right by the sea, where Icarus was drowned and subsequently been buried, the contemporary Icarians have erected a statue of Icarus, a kind of memorial to their tragically drowned mythical ancestor (Figures 99 and 100)

<sup>123</sup> For the complete poem: Appendix no 21.



Figure 99. Panoramic view of Icaria's port with Icarus' statue. On the wall it reads: 'welcome to the island of Icarus'.



Figure 100. Close-up of Icarus' statue.

Pavlidis provided another interpretation of Icarus' mythical figure and of the archetypal meanings that this encompasses. In this case, Icarus becomes the embodiment of arrogance. Interestingly, Pavlidis found a concise portrayal of Icarus as an archetype of arrogance in two turns of a Greek folk song, which translates as: 'You are building your nest too high and the branch will bend on you; and your bird will fly away and you will end up alone with your heartache'<sup>124</sup>. Pavlidis claims, with reference to the connection between the ancient hero, Icarus, and the quatrain of the modern Greek folk tradition, that this is what mythology is really about. For Pavlidis, in other words, the myth is its message, while the secondary elements of the plot, as well as the names and places, are only facilitators of the message's transmission. From this perspective, mythical heroes and divinities can be detected in intellectual creations (like the folk quatrain), even when the latter bear no direct reference to the mythical figure.

Aggelakas' views on contemporary mythology's function are also remarkable. He drew on the figure of the Sphinx to demonstrate the transformation and re-use of myths over the centuries. 'I believe', he said, '[that Mona Lisa] was the *Sphinx of the Renaissance*'. Mona Lisa, Aggelakas claimed, is no other than Leonardo da Vinci's version of the Sphinx. Before da Vinci, Aggelakas maintained, the same transformation process had also taken place in the case of the ancient Greeks, who presented their view of the ancient Egyptians' Sphinx in the myth of Oedipus and in their art, as a votive as well as a tomb sign (Figure 101).

<sup>124</sup> «Ψηλά τη χιζίζεις τη φωλιά και θα λυγίσει ο κλώνος και θα σου φύγει το πουλί και θα σου μείνει ο πόνος».



*The Egyptian Sphinx*



*The Greek Sphinx, as a tomb sign*



*The Greek Sphinx in the Oedipus' myth*



*Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci*

**Figure 101. The many faces of the Sphinx.**

The archetypal power that cuts across all these versions of the Sphinx is, Aggelakas suggested, 'mystery'. The sexless, massive, Egyptian Sphinx has looked out over the land of Pharaohs for many thousands of years, with its empty, otherworldly, gaze. It is silent yet wise. In its Greek version, and as a tomb sign, the mute Sphinx is chosen as a guardian of the secrets of afterlife. In Oedipus' myth, the Sphinx breaks her silence, but

this is only to pose an unsolvable riddle and to condemn to death those who fail to answer it. The Sphinx is mute or puzzling when she eventually speaks, she belongs to no known living-species (being half-human, half-animal), she is the epitome of mystery. Mona Lisa, on the other hand, has a complex nexus of speculations woven around her smile, her identity and, lately, even her gender. Overall, all three figures constitute embodiments of the archetypical appeal that mystery has to humans and of the challenge that it poses to them.

Dimitris Gardikiotis also expressed his opinions on 'contemporary mythology' and its heroes. The artist came up with an interesting comment on the story of Phaethon, the young son of god Sun, who got his father to lend him his chariot for a ride in the skies. Yet, as Phaethon was too weak and inexperienced, he lost control of the vehicle and caused great destruction: when the chariot came too close to the ground everything was burnt; when it went up, too far from the earth, lethal cold prevailed on the planet. Eventually, Phaeton was killed by Zeus' thunderbolt, who was attempting to save the earth and humans. The picture of a chariot that goes up and down in the sky setting the fields afire is fascinating, Gardikiotis said. Phaethon in his foolish frenzy, he went on, resembles the boy who secretly takes his father's vehicle and crashes. Going one step further, I would suggest that Gardikiotis' example poses a case of 'hubris', a popular archetypical theme of Greek myths and of ancient Greek letters in general, with both Phaethon and the boy being punished not for their disobedience, but because they dared to equate themselves with their fathers and, thus, misappropriate a superior state of being.

### **The birth of new myths**

'Contemporary Greek mythology's' second aspect concerns the construction of a contemporary mythology through the creation of new and original myths, rather than through the re-interpretation and re-elaboration of old ones. What I shall explore here concerns whether new myths emerge nowadays, in order to give voice to phenomena of contemporary society, that cannot be foreseen and covered by the typical motifs of ancient Greek mythology. In other words, I shall investigate the existence and construction of new myths that embody and express new ideas, new thoughts, new fears, hopes and - most importantly - values.

Pavlidis, the interviewee who introduced me to the concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology' provided various examples of the construction of new, contemporary, myths. For instance, he claimed that people today create fantasies and build on these fantasies, about many things that they have not personally experienced. In this way, Pavlidis explains, the Greeks have a certain impression of Japan, China or

Russia, while other people have a certain apprehension of Greece. *'In Greece'*, Pavlidis said, developing his argument, *'it is not sure that everyone has a first-hand knowledge of everyday life in New York, but we have more or less constructed a certain myth about Brooklyn'*. These are regarded by Pavlidis as contemporary mythologies, in the sense that they are newly established fantasies and myths that are born and function in the new global system that we today live in, where cultural borders are open and the influx of information is large. Pavlidis regards art as a major means through which contemporary myths are constructed. He stated, for example, that his perception of Arizona is derived straight from movies such as *'Paris-Texas'*, or *'Arizona Dream'*. In addition, Pavlidis claimed that Lorca's poetry makes him travel to the Spain of foregone times, while Picasso's *'Guernica'* turns him into an eye witness of the Spanish civil war.

'Collectiveness' is a parameter of Pavlidis' conception of 'contemporary Greek mythology', yet it is not a prerequisite of it. He defines 'contemporary myth' as a contemporary fantasy - like his idea of Arizona or Spain that is embraced by a number of people, however, his description of the contemporary myth-making process implies that 'contemporary mythology' is more of a personal matter, or, anyway, a matter that can concern only a number of people, instead of the society in its whole. As to the channels through which this collective status can be achieved, Pavlidis maintained that we might be able to speak of the birth of a contemporary myth from the moment that an artist, like himself, lets his personal myths reach other people through his art. When these myths, Pavlidis emphasized, have a broad status, they constitute the most authentic portrayal of a time and of its peoples. *'I believe'*, he said, *'that people both in antiquity and nowadays construct this magical world and that in this way they can sometimes demonstrate a situation better than historians do'*. So, according to Pavlidis, these contemporary myths are reflections of ideas that historical records fail to identify.

I would argue, drawing on Marc Quinn's statement, with reference to his series of sculptures with Kate Moss (Figure 102), that these 'contemporary myths' 'have clicked with the collective unconscious'<sup>125</sup>



Figure 102. Kate Moss as Sphinx by Marc Quinn.

<sup>125</sup> <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1752241,00.html>, [accessed 07<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

in order to become such, and that they thus constitute subtle psychological portraits of an era and its people.

Savvopoulos' contribution to this discussion regarding the existence of new, contemporary, myths that are characteristic of the culture and character of contemporary Greece and its people is of special weight, as Savvopoulos himself is ranked, at least by the Greek media, as a mythical figure in contemporary Greece (Figure 103). Savvopoulos said to me: *'mythology lives; it is still in progress and it has got unexpected targets'*. Here, he was referring in particular



Figure 103. 'A myth sums up: Dionyssis Savvopoulos'. From an article of 'KAIK' magazine, May 2004.

to two of the most important musicians of contemporary Greece, Vassilis Tsitsanis and Manos Chadjidakis, who, according to Savvopoulos, constitute characteristic examples of the materia, from which contemporary Greece's mythology is made of.

What is interesting in Savvopoulos' statement are the diverse musical and personal profiles of Tsitsanis and Chadjidakis. Tsitsanis (1915-1984) was a composer of rembetiko, of the music of illegal substances, of poverty and the sorrows of jail (Figure 104). He was a child of a large family and he first came into touch with music through his father, who made rustic shoes (tsarouchi), and who used to play the songs of the guerrillas of the Greek Revolution on his mandolin. Tsitsanis' songs and his use of the bouzouki – which was an illegal instrument at the time – were stigmatized as immoral by the Greek juntas of the first half



Figure 104. Vassilis Tsitsanis.

of the twentieth century, and Tsitsanis was on many occasions imprisoned. Tsitsanis was not a 'technical' musician, in the sense that he did not compose his songs, based on musical norms. On the contrary, he composed them 'by heart' and only put on paper their final versions. In 1980, UNESCO initiated the recording of a double album, where Tsitsanis performed some of his most known songs<sup>126</sup>. This record won, upon his release in France, in 1985, the Charles Gross prize of the Music Academy<sup>127</sup>. Today, UNESCO holds some of Tsitsanis' handwritten scores<sup>128</sup>.

<sup>126</sup> <http://homepages.pathfinder.gr/laikotragoydi/bios/tsitsanis.htm>, [accessed 18<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, [accessed 18<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

<sup>128</sup> <http://portal.kithara.gr/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=438>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

Chadjidakis (1925-1994), on the other hand, might be described as a 'nobleman' of contemporary Greek musical culture (Figure 105). He is considered to be one of the major representatives of contemporary Greek 'artistic music', who composed symphonic works, as well as 'artistic popular songs'. Chadjidakis was active in many fields of Greek culture, including his work in the Third Programme of Greek radio and his Record Company 'Sirius'. He was born into an upper middle class family and his father was a lawyer. He started his studies in music at in the age of four, and later enrolled in the School of Philosophy of the University of Athens, where he became associated with the élite of the Greek intelligentsia of his time<sup>129</sup>. Tsitsanis is characterized on the website of the Greek Ministry of External Affairs, as 'the National Popular Composer of Greece', whereas the same source states for Chadjidakis that he 'is not a part of our civilization. He is the Greek Civilization himself.'<sup>130</sup>



Figure 105. Manos Chadjidakis.

Contemporary mythology, according to Savvopoulos, does not have to be grand, nor do the circumstances of its genesis have to be striking. Drawing on his own experience, he said: *'In 1963, I walked past 'Floka' on Panepistimiou street - 'Floka' does not exist anymore - and I saw Chadjidakis and Gatsos sitting at a table and eating spaghetti. Well, at that moment I felt that this scene would enter the land of myth. I was witnessing a mythical scene at that moment.'* In this way, Savvopoulos constructs his mythology from a seemingly commonplace, circumstance. However, it is the compressed wisdom and creative dynamics that this circumstance embodies – thanks to its participants – that elevates it to the land of myth. Furthermore, I would argue that, in his example, Savvopoulos essentially mythologizes the impalpable creative moment that takes society and humanity a step further.

Lachas took the discussion of 'contemporary Greek mythology' onto another level. Speaking firstly of himself and secondly of the collective mythologizing process of the Greeks, Lachas introduces a new 'contemporary myth' into the discussion, St. Cosmas the Aetolian (1714-1779) (Figure 106). This saint was a canonized monk of the Greek Orthodox Church. He lived during the years of Greece's Turkish domination and dedicated his life to the preparation of the revolt of 1821, by reinforcing a feeling of Greek identity, through his promotion of the teaching of Greek language in schools that he himself established all over the Greek part of the Ottoman Empire. It is estimated

<sup>129</sup> [http://www.sansimera.gr/archive/biographies/show.php?id=147&name=Manos\\_Hatzidakis](http://www.sansimera.gr/archive/biographies/show.php?id=147&name=Manos_Hatzidakis), [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2007].

<sup>130</sup> <http://old.mfa.gr/english/greece/today/culture/music/index.html>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007].



Figure 106. St. Cosmas the Aetolian.

that he established more than one hundred schools. St. Cosmas the Aetolian was finally executed by the Ottoman authorities on the suspicion that he was Russian agent.

Lachas' 'mythical hero' is quite different to those of Savvopoulos. The latter are personalities who channel their dynamism to the production of music, and are dedicated to the promotion of psychological 'well being'. They are quiet servants of humanity, who assure the maintenance of the humane element in humans by means of music. St. Cosmas the Aetolian, on the other hand, represents the desire for primordial ingredients of life, such as freedom and, above all, survival. He was the revolu

tionary, the anti-conformist and the militant pursuer of the common good. These two examples and types of contemporary myth will be discussed further in the following section, which explores the character and qualities of the material from which 'contemporary Greek mythology' is composed.

#### The qualities of contemporary myths

The two types of contemporary myth that emerge, then, from my interviewees' elaboration of the topic are: the 'intellectual' artist, and the 'fighting' activist. We shall now examine both of these categories in turn.

According to Savvopoulos, a 'god' of contemporary mythology is a person who possesses some sort of knowledge that others do not. When you come across an extraordinary piece of work that catches your eye and, most importantly, stimulates your thoughts and puts you in the process of reflecting on it and on the background of its genesis, the myth-making mechanism is already active. Malamas' definition of a contemporary mythical person emerges from his description of a poet. He describes a poet as '*a forerunner of humanity who walks ahead, ... miles ahead*'. The poet, he said, pleads humanity to rise to a higher level, which the poet is already aware of. The poet can stimulate people and show them the way up. Artists, then, as mythical figures, are in possession of some sort of knowledge, which comes from the charisma of insight that they inherently possess. The moving force that starts up the mythologizing mechanism is the fact that other members of the community or society, are in need of the things that the artists have to offer, such as their insight and their foresight. As Savvopoulos put it, people today - as surprising as this might seem - cannot live by having money as

their only or ultimate value; they are also in need of some sort of spirituality, a portion of which is given to them by artists, namely by the individuals that people subsequently raise to the status of 'myth'.

In this light, the 'intellectual' and the 'activist' mythical individual come closer to each other. Lachas, in his discussion of the 'mythical' figure of St. Cosmas the Aetolian, names self-transgression as residing in the core of its substance. *'St. Cosmas the Aetolian is a strange phenomenon'*, he said, *'as instead of keeping quiet in his house, he decided to help kids, and to go and build schools from the plinths of churches'*. The important point here, as Lachas explained, is that St. Cosmas the Aetolian promoted the building of schools at the expense of the building of churches, despite being a monk, as he was ahead of his era and could understand things that that seemed irrational at the time, namely that freedom would only come through the cultivation and reinforcement of a common national identity, whose most robust foundation would be the commonly spoken Greek language. *'He could foresee that the road to freedom passed through education and he chose to sacrifice his personal needs - namely the practice of theology in church - for a broader vision'*, Lachas commented.

So, both categories of contemporary myth are essentially imbued with common characteristics. In effect, in both categories we are presented with 'enlightened' individuals, who are gifted with insight and foresight, and who, each one from his own field of action, struggle for a common purpose of progressing and elevating humanity.

Savvopoulos in an interview for the Greek magazine 'CLICK' («ΚΛΙΚ»), provides an enlightening portrayal of the properties and function that a contemporary myth possesses today<sup>131</sup>:

'for me the difference lies elsewhere. Let us take for instance a very talented man of the previous generation...Giorgos Mouzakis, a vivid and talented 'commercial' artist. Yet, the songs of Mouzakis, same as of some contemporary 'commercial' artists,<sup>132</sup> would have existed even if they (the artists) would have existed not, as though as it is essentially the need of an era that generates them. On the contrary, songs as those of Tsitsanis and CChadjidakis would not have existed if those who wrote them would have neither existed. I will move to a more classic example, to raise the quality level. The earth moves, whether Galileus claims so or not; the truth of Socrates, though, would have not existed,

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<sup>131</sup> <http://www.klik.gr/205/nionios/default3.asp>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

<sup>132</sup> In the interview he names them: Giorgos Theofanous and Anna Vissi.

had Socrates existed not. So, my heart melted and always wanted the truth of Socrates, Chadjidakis, Cavafis and Tsitsanis.<sup>133</sup>

## Summary

The concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology' can be divided into two major themes. The first views 'contemporary Greek mythology' through the prism of the re-interpretation and the re-elaboration of ancient Greek mythical figures within a contemporary nexus of meanings and connotations. Central to this aspect of 'contemporary Greek mythology' is the notion of the archetype, which is essentially the main object of negotiation in any myth's contemporary 'revival'. Thus, in my interviews, Pavlidis referred to Atlantis in the form of a tourist hotel and Zachariadis made use of Artemis as a cosmic force in his work. In the same way, Prometheus is 'reincarnated' as Che Guevara, Commandant Marcos and Aris Velouchiotis, while the Sphinx finds a new body in Da Vinci's Mona Lisa. Close to these personified transformations of myth stand the anonymous contemporary gods and heroes, like Vasileiadis' Icarus and Gardikiotis' Phaethon.

The second theme of 'contemporary Greek mythology' relates to the creation of new, original myths, which bear no reference to and are not parallelized with any of the known mythical figures and tales of ancient Greek mythology. The comments of the interviewees on this topic lead to the identification of two general categories of contemporary 'mythologized individual'. The first can be claimed to represent the 'introvert intellectual', whereas the second can be said to correspond to the 'militant activist'. A common set of attributes shared by these two categories also emerge. These common attributes, which can be summarized as self-transgression, insight and foresight, all used in the service of humanity's progress and evaluation, ultimately portray the mythologized individual. They are, according to my interviewees, the desirable qualities of a contemporary Greek myth.

## Speculations on the concept of 'contemporary Greek mythology'

Zervoudakis thinks differently about Greek mythology and especially about the existence, construction and function of new, contemporary, myths (such as Tsitsanis, Chadjidakis and St. Cosmas the Aetolian). Despite warmly supporting the ultimate significance of myths for contemporary life, and even though not completely rejecting the idea of the existence of 'mythical' individuals in contemporary Greek society, Zervoudakis is very cautious when it comes to attributing the status of myth to a

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<sup>133</sup> <http://www.klik.gr/205/nionios/default3.asp>, [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

contemporary personality. *'Chadjidakis'*, Zervoudakis claimed, *'was not a mythical person for those who were close to him. For those who knew him he would have been an ordinary person with his good and his bad points, someone who had great abilities and talents, but also great weaknesses. These individuals'*, he stated with reference to *'contemporary heroes'*, *'are very significant personages of contemporary culture, but they are not myths'*; they were gifted individuals and pioneers in their field of action and, as such, they can be role models, but cannot be attributed the status of *'myth'*, as they cannot in reality support the mythical, namely the *'uplifting'* function. So, Zervoudakis does not disagree with the criteria that the other interviewees set in the quest for contemporary myths, but he does object to, or at least he doubts, the feasibility and frequency of the existence of such *'contemporary myths'*.

The strict criteria that Zervoudakis attributes to the concept of *'myth'* can also be detected in the cautious way in which he approaches mythology's use in art. In fact, Zervoudakis is one of the three interviewees (the other two are Lachas and Aggelakas), who do not incorporate mythology within the expressive means of their art at all. This, he explained, is out of awe and a feeling of *'inadequacy'* towards the demands that an intellectual creation as perfected as Greek mythology puts on its contemporary administrator.

As he stated in his interview, any attempt to re-elaborate and re-interpret mythology requires that the artist should have a solid knowledge of the topic and an in-depth comprehension of the original set of myths. The goal of any contemporary artistic usage of an ancient myth, Zervoudakis claimed, should be the *'promotion'* of the ancient myth and not simply the recycling of its meanings. However, he concluded that, since Greek myths are already refined and elaborated to such an excellent degree, this is an enterprise that should not be taken lightly, and is perhaps better to be avoided altogether, unless the artist is fully aware of their mission and also fully equipped to pursue it. After our interview, on our way back home, Zervoudakis mentioned that he prefers Chadjidakis' approach to myth, who in his song *'Hector and Andromache'* chose not to re-interpret myth, but rather to narrate it again, using his own expressive ways.

In this regard, Zervoudakis stands very close to Markoglou's hesitations as to the aesthetic and moral probity of any attempt to tie ancient Greek mythology to contemporary Greek culture. More than that, though, Zervoudakis' viewpoint is very similar to Pavlidis' opinion on the use of Greek mythology by contemporary art. Pavlidis claimed that, *'if myths are used as a cliché and as a facility, the audience has every right to look down on them'*. Pavlidis pointed out that it is not unusual for artists to find refuge in a well-known story from Greek mythology, which is already charged with a strong and easily recognizable symbolism; and that, in this way, they claim a specific and pre-determined effect on their audience. Mythology in art, Pavlidis maintains, can

function both as a retrograde as a progressive force, depending on the way in which it is handled. However, he admits that ancient Greek mythology has been extensively and intensely abused in contemporary Greece, and specifically by art to the point where it has been turned into a facility, a ready reckoner and a resort for the artist who cannot, or does not want to, come up with their own, personal, innovative ways of expressing ideas and emotions.

Pavlidis' ideas are echoed by Odysseas Elytis, a Nobel Prize winning poet. As he stated,

'the revelation of an alternative way of perceiving things, undeniably constitutes poetry and moreover "first hand" poetry. And (this is something) that we have almost forgotten in the hydrocephalus times we live in, where all those who write poems reach out their hands in desperation to latch themselves onto the lifesaving boats of history and ancient literature ... A poetry, which attempts to "fathom into the insignificant" and to extract from the everyday its real meaning, is normal ... to consciously avoid - and this is of fundamental importance - the utilization of elements from the ancient Greek letters and from mythology.'<sup>134</sup>

As Edmund Keeley, a scholar of modern Greek literature, comments on this painstaking statement by Elytis: 'Truly, the poet approaches the "indirect references to older layers of education" as some sort of neo-intellectualism and he tries to avoid commonplace mythological images, like the thread of Ariadne, considering them to be an easy and ready-made solution.'<sup>135</sup>

### **Urban Myths**

Instead of promoting the re-interpretation and re-elaboration of tales from ancient Greek mythology, then, Zervoudakis, lays an emphasis on another type of 'contemporary myth', so-called urban myths. '*These are the real "contemporary mythology"*', he said, emphasizing the point that these 'contemporary myths', instead of the ancient ones, can indeed play an active role in the life of the contemporary individual. '*These are the stories that maintain magic in our lives, in this harsh rational era we live in*', he said. Zervoudakis warned that urban myths lose their intensity and

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<sup>134</sup> Ivask, I. ed., *Odysseus Elytis: analogies of light*, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1981, pp. 7-15; Αθήνα: Αστερίας, 1971, pp. 398-375.

<sup>135</sup> Keeley, E., *Μύθος και φωνή στη σύγχρονη Ελληνική ποίηση (Myth and voice in contemporary Greek poetry)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Στιγμή (Stigma), 1987, p. 25.

credibility. *'You do not hear about haunted places anymore, about spirits and fairies'*, Zervoudakis exclaimed, and commented that *'our grandfathers truly allowed space for the supernatural in their lives; these people were not necessarily naïve, but they were in touch with their environment and knew how to keep alive the aspect of themselves that accepts the inexplicable; life sustained its charms and its juices.'* Urban myths, Zervoudakis claimed, represent the 'real' 'contemporary mythology' that contemporary people live by, because they are integral to the urban landscape the contemporary individual organizes their life within and, as such, can have a direct impact on the way which the contemporary individual perceives the cosmos. Zervoudakis does not consider these stories to be inferior to the stories of ancient mythology, despite their often crude structural features and their seemingly naïve plot. On the contrary, he finds in all of them the valuable properties of their ancient counterparts. So, Zervoudakis suggests that people today should try and find all these soul-promoting functions of the ancient Greek myths in their contemporary counterparts, which were 'imprinted' on the landscape of contemporary life and have the power to put the 'supernatural' and the 'transcendental' directly into our experiences of life.

#### **Summary**

Zervoudakis suggests an alternative to the previously discussed and positively appraised concept of a 'contemporary Greek mythology' based either on the re-interpretation and use of ancient myths, or on the creation of new myths, compatible to contemporary Greek society, with reference to Greek history and culture's personalities. He questions the feasibility of the existence of individuals that are worthy of the title of 'myth', and also highlights the complexities and difficulties of employing ancient Greek mythology in contemporary art. Zervoudakis contrasts these 'risky' types of 'contemporary Greek mythology' with urban myths, namely the myths that are constructed with reference to, and are circulated within, the landscape of contemporary cities. The artist maintains that these myths compose the actual 'contemporary mythology' that people today need, as they can serve the ultimate purposes of putting the 'transcendental' directly into contemporary life and of reminding people how to keep their minds open to the inexplicable and the fairy-like.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Greek mythology, then, proved to be a prolific topic of discussion. My interviewees, even those who were initially hesitant when it came to their adequacy as analysts of

mythology, provided, more or less explicitly - and more or less consciously - , interesting and fresh insights into 'worn' and clichéd mythological topics and figures. I would suggest that the most unexpected find of my interviews was probably the distinction between Classical and pre-Hellenic myths and the emergence of the latter as a separate notional group and, moreover, as the ideal representatives of the notion of 'myth'. Another unexpected find was the introduction by Pavlidis of the concept of 'contemporary mythology' into the research and particularly his analysis of the process of contemporary myths' construction through art.

By reviewing the findings of my interviews that were presented in this chapter, I would suggest that, despite the different angles from which my interviewees selected and elaborated their mythological themes, their perceptions of mythology and of myth's substance, in effect, overly converge. This is clear from the definitions of myth that my interviewees came up with, responding to the (usually) final question that I posed to them.

Myth, then, was maintained to be *'an aspect of the world's history ... a viewpoint of the world's history'*; *'an aspect of human substance, which contains in abundance the primitive and magical element'*, according to Dimitris Aggelakas and Vasileiadis, respectively. Markoglou defined myth as *'the condensation of life and of life's anticipations and interpretations into a symbol'*, whereas Panagiotakis understands myth as *'the endeavor of man to interpret what he/she could not understand'*. Panagiotakis added that *'this is the situation we are in today too and [from this perspective myth], is a locus of which we can become participants'*. Lachas perceived myth as *'the surpassing of banality'*. Likewise, Stefania Gardikioti defined myth as *'condensed tradition'* and Simotas as *'the consciousness of the era; the collective self-consciousness of a society ... the way that people view the world, the way people face life and think'*. In a similar spirit, Pavlidis stated that *'myth is a parallel life, which stems from real life'*. Moreover, the musician highlighted that *'Greek mythology is being written now'*.

So, what emerges from the above quoted definitions is that, for my interviewees, myth is, on the one hand, a richly meaningful repository of the diachronic experience of life by humans, and, on the other hand, that myth-making is still in progress, and will always be as long as people confront life and its phenomena. Ultimately, I would suggest that my interviewees' perceptions of myth are best encapsulated in Savvopoulos' response to my final question: *'myth is a lie that tells the truth'*, the musician said, and his definition is essentially the foundation upon which my interviewees' discussion of mythology was built.

## 5. GREEK MYTHOLOGY AND GREEK MUSEUMS

### 1. Introduction

The interviewed contemporary artists of Greece contributed interesting remarks with reference to Greek mythology's meaning and its significance for, and association with the contemporary individual. Greek mythology in their hands - whether this is reflected in their works or words - escapes the status of a banality and revitalized, emerging full of possibilities.

What is the case with official culture, though? This chapter is divided in two parts. The first part endeavours to investigate and answer the fifth research question, in other words, 'How do Greek museums, as official institutions, deal with Greek mythology and its dynamics?' More specifically, it does so by concentrating on Greek mythology's relation to Greek archaeological museums. The consideration of Greek mythology's museological status is based both on my personal observations, as well as on the comments of my museum-related interviewees. Moreover, this chapter explores the sixth research question, i.e. 'What are the consequences of Greek mythology's museological status?' As part of this investigation, Greek mythology is examined in association with the concept of 'intangible heritage', and light is shed on the advantages and disadvantages that are implied by this association. The relation of Greek mythology to Greek archaeological museums is critically evaluated with reference to the effects it has both on the institution itself, as well as on Greek mythology's present and future. In the context of this investigation, the status of Greek mythology in contemporary Greek society (Research Question 3) is reviewed. Next, the first part of this chapter endeavours to answer the question 'How could Greek museums enhance their relationship with Greek mythology and contribute to the development of a meaningful relationship between Greek mythology and Greek people? In this context, an alternative museological approach to Greek mythology is suggested, which emerges from the investigation of research question 8, i.e. 'What role could contemporary Greek art play in this dialogue?' The museological potency of the meanings that my interviewees made of Greek mythology are examined, with reference both to Greek mythology's representation in museums, as well as to their effectiveness as a means of communication with museum-visitors.

The second part of this chapter focuses on research question 9, in other words, 'How could the dynamics of Greek mythology in contemporary art be transferred into a museum context?' and presents a virtual museological exhibition of Greek mythology, where my interviewees' remarks are integrated into the museum's

discourse. Finally, this chapter closes with the consideration of the practical implications that are entailed in the application of my interviewees' mythological remarks to a museum context (Research Question 10). Prior to the discussion of these issues, this chapter begins by presenting the biographical profiles of the museum-related interviewees who participated in this research. The transcribed interviews are presented in Appendices 17-19.

## 2. The interviewees

### Evangelos Venizelos<sup>1</sup>



Figure 107. Evangelos Venizelos.

Evangelos Venizelos was born in 1957 in Thessaloniki (Figure 107). He studied Law at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and participated actively in the student movement as member of the Association of Students of Law and of the Central Council of the Student Union of the University. After his graduation he continued his postgraduate studies at the University of Paris II: the Sorbonne. In 1980 he gained a PhD in Law. Next, in 1984 he was elected Reader and then Professor of Constitutional Law in the Faculty of Law of Aristotle University. His political career began in 1990, when he was elected member of the Central Committee of the National

Socialist Movement (PA.SO.K). From 1990 until 2004 he has been appointed to the posts of under-Secretary of the Government's Presidency and representative of PA.SO.K's Press Office, governmental representative, Minister of Transport and Communications, Minister of Justice and Minister of Development. Evangelos Venizelos has also served twice in the position of Minister of Culture.

During his service in the Ministry of Culture Venizelos was, among other things, responsible for the coordination of the preparations for the 2004 Olympic Games and in charge of the 'Cultural Olympics'. This included 'Cinemythology' («Σινεμυθολογία»), a retrospective, which explored the various trajectories taken by Greek myths and cinema (and theatre) in the 20th century<sup>2</sup> and which aimed towards

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.yppo.gr/1/g1120.jsp?person=16>, [accessed 26<sup>th</sup> October 2004].

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.filmfestival.gr/tributes/2003-2004/cinemythology/uk/index.html>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007].

the 'illumination of the diachronic impact of Greek myths and their spreading to the entire width of cinematic and audiovisual creation'<sup>3</sup>. This also included the museum exhibition 'The bull in the Mediterranean', which discussed the bull, as embodiment of the divine, as an object or symbol of worship and heroic authority<sup>4</sup>, which was first presented in the Museum d' Història de la Ciutat, in Barcelona. During his service as Minister of Culture other national museum exhibitions were organized, such as 'Gods and Heroes of the Bronze Age. Europe in Odysseus' Origins' in 2000, and 'Greeks in Spain: on Heracles' Footsteps' in 1998. Evaggelos Venizelos has published a large number of articles and scientific papers and has made numerous contributions to the Press.

The interview with Evaggelos Venizelos shed light on the ideological filter through which Greece's official culture views mythology and on the system of values that invests in it. Moreover, Evaggelos Venizelos' active collaboration with archaeological museums provided me with a firsthand description of these museums' operational style and ideological profile.

#### Malamatenia Skaltsa<sup>5</sup>

Matoula Scaltsa was born in 1950 in Megalo Peuko of Attica (Figure 108). She studied history and archaeology at the University of Athens. She received her MA from the Department of Arts Policy and Management of City University, and her PhD from the Department of Architecture of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is Professor of Art History and Museology at the School of Architecture of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Director of the Interuniversity Postgraduate Program of Museology (IPP) of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and of the University of Western Macedonia. She also teaches museology in the 'Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Monuments' and 'Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art and Mechanisms' postgraduate interdepartmental programs of the School of Engineering of the Aristotle University.



Figure 108. Malamatenia Skaltsa.

<sup>3</sup> Programme of 'Cinemythology'.

<sup>4</sup> *The bull in the Mediterranean*, Exhibition leaflet.

<sup>5</sup> <http://users.auth.gr/~scaltsa/biogren.htm>, [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> January 2007].

She is the author of books on art and museums, as well as the author of art collections' catalogues. She has published more than 100 articles on cultural matters in Greek and foreign collective editions, conference and symposia proceedings, journals, art encyclopaedias, exhibition catalogues and bulletins of cultural foundations' in Greece and abroad.

Over the last 20 years, from 1985 to this day, Skaltsa has curated more than 50 exhibitions of visual arts (thematic, monographic and retrospective), historic documents and archaeological artefacts in the museums of Thessaloniki, Athens and Patras, having collaborated with the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, the Benaki Museum, the National Bank of Greece's Cultural Foundation, the Sports Museum and others. Along with exhibitions, she has supervised the conception and compilation of museum education programs for children and is in charge of the education programs of the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art.

Since 1985 she has been a member of the Board of the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and a member of its Visual Arts Committee. She has also been a member of the Visual Arts Board of the National Bank of Greece, as well as of the Advisory Assembly in Museum Policy of the Ministry of Culture. In 1995 she was in charge of Visual Arts Events and Cultural Events Programming Coordination at the 'Thessaloniki '97' Cultural Capital of Europe Foundation. Skaltsa is also a Scientific Supervisor and Member of a Research Group in Research Programs funded by the European Union on museological issues. She is President of the Association of Greek Museologists, founding Member of the Association of Greek Art Historians, a Member of ICOM, Member of the UK Museums Association, Member of AICA and of the Association of Greek Art Critics. She is married to the architect Panos Tzonos.

Malamatenia Skaltsa contributed significantly to the investigation and understanding of research questions 5 to 10. Malamatenia Skaltsa discussed a wide range of issues that concern Greek mythology's relation to museums. She discussed analytically Greek mythology's current museological status and shed light on the reasons that lie behind it. She focused particularly on the potentials for change and on the evaluation of contemporary artists' contribution to this. In addition, Skaltsa's rich experience in the development of museological exhibitions was valuable for the consideration of the practical issues that Greek mythology's intangible nature poses upon its museological representation.

## Polixeni Adam - Veleni<sup>6</sup>



Figure 109. Polixeni Adam Veleni

Polixeni Adam - Veleni was born in Thessaloniki, where she lives permanently (Figure 109). She is a graduate of the Departments of History and Archaeology of the Faculty of Philosophy of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki as well as of the Department of Theatre Studies of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the same university. She has a Masters degree and a PhD in Archaeology. She has also studied histrionics in the Theatrical Art Workshop, in collaboration with the Experimental Art Scene, as well as Theatrical Theory and Practice in the respective department of the University of Paris III in Sorbonne. She has worked for six years for the Archaeological Service, in the Ephorate of Antiquities of Edessa, in the 16<sup>th</sup> Ephorate

of Antiquities of Thessaloniki, and she was also appointed Director of the 17<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Antiquities in Pieria. Since 2005 Veleni has been Director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. She also teaches History of Theatre and Repertoire Studies in the 'Theatrical Workshop of Art' in Thessaloniki.

She has presented papers at many national and international archaeological conferences and she has published numerous articles, reports and monographs. She is also the editor of books, journals and conference proceedings. She is responsible for the organization of the annual archaeological meeting on the Archaeological Work in Macedonia and Thrace (AEMΘ) that has been realized in Thessaloniki for the last 18 years, as well as for the publication of this meeting's proceedings.

She has contributed to Thessalonian and national newspapers and is a member of the editorial board of the journal, 'Thessalonians' City'. She has participated in the development of nine archaeological museum exhibitions, in Greece and abroad. She has also collaborated in the organization of museum educational programs for children of primary and secondary education on Petres, and on the ancient Forum of Thessaloniki. She has worked for the Greek national TV, in the development and presentation of documentaries of a historical and archaeological topic. She is a member of the Macedonian Artistic Company and of the administrative board of 'Friends of

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.peebe.g.r/site.php?file=bio.xml>, [accessed 26<sup>th</sup> October 2004].

Institution Melina Merkouri', among others. She is married to the Professor of Byzantine Archaeology, Giorgos Velenis.

Veleni reflected on the significance of Greek mythology's meaningful representation in the discourse of Greek archaeological museums and she particularly defended the important role that contemporary artists could play in this. Veleni's interview particularly helped me to pinpoint the difficulties and pitfalls that are entailed in the collaboration between artists and museums.

## **2. Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums**

### **2.1 The context of the relationship**

In contemporary Greece, there are no museums dedicated exclusively to the presentation of Greek mythology. There are, however, museums of contemporary art, museums of Byzantine culture and of Byzantine art, folklore museums, archaeological museums, museums of cinema, museums of sports, to mention only a few. As we saw in Chapter Three, mythology is an ideational system that has had an impact on various fields of thinking and expression, from art to science and from philosophy to sociology. Thus, Greek myths can be encountered on objects that are displayed in various and diverse museological environments, such as folklore museums or museums of contemporary art, or even Byzantine museums. Without a doubt, though, it is in the archaeological museums where the greatest number of objects with a mythological theme, and by extension also the greatest variety of mythological topics, are gathered under one roof. Besides, one should consider that some of the most admired pieces of ancient Greek material culture owe their existence to Greek mythology, in the sense that they were either dedicated to a deity's worship, or used mythological symbolisms to convey certain messages, e.g. of political power. Poseidon of Artemision, the metopes and the pediment of the temple of Zeus in Olympia, Hermes of Praxiteles, and even the cornerstone of ancient Greek material culture, the Parthenon, are a few examples. Alongside these striking pieces, Greek archaeological museums are literally filled with less well-known vases, votive reliefs, sculptures and statues that bear depictions from Greek mythology.

Whether, and in what sense, the ancient Greeks believed in their myths, as well to what extent mythology was synonymous with religion in ancient Greek society, are debatable issues.<sup>7</sup> In any case, mythology was involved in a variety of life

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the relation of ancient Greeks with their myths see: Veyne, P., *Did the Greeks believe in their myths?*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988. For a discussion of Greek mythology's relation to

circumstances, including death (e.g. the Sphinx was used as a tomb sign, and Hermes with the property of psychopomp was depicted on funerary lecythe; Figures 110 and 111), entertainment (e.g. Dionysus and the Maenads are a frequent depiction on vases used in banquets; Figures 112), and, of course, worship (e.g. devotional statues; Figure 113).



Figure 110. Sphinx from a grave in Kerameikos cemetery, Athens. Kerameikos Museum.



Figure 111. Hermes as psychopomp conducts the deceased, *Myrrhine*, to Hades. Carved funerary lekythos. National Archaeological Museum.



Figure 112. *Dionysus as companion in banqueting*. Black-figure Athenian column krater. Late 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 113. Cult statue of Apollo. Archaeological museum of Delphi.

Mythology was also an ideation with great political potency and as such featured in some of the most impressive monumental works of Greek antiquity, such the Siphnians'

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religion see: Festugière, A.-J., 'La Grèce. La religion' ('Greece. Religion'), Gorce, M., and Mortier, R., eds., *Histoire générale des religions* (General history of religions) II, pp. 27-197 and Vernant, P., *Μύθος και θρησκεία στην αρχαία Ελλάδα* (Myth and religion in ancient Greece).

Thesaurus<sup>8</sup>, the building that the citizens of the island of Siphnos dedicated to Apollo to thank him for their wealth.<sup>9</sup> The four sides of the Thesaurus' frieze are adorned with the judgment of Paris, Gigantomachy, the abduction of the Leucippides, and an assembly of the gods of Olympus, who overlook the Trojan War (Figure 114). The pediment of the Thesaurus features the quarrel between Apollo and Heracles over the Delphic tripod (Figure 115). So, whatever relationship the ancient Greeks might have maintained with their myths, mythology constituted an integral element of the way in which the ancient Greeks interacted with the world. The material culture, on which this interaction was projected, constitutes now the subject matter of contemporary Greek archaeological museums.



Figure 114. East frieze of the Siphnian Thesaurus. Archaeological Museum of Delphi.



Figure 115. Detail from the pediment of the Siphnian Thesaurus. Archaeological Museum of Delphi.

## 2.2 The status of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums: the situation today

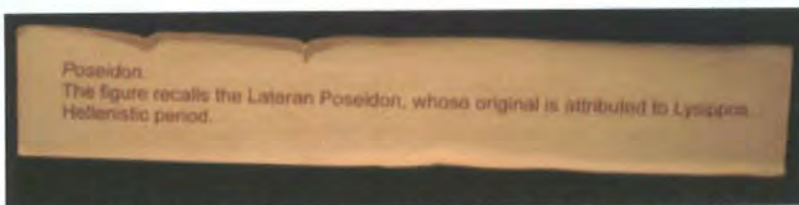
Yet, when it comes to the use that Greek archaeological museums make of the exuberant presence of the meaning- and symbolism-laden subject matter that Greek mythology is, the situation is rather dull. Greek mythology's abundant physical presence in Greek archaeological museums is counteracted by its severe underrepresentation, as an examination of the exhibitions of the majority of Greek archaeological museums proves, and as the comments of my museum-related informants confirm. *'(Ancient Greek mythology) does not exist (in Greek archaeological museums)...not even a pure archaeologist would claim otherwise'*, Skaltsa claims. More

<sup>8</sup> 'Thêsauron', or treasure-houses, were small, temple-like structures, found typically in the sanctuaries of ancient Delphi and Olympia. They were built by Greek city-states to house the dedications of their citizens.

<sup>9</sup> Neer, R. T., 'Framing the gift: the politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi', *Classical Antiquity* 20, 2, 2001, pp. 273-344.

specifically, the core issue in Greek mythology's museological mismanagement is that it does not constitute a separate topic in Greek archaeological museums' narratives. Instead, it is only present through the displayed objects. If an object with a mythological theme is displayed in the museum, then mythology is also displayed indirectly, but the opposite never occurs. So, mythology's presence in Greek archaeological museums is incidental, and therefore, also latent. In practice, any reference to mythology is made apropos of the displayed artefact's description, which is provided on an explanatory label, or text panel.

As mythology was so much a matter of public worship and political ideology, such artefacts happen in some cases to be of noteworthy artistry. They can be a reproduction of an important original work (Figure 116), the identified work of a distinguished ancient master (Figure 117), a work that is indicative of a certain style (Figures 118 - 120), or simply a work that is famous for its fine details, the original or imposing way that it negotiates its topic, etc (Figures 121 and 122).



**Figure 116. Statuette of Poseidon in the Archaeological museum of Pella.**



## HERMES OF PRAXITELES (340-330 BC.)

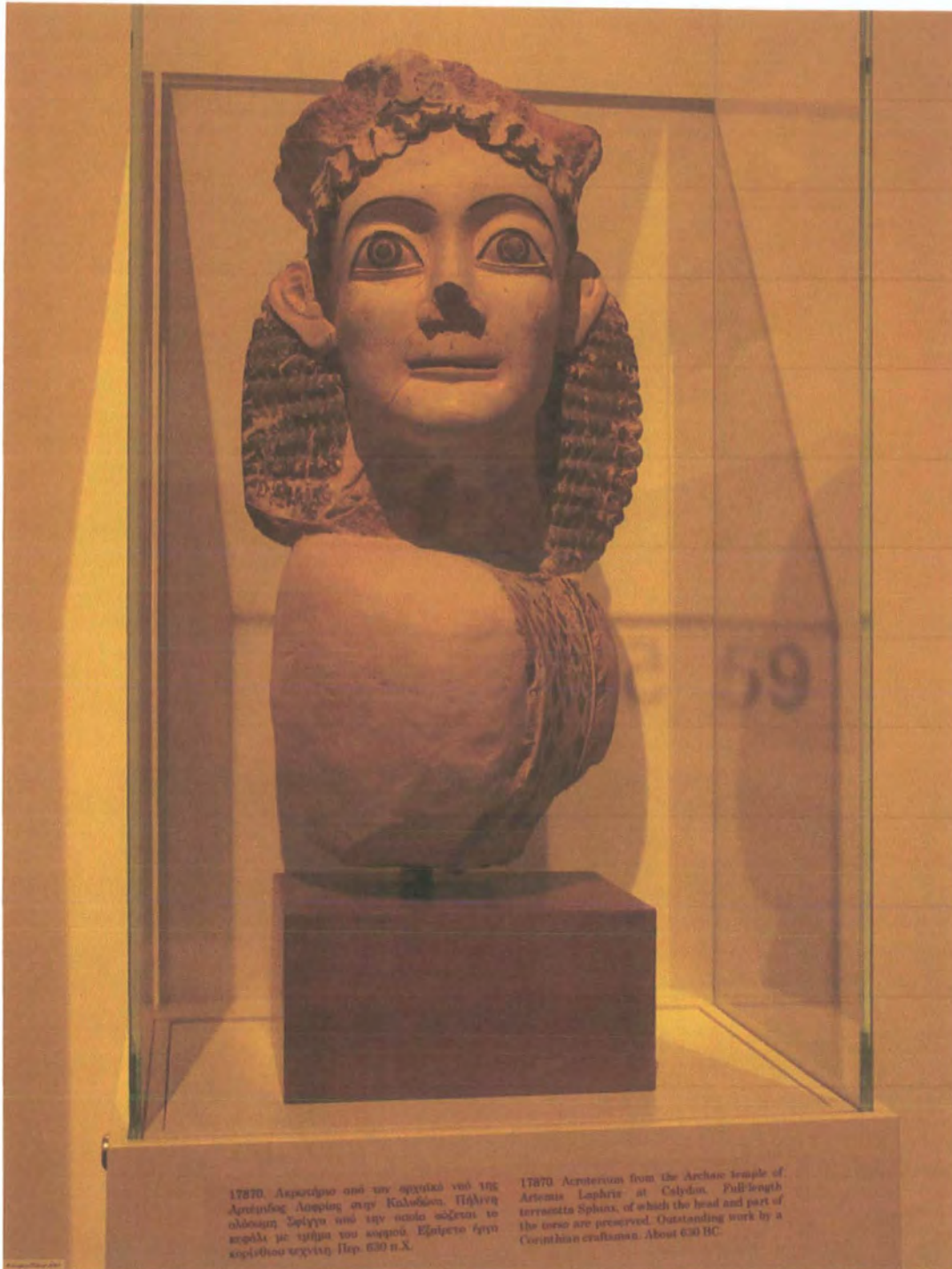
Found during excavations at the temple of Hera in 1877.  
The messenger of the gods, charged by Zeus to take the infant Dionysos to the Nymphs, who were to nurse him, rests on the way having thrown his cloak over a tree trunk.

In his raised right arm he was probably holding a bunch of grapes, a symbol associated with the future god of wine. Dionysos reaches out for it.

The sculptor brought out the beauty of the figure by expressing the Olympian serenity of the god's face and the harmony of his body. The highly polished surface adds to the graceful and soft characteristics of the art of Praxiteles.

Parian marble. Height 2.13 m.  
The calves and the left foot are restored with plaster.

Figure 117. Hermes of Praxiteles. Archaeological Museum of Olympia.



**Figure 118. The Sphinx. The label reads: 'Acroterium from the Archaic temple of Artemis Laphris at Calydon. Full-length terracotta Sphinx, of which the head and part of the torso are preserved. Outstanding work by a Corinthian craftsman. About 630 BC.' National Archaeological Museums, Athens.**



**Figure 119. Hera. The label reads: 'Head of Hera. Marble. Found in the Argive Heraion. It belongs to the cult statue of the goddess or to a statue from the West pediment of the temple of Hera. Argive work, associated with the school of Polykleitos, ca. 420 BC.'. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.**



**X 15161.** Χαλκίνο άγαλμα Διός ή Ποσειδώνος.  
 Βρέθηκε στο βόθρo της θάλασσας κοντά στο ακρωτήριo Αρτεμισίo στη βόρεια Εύβοια. Ο θεός, σε έντονη διάσκελισμό, τεντώνει μπροστά το αριστερό χέρι, ενώ με το δεξί κρατούσε τον κεραυνό ή την τρίαινα.  
 Οι γνώμες διίστανται για το αν αποδίδεται ο Δίας ή ο Ποσειδώνος (πιθανότερη φαίνεται η πρώτη άποψη). Ανεξάρτητα από το πρόβλημα αυτό, το άγαλμα είναι ένα από τα λίγα σωζόμενα πρωτότυπα έργα του αυστηρού ρυθμού με θαυμάσια απόδοση της κίνησης και της διάπλασης του κορμού, αναμφίβολα δημιούργημα μεγάλου γλύπτη της πρώτης κλασικής εποχής.  
 Γύρω στα 460 π.Χ.

**X 15161.** Bronze statue of Zeus or Poseidon.  
 Found in the sea of Cape Artemision, in northern Euboea.  
 The god, shown in great stride, extends his left arm before his body, while holding a thunderbolt or trident in his right hand.  
 His identification as Zeus or Poseidon is controversial (the former identification is more probable). It is one of the few preserved original statues of the Severe Style, notable for the exquisite rendering of motion and anatomy. It is certainly the work of a great sculptor of the early Classical period, ca. 460 BC.

Figure 120. Zeus or Poseidon. The label reads: 'Bronze statue of Zeus or Poseidon. Found in the sea of Cape Artemision, in northern Euboea. The god, shown in great stride, extends his left arm before his body, while holding a thunderbolt or trident in his right hand. His identification as Zeus or Poseidon is controversial (the former identification is more probable). It is one of few preserved original statues of the Severe Style, notable for the exquisite rendering of motion and anatomy. It is certainly the work of a great sculptor of the early Classical period, ca. 460 BC. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



#### THE ATTIC RED-FIGURE HYDRIA

On the main side of the hydria there is a depiction of the contest between Athena and Poseidon over the possession of Athens.

In the centre of the representation Zeus's thunderbolt, through the branches of the olive tree, has decided the outcome of the conflict. On the left, moving in a downward direction, Athena is portrayed; below, Nike prepares to crown the victory-winning tree. Behind her is the King of Athens, Cecrops. On the right, Poseidon's world recedes. The god holds his trident in one hand and a horse in the other, in the direction of the Athenians; between the horse's legs a dolphin is depicted. Beyond, in characteristic motion, is the god's wife Amphitrite and below is Triton. On the shoulder of the vase from right to left are depicted the gods Hermes, Artemis and Apollo, two figures of warriors which are difficult to interpret, a Nike and Dionysos on the left. Between the handles appear a maenad with a wreath and a satyr with a trumpet.

The hydria, which is outstanding both in conception and execution, is a work from the end of the 5th century BC. It was found in the cemetery in the area of the Agora.

**Figure 121. Hydria, where the myth of Athena's and Poseidon's contest over Athens is depicted. Archaeological Museum of Pella.**



**3335.** Group of Aphrodite, Pan and Eros. Parian marble.  
Found in the 'House of the Poseidoniastai of Beryttos' (Beirut), Delos. Traces of colour can be made out in many places. The nude goddess Aphrodite attempts to fend off the goat-footed god Pan who makes erotic advances to her. She holds her sandal threateningly in her right hand, while the winged god Eros comes to her aid. According to the inscription on the base, the group was dedicated by Dionysios of Beryttos to his ancestral gods.  
About 100 BC.

**Figure 122. Aphrodite and Pan. National Arhcaeological Museum, Athens.**

In all these examples, mythology disappears under the weight of the object's overwhelming aesthetic significance. The explanatory labels of the artefacts focus on the external characteristics of the object (material and dimensions) and they describe it in detail, often stating the obvious (e.g. in Figure 120 'The god, shown in great stride,

extends his left arm before his body'; in Figure 121, 'between the horses' legs a dolphin is depicted'). Most importantly, though, they praise the beauty of the object, even if this means using terms that say nothing to the non-professional (e.g. The Zeus or Poseidon is 'one of few preserved original statues of the *Severe Style*'; Hera is an 'Argive work, associated with the school of Polykleitos'; the Sphinx is simply 'outstanding'; Poseidon is of the *Lateran* type; and in Hermes' case the visitor is told that 'the sculptor has brought out the beauty of figure by expressing the Olympian serenity of the god's face and the harmony of his body'). Any reference to the mythical figure depicted is short, usually epigrammatic, and often confusing (e.g. 'the Sphinx is from the Archaic temple of Artemis *Laphris*'). Key points for the understanding of the work, even in aesthetic terms are omitted, such as, for instance, what is a Sphinx, what is her relationship with Artemis, what is the meaning of placing her on the top of the goddess' temple, or what is the story behind Hermes and Dionysus, what are the circumstances behind the serenity that the sculptor depicts on Hermes' face, who are all these figures that participate in the contest between Poseidon and Athena over Athens' ruling? Thus, I would argue that in these displays the roles are overturned, and instead of being mythology and its figures that allowed (through their specific character and attributes) the sculptor to express his talent, it is the artwork that attributes to the depicted figures one or another characteristic and essentially determines, whether Hera is noble and Aphrodite playful and strict at the same time, whether Poseidon or Zeus are to hold a trident or a thunderbolt, etc. In other words, it appears as if it is the art-object that creates the myth and not the other way round.

Perhaps more surprisingly, though, the same denial of mythology can also be observed in Greek archaeological museums in relation to objects of rather 'ordinary' mastery, which are displayed in the museum only because of their mythological theme (Figures 123 - 127). Likewise, a mythology-focused discourse is absent even in museums that owe their existence entirely to mythology, such as the archaeological museum of Eleusis, which presents the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries, which are, in turn, dedicated to the mythical goddesses Demeter and Kore, or Persephone, and associated with the myth of Persephone's abduction by Pluto (Figure 128).



Figure 123. The label reads 'Votive relief with Pluto, Persephone and supplicants. 4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.'. Archaeological Museum of Eleusis.



Figure 124. Iris. The label reads: 'Shed of black-figured hypokreterion. Iris with kerykeion (or caduceus) is depicted. Beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.'. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



Figure 125. Head of Apollo. The label reads: 'Head of Apollo. Thessaloniki. Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> circa A.D.'. Archaeological museum of Thessaloniki.



Marble statues from the Temple of the Egyptian Gods. Isis-Persephone, with her symbolic ornament on the head (disc-and-crescent) is holding a sistrum. Zeus -Serapis, with a modion on the head, is depicted as Plouto, Lord of the Underworld. Next to him is standing the three-headed dog Cerberus, guardian of Hades. Cortyn.  
Roman Imperial times (180-190 AD)

Figure 126. An impressive and illustrative depiction of the mythical gods of the 'Underworld', Persephone and Pluto. Archaeological Museum of Heracleion



Terracotta statuettes found in houses at Pella. Hellenistic period.

Figure 127. Statuettes of Cybele, Eros and Aphrodite. Their mythical identity is not even stated and the intimacy and ideological relation of the statuettes' owner (they were objects of domestic worship) to these deities is completely ignored.



Figure 128. Displays scattered in the museum space, with no organic, from the perspective of their mythical content, connection to each other. Archaeological Museum of Eleusis.

In these cases, then, the names of the depicted mythical figures are epigrammatically mentioned (Figures 123-126), and no further clarifications are given. In some cases, even this simple identification does not occur (Figure 127), and thus the intangible myth is completely overshadowed by the tangible object. In some other cases, where the presentation of the mythical figure expands beyond the epigrammatic reference, the information given is puzzling and peripheral to the core of the figure's essence. Thus, the museum fails to take advantage of the illustrative depiction of Persephone Pluto and Cerberus, where the mythical divinities and their mythical milieu (e.g. the Cerberus) are presented in all their emotive power (Figure 126). The label does not really add anything to the understanding of the depicted figures. On the contrary, the visitor encounters a host of unknown terms and is hindered by a large amount of prior knowledge that is taken for granted. Thus, Persephone wears her *symbolic* ornament, which is a disc and a crescent, and holds a *seistrum*, whereas Pluto, who is at the same time Zeus and Serapis, wears a *modion*. Issues such as what are a *seistrum* and a *modion*, and most importantly how they are related to these deities, what is Persephone's ornament symbolic of, and, in the end, who were Persephone, Pluto and the Cerberus, what significations did they embody and what symbolic value could they have had for the contemporary individual are bypassed. In other words, instead of stating that (roughly speaking) 'Persephone is a lunar goddess and this why she is wearing the disc-and-crescent emblem', the museum moves in the opposite direction, by stating that 'the figure is wearing the disc-and-crescent emblem and this is why she is Persephone'.

Finally, in the museum of Eleusis, which should by definition be a mythological museum, the myth is fragmented, in accordance with the fragments of the material remains that are displayed. The latter stand isolated and disconnected to one another in the museum space and no indication is provided of them being interrelated, by participating in the same myth, in the same cult, and in the end in the same set of ideas and worldview. So, here too, myth submits to the ever-dominant object. Suggestively, the much-discussed depiction of Hecate (according to some) or Persephone (according to others)<sup>10</sup>, which is better known as the 'fleeing Kore' (Figure 128 first from the left) and which constitutes a significant reference to the essence of Demeter and Persephone's cult and to the Eleusinian Mysteries, is not presented in the museum as such, but rather as 'a member of the pediment of the Sacred House' and is identified merely as 'Fleeing Maiden'. Overall, then, I would claim that Greek archaeological museums, in general, do not recognize mythology in their displays, in the sense that they fail to identify the artefact's 'soul', or, more specifically, the idea that

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards, Ch. M., 'The Running Maiden from Eleusis and the early classical image of Hecate', *American Journal of Archaeology* 90, 3, Jul. 1986, pp. 307-318.

was crystallized in a statue, a vase painting, a frieze, etc.

Even when Greek museums do identify the existence of myth in their discourse, one cannot fail to notice that mythology is inadequately discussed, and that separate space is dedicated exclusively for its presentation (Figures 129- 131). Mycenae is an archetypical land of myth (it is theatre of the myths of Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Electra, etc, as well as the place that kick-started the Iliad and the Odyssey, when Iphigenia went down the Mycenae hill to be sacrificed) and the site, where life and myth go side by side (the remains of the Mycenaean Megaron, where the mythical Agamemnon would have passed his days are still there). Here, the recently refurbished archaeological museum presents the bloody mythology of Mycenae in three text panels (Figure 129).



Figure 129. Mythology in the archaeological museum of Mycenae.

The panels are placed near the entrance of the museum, in a room that serves as a type of lobby, before the visitor goes down the steps that lead to the main exhibition of artefacts. So, mythology is, by default, not integrated into the actual exhibition. Moreover, there is an explicit division between the world of objects and the world of ideas and these two do not appear to interact with each other. I would argue that the very division of the museum space transmits a latent but powerful message: on the one side there is *real* life, on the other side there is myth. Mythology is, as a

consequence, exiled to the sphere of absurd fiction, and an awkwardness as to the reason for these stories' existence is demonstrated on the part of the museum.

The information that is provided by the panels develops around two themes. The two first panels are entitled 'The legends of Mycenae' and the third panel is entitled 'the Trojan war'. In the first two panels, the mythical background of the Atreides' house's curse is briefly narrated. The third panel links Mycenae to the Trojan War. The mythological information is enhanced on both panels by images of artefacts with relevant depictions.

The content of these panels is plainly descriptive. For example, in the panel entitled 'The house of Pelops', where the beginning of the Atreides' curse and the consequences that this had for Agamemnon's family are considered, the discussion is exhausted in a mere listing of the mythical events (Figure 130).



Figure 130. Text panel on the 'legends' of Mycenae' from the archaeological museum of Mycenae.

Thus, the absurdity of myth (e.g. Atreus kills his own nephews and nieces, cooks them and eats with them his brother, the father of the victims, etc), the violence, and the overwhelming hatred that imbues the life of its protagonists, are presented as things that do not require interpretation, precisely because they belong to myth, and myth is by definition an absurdity.

Idaion (or Idaeon) Cave is another archetypically mythical *locus*, as its identity is associated more than anything else with the myth of Zeus, Rhea and Cronus. In the museum, a text panel is dedicated to the discussion of the Cave (Figure 131).

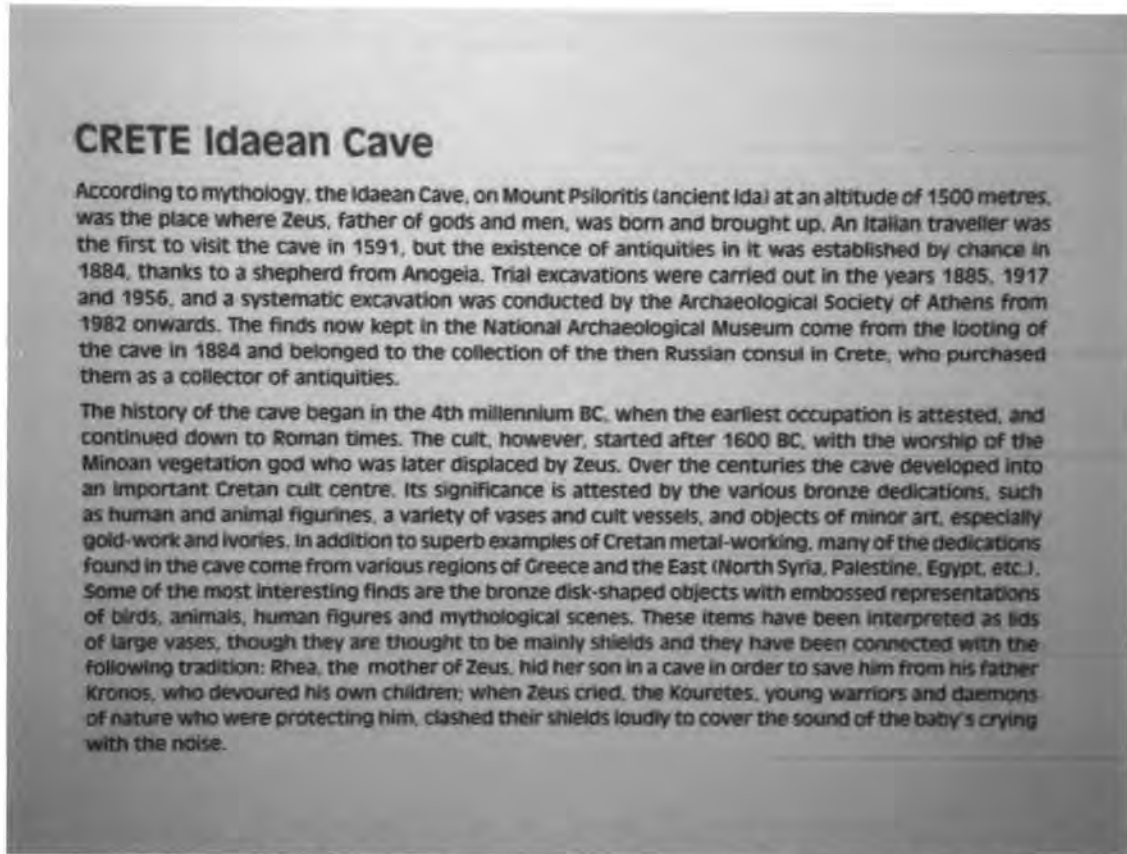


Figure 131. The myth of Rhea, Cronus, baby Zeus and the Corybantes as presented in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

In this, mythology is attributed only a short and hazy mention, which in reality does not speak much about myth. Characteristically, myth is referred to via the object (e.g. '...some of the most interesting finds are the bronze disk-shaped objects with embossed representations of birds, animals, human figures and *mythological scenes*...'). Also, the Kouretes are confusingly identified both as warriors (i.e. humans) and as demons (i.e. supernatural beings). Furthermore, they are presented as arbitrary and disconnected from any rational explanation and notional relation to the myth's meaning that they clashed their shields to protect Zeus. Thus, myth emerges, on the one hand, as a decorative convention; as a means with which the artist fills the object's surface. On the other hand, myth comes across as a somehow meaningless imagery, the creation of a mind that was either deficient, or different to ours. All the magic and vividness of the Kouretes' myth that was explored in Chapter Four, in the contemporary artists'

interviews, is suppressed under an uneasy attitude of the museum towards myth that eventually leads to the diminishment of the myth's significance.

At this point, and before we move to the discussion of the implications of mythology's misrepresentation in museums and the reasons that lie behind this misrepresentation, it should be mentioned that the only exception to this norm is the refurbished Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. Here, Greek mythology gains a separate mention and is emphasized as an element of the ancient Thessalonian and Macedonian civilization. More specifically, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki incorporates in its discourse a section that is dedicated to 'Myth and worship' (Figure 132).

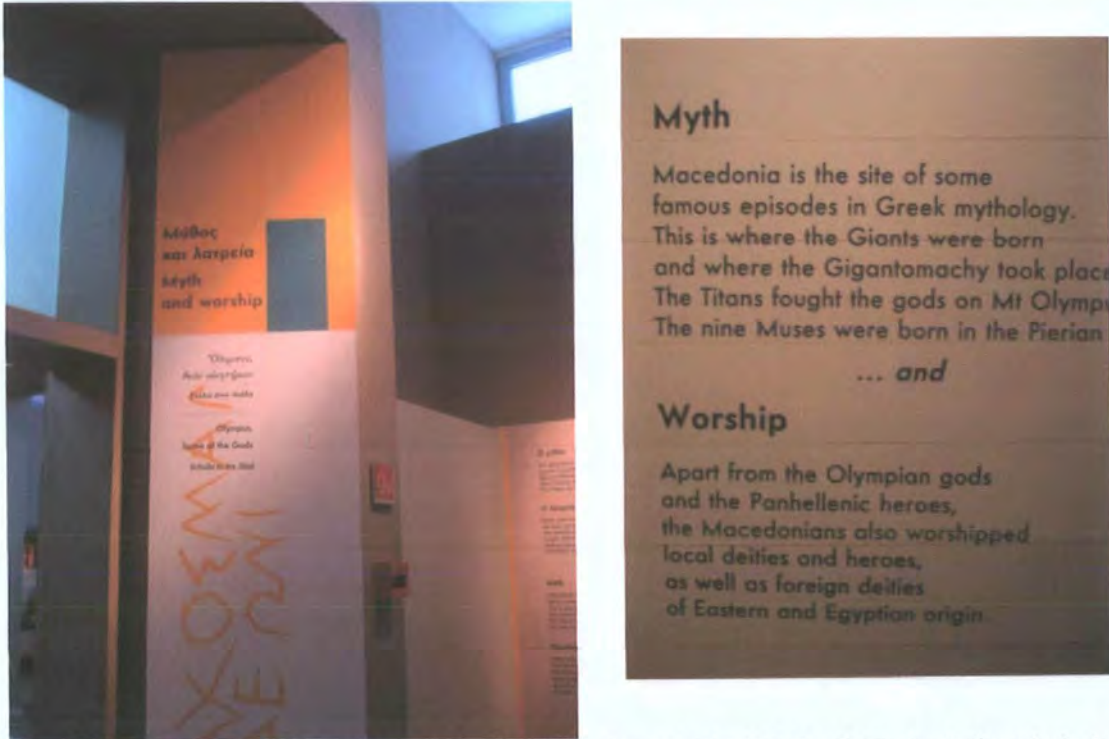


Figure132. Text panels at the entrance of the 'Myths and worship' exhibition from the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

In this section, finds from the city of Thessaloniki and from other areas of Macedonia, such as Chalkidiki, that relate to the religious life of ancient Macedonia are exhibited. Among them, votive offerings, statues from sanctuaries and temples, as well as religious objects for private use - all with mythological references - are included (Figures 133 - 137).



Figure 133. From the 'Myth and worship' exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.



Figure 134. Clay bust of Demeter. It was hanging on the wall of a house. 'Myths and worship' exhibition. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.



Figure135. Potshred with depiction of Odysseys. 'Myths and worship' exhibition. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.



Figure 136. Text panel from the 'Myth and worship' exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

Figure 137. Votive relief to the god Dionysus. From the 'Myth and worship' exhibition. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

Admittedly, and as Veleni, the Director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki herself pointed out in our interview, the 'Myth and worship' exhibition could be further developed, specifically with reference to the extent of mythology's analysis in it. For the time being, the joint discussion of myth and worship remains rather preliminary and superficial, in the sense that the ideological substratum and content of mythical figures and incidents that rendered them recipients of worship does not become evident. I would argue though that, even in this incomplete form, the contribution of the Thessalonian museum's to the museological presentation of mythology is significant, not only for its uniqueness, but also because it succeeds, first, in drawing attention to mythology as a cultural topic with an individual substance, and second, in promoting it as an *active* element of the life of ancient Greeks.

So, considering the consequences that the attitude of the majority of Greek archaeological museums has for Greek mythology, I would argue that mythology emerges as a decorative convention, as merely the means with which the ancient artist sought to fill the object's surface. Moreover, mythology as an intellectual creation comes across as being inexplicable, or rather not worthy of interpretation, as it stems from an ancient mind that is too simplistic and too different to our own to be investigated. Thus, mythology is presented in the museum as is, as an incomprehensible

story, with no interest for the contemporary individual. I would argue that this attitude is the result of two interrelated characteristics of the Greek archaeological museums' identity and operation.

The first characteristic is associated with the fact that the introduction of the concept of the museum in Greece, in 1829, resulted from the needs of Greek irredentism<sup>11</sup> (i.e. the restoration of the Greek nation's independence from the Ottomans), which in turn was based on the concept of primordialism<sup>12</sup> (i.e. the idea that the unification of the Greeks in one nation has its roots in antiquity). The role of this museum was, on the one hand, to showcase the wonders of the ancient Greek civilization, and on the other hand, to demonstrate that the Ottoman-oppressed Greeks of the nineteenth century were worthy children of their glorious ancestors, who appreciated and looked after their ancient heritage. The audience for this behavior was Europe, or more accurately the Western world<sup>13</sup>, which ever since the Renaissance had been fascinated by ancient Greek art and, by the nineteenth century had idealized Hellas and had recognized ancient Greece as the cradle of its civilization<sup>14</sup>. For the nineteenth century Greeks it was this admiration of the West for their ancestors that would help them break the shackles of the obscure Orient and 'regain immediately all their ancestral purity and virtue'<sup>15</sup>. Under these circumstances, the ancient monuments that were at that time scattered all over the Greek territory (Figures 138 - 140) or came to light through excavations became the 'at hand national symbols'<sup>16</sup> and filled the museums.

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<sup>11</sup> Κόκκου, Α. (Kokkou, A.), *Η μέριμνα για τις αρχαιότητες στην Ελλάδα και τα πρώτα μουσεία* (The provision for the antiquities in Greece and the first museums), Αθήνα (Athens): Ερμής (Ermis), 1977; Βουδούρη, Δ. (Voudouri, D.), *Κράτος και μουσεία. Το θεσμικό πλαίσιο των αρχαιολογικών μουσείων* (State and museums. The institutional context of archaeological museums), Αθήνα (Athens); Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Σάκκουλα (Sakoula), 2003, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> According to the concept of primordialism the nation existed long before any state formation was achieved. For a discussion of Greek primordialism see; Kotsakis, K., 'The past is ours: Images of Greek Macedonia', Meskell, L. ed., *Archaeology under fire*, London; New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 44-67, (p. 48).

<sup>13</sup> Mango, C., 'Byzantine and Romantic Hellenism', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18, 1965, pp. 29-43, (p. 37); Δημαράς, Κ. Θ. (Demaras, K. Th.), *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός* (Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment), Αθήνα (Athens): Ερμής (Ermis), 1985; Κιτρομηλίδης, Π. (Ketromelides, P.), *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός. Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες* (Ne-Hellenic Enlightenment. The political and social ideas), Αθήνα (Athens): Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης (Educational Institution of National Bank), 1996; Κονδύλης, Π. (Kondyles, P.), *Ο Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός. Οι φιλοσοφικές ιδέες* (The Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment. The philosophical ideas), Αθήνα (Athens): Θεμέλιο (Themelio), 1988.

<sup>14</sup> Michas, P. M., *From 'Romios' to 'Hellene' (or Greek): a study in social discontinuity*, MA dissertation, Århus University, 1977; Friedman, J., 'The past in the future: history and the politics of identity', *American Anthropologist* 4, 1992, pp. 837-850, (p. 839).

<sup>15</sup> Mango, C., 'Byzantine and Romantic Hellenism', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18 1965, pp. 29-43, (p. 37).

<sup>16</sup> Σκοπετέα, Ε. (Skopetea, E.), *Το «πρότυπο βασίλειο» και η μεγάλη ιδέα* (The 'paradigm kingdom' and the great idea), Αθήνα (Athens): Πολύτυπο (Polytypo), 1998, p. 197.



Figure 138. Landscapes of Athens in the nineteenth century.



Figure 139. Mycenae of the nineteenth century.

Figure 140. Sunium of the nineteenth century.

More specifically, as Gazi points out, the first museums were ordered so as to display as many artefacts as possible, arranged in a chronological and typological order and studied from an art historical perspective<sup>17</sup> (Figures 141 and 142). Thus, Greek archaeological museums, from the time of their emergence, owed their existence to the obvious tangible and aesthetic object, which could transmit a direct message of nationhood. This type of 'aesthetic'<sup>18</sup>, as Spanos comments, is a sealed-off, self-bounded, inclusive image<sup>19</sup>, which stands alone and decontextualized in the museum. The information that accompanies it is minimal and restricted to technical features, such as material, dimensions, date and origin. Greek archaeological museums were not created to discuss material *culture*, but material beauty, which is self-evident and requires no penetration of the object's surface, as 'masterpieces speak for

<sup>17</sup> Γκαζή, Α. (Gazi, A.), «Η έκθεση αρχαιοτήτων στην Ελλάδα (1829-1909). Ιδεολογικές αφετηρίες, πρακτικές προσεγγίσεις» ('The exhibition of antiquities in Greece (1829-1909). Ideological departure points, practical approaches'), *Αρχαιολογία και Τέχνες (Archaeologia kai Technes)* 73, 1999, pp. 45-53.

<sup>18</sup> Shanks, M. and Tilley, Ch., *Re-constructing archaeology. Theory and practice*, London: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1992, pp. 71-74.

<sup>19</sup> Spanos, W., 'Breaking the circle: hermeneutics ad disclosure', *Boundary 2*, 5, 1977, pp. 421-457, ( p. 427).

themselves'.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 141. The old Museum of Delphi.



Figure 142. The old National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

The splendor of the ancient Greek civilization, with its trademark material culture, which came to be commonly perceived and referred to as 'art', has never

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<sup>20</sup> Γκράτζιου, Ο. (Gratziou, O.), «Τ' αριστουργήματα μιλάνε μόνα τους» ('The masterpieces speak for themselves'), *Αρχαιολογία (Archaeologia)* 16, 1985, pp. 37-40; Shanks, M. and Tilley, Ch., *Reconstructing archaeology. Theory and practice*, p. 72.

ceased to constitute the symbolic capital, on which the present time Greeks draw, in order either to identify the insignia of their national identity, or to negotiate their political claims and needs<sup>21</sup> (Figure 143).



*"Speaking of pictures... Greeks still look like their forebears".  
περιοδικό LIFE, 14/7/1947.*

**Figure 143. Detecting the contemporary national identity through ancient art. LIFE magazine, year 1947.**

In this spirit, the tying of Greek archaeological museums to the 'aesthetic artefact' continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to the present day. For example, the museum of Delphi maintained until 2004 the exhibition of 1958-1962 in which even the structural elements of the ancient monuments were installed as individual artefacts, on pedestals and close to the eye-level of the viewer, so that every tiny detail of them could be visible.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the National Archaeological Museum in Athens maintained, until its refurbishment in 2004, the same, outdated, approach to its collections, whose main goal was, according the curator herself, for visitors to admire the masterpieces, to grasp the 'creative spark' and the 'psychic freshness' that

<sup>21</sup> For the discussion of ancient Greek heritage as symbolic capital see: Hamilakis, Y., and Yalouri, E., 'Antiquities as symbolic capital in modern Greek society', *Antiquity* 70, 1996, pp. 117-129;

<sup>22</sup> Κολώνια, Ρ. (Kolonia, R.), «Μουσείο Δελφών. Η ιστορία ενός αιώνα» ('Museum of Delphi. A century's history'), Γαρουφαλής, Δ. and Κωνσταντινίδη-Συβρίδη, Ε. (Garoufalis, D. and Konstantinidi-Syvridi, E.) eds., *Η αρχαιολογία στην Ελλάδα (Archaeology in Greece)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Corpus, 2002, p. 97.

characterizes the 'secondary objects' of Greek antiquity<sup>23</sup>, and also to teach the Greeks that their ancestors were not fiction but a 'real splendor that nourished and still illuminates the world'<sup>24</sup>. The displays were accompanied by 'short interpretative comments', in order for 'individual important works' to be highlighted, that were mostly 'poetic'<sup>25</sup>. Yet, even after the recent refurbishment of the museum, not many things seem to have changed. The artefacts are divided in collections according to their material (The Sculpture Collection; The Vase and Minor Objects Collection; The Metals Collection), whereas in the Neolithic, the Thera and the Mycenaean Collections the artefacts are displayed isolated and are studied from an aesthetic perspective. An anonymous visitor to the museum commented on a blog,

'...objects of a distant era displayed in a random order... minimalistic information on the showcases that separated me from the history of my country, probably because there were more important things to keep me occupied in this museum, which however, do not fall into my awareness. The explanatory labels mentioned the number of the exhibit – usually in wrong order – and a short description of the object – usually a one-sentence word. I still have not understood what the ancients meant by 'pyxis', since those objects, were similar to anything but a compass (pyxis in Modern Greek)<sup>26</sup>.

The outdated character of the majority of Greek archaeological museums today was also confirmed by my interviewees. '*Greek museums are not museums of ideas, they are art history museums and museums of aesthetics*', Venizelos summarizes. The same situation and outlook is maintained by Skaltsa, who added that, in reality, all that museums are occupied with is the glory of the Greeks' ancestors and its manifestation through art. I would argue that a decisive role in the moulding and maintenance of this object-oriented and aesthetic character of Greek archaeological museums has also been played by the administrative dependence of these museums on the discipline of

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<sup>23</sup> Καρούζου, Σ. (Karouzou, S.), «Αρχαίοι και τέχνη. Η νέα αίθουσα του Εθνικού Μουσείου» ('The ancients and art. The new exhibition of the National Museum), *Νέα Εστία (Nea Hestia)* 59, 695, 1956, pp. 849-855; Καρούζου, Σ. (Karouzou, S.), *Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, συλλογή γλυπτών. Περιγραφικός κατάλογος (National Archaeological Museum, collection of Sculptures. Descriptive catalogue)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Διεύθυνση αρχαιοτήτων και αναστηλώσεων (Directorship of antiquities and erections), 1967; Καρούζου, Σ. (Karouzou, S.), *Εθνικό Μουσείο. Γενικός Οδηγός (National Museum. General Guide)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Εκδοτική Αθηνών (Ekdotiki Athinon), 1979.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> <http://miaparea.blogspot.com/2005/06/modern-greece-what-faq-e.html>, [accessed, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2006].

archaeology. Archaeological museums in Greece were originally established under the Archaeological Service and were shared between the 25 Ephorates of Antiquities. The 'Museums Section' of each Ephorate is responsible for the exhibition of the artefacts in the museums of archaeology. So, the archaeologist emerged from the start as the totalitarian authority of the Greek archaeological museums<sup>27</sup> and as the 'ultimate master of the find'<sup>28</sup>.

The practical consequences of this 'autocracy' relate to the profile of the discipline of archaeology in Greece. More specifically, they relate to Greek archaeology's lack of a substantial theoretical base ever since its establishment by Winckelmann.<sup>29</sup> The scientific tools of empiricism and neo-positivism, which early Greek archaeology drew on, promoted the archaeological finds' materiality over their interpretation<sup>30</sup> and, thus, the holistic examination of the archaeological record has been neglected.<sup>31</sup>

The ultimate authority of the archaeologist in museums remained unchallenged, in practice, until the beginning of this century. Only as recently as 1997 (Law 2557/1997), were official measures taken to limit of the archaeological museums' absolute dependence on the Archaeological Service. The most significant among these measures was the institution of a 'Museums Council' (Law3028/2002)<sup>32</sup>, which consists of twenty four museum-related professionals, (such as archaeologists with practical experience in museum administration, a representative of the 'Chamber of Visual Arts of Greece', etc). Naturally, in practice, the dependence of archaeological museums on

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<sup>27</sup> Ζίας, Ν. (Zias, N.), «Εμπειρία κτηθείσα εν τη υπηρεσία» ('Experience gained while on duty'), Skaltsa, M. ed., *Museology towards the 21st century*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Εντευκτήριον (Endevktirion), 1999, pp. 78-81.

<sup>28</sup> Σαατσόγλου-Παλιαδέλη, Χρ. (Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, Chr.), «Αρχαιολογώντας με τους άλλους» ('Archaeologizing with the others'), *Επτάκυκλος (Eptakyklos)* 10, September '98- January '99, pp. 33-35, (p.34).

<sup>29</sup> Kotsakis, K., 'The powerful past: theoretical trends in Greek archaeology', Hodder, I. ed., *Archaeological theory in Europe. The last three decades*, Routledge: London, 1991; Βουδούρη Δ. (Voudouri, D), *Κράτος και μουσεια. Το θεσμικό πλαίσιο των αρχαιολογικών μουσείων (State and museums. The institutional context of archaeological museums)*.

<sup>30</sup> Kotsakis, K., 'Ideological aspects of contemporary archaeology in Greece', Haagsma, M.; den Boer, P., and Moorman, M. E. eds., *The impact of classical Greece on European and national identities*. (Proceedings of an International Colloquium held at the Netherlands Institute at Athens, 2-4 October 2000). Amsterdam: Publications of the Netherlands Institute at Athens, 2003, pp. 55-70.

<sup>31</sup> Καλπαξής, Θ. (Kalpaxis, Th.), *Αρχαιολογία και πολιτική, II, Η ανασκαφή του ναού της Αρτέμιδος (Archaeology and politics, II, The excavation of the temple of Artemis)*, Ρέθυμνο (Rethymno): Ινστιτούτο Μεσογειακών Σπουδών – Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης (Institute of Mediterranean Studies – University Publications of Crete), 1993; Χαμηλάκης, Γ. (Hamilakis, Y.), «Η αληθινή ταυτότητα του ιερού βράχου» ('The real identity of the holy rock'), *ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ (TO VEMA)*, 16 July 2000, p. B03; Κουμανούδης, Στ. Ν. (Koumanoudes, St. N.), *Η ελληνική αρχαιολογία (The Greek archaeology)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Κείμενα (Keimena), 1984, p.16.

<sup>32</sup> Βουδούρη Δ. (Voudouri, D), *Κράτος και μουσεια. Το θεσμικό πλαίσιο των αρχαιολογικών μουσείων (State and museums. The institutional context of archaeological museums)*, p. 279.

the archaeologist do not change that easily and, as Venizelos pointed out in our interview, archaeologists still *'oppose this effort for change, because each has got to have their subject, their period, their expertise'*.

I would claim that the failure of Greek archaeological museums to come up with a holistic reading of their subject matter is also symptomatic of (and influenced by) the general misconception of the nature of cultural heritage, as reflected in the definition, by Greek legislation, of the 'Protection of antiquities and cultural heritage in general', and of the constitutive parts of Greek cultural heritage as 'cultural goods'.<sup>33</sup> According to this definition, Greek cultural heritage includes 'intangible cultural goods', within which myths are also included. The significance of this small detail is clarified by the example of Italy's problematic conception of its cultural heritage as discussed by Giovanni Pinna for 'Museum International'.<sup>34</sup> As Pinna explains, the complex set of assets, symbols and traditions that in English and in French are defined as 'cultural heritage', are instead defined by the Italian state as 'beni culturali', namely 'cultural goods'. In Greek legislation, the term 'cultural heritage' does indeed exist, however the manifestations of this heritage - including myths - are perceived as 'cultural goods', as in Italy's case. As Pinna states, 'words are never used haphazardly in a given language' and the adoption of the term 'beni culturali' or 'cultural goods' is indicative of the fragmentary way in which the composition of heritage is perceived.<sup>35</sup> In this way, 'cultural heritage' is presented as a sum of many small pieces – objects, customs, traditions, intangible artistic creations – that bear few ideological or conceptual bonds to one another. 'Cultural goods' are independent and self-contained values; their value is self-evident and independent from the other elements of the cultural context, which they emerged from. As Pinna emphasizes, the symbolic aspect of these 'cultural goods' is neglected, whereas their material aspect is over-emphasized.<sup>36</sup>

So, I would argue that the archaeological museums in Greece have never felt the need to encounter the intangible in their space and they do not consider the representation of mythology to fall either in their intellectual province, or in their duties. Yet, this is a result neither of reluctance nor of ignorance, but rather of a deep-rooted misconception regarding the nature of the tangible world and a narrowing of the perceptual horizon that leads to conviction that Apollo *is* the marble head.

Just how deeply the dependence of museums on 'visuality' is rooted, is manifested by my interviewees' reaction towards mythology with representatives of the official culture, like Venizelos, and representatives of 'unofficial culture', like Alaveras.

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<sup>33</sup> [http://www.yppo.gr/files/g\\_1950.pdf](http://www.yppo.gr/files/g_1950.pdf), [accessed, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007].

<sup>34</sup> Pinna, G., 'Heritage and cultural assets', *Museum International* 210, 53, 2, April-June 2001, pp. 62-64.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

*'There is also the disadvantage of the lack of artifacts that could help the development of an exhibition on mythology, an exhibition with very specific artifacts on display. Mythology is more of an idea than of something tangible, Venizelos says. The product of 'mythification' has to have a certain amount of tangibility, in order for it to function in a museum, Alaveras likewise says. As for the question of how the product of 'mythification' can become a subject of museological research, he answers: yes. How will it happen? How will it stand in a museum? I cannot imagine how this could happen, although what you say sounds very attractive to me. I do not know to what extent this can be realized. I would be very interested in seeing this applied in practice. It would be very interesting to see how this could become part of museological practice.*

### **3. Greek mythology as intangible heritage in museums**

As mentioned in Chapter One, Greek mythology faces the same perils as the UNESCO - established manifestations of intangible cultural heritage, and is therefore also in need of safeguarding. UNESCO, in the 'Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage' determines that the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is a responsibility of both formal and informal education and that museums are defined as part of the latter. UNESCO explains 'safeguarding' precisely as:

*'measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission....., as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage'<sup>37</sup>*

So, it follows that, by failing to identify mythology among their subject matters, Greek archaeological museums also imperil mythology's documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, as well as its revitalization.

#### **3.1 Implications for Greek mythology**

Greek mythology, as mentioned in Chapter One and observed in Chapter Three, is an element of ancient Greek culture that has been extensively studied and documented. Given this, Greek mythology's extinction appears to be out of question - at least in the foreseeable future and, so, Greek archaeological museums should not need to shoulder

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>, [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

the responsibility for its documentation. I would argue, though, that Greek mythology's extensive documentation has raised other issues on which museums should indeed have a word.

More specifically, Greek mythology has been so thoroughly documented and researched that it can hardly be perceived outside the elitist boundaries of scholarship. 'Science itself', Kerenyi says, 'is obliged to open for mythology the road it closed with its interpretations – science in its widest sense, which in this specific case is the historical, the psychological, the cultural and the anthropological study of myths'<sup>38</sup>. So, the under-representation of mythology in museums also adds to mythology's institutionalization, by putting mythology, with no further explanation, into an environment that is thoroughly dedicated to the past. Following the mode of thought that was first introduced by Herodotus, and that was subsequently adopted by Western thought as part of the general schema of a dualistic perception of the world, Greek archaeological museums perceive the past that they exhibit in contradistinction to the present.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, in the case of Greece this is not just any past, but a celebrated, almost sacred, past. Glorious, austere, wise, flawless, this past - from prehistory to the Hellenistic era - is almost unreal in its perfection; it is beloved, but alien in the implausibility of its qualities. We are all, as Greeks, happy that this past has existed, but we cannot imagine ourselves in it: too much philosophy, too much valour, we probably would not cope. Greek mythology, then, is disconnected from life, it resides in a foreign country, which we have no reason to visit.

This observation is relevant to the status that the Hellenic past, in general, possesses in the self-perception and self-identification of present-day Greeks. Scholars such as Kotsakis, Hamilakis and Herzfeld, among others<sup>40</sup>, suggest that Greek heritage has two faces, a Hellenic and a Byzantine one, that are different and even antithetical to one another, and they point out that the present day Greeks do not actually feel as close to their Hellenic ancestors as is implied by the nineteenth century declaration of Greek national identity. Thus, as Kotsakis puts it, in Greece there have always existed

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<sup>38</sup> Jung, C. G., and Kerenyi, C., *Η επιστήμη της μυθολογίας (Introduction to the science of mythology)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Ιάμβλιχος (Iamblichos), 1989, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Κωτσάκης, Κ. (Kotsakis, K.), «Αντικείμενα και αφηγήσεις. Η ερμηνεία του υλικού πολιτισμού στη σύγχρονη αρχαιολογία» ('Objects and narratives. The interpretation of material culture in contemporary archaeology'), *Επτάκυκλος (Eptakyklos)* 10, September 1998-January 1999, pp. 11-23 (p.11).

<sup>40</sup> Herzfeld, D., *Ours once more: folklore, ideology and the making of Modern Greece*, Houston: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.19-20 and 90-96; Kotsakis, K., 'The past is ours', Meskell, L. ed., *Archaeology under fire*, pp.44-67, (pp. 54-56); Λεοντή, Α. (Leonti, A.), *Τοπογραφίες Ελληνισμού: χαρτογραφώντας την Ελλάδα (Topographies of Hellenism: mapping Greece)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Scripta, 1998, pp. 133-134; Toynebee, A., *The Greeks and their heritages*, p.7; Hamilakis, Y., and Giallouri, E., 'Antiquities as symbolic capital in modern Greek society', *Antiquity*, 70, 1996, pp. 117-129; Lowenthal, D., 'Classical antiquities as national and global heritage', pp. 726-735; Michas, P. M., *From 'Romios' to 'Hellene' (or Greek): a study in social discontinuity*.

two different cultural models, an 'extrovert' Hellenic one, constructed by, and primarily addressed to, an international audience, and an 'introvert' Byzantine one, of a domestic favour.<sup>41</sup>

UNESCO's convention firmly underlines the vital significance that the living community has for the preservation, promotion and transmission of intangible heritage, saying that one of the features of Intangible Cultural Heritage is its constant re-creation 'by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history'.<sup>42</sup> As Pinna explains, 'the living cultural expressions preserved artificially from the outside become fossilised in space and time; they lose any point of contact with the community in which they originated, they cease to be passed down and hence cease to be heritage.'<sup>43</sup> So, the loss of contact with the community equals degeneration and essential 'cancellation'.

However, as pointed out in Chapter One, mythology is indeed widespread in contemporary Greece: people are named after ancient gods and heroes, hotels, bars, consumer goods and companies bear names from Greek mythology. So, Greek mythology has not perished, it is indeed present, it is remembered, it does circulate within Greek society and is passed down from the past to the present and from the present to the future. The question though is, in what form do we want Greek mythology to be passed down and transmitted? To 'safeguard' is to ensure the dynamism of intangible cultural heritage, Yoshida says<sup>44</sup>, but this hardly seems to be the case with Greek mythology. What we witness with reference to mythology's omnipresence is rather overexploitation and lack of purpose, which generates and at the same time maintains the derogation of Greek mythology into cliché. The fear, articulated by Walsh, that the past is becoming a plaything whose only meaning and purpose is to be consumed by museum visitors, seems to come true in the relationship of mythology and Greek archaeological museums.<sup>45</sup> Greek mythology constitutes a source on which anyone can draw, but this seldom goes hand in hand with any real analysis and interpretation of mythology. What Greek society essentially recreates from Greek mythology is this beautiful relic, trapped in a time-wrap, that it given to Greek society by Greece's official culture.

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<sup>41</sup> Kotsakis, K., 'The past is ours', Meskell, L. ed., *Archaeology under fire*, pp. 44-67 (p.55).

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002>, [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> September 2007].

<sup>43</sup> Pinna, G., 'Intangible Heritage and Museums', *ICOM News: News Bulletin* 56, 4, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Yoshida, K., 'The Museum and the Intangible Cultural Heritage', *Museum International* 56, 1-2, May 2004, pp. 108-112.

<sup>45</sup> Walsh, K., *The representation of the past*, London: Routledge, 1992.

Like Brett, Dicks, Hewison and Jameson<sup>46</sup> I would argue that mythology's absence from the museums' discourse equals the silent acceptance of the 'post-modernist', in the sense of absurd identity that contemporary society imposes on Greek mythology.

This becomes more obvious when Greek mythology's position in 'drastic' and 'static' advertisement is observed. Here, gods and heroes of mythology lend their names to products, enterprises and advertisements, ranging from soap, to hotels, to butcher's counters, to computer software, to elevator brands. In some cases, a clear metonymic relationship between the mythical figure and the commodity can be detected. In these cases, the mythical figures play essentially the role of a quality 'guarantor'. In other words, they endow the advertised commodities with the specific properties that have been traditionally attributed to the mythical figures (Figure 144). Thus, Hephaestus, as the divine smith, guarantees robust and strong elevators; the Hellenic Post declares its experience and effectiveness by being associated with Hermes, the first and moreover divine messenger; Zeus, as the almighty king of gods, lends some of his kudos to the software program; and so on.



Figure 144. Mythical figures as 'quality guarantors' of commodities.

In other cases, however, the affinity between the commodity and the mythical reference is non-existent (Figure 145). Thus, Artemis, the mythical virgin of the woods,

<sup>46</sup> Dicks, B., *Heritage, place and community*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000, p. 33; Brett, D., *The construction of heritage*, University College, Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 1996, p. 35.

is associated with a butcher's counter; Hermes, the divine messenger, the psychopomp and the guard of the crossroads advertises cement; whereas Hera, the tremendous protector of marriage and labour, becomes, completely irrelevantly, a chair.



Figure 145. Mythical figures with an absurd relation to the advertised commodities.

Here, it is in fact mythology's 'antiquity' that is commercially exploited, in the same way that Benson and Hedges cigarettes appropriated the Egyptian pyramids<sup>47</sup>. The advertised commodities acquire ancient kudos, by association with mythology, regardless of, whether this association is merely exhausted in an arbitrary brand name<sup>48</sup>.

This point is discussed further, and with specific reference to Greek mythology, by Bouliotis.<sup>49</sup> In the exploitation of mythology for commercial purposes, Bouliotis comments, 'ancient' equals 'classic', which in turn refers to qualities such as perfection, sobriety, solemnity, elegance, durability, healthy content, etc.<sup>50</sup> It is evident here that the advertising messages are not chosen with reference to any knowledge that the consumer may possess about antiquity. On the contrary, I would argue that the advertisement invests in the 'hazy and extraneous knowledge', in Bouliotis' words, that characterizes the relation of the general public to antiquity<sup>51</sup>. This 'hazy and extraneous knowledge',

<sup>47</sup> Fowler, P. J., *The past in contemporary society: then, now*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> Μπουλιώτης, Χ. (Bouliotis, Ch.), «Η αρχαιότητα στη διαφήμιση» ('Antiquity in advertisement'), *Αρχαιολογία (Archaeologia)* 27, 1988, pp. 22-29, (p. 24).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

is further reinforced by mythology's involvement in the post-modern 'heritage industry'. Thus, as the motto of an alcoholic drink indicates, mythology becomes everything and, in the end, nothing (Figure 146). It is synonymous with 'ancient', which means 'classic', which in the end means whatever the consumer decides it to mean. It is identified with an absurd string of largely irrelevant references that function out of context. This is further cultivated and eventually perpetuated by the museum due to its failure to provide an alternative context for the perception of ancient Greek myths.



*There's a Legend (Mythos) everywhere...*  
**Figure 146.** Advertisement of the Greek beer 'Mythos'. The motto of the beer is: 'there is a myth everywhere'.

I would argue that, in the case of Greece, the commodification of ancient heritage, including mythology, also entails the concept of 'banal nationalism', as discussed by Billig<sup>52</sup>. 'Banal nationalism', refers to the type of national identity discourse that is not aggressive and direct, but rather latent and quiet. An example of the latter is the flag that quietly waves before our eyes on the staff of a public building, by contrast to the 'screaming' flag at the head of a protest.<sup>53</sup> Yet, Billig maintains, this mild form of nationalism is no less potent, because its expressions (in our case, the omnipresent mythical figures) may be so much part of routine life that they pass unnoticed, however they do actually constitute 'daily, unmindful reminders of nationhood'<sup>54</sup>.

Greek mythology, though, also constitutes the material for more aggressive nationalist imageries and discourses, through its association with 'alternative archaeological' theories<sup>55</sup> which develop and function in association with the discourse of 'national mysticism'<sup>56</sup>. In the context of this discourse, mythical figures are presented as historical personalities, mythical incidents as historical facts and the gods of Olympus as the founders of the Greek nation. In short, the Greeks (the Hellenes) are presented as descendants of the 'Hel', i.e. the Gods of Olympus, who were in reality supreme beings

<sup>52</sup> Billig, M., *Banal nationalism*, London: Sage, 1995, pp. 174-177.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-177.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>55</sup> Schadla-Hall, T., 'The comforts of unreason: the importance and relevance of alternative archaeology', Merriman, N. ed., *Public archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 255-271.

<sup>56</sup> The term 'national mysticism' refers the use of pseudoscientific and apocryphal beliefs to support nationalistic claims.

with advance technology and great power (Figure 147).<sup>57</sup>

Their alleged historical fights have been used for the construction of more or less explicit imperialist discourses. Liakopoulos, a leading figure of 'nationalist mysticism', declares in his book:

'almost everybody thinks that Dionysus was the personification of raving and wine-drinking. Our educational system – it is unclear why – suppresses the truth, i.e. that Dionysus was one of the biggest army commanders of all times and that he conquered and colonized the Upper East. Thus, many millions of Greeks live in these areas, today, but no one has ever heard about them'<sup>58</sup>; and

'Heracles has reached us in the form of the righteous hero, who, dressed in his lion skin and with a club at hand, helped the poor and the weak. Yet, things are not like this. Heracles was a major army commander. In fact, in one of his expeditions, he conquered and ruled Central America, at least, according to the written testimonies of Plutarch, whom, the academic community accepts and trusts, worldwide.'<sup>59</sup>

An entire nexus of prophecies has also been built upon these beliefs, which aim to promote the Greeks as the world's primordial and legitimate rulers. According to these, the world is today once again threatened by the 'Nephelim' and it will be saved, in 2024, when the Greeks, the superior race and the descendants of the Olympian Gods, reconquer the world<sup>60</sup>. A group of 'Hel' who live among us is preparing the ground for the Greeks' future dominance (Figure 148.). In works of the same ideological orientation, Greek mythology is arbitrarily blended with Christianity in an attempt to win 'national mysticism's' pseudohistorical discourses an appeal among the Christian

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<sup>57</sup> «Φοβερό μυστικό από τον Λιακόπουλο» ('Awesome secret from Liakopoulos'), *Espresso*, 18 October 2007, pp. 23-24.

<sup>58</sup> Λιακόπουλος, Δ. (Liakopoulos, D.), *Γη, ο πλανήτης των Ελλήνων. Ασία (Earth, the Greek planet. Asia)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Λιακόπουλος (Liakopoulos), 2006, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Λιακόπουλος, Δ. (Liakopoulos, D.), *Γη, ο πλανήτης των Ελλήνων, Ευρώπη (Earth, the Greek planet. Europe)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Λιακόπουλος (Liakopoulos), 2006, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> A concise and enlightening presentation of 'mystic nationalism' and of its leading figure's, Liakopoulos, positions can be found at:

<http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://content.answers.com/main/content/wp/en/thumb/1/19/240px-UT-Hodges-Centaur.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.answers.com/topic/dimosthenis-liakopoulos&h=164&w=240&sz=30&hl=en&start=28&tbnid=4d23BkfGSNhYxM:&tbnh=75&tbnw=110&prev=/images%3Fq%3D%25CE%25BF%2B%25CE%25BA%25CE%25B1%25CE%25B9%25CF%2581%25CE%25BF%25CF%2582%2B%25CE%25B3%25CE%25B1%25CF%2581%2B%25CE%25B5%25CE%25B3%25CE%25B3%25CF%2585%25CF%2582%26start%3D18%26gbv%3D2%26ndsp%3D18%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN>

Orthodox population of contemporary Greece. Thus, Prometheus, the Titan with whom my interviewees were preoccupied in Chapter Four, is claimed to have been saved not by Heracles, as the mythical tradition has it, but by Jesus Christ. Aeschylus is presented as a prophet and his tragedy ‘Prometheus Bound’ is interpreted as a prophecy on the coming of the Messiah who would save the world that is represented by Prometheus<sup>61</sup>.



Figure 147. Cover of the book ‘The technology of the gods’, which refers to the ‘Hel’.



Figure 148. Cover of the book ‘They live among us’. It refers to the ‘Hel’ and depicts the statue of Apollo from the pediment of the god’s temple in Olympia, wearing a diadem with the Delphic ‘E’, the ‘Hel’s’ sacred letter.

The discourse of ‘mystic nationalist’ is not a marginal, underground, cult that is revealed only to the ‘initiated’. On the contrary, it is extensively published and its books are showcased in big, central, bookstores both in Athens and in Thessaloniki. Furthermore, the beliefs of ‘national mysticism’ are promoted in television programs, which are broadcast everyday by a multitude of minor Greek TV stations. So, I would claim that today the implausible preachings of ‘national mysticism’ are also to be added to the constitutive elements of the ‘hazy and extraneous knowledge’ that characterizes the Greek general public’s relation to mythology. Given this, I maintain that Greek museums cannot afford to ignore what occurs outside their walls, in society, which they exist because of and for. ‘Nationalist mysticism’s’ theories may be a laughable matter for the expert, or the informed visitor, but they are not for the majority of the public who do not possess or read academic books on mythology and do not hear a satisfactory counter-argument to the, often well constructed, imaginings on the significance and

<sup>61</sup> Σακέτος, Α., *Λάλων Υδωρ (Speaking Water)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Λιακόπουλος (Liakopoulos), 2005, pp. 279-288.

relevance of Greek myths that 'national mysticism' promotes.

#### 4. Mythology and the 'new' museum experience

The failure of Greek archaeological museums to identify mythology among their subject matter deprives mythology of the opportunity of being effectively preserved, protected, promoted, transmitted, enhanced and revitalized. The question now is, how is the museum affected by this dysfunctional relationship? What opportunities is the museum deprived of through mythology's exclusion? These questions shall be investigated in the following sections. For this purpose this discussion relates to the definition of 'museum', as published by Museums Australia:

'a museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organizations that contribute long-term value to communities'.<sup>62</sup>

Museums Australia's definition departs significantly from ICOM's acknowledgment of 'material evidence' as the exclusive object of acquisition, conservation, research, communication and exhibition in museums, by also naming 'ideas' as part of the communicative tools of the museum. Noticeable also is the special emphasis that the 'Museums Australia' definition puts on the relationship between museum and society, in the spirit of 'New Museology's' rhetoric and, of course, the current Australian post-colonial political climate. According to ICOM's definition, by contrast, the museum is

'a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment'<sup>63</sup>.

Here then, the social relationship of the museum is left on at abstract preliminary level.

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/site/page13.php>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

<sup>63</sup> <http://icom.museum/definition.html>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

According to Museums Australia, on the other hand the 'museum' becomes concrete, as it is specifically stated that a museum 'helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future'<sup>64</sup>. It is against this baseline that the museological value of mythology will be assessed and discussed below. In other words, mythology's significance for the Greek museum can be perceived with reference to the new experience that the museum is called to construct for its visitors and which, according to Museums Australia's definition, is described as 'helping people understand the world and interpret the past and present and explore the future'<sup>65</sup>.

This new concept derives in part from the long debate that developed in the museum world after World War II<sup>66</sup> and which, among other things, led to a demand for the reconsideration of the museum's relation to society and of the role that education should have in a museum context. Thus, perceived within a broader consciousness of the museum's social responsibility, museum education changed from the traditional didactic delivery of facts to the implementation and conveyance of learning experiences<sup>67</sup>. The 'new', re-invented, museum is a place of inspiration, a place where stories and ideas are communicated with the ultimate goal of creating fulfilled individuals.<sup>68</sup> In Wittlin's words, the new educational experience is about helping visitors to realize 'new relationships between phenomena on earth, and between their own behaviours and what happens around them'; it is about developing 'a wider gamut of understandings and of appreciations'; and it is about developing the visitor's ability to 'think judiciously and to feel humanely'.<sup>69</sup> As Roberts puts it, this 'change of guard' in museums 'it is about visitors using museums in ways that are personally significant to them'<sup>70</sup>. Interestingly, the most concise definition of this new educational reality of museums was expressed many years before all these sweeping changes in museums occurred, by Rea, who, in 1930 perceived museums' educational function as being

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/site/page13.php>, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

<sup>66</sup> Specht, J., and ManLulich, C., 'Changes and challenges: the Australian museum and indigenous communities', McManus, M. P., *Archaeological displays and the public*, London: Archetype Publications, 2000, pp. 39-63, (p. 39).

<sup>67</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, E. *The educational role of the museum*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1999.

<sup>68</sup> Skramstad, H., 'An agenda for museums in the twenty-first century', Anderson, G. ed., *Reinventing the museum. Historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift*, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004, pp. 118-134, (p., 126).

<sup>69</sup> Wittlin, A., 'A twelve point program for museum renewal', Anderson, G. ed., *Reinventing the museum. Historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift*, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004, pp. 44-79, (p. 47).

<sup>70</sup> Roberts, L. C., *From knowledge to narrative: educators and the changing museum*, Washington D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977, p. 132.

synonymous to 'the enrichment of the life of the people'.<sup>71</sup>

The museological representation of Greek mythology, I would argue, contains all the qualities needed to construct this much-desired holistic educational experience that the 'new' museum is seeking. If the ultimate desire of the museum is 'to change the way people see both the world and the possibility of their own lives'<sup>72</sup>, then mythology provides a concise means towards meeting this goal, especially in Greece. Through mythology, the Greek archaeological museum, without denying its archaeological character, can engage with a host of life-influencing topics. Mythology is a massive accumulation of skillfully disguised archetypical experiences of humanity, which, through insightful museological interpretation and imaginative museological representation, can be revealed, elaborated and communicated. Through mythology, museum visitors can learn about the past, while learning about themselves. It is like a mind-game with multiple levels, in which museum visitors are called to understand the present and themselves through the past, while at the same time perceiving both the past and the present as agents of a pan-human language. Myths, Campbell maintains, are stories that speak 'of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance' and which help us understand life and the mysterious and essentially find out who we are.<sup>73</sup>

## 5. From theory to practice

So, I would argue that, in order for a radical revision of Greek mythology's relation to Greek archaeological museums and their visitors to be achieved, the museum needs to face and overcome three main challenges. First, Greek mythology needs to be highlighted as a separate cultural asset (the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki has taken steps in this direction). Second, Greek mythology needs to be promoted by the museum as something whose absurd surface is underlied by rationale. Third, the museum has to persuade its visitors that Greek mythology is relevant and meaningful.

In Chapter Four it was established that Greek mythology powerfully retains its notional and ideological dynamics in contemporary Greek art. So, I would argue that the museum could find in contemporary art the interpretative mechanism it requires, in order to invest Greek mythology with meaningful significance and an up-to-date image. In the following section then, I consider the ways in which contemporary artists could

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<sup>71</sup>Rea, P. M., What are museums for?, *Journal of adult education* 2, June 1930, pp. 265-271.

<sup>72</sup>Skramstad, H., 'An agenda for museums in the twenty-first century', Anderson, G. ed., *Reinventing the museum. Historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift*, pp. 118-134, (p., 132).

<sup>73</sup>Campbell, J., *The power of myth*, p. 4.

contribute to the enhancement of the relationship between Greek people and Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums.

### 5.1 Artists and museums

The effectiveness of artists as communicators in museums is appraised here on the basis of the discussion of the relation between artist and society in the field of sociology. The connection of the artist to society has been analyzed by Marxist theorists, such as Gramsci and Goldman<sup>74</sup>. Goldman in presenting his concept of the 'trans-individual' argues that,

'the social group would not be competent (or would find it extremely difficult) to gain awareness of its goals and its ambitions, without the intervention of privileged and creative individuals. On the other side, these individuals (among which artists are included) would not be able to create, had they found not the principal elements that join them to the collective conscience'<sup>75</sup>.

Jane Wolf in her book on *The social production of art* also emphasizes the bond between artists and society, since artists and their works 'are conditioned not only on the basis of biography, but also through the interference of collective conscience'<sup>76</sup>. Finally, Pierre Bourdieu in his discussion of the relationship between cultural production and society claims that it is time that artists were demystified and that the belief that creative production is a sort of 'social magic', or 'special language of grace', or charisma, were deconstructed.<sup>77</sup> He points out that artists are not some otherworldly, charismatic, creatures that live disconnected from the everyday world that other people experience, nor are they creatures that respond differently to this world, being gifted with beyond average alertness. Furthermore, Bourdieu points out that art is inevitably connected to society, as it is society which recognizes an artwork as such.<sup>78</sup> This argument is fully

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<sup>74</sup> Suggested further reading: Jones, J. S., *Antonio Gramsci*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006; Evans, M., *Lucien Goldman: an introduction*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981; Goldman, L., *Lukacs and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992; Goldman, L., *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1987; Goldman, L., *Power and Humanism*, London: Spokesman Books, 1974.

<sup>75</sup> Goldman, L., 'Genetic structuralism in the sociology of literature', in Burns, E., and T. eds., *Sociology of literature and drama*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 115.

<sup>76</sup> Wolf, J., *The social production of art*, London: the MacMillan Press, 1981, p. 119.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

confirmed by my sample of interviewed contemporary artists, all of whom are well-known and valued within Greek society.

In addition, Bourdieu in his analysis of the field of cultural production makes one more remark that is of vital significance to the way in which I have promoted artists as interpreters of mythology in this thesis. The most significant social and cultural contribution of artists, Bourdieu maintains, is their ability of 'making of meanings'.<sup>79</sup> This ability of pinpointing significances in things and of giving shape to the abstract is key to this interpretative role. Myths are one such category of thing, which, through their polysemic nature, are prone to being deciphered; they almost call forth artistic inquiry. The scholar Metta confirms this, by stating that 'the return of the ancient myth in the contemporary work of art does not equal repetition, but a critical renewal of the myth's plausibility or of its truth, as well as of its communicative potentials'.<sup>80</sup> With reference to the latter, Jung's analysis of the social importance of art is particularly relevant.<sup>81</sup> The source of the artwork, Jung maintained, is not the *personal unconscious*, but the unconscious mythology, whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind.<sup>82</sup> Ancestral experiences underlie any artistic creation. Furthermore, Jung claimed that

'the artist seizes on this (primordial) image and, in raising it from deepest unconsciousness he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it, until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries accordingly to their powers'.<sup>83</sup>

This positively appraised relationship between artists and mythology is taken one step further by Campbell, who declares that artists are not merely effective interpreters of ancient myths, but their *only* eligible interpreters. Campbell, in *The power of myth*, explains that today the interpretation of myths lies in the hands of artists. Artists, Campbell maintains, are the shamans of our era who can interpret the unseen things for us. The interpretation of myths is the artists' function and it is artists who communicate myth for today, provided, he says, they are artists who really understand myth and not 'simply sociologists with a program for you'.<sup>84</sup>

From a museological perspective, recent museum practice has demonstrated that the assigning of contemporary artists to the role of interpreter in

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<sup>79</sup> Webb, J., *Understanding Bourdieu*, Thousand Oaks; New Delhi; London: Sage, 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Μήττα, Δ (Metta, D.), *Μύθος και τέχνη (Myth and art)*, p. 163 and following.

<sup>81</sup> Jung, C., *The spirit in art, man and literature*, London: Routledge, 1984.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>84</sup> Campbell, J., *The power of myth*, p. 122.

museums can be very beneficial. In general, artists are believed to be effective agents of learning, both in official and in unofficial education<sup>85</sup>, through their qualities as imaginative educators<sup>86</sup>, influential role models<sup>87</sup>, and good collaborators in learning, within the context of 'engaged pedagogy'<sup>88</sup>, as well as social activists<sup>89</sup>. With specific reference to museums, experience has shown that artists can bring a degree of 'lateral thinking that is unusual among teachers and museum staff'.<sup>90</sup> As Sarah Lockwood, the head of life-long learning at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich says, artists in museums can encourage creative thinking and help see the collections from a different perspective.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, when it comes to a subject like mythology, contemporary artists, apart from being inventive, creative and imaginative individuals, have one more advantage: they have no expert knowledge of the subject. This may sound bizarre, but this lack of 'inside' knowledge is actually liberating, as it helps them see beyond the academic subject and towards the great journey that mythology is. Furthermore, it releases them from interpretative taboos and helps them think about mythology holistically, outside the confines of academic interpretive traditions.

The contribution of contemporary artists to museum practice is not limited, though, to a mere auxiliary role, helping curators broaden their interpretative horizons. Artists in museums have also proved extraordinarily effective when actively intervening in the exhibition with their artworks, as aids to communication, and as facilitators of the learning process in the museum. With special reference to archaeological museums, artists, Jameson maintains, can communicate contexts and settings in a compelling and unique way.<sup>92</sup> They help, he says, to value and redefine the subject matter (which is a basic principle of constructivist learning<sup>93</sup>) and make it more meaningful to the public.<sup>94</sup> The imaginative interpretations of the subject matter can be the reverse of 'dry' and

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<sup>85</sup> Pringle, E., *'We did stir things up' The role of artists in sites for learning*, London: The Arts Council of England, 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Oddie, D., and Allen, G., *Artists in schools. A review*, London: The Stationery Office, 1998; Dewey, J., *Experience and education*, London: Collier McMillan, 1938.

<sup>87</sup> Manser, S., *Artists in residence. A teacher's handbook*, London: London Arts Board and St Katherine and Shadwell Trust, 1995; Sharp, C., and Dust, K., *Artists in schools. A handbook for teachers and artists*, London: Bedford Square Press, 2001.

<sup>88</sup> Hooks, B., *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*, London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>89</sup> Kaye, C., and Blee, T. (eds.), *The arts in healthcare*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997; Paley, N., *Finding art's place: experiments in contemporary education and culture*, London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>90</sup> Morris, J. 'Artistic values', *Museum Practice*, Autumn 2005, pp. 44-45, (p. 45).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> Jameson, J. H., 'Art and imagery for public interpretation', Jameson, J. H.; Ehrenjard, J. E., and Finn, A. eds., *Ancient muses: archaeology and the arts*, Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2003, pp. 57-64.

<sup>93</sup> Hein, G., *Learning in museum*. London: Routledge, 1998.

<sup>94</sup> Jameson, J. H., 'Art and imagery for public interpretation', Jameson, J. H.; Ehrenjard, J. E., and Finn, A. eds., *Ancient muses: archaeology and the arts*. pp. 57-64.

straight-forward academic approaches to the collections and their meanings and can add many elements that are traditionally missing from the museological narrative, such as humour, irony and provocation, which are very effective in stimulating the visitor's perceptions and learning.<sup>95</sup> Jameson thinks that works of art are essentially social and cultural statements, which the museum visitor perceives and is called to ponder over,<sup>96</sup> whereas Stearn proposes that art works, in the context of archaeological exhibitions, are 'aesthetic and humanistic expressions of cultural history' that give the visitor 'added and enhanced perspectives on cultural history, society, and the human condition'<sup>97</sup>. And this is, I would say, precisely what a post-modern holistic museum experience should strive to achieve.

Another potential benefit deriving from the collaboration between museums and contemporary cultural production is that the museum could become noticed by, and appeal to, alternative audiences that do not traditionally visit museums. Thus, among the criteria that were taken into account in the selection of contemporary artists as interviewees for this thesis was their appeal to a wide and diverse audience, and particularly their popularity with population groups that are commonly 'difficult' for the museum, such as teenagers and individuals of average education. Finally, it should be mentioned that, particularly in the case of mythology, contemporary artists, through their works and their comments, actually echo certain academic interpretations of mythology. In fact, in quite a few cases, interpretations of mythology that have been articulated by scholars of various schools of mythological thought were reflected in my interviewees' mythological insights, unbeknown to the latter. This convergence of thinking gives the museum the opportunity to refer to otherwise abstract and complex theories in a simplified way, through actual examples, which bring them closer to the perceptual sphere of the museum visitor.

Artists and academics are, arguably, two sides of the same coin and complement each other. Mythology is not only about insight and imagination; it is also an intentional, carefully and densely structured creation, with religious, social and political connotations. On the other hand, mythology does not take one far, if approached only through cold-blooded rationality. In any case, as Rea pointed out back in 1938<sup>98</sup>, museums, in the context of the holistic, life-enriching, experience that they are called to offer their visitors, should not neglect their obligations towards

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<sup>95</sup> Pearce, S. M., 'Presenting archaeology', Merriman, N, ed., *Making early histories in museums*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999, pp. 12-27; Shanks and Tilley, *Re-constructing archaeology. Theory and practice*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>96</sup> Jameson, J. H., 'Art and imagery for public interpretation', Jameson, J. H.; Ehrenjard, J. E., and Finn, A. eds., *Ancient muses: archaeology and the arts*. pp. 57-64, ( p. 59).

<sup>97</sup> Stearns, P. N., *Why should study history?*, at <http://www.historians.org/80/pubs/stearns.htm>, [accessed 23 November 2007].

<sup>98</sup> Rea, P. M., 'What are museums for?' *Journal of adult education 2*, June 1930, pp. 265-271.

scholarship, which are as valid as ever, since museums house academic evidence. Much more recently, scholars such as Merriman and Skeates have drawn attention to the crossing of the line in museums in terms of the emphasis that they put on the significance of the role of the visitor, as interpreter, and make a plea for the reintroduction of scholarship into 'museum education'.<sup>99</sup> I would add that especially in a topic as complex, as mythology, the visitor expects to find in the museum valid answers to their questions. As Dean has pointed out, people look for answers in museums and they go to museums to 'learn facts' about things.<sup>100</sup>

Merriman with his concept of 'informed imagination' provides the theoretical approach to Greek mythology that is advocated in this chapter. Through 'informed imagination', museums can encourage a diversity of views, creativity and the use of imagination by visitors, but without neglecting their role as conveyors of knowledge about the past through historical contextualization.<sup>101</sup>

From an educational perspective, the use of contemporary artists as museum interpreters is largely based on the principles of constructivist learning and well as on the learning theories of Csikszentmihalyi<sup>102</sup>. In accordance with constructivist learning, the use of contemporary artists in the museum can give visitors the opportunity for new experiences<sup>103</sup>. The museum visitors are stimulated by the fact that popular artists, who they do not traditionally encounter in the museum, display their opinions on an old and academic subject matter. In addition, the amateur status and relationship of contemporary artists in relation to mythology, and the awareness on the part of the visitor that he is not the only amateur in the room, can be liberating, and encouraging, especially when it is made clear that this is accepted by the museum.<sup>104</sup>

Uzzell emphasizes the point that abstraction impinges on our engagement with topics presented in the museum.<sup>105</sup> The illustration of Greek mythology's diachronic meaning and relevance to the contemporary individual, through its use in

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<sup>99</sup> Merriman, N., 'Introduction', Merriman, N. ed., *Public archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 1-17, (p. 12); Skeates, R., *Debating the archaeological heritage*, London: Duckworth, 2000, pp. 122-124

<sup>100</sup> Dean, D., *Museum exhibition*, London; New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 25.

<sup>101</sup> Merriman, N., 'involving the public in museum archaeology', Merriman, N. ed., *Public archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 85-108, (pp. 102-103).

<sup>102</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, M and Hermanson, K. 'Intrinsic motivation in museums', Hooper-Greenhill, E. ed., *The educational role of the museum*, p. 146-160.

<sup>103</sup> Copeland, T., 'Presenting archaeology to the public', Merriman, N. ed., *Public archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 132-144, (pp. 140-142).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-142 ; Potter, B. P., Jr, 'The archaeological site as an interpretive environment', Jameson, J. H. ed., *Presenting archaeology to the public: digging for truths*, Walnut Creek; California: Altamira Press, 1997, pp. 43-44.

<sup>105</sup> Uzzell, D., 'Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, London: The Stationary Office, 1998, pp. 11-25.

artworks, creates a specific, 'tangible' means through which the visitor can perceive the museum's message. The examination of mythology in a more real-life framework could be especially important for adult visitors, who tend to be very pragmatic.<sup>106</sup>

Related to this is Tilden's remark that museum visitors will neither stay with a display, not learn from it, unless they can establish a relation between the museological subject matter and their lives, their experiences, and their existing knowledges.<sup>107</sup> Sotto has also underlined the importance of pre-existing schemata or mental models for the effective perception and elaboration of information.<sup>108</sup> According to his theory, which has been discussed in a museological context by Hooper-Greenhill, individuals, in order to grasp abstract concepts and elaborate new information, have the need of a pre-existing mental pattern, a schema that functions as the frame for the new cognitive structure.<sup>109</sup> Spalding illustrates this recalling that 'Picasso never painted a totally abstract painting, because, he said, he wanted to provide a figurative stepping-stone into the picture - a recognizable way in for anyone, whether or not they knew anything about art'.<sup>110</sup>

The establishment of personal links between the museum visitor and the museum display also has the benefit of injecting an affective component into the subject-matter and museum experience. Uzzell claims that issues that involve personal values, beliefs and interests will excite a degree of emotional arousal<sup>111</sup>, whereas Jameson links this to contemporary art, claiming that the presence of contemporary art in archaeological museums can evoke feelings and cause the visitor to think.<sup>112</sup> This kind of interpretation has been named by Uzzell as 'hot interpretation'<sup>113</sup>. For Tilden, interpretation which does not lead to an emotional experience of the world is deficient

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<sup>106</sup> Burton, H., *Adult museum programs: designing meaningful experiences*, London: Altamira Press, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Tilden, F., *Interpreting our heritage*, p. 9.

<sup>108</sup> Sotto, E., *When teaching becomes learning. A theory and practice of teaching*, London and New York: Cassell, 1994.

<sup>109</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, E., 'Learning from the learning theory', Hooper-Greenhill, E. ed., *The educational role of the museum*, pp.137-145, (p.143).

<sup>110</sup> Spalding, J., *The poetic museum: reviving the historic collections*, Munich; London; New York: Prestel, 2002, p.89.

<sup>111</sup> Uzzell, D., 'Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, London: The Stationary Office, 1998, pp. 11-25.

<sup>112</sup> Jameson, J. H., 'Art and imagery for public interpretation', Jameson, J., H.; Ehrenjard, J., E., and Finn, A. (eds.), *Ancient muses: archaeology and the arts*, pp. 57-64, (p. 59).

<sup>113</sup> Uzzell, D., 'Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, pp. 11-25, (p. 13); Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R., 'Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, pp. 152-171.

in some important respect<sup>114</sup>, whereas Uzzel claims that 'good' interpretation entails the provocation of emotions. Artists' interpretations of myths are, I would argue, direct and emotion-laden, as they emerge from a personal involvement with and experience of the myth. So, artists' emotive approaches to the meanings of mythology are well-suited to provoking a response on the part of the visitors, be it positive, or negative. The effectiveness of 'hot interpretation' is also supported by constructivist learning theory, which maintains that learning involves the stimulation of the visitor's thought and furthermore relies on the freedom of the museum visitor to analyze and create<sup>115</sup>. Hein, the key representative of constructivist learning theory, places the affective, self-directed experience, at the heart of the learning process.<sup>116</sup>

Another important constructivist learning factor, which artists as interpreters could fulfill, is in the 'personification' of Greek mythology.<sup>117</sup> In other words, the use of 'real' and familiar people like contemporary artists (instead of the impersonal and unfamiliar curator) as communicators in the museum has the potential to bring the human element into archaeological exhibitions, which have been criticized by scholars as deficient due to their failure to take adequate account of the human factor.<sup>118</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, in his learning theory, indicates that people are interested in people and that museum visitors ask for a 'soulful' connection between themselves, the displays, and the larger cosmos.<sup>119</sup> The literature that concerns the method of 'live interpretation' in museums is investigated further in Csikszentmihalyi's theory, which states that in museums people want to feel a part of the experience, seeking kinship with the past, through the existence of a group of which they can feel members.<sup>120</sup>

I would argue that this connection of mythology to real-life and to the present also has a benefit for mythology as it could counteract Laenen's criticism that 'most museums present the past in isolation from the present, forgetting that the present is a continuation of the past, and that the present is tomorrow's past'<sup>121</sup>. The

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<sup>114</sup> Tilden, Fr., *Interpreting our heritage*.

<sup>115</sup> Hein, G., *Learning in museum*.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*; Tilden, Fr., *Interpreting our heritage*.

<sup>118</sup> Hall, C. M., and McArthur, S., 'Heritage management: an introductory framework', Hall, C. M., and McArthur, S. eds., *Heritage management in New Zealand and Australia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.13.

<sup>119</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, M., and Hermanson, K., 'Intrinsic motivation in museums: why does one want to learn?' *The educational role of the museum*, Hooper-Greenhill, E. ed., pp. 146-160.

<sup>120</sup> Sanson, E., 'Peopling the past: Current practices in archaeological site interpretation', McManus, M. P. ed., *Archaeological displays and the public*, pp.119-120; Tilden, F., *Interpreting our heritage*, p.11; Robertshaw, A., 'From houses into homes: one approach to live interpretation.' *Journal of social history curator's group* 19, 1992, pp. 14-20.

<sup>121</sup> Laenen, M. 'The integration of museums and theme parks: the example of Bokrijk', Uzzell, D.; Blud, L.; O'Callaghan, B., and Davies, P., eds., *Ironbridge Gorge museum: strategy for interpretative and*

realization, on the part of the visitors, that mythology is a thread that runs from the past through the present to the future, would help them perceive mythology as a meaningful intellectual creation, rather than encounter it as a cliché.

## 6. Contemporary artists presenting Greek mythology in the museum

### 6.1 Introduction

This section addresses my ninth research question, i.e. ‘how could the dynamics of Greek mythology in contemporary art be transferred into a museum context?’ The interviewed artists’ mythological ideas will be presented here integrated with in a museological discourse on mythology, including a discussion of what purpose each idea serves, the messages it transmits, the impact it has on both visitors and mythology, etc. My presentation is divided into 5 parts and further subsections, each one of which corresponds to the discussion of a different aspect of mythology that emerged from the analysis and coding of my interviews. In each theme my interviewees’ artworks and ideas comprise the focus around which the discussion of mythology is developed.

I should add that the presentation that follows does not take the form of a museological ‘case study’, in the sense that it does relate my interviewees’ mythological remarks to the collections of a specific Greek archaeological museum, but rather outlines a ‘virtual’ museological discussion of mythology. This was decided on the basis that, a) at present, there is no museum exhibition on mythology with reference to which the contemporary artists’ contribution could be examined, and b) the majority of Greek archaeological museums have in their collections artefacts with a mythological theme, which are either on display, or in storage. As a result, my interviewees’ mythological meanings are illustrated in the following presentation through selected examples of material culture with a mythological theme from a variety of Greek archaeological museum collections. In addition, my interviewees’ comments are in some cases illustrated by a series of mock-up text panels. These panels mostly feature the picture of the interviewee along with his comment, in order for the sense of ‘personification’ and intimacy between the visitor and the subject matter to be illuminated and reinforced. In addition, in some cases, the key-words of the comments are highlighted in red, in an attempt to emphasize them, since, as Dean remarks, the more graphically intense the font type is, the more attention it attracts<sup>122</sup>.

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*educational development*. Report of the Leverhulme Trust and the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, 1988, p. 14.

<sup>122</sup> Dean, D., *Museum exhibition*, p. 52.

I must emphasize that this presentation does not claim to offer a complete or definitive model for a museological representation of mythology. It is intended to demonstrate the potential value of the meanings that my interviewees made of mythology to museum curators in building an effective presentation of Greek myths.

## 6.2 The presentation

### Greek mythology and immigration: Odysseus

Immigration is a social phenomenon that has had a great impact of Greek society. Over the last two decades, Greece has witnessed a massive influx of immigrants mainly from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, but also from China, Africa and Asia<sup>123</sup>. According to the Organism of Financial Collaboration and Development, 10% of Greece's population is today comprised of immigrants.<sup>124</sup> Although Greek 'xenophobia' is generally speaking not of the violent type, and although the Balkan population is already in its second generation, there is still a vast chasm that separates 'us' from 'them' and a persistent mistrust of the 'other'. These problematic perceptions and behaviors are further inflamed by the political voices of the far right, which made their appearance on the margins of Greek politics a few years ago and have gradually gained ground to the point that they have now been admitted to the Greek parliament<sup>125</sup>.

The interactive performance of Panagiotakis entitled 'Eden' and the discussion of the issue of immigration through the Babylonian myth of Gilgamesh (pp. 143-144), could constitute the model for the construction and presentation of a similar discourse in the Greek archaeological museum. There, the myth of Gilgamesh, which is largely unknown to the Greek public, could be replaced by the highly popular adventures of Odysseus. The myths of Gilgamesh and Odysseus bear resemblances, in that both wander in the quest of something and are committed to their goal, as

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<sup>123</sup> Siadima, M., *Immigration in Greece during the 1990's: an overview*, Unpublished dissertation, MA in Mediterranean Studies, King's College, London, 2001;

<http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=11424&subid=2&tag=8400&pubid=208585>, [accessed 29<sup>th</sup> December 2007]; Ρωμανός, Κ. (Romanos, K.), «Η Ελλάδα ξέφραγο αμπέλι» ('Greece is an unguarded field'), *Ρεσάλτο (Resalto)* 9, August-September 2006, pp.62-79.

<http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=146727>, [accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> February 2008];

[www.idec.gr/iier/new/asian\\_migrants\\_gr.pdf](http://www.idec.gr/iier/new/asian_migrants_gr.pdf), [accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> February 2008]; [http://extras.ha.uth.gr/g-m/ln2/paper\\_05.asp](http://extras.ha.uth.gr/g-m/ln2/paper_05.asp), [accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> February 2008].

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=146727>, [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> February 2008].

<sup>125</sup> «Συνέντευξη Γ. Καρατζαφέρη» ('Interview of G. Karatzafaris'), *New Times Nexus* 21, July - August 2005, p. 30.; Κολοβός, Γ. «Η θέση του ΛΑ.Ο.Σ. για το μεταναστευτικό και οι επερχόμενες εκλογές.» ('The position of ΛΑ.Ο.Σ. on the immigration issue and the forthcoming elections'), *Patria* 4, September 2007, pp. 32-33.

discussed by scholars<sup>126</sup>. West points out, for example, that both Odysseus and Gilgamesh travelled to the end of the world, they both descended into the underworld, and they both had divine advisors, as well as enemies.<sup>127</sup>

Panagiotakis' unexpected and interesting reading of Gilgamesh's story as an archetype of immigration could open the way for a brand-new reading of the rather worn and clichéd figure of Odysseus in the Greek archaeological museum. In this venture, the museum could be aided by the creation of mental links based on the fact that the word 'odyssey' is used in spoken Greek to characterize a situation of exceptional hardship and, in this context, is a frequent metaphor of immigration. With this in mind, the museum could juxtapose the immigrant with Odysseus and highlight that the immigrant *is* Odysseus. What is significant here is that the conventional comparison between 'odyssey' and immigration is limited only to the element of hardship. Yet the museum could take this comparison further and shed light on the other qualities that underlie the association between Odysseus and the immigrant, with the aim of showing that if we admire Odysseus for what he represents, then we also have to do the same for the anonymous immigrant. So, the museum could point out that Odysseus successfully encountered hostile monsters and difficult situations thanks to his determination and cunning; and that the immigrant too needs to be strong in character and mind to make it through the Greek borders and endure the hardships and to stand on their feet in an unknown - and often hostile - environment.

In this way, the adaptation of Panagiotakis' mythological parallel could provide the Greek museum with an opportunity to invite its visitors reflect on the clichéd figure of Odysseus and to review what aspects of the human character we celebrate in him. The museum could also discuss the qualities that make Odysseus a hero, by comparing and contrasting him with other famous heroes of Greek mythology, such as Agamemnon and Heracles. Odysseus' strong asset is his character, rather than his social status (like Agamemnon), or his physical strength (like Heracles). Odysseus is the 'shifty' and 'versatile' individual, who makes it through thanks to his smart ways, emphasized by the familiar Greek phrase, 'ingenious (*πολυμήχανος*) Odysseus' (Figure 149).

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<sup>126</sup> West, M., *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 402-417.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 402-417.



Odysseus is a hero because he is cunning and resourceful

Odysseus is the celebrated survivor

**Figure 149. Mock-up text panel. The heroic qualities of Odysseus. Odysseus or one of his companions escapes the Cyclops' cave tied on the belly of a ram. Bronze piece of decoration. Second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. Archaeological Museum of Delphi.**

So, the museum could point out that if Odysseus is worthy of admiration, so too should be the immigrant. It could then invite its visitors reflect on this, in accordance with the principles of the constructivist learning theory<sup>128</sup>, by posing them a stimulating and broad question, such as: 'if our culture celebrates survivors like Odysseus, then do we also respect and admire the anonymous immigrant?' The museum could also draw on Homer's words to illustrate and reinforce this discourse. For instance, in Rapsody 7, Alkinous, the king of Phaeakes, takes Odysseus in the form of an anonymous castaway to his palace and offers him shelter, food and honours, saying that 'a stranger who begs is as worthy as one's brother, provided that the one who receives the stranger is even a tiny bit sane'<sup>129</sup>.

The Greek archaeological museum could draw further on Panagiotakis' 'Eden'. In the original performance, the audience traced the journey of Gilgamesh, by following the performers who moved in space passing from the one mythical adventure

<sup>128</sup> Copeland, T., 'Presenting archaeology to the public', Merriman, N. ed., *Public archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 132-144, (pp. 140-142).

<sup>129</sup> «Ο κάθε ξένος που ικετεύει αξίζει όσο κι ο αδελφός, αν έχει κι ο φιλόξενος λιγάκι στέρεο νου», translation by Marina Antonopoulou.



Department of Preschool Education of the University of Thessaly.<sup>130</sup> In general, this programme was based on the collection of heirlooms and related oral histories of native and immigrant students, as well as of Greek families with an immigrant background. In a first stage, the collected heirlooms and stories served to stimulate discussion and to encourage native and immigrant students to compare and contrast their cultures and traditions. At the same time, the oral histories of native and foreign immigrants were also juxtaposed and compared. In a second stage, the collected tangible and intangible material was put on display in a temporary exhibition. The project report mentions that similarities in customs and beliefs were pinpointed and that it was revealed that Greek immigrants and foreign immigrants share the same dreams, the same needs, and employ the same practices in seeking to adjust themselves to a new country<sup>131</sup>.

The model for discussing immigration that Panagiotakis suggested in his 'Eden' could be beneficial for the Greek archaeological museum in one more way. The linkage of the foreigner immigrant to a figure that is as familiar and 'owned' as Odysseus is to the Greeks could bring museum visitors closer to the idea of immigration. In other words, such a message could propose that the immigrant is not only an Albanian or Russian, but also - metaphorically - the 'noble' Greek individual. The Greek archaeological museum could also link its discourse to real life by using graffiti from the streets of the country's cities (Figure 151) and let its visitors explore and either reject or embrace this suggested personal connection to the concept of immigration.



**Figure 151. Mock-up text panel. Immigration concerns us all. 'We are all immigrants'. Graffiti on a wall in Thessaloniki.**

<sup>130</sup> Vlachaki, M., 'Crossing cultures through the intangible heritage: an educational programme about migration in Greece', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 2, 2007, pp. 93-102.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

The Ellis Island Foundation, based in the USA, has encouraged this 'from within' examination of the immigrant status in the 'Ellis island family histories' project, where individuals are asked to search their family history and figure out whether there was an immigration background to them.<sup>132</sup> The Greek archaeological museum could draw on this and remind its visitors that close to the culture and myths that Greece has exported to the world, it has also 'exported' many immigrants to countries such as Australia, Germany and America. This could be illustrated by referring to exhibitions of foreign museum on immigration, where Greek immigrants constitute the display. Two such exhibitions are the 'New Lives in a New Land: Immigration in Somerville & the Greater Boston Area -The Greek Community' and 'Hope, Valor, and Inspiration: 1896-1918: The World of George Dilboy - Greek Immigrant and American Hero', both presented at the Somerville Museum, in the USA.<sup>133</sup>

Bringing museum visitors closer to the idea of immigration and reminding them that immigration is not a matter of nationality relates to the conclusion that Panagiotakis reaches in his 'Eden', where, in the end, Gilgamesh through all his wanderings comes to realize that the only truly immortal thing is the culture that people create. Based on this, the Greek archaeological museum could invite immigrants to speak of their culture, of which they are proud, just like Greek immigrants were proud of their culture. Moreover, the museum could lay emphasis on the immigrants' myths, or folk tales that bear resemblances to Greek folk tales or myths. The museum could also contribute to this by juxtaposing and comparing the myths of Odysseus and Gilgamesh on a text panel, emphasizing the similarities between them.

So, to summarize, the adaptation of Panagiotakis' mythological parallel by the Greek archaeological museum could work on two levels in the museum and be beneficial both for the understanding of Odysseus' myth and for the highlighting of the contemporary social phenomenon of immigration. Specifically, as far as the myth of Odysseus is concerned, it has a three-fold meaning: it 'humanizes' the mythical hero, it encourages an evaluation of his personality and the attributes we have assigned to it, and updates it through its connection to an active social issue. Thus, the story and figure of Odysseus emerge as diachronically significant and relevant to the contemporary individual.

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<sup>132</sup> [http://www.ellisland.org/genealogy/ellis\\_island.asp](http://www.ellisland.org/genealogy/ellis_island.asp), [accessed, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007];

[http://www.ellisland.org/immexp/wseix\\_2\\_3.asp](http://www.ellisland.org/immexp/wseix_2_3.asp), [accessed, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007].

<sup>133</sup> <http://somerwillmuseum.org/>, [accessed, 02<sup>nd</sup> November 2007];

<http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.helleniccomserve.com/images/dilboy1.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.helleniccomserve.com/dilboyexhibit.html&h=133&w=100&sz=8&hl=en&start=5&tbnid=9971XZjAqVs5M:&tbnh=92&tbnw=69&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dimmigration%2Bmuseum%2BGreeks%26gbv%3D2%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG>, [accessed, 02<sup>nd</sup> November 2007].

The adaptation of Panagiotakis' discursive model of immigration and the comparison between Odysseus and the immigrant has one more advantage: it creates a set of contradictive values that could stimulate the visitors' interest. More specifically, it compares and ultimately equates the ideal Western hero that Odysseus is with the humble Slavic immigrant. This challenges and contradicts the established imageries of both the former and the latter and can, according to constructivist learning theory, trigger the learning process<sup>134</sup>.

### **Greek mythology's internationality : Deucalion and Pyrrha**

The juxtaposition of the myths of Odysseus and Gilgamesh could open the way for the discussion of Greek mythology's 'internationality' in the Greek archaeological museum. The most evident and accessible example of an 'international' myth is probably the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha. According to this myth, Zeus once decided to flood the earth and destroy the human race. Before doing so, though, he ordered Deucalion to construct a boat. Deucalion and his wife, Pyrrha, survived the flood in this boat and landed on Mount Parnassus. As soon as they landed there, they offered a sacrifice to the gods and enquired as to how to repopulate the earth. They were ordered to throw behind them 'the bones of their mother'. Deucalion and Pyrrha correctly interpreted this as throwing behind them stones, i.e. 'the bones' of Mother Earth. The stones thrown by Deucalion were turned into men, while those thrown by Pyrrha were turned into women. Deucalion and Pyrrha had several sons and daughters. The first was Hellenas, the eponymous king of the Hellenes, i.e. the present-day Greeks.

The myth of Deucalion resembles the biblical story of Noah and the Flood. In Genesis (6:11–9:19), Noah and his family were chosen by God, thanks to their piety, to survive the flood that God sent in order to extinguish the corrupted human race. God instructed Noah to build an ark, where he put his family as well as one male and one female animal of every species. The waters covered the earth for 150 days and, when they dried, Noah's ark came to rest on Mount Ararat. There, Noah built an altar and made an offering to God. In this story, Noah is the earth's repopulator, and consequently the distant ancestor of contemporary humans.

The myth of Deucalion is, I would argue, ideal for the discussion in the Greek archaeological museum of mythology's internationality. On the one hand, its similarities to the myth of Noah are easily perceptible by the majority of contemporary Greeks, as this latter belong to the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church. On the other hand, it is an international myth: apart from Greek and Hebraic, the flood is also encountered in a

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<sup>134</sup> Copeland, T., 'Presenting archaeology to the public', Merriman, N. (ed.), *Public archaeology*, pp. 132-144, pp. 140-142.

variety of mythical traditions around the world, including: Sumerian, Babylonian, Australian, Chaldean, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Apache, Mayan, Aztec, Squamish, Skagit, Mandingo, 'People of Mount Jefferson', Yakima, Caddo, Chippewa, Navajo and Hopi. A world map, marking these civilizations could help museum audiences grasp the extent of the flood motif's distribution (Figure 152).



Figure 152. Mock-up text panel. World map with an approximate depiction of the distribution of the mythical motif of the flood.

From a scholarly perspective, there are two predominant theories regarding the similarities between the mythologies of diverse and distant civilizations: the theory of diffusion, and the theory of independent invention.<sup>135</sup> According to the former,

<sup>135</sup> Suggested reading: Gray, L. H. and Moore, G. F. eds., *The mythology of all races*, 13 vol., New York: Cooper Square, 1916-33; Malinowski, B. *Magic, science, and religion*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1948; Campbell, J., *The masks of God* (4 vol., 1959-68), London: Penguin Books, 1976; Eliade, M., *Myth and reality*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963; Dundes, A. ed., *The study of folklore*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall College, 1965; Dundes, A., *Sacred narrative*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Lévi-Strauss, C., *Mythologies* (4 vol.), New York: Harper & Row, 1969-81; Maranda, P., *Mythology*,

myths are created in one society and diffuse from there to somewhere else. According to the latter, each society invents each own myths. The 'diffusionists' base their arguments on the striking similarities between the mythological motifs, which -they claim - cannot be coincidental. The supporters of independent invention claim that the similar motifs are too scattered geographically to have been diffused and that the societies where these motifs appear show no evidence of having been in touch with each other at any point in their ancient history.

The museum could refer to these two theories, but it would not have to focus exclusively on them. Instead, it could invite its visitors to reflect on the more relevant to the visitor's experiences significance of myths' internationality, drawing on Papakonstantinou's perception of the topic. Papakonstantinou stated that '*myths can make us see those things that bring us together*'. The museum could adopt this comment as its motto and combine it with Papakonstantinou's preference for the myth of Deucalion, to make a statement (Figures 153 and 154).

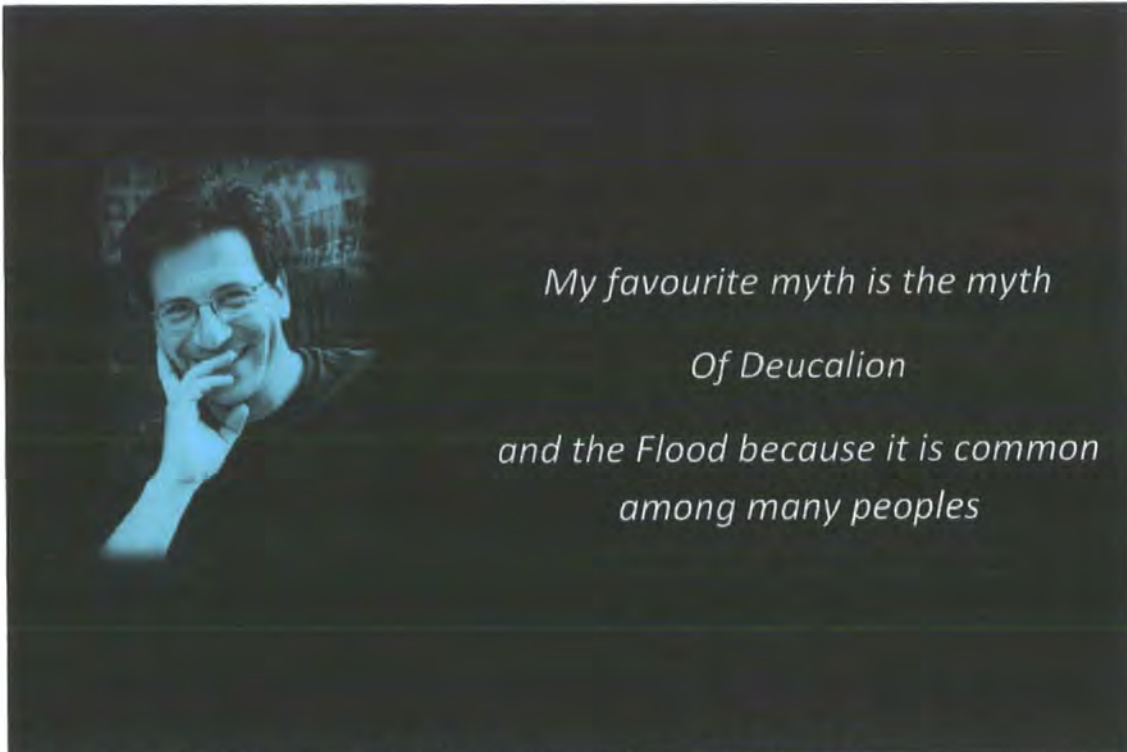


Figure 153. Mock - up text panel. Papakonstantinou and the myth of Deucalion.

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Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; Thompson, S., *The folktale*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977; Day, M. S., *The many meanings of myth*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1984; Armstrong, K. A., *A short history of myth*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2005.



Figure 154. Mock-up text panel. Thanassis Papakonstantinou on myths' internationality.

Based on Papakonstantinou's remark, the museum could point out that, whether as a result of diffusion or invention, the encountering of similar or identical myths in the most distant civilizations means that people have always expressed their concerns through the same stories, and that are characterized by a similar perspective towards the world. In this way, the museum could invite its visitors to focus on how similar people can be on the inside, regardless of their external features, such as race and skin colour.

Papakonstantinou in his interview, took his remark on a trans-racial mythology a step further, speaking of a common biological origin for humanity. This remark of Papakonstantinou could be used by the museum to discuss Greek ethnocentrism, or rather the attempt to establish the uniqueness and superiority of the Greek race through the purity of the Greek DNA<sup>136</sup>. The museum could use as a counterargument the fairly recent theory of 'Mitochondrial Eve', i.e. of the African woman who lived approximately 200,000 ago and who, according to some researchers, is the common ancestor of all living humans<sup>137</sup>. What the museum could aim to achieve

<sup>136</sup> «Καθαρό το DNA των Ελλήνων» ('The Greeks' DNA is pure'), *Απογευματινή της Κυριακής* (*Apogevmatini tis Kyriakis*), 6 November 2003, p. 22.

<sup>137</sup> Chang, J. T., 'Recent common ancestors of all present-day individuals', *Advances in Applied Probability*, 31, 1999, pp. 1002-1026; Rohde, D. L. T. 'On the common ancestors of all living humans', at: <http://tedlab.mit.edu/~dr/>, [accessed 04 August 2007].

through this juxtaposition of biological theories is not to persuade its visitors as to the validity of the one or other theory, but rather to let them speculate on the significance of racial purity, given the association of the most distant and seemingly diverse civilizations and races through their common expressive forms (Figure 155). The main message here could be: if our minds and souls are so similar that one myth can touch so many and so different cultures, then why do we endeavour to be separated from other peoples rather than joined with them?



Figure 155. Mock-up text panel. Myths join us. Greeks and racial purity. Article from a Greek newspaper. 'The DNA of the Greeks is pure' is the title of the main article. The column on the right is entitled: 'We passed our genetic code to the rest of Europe too'. The article below says: 'The signature of the Greeks is revealed in South Italy'.

## Greek mythology and the human psyche: The Kourites

As we observed in Chapter Four, the interviews of the musicians Aggelakas and Malamas produced an interesting analysis of the 'psychological' aspect of Greek mythology. From a scientific perspective, and more precisely from the perspective of psychology, mythological stories and figures contain symbols, which are known as 'archetypes'<sup>138</sup>. According to this opinion, the unconscious tries to transmit to the Ego through myths ecumenical and diachronic archetypes<sup>139</sup>. In general terms, it can be said that an archetype is a set conceptual model that pre-exists inside the human mind and is developed in a mythical figure or tale<sup>140</sup>. For example, Jung suggests that Odysseus was devised to suit the way in which the Greeks perceived heroism<sup>141</sup>. However, he emphasizes the point that the concept of heroism itself is not shaped along with and in accordance to Odysseus, but it pre-exists. So, what is invented are the myths about heroism. The myth of Odysseus was passed down from one generation to the other, but the archetype of heroism exists in any case inside the human mind and is transmitted through inheritance.<sup>142</sup> The existence of archetypes inside us can be justified as the outcome of the perpetually repeated experiences of humanity; archetypes are mnemonic repositories, imprinted on the human mind.<sup>143</sup>

For Luc Benoist<sup>144</sup> and Jean Paul Vernant<sup>145</sup>, myths are perpetuated, mute, internal tendencies. For Benoist, the etymological root of the word 'myth' can be detected in the Latin 'mutus', meaning mute and silent.<sup>146</sup> Myth's main function is, for Benoist, the expression of those things that can only be expressed in a symbolic way.<sup>147</sup> The tendencies that myths reveal are essential 'models', which underlie every manifestation of life; they resemble memories that are inherited by our ancestors and which reside subconsciously inside us. As these fundamental (but subconscious and 'mute') tendencies are perpetuated, they gradually become crystallized in themes. These 'thematized' subconscious tendencies are eventually expressed in a covert way.

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<sup>138</sup> Jung, C. G., *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Collected works, Vol 9, Part 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Segal, R., «Εισαγωγή» ('Introduction'), Segal, R. ed., *Γιούνγκ και μυθολογία (Jung on mythology)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Κέδρος (Kedros), 2004, pp. 13-80, (p. 34) (Original English edition: Segal, R. *Jung on mythology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Benoist, L., *Σημεία, σύμβολα και μύθοι (Signs, symbols and myths)*, Αθήνα (Athens): Καρδαμίτσα (Kardametsa), 1992.

<sup>145</sup> Vernant, J. P., *Μύθος και θρησκεία στην αρχαία Ελλάδα (Myth and religion in ancient Greece)*.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

In this way, a myth is born.<sup>148</sup> Once these tendencies take the form of myth, they can 'experiment' with their local and temporal context as well as with their protagonists. What is important in Benoist's theory is that these themes are not particularly numerous, as the fundamental issues that affect the human mind are limited. Even more specifically, Benoist believes that these themes can be summarized in terms of three 'roots of metaphysical facture': action, love, and wisdom.

In the same spirit as Benoist, and my interviewees, Vernant believes that the gods of the ancient Greeks were not persons, but powers. He claims that these gods still 'live' in this world, and still constitute a part of it, in the sense that they are embodiments of affairs that are anything but unearthly; they can address an experienced concept, like 'night', as much as an experienced feeling, or a passion, or a moral or judicial notion.<sup>149</sup> 'Gods', Otto adds, 'are never of a transcendental character, they are never out of our universe...They are a power inside us, they are a divine instinct'<sup>150</sup>

Malamas, Aggelakas and Savvopoulos made comments and produced artworks that could assist the museum in illuminating and illustrating this scholarly 'psychological' aspect of mythology.

*'Myths', Malamas said, 'are the subconscious powers and tendencies that coexist inside humans. For every psychological tendency they [the ancient Greeks] created a deity; of course, by sacrificing to these deities we aim to sooth our soul, to release it from lust, from passion, from jealousy, from any sort of misery'. Aggelakas, in the same spirit, claimed that 'myths are powers and tensions that still rule our lives and that will never cease to'.*

The museum could display the vivid comments of my interviewees on text panels, to liven up its discourse and provide a useful summary of complex academic theories in a 'playful' and accessible way (Figures 156-157).

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>149</sup> Vernant, J.-P., *Μύθος και θρησκεία στην αρχαία Ελλάδα (Myth and religion in ancient Greece)*, pp. 12-18.

<sup>150</sup> Otto, W. F., 'The idea of God in Aeschylus and Sophocles', Rose, H. S. ed., *La notion du divin (The notion of the divine)*, Genève: Fondation Hardt | Vandoeuvres, 1954, p. 188.

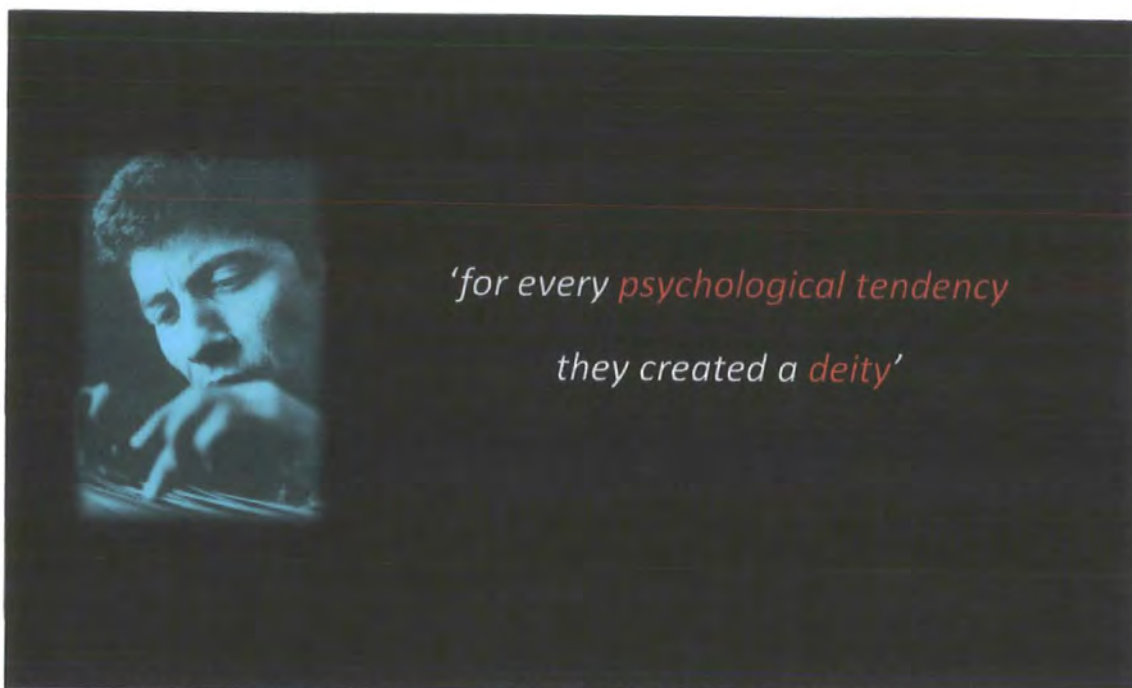
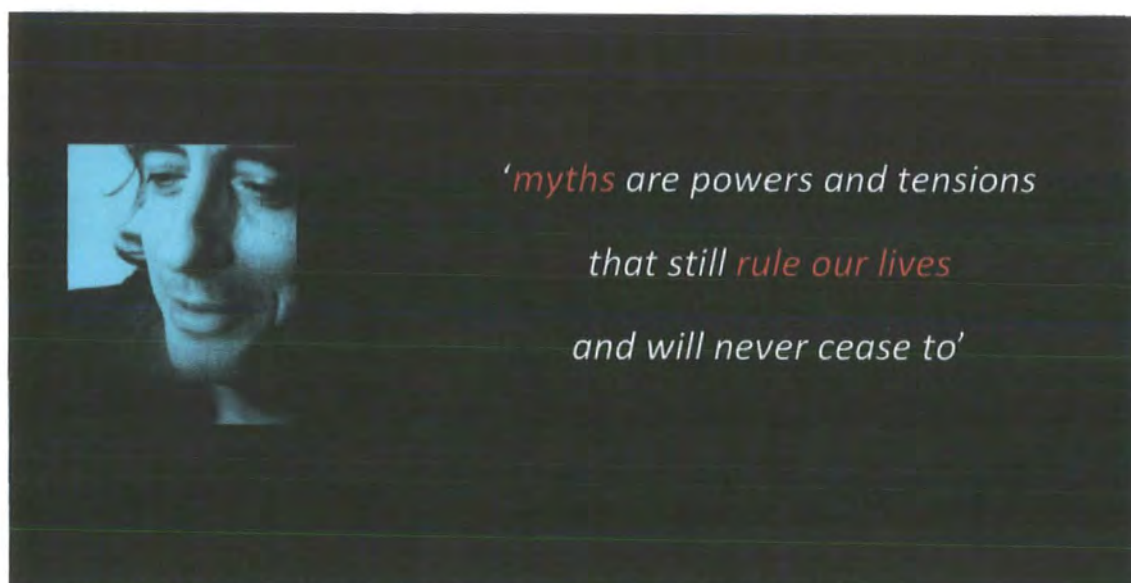


Figure 156. Mock-up text panel. Malamas and the myths' psychological function.



Figures 157. Mock-up text panel. Aggelakas on myths' psychological function.

The analysis of the Kourites by Aggelakas could help the museum illustrate with a specific example, the psychological function of myths, at the same time as illuminating for its visitors the latent existence of mythology in the actions and circumstances of contemporary life, according to Vasileiadis' statement (Figure 158).

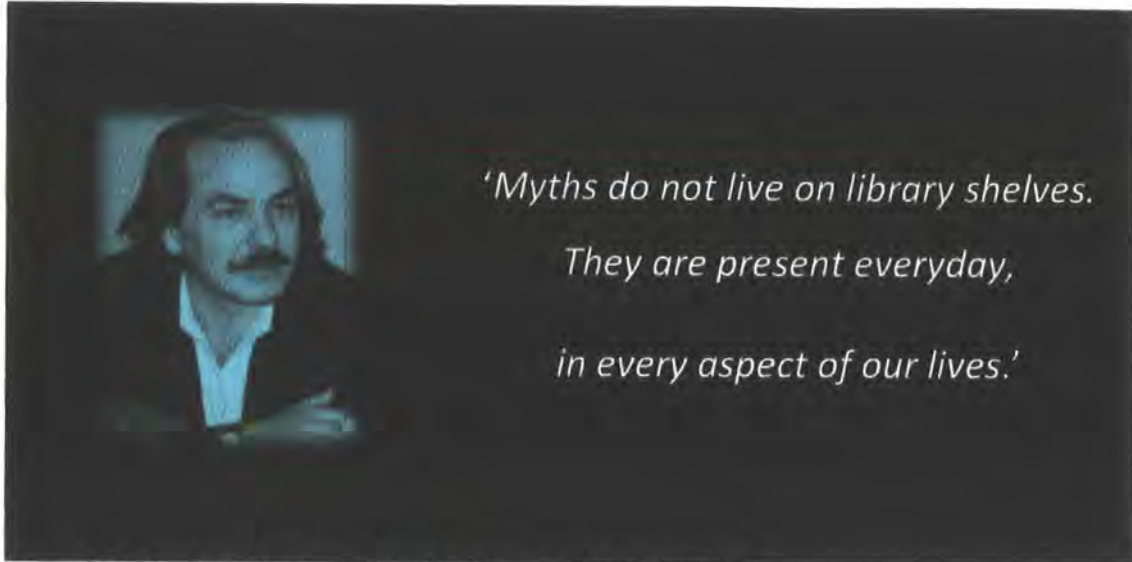


Figure 158. Mock – up text panel. Vasileiadis on myths' diachronism.

The Kourites, Aggelakas said, deciphering the myth of the Kourites as protectors of baby Zeus, represent the power of music and *'a powerful music can prevent a negative thought from getting inside us, or a piece of music can make us blossom and come up with new, magical, ideas about the world and life'*. Mythological research has proved that Aggelakas' deciphering of the myth is in fact quite accurate. The ancient Greek Kourites are thought to have originated from the Phrygian 'Corybantes', the orgiastic flute-playing companions of Cybele, the Phrygian goddess of gods, humans, animals and plants.<sup>151</sup> The Kourites are believed to be the daemonic creatures that danced frantically accompanying 'Great Couros', that is Cretan Zeus - a god of nature - on his arrival in Crete. A reference to this occurs in the 'Hymn to Zeus', which was found in the Mycenaean city of Palaiokastro near Cretan Zeus's major sanctuary.<sup>152</sup> From this, it appears that the Kourites, the daemonic dancers, believed that the power of God itself entered their dance steps via the orgiastic music, and that in this way he blessed the community and protected it from all harm.<sup>153</sup>

This linkage between the Kourites and the power of music that is suggested by Aggelakas could valuably inform a museum display, as it has the power to turn abstract and obscure mythical figures into experienced emotions and vice versa. This twofold linkage, and specifically the parallel that Aggelakas created between the

<sup>151</sup> Καμαρέττα, Αι (Kamaretta, Ae.), «Θεοί μεταλλουργοί και πολεμιστές» ('Blacksmiths and warrior gods'), *Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Greek Mythology) II*, Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.) ed., pp. 292-312, (p. 293-294 and 300-302).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

Kourites and the rock 'n' roll musician, could be illustrated in the museum in a way that underlines the dynamic character of the ancient Kourites and at the same time negotiating (in a slightly humorous way) this conjunction of the ancient and the academic with the contemporary and the secular (Figures 159 - 161). As Shanks claims, humour is a powerful communicative tool that museums should make use of<sup>154</sup>. Aggelakas through his song 'Like hell I will cry!' provides a description of this soul-protecting and soul-empowering function of music and dance. The museum could also cite Aggelakas' song to further emphasize its discourse (Figure 162).

### In religion

The Kourites were the dancing winged demons  
who accompanied the Cretan Zeus  
and caused the earth to blossom



Shield with the Kourites and Zeus. It was found inside Idaion Cave. This cave was also the place where initiation rites of young warriors (young=kouros, or Kourites) took place

<sup>154</sup> Shanks, M. and Tilley, Ch., *Re-constructing archaeology. Theory and practice*, pp. 98-99.



The 'Kouros of Palaikastron'. Archaeological Museum of Siteia

### In myth

The Kourites were the musicians who saved baby Zeus by playing loud music and dancing frantically



Figure 159. Mock-up text panel. The Kourites in religion and myth.

*'The Kourites represent the power of music'*



Figure 160. Mock-up text panel. The Kourites as rock 'n' roll musicians.

*'a powerful music*

*can prevent a negative thought from  
getting inside us'*

The Kourites saved Zeus

*'a powerful music can make us blossom'*

The Kourites helped nature blossom



Figure 161. Mock-up text panel. Aggelikas and the Kourites' meaning.

'Like hell I will cry!'

But I will fly like an eagle over the sorrows, with a wild proud  
dance,

Like hell I will cry!, like hell I will fear!,

Like hell will cry!, like hell I will fear!

Figure 162. Mock-up text panel. Song 'Like hell I will cry!' by Yiannis Aggelakas.

Aggelakas' deciphering of the myth of the Kourites could provide a platform for an even more expressive demonstration of the myth's diachronism in the museum. Euripides, in 'Bacchae', passes down to us the information that the Kourites (identified with the Corybantes in Euripides' drama) were armed and wore a helmet with three tufts on the top (*τρικόρυθες*)<sup>155</sup>. It is also known that the Kourites danced the dance called 'πρύλιν' (transliterated 'prilin'), that is, *πυρρίχη* (transliterated 'pyrrichin'), which is the same dance that Athena danced, as soon as she came off Zeus's head<sup>156</sup>. Today, the *πυρρίχιος* (transliterated 'pyrrichios', translated 'pyrrhic') dance is danced by the Pontians, i.e. the Greeks of the Pontic Sea, the modern Black Sea, whose all-black costume includes a helmet-like head gear with a protruding cloth piece or tassel. The pyrrhic dance is performed exclusively by armed men and comprises rapid movements of the head, shaking of the shoulders or of the whole body, violent bobs of the arms, and on the spot banging of the ground with their feet, to threaten the demons of the earth, accompanied by loud yells (Figure 163).

A museum could make use of this link between the present people of the Pontus and the mythical ecstatic dancers. Whereas the 'pyrrichios' dance is widely recognized in Greece, a video with its performance could undoubtedly reinforce the

<sup>155</sup> Euripides, *Bacchae*, London: Penguin, 2006.

<sup>156</sup> Athena was born off of Zeus' forehead.

association between Aggelakas' powerful music, the Kourites soul-empowering 'magical' dance, and the contemporary Pontians' continuation of this mytho-dancing tradition. To make this more explicit, the museum could even invite the contemporary Kourites (namely the 'pyrrhic' dancers) themselves to speak of how they feel when they perform, by presenting small extracts of interviews in audiovisual or written form.



Figure 163. Contemporary Pontians dancing the pyrrhic dance.

#### Greek myths as guides of behavior: Circe, Hermes and Odysseus

Malamas deciphered the meaning of his song 'Circe', in his interview, drawing on the figures of Odysseus, Hermes and the mythical Circe (pp. 124-125), and explained how he found his way through a difficult situation by listening to his conscience, like Odysseus managed to escape Circe's allure by listening to Hermes. In Chapter Four this 'guiding' function of myths was discussed under the title 'Myths as behavioural exempla' (pp.123-230). This quality of myths has also been pinpointed by scholars. 'We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known', comments Campbell.<sup>157</sup> Jung, in the context of his 'social functionalism', believed that the primary function of myths is to etch on humans' minds the right behavior. Myths provide a behavioral guidebook and the acts of mythological figures become role models. More specifically, he argued that

'the way a man has to behave is presented with an archetype. For this reason the primitives narrated the stories they narrated ... Our

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<sup>157</sup> Campbell, J., *The power of myth*, p. 151.

ancestors did this and that and you have to do the same thing. Or, that hero did this and this has to constitute a role model for you.’<sup>158</sup>

Campbell provides a charming and enlightening metaphor of this function of myth, saying that: ‘it is as though the same play were taken from one place to the another, and at each place the local players put on local costumes and enact the same old play’.<sup>159</sup>

Malamas, in his analysis of ‘Circe’, summarized, unbeknown to him, the scholarly theses, saying that ‘*we all play in a myth*’ and that ‘*a mythical figure has been in your place before*’. Savvopoulos also contributed his opinion to the function of myths as behavioural exempla, by making the summary statement: ‘*listen to the myth! It can show you where to go and what to do*’. The museum could take advantage of Malamas’ and Savvopoulos’ comments in order to illuminate the scholarly theories and of Malamas’ analysis of ‘Circe’ to show to its visitors *how* one can learn from a myth in practice (Figures 164 – 168). Moreover, the museum could use the popular artists’ comments in order to encourage its visitors to *experience* mythology, by inviting them to put themselves in the place of the individual who plays in a myth, through a straightforward question (Figure 169).

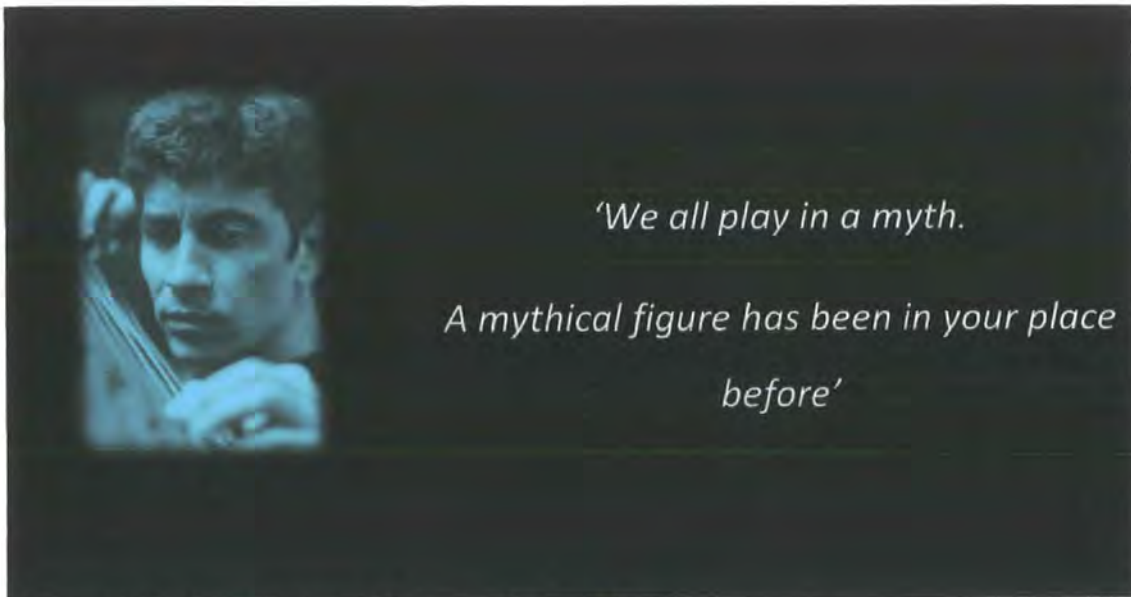


Figure 164. Mock-up text panel. Malamas on myths as plays.

<sup>158</sup> Jung, C., ‘The Houston films’, *C. G. Jung speaking*, Hull, R. F. C. ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 292-293.

<sup>159</sup> Campbell, J., *The power of myth*, p. 45.

'Circe'

Witch Circe where are you taking me?  
in which corner do you leave and erase me?  
I forgot what I'm looking for  
I live in your world and I wonder

Figure 165. Mock - up text panel. Song 'Circe', by Socrates Malamas.

When ~~Circe~~ allured Odysseus,  
he listened to the advice of ~~Hermes~~.  
Circe turned Odysseus' apathetic friends into ~~pigs~~!

Figure 166. Mock-up text panel. Odysseus and Circe.

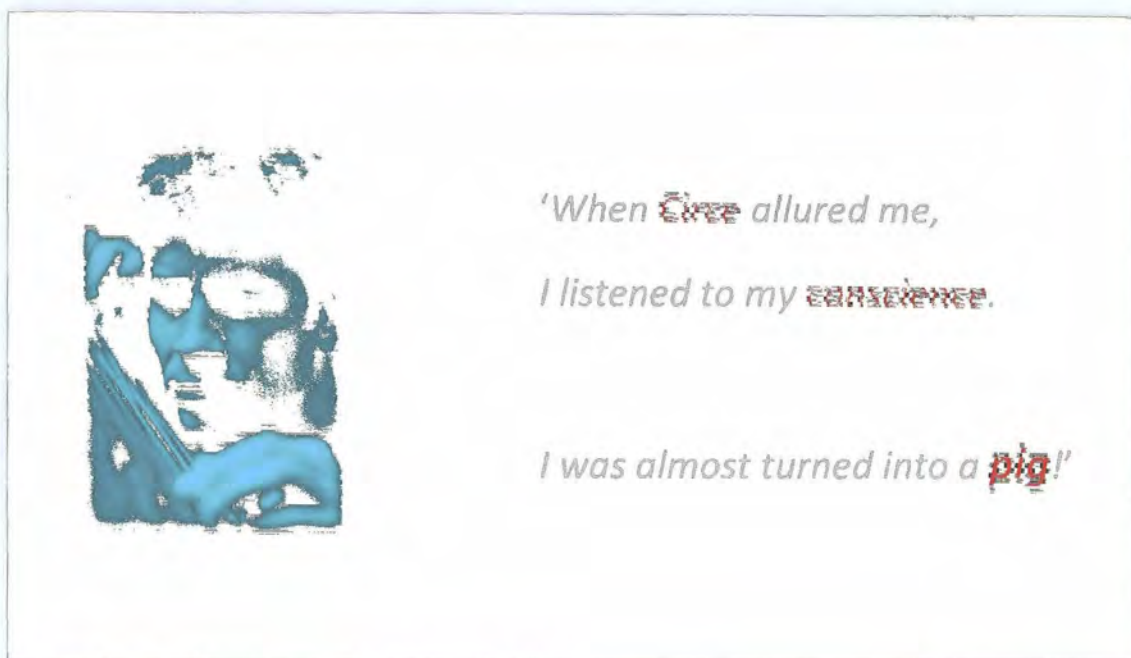


Figure 167. Mock-up text panel. Malamas and Circe.



Figure 168. Mock-up text panel. Savvopoulos and myths as guides.

Which mythical figure is **you**?

What happens next in **your** myth?

Figure 169. Mock-up text panel. The visitor is invited to an affective experience of the myth.

#### The concept of a divine nature: Gaea and Demeter

This section utilizes the ecological overtones that my interviewees detected in primordial mythological figures, such as Gaea and the cryptic cult of the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'. The goal is, on the one hand, to observe the relationship of man with nature through mythological terms, and, on the other hand, to reconsider the relationship of contemporary man with the environment.

The investigation of ecological disasters through mythology serves the method of 'hot interpretation' that, as stated previously, imbues the museological presentation of mythology through contemporary art. Uzzell claims that visitors' emotional responses could be triggered through interpretation related to issues which evoke strong ideological beliefs and convictions, such as the protection of a rare bird or plant species or opposition to non-renewable energy sources such as nuclear power.<sup>160</sup> Uzzell maintains that interpretation of environmental change, if we wish it to be successful and bring about change, has to 'be seen as intermeshing within a wider set of understandings and beliefs'<sup>161</sup>. Here, the theme of divine nature moves in the same direction as Uzzell's: its purpose is not to provide detailed prognoses of the tragic impact of the arsons on the Greek ecosystem, but to stir the visitor on an ideological

<sup>160</sup> Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R., 'Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, pp. 152-171, (p. 154).

<sup>161</sup> Uzzell, D., 'Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, p. 11.

level. The mission of the museum in this case is to make links, to remind its visitors, to make them aware. In addition, the reference to contemporary examples of the environment's destruction serves the principle of environmental psychology, which suggests that we deny that environmental problems are serious where we live and that we think that they increase in severity the further away they are from us<sup>162</sup>.

From an academic perspective, the discussion of Greece's primordial mythology is a somewhat unresolved topic, characterized by a wide variety of opinions and approaches<sup>163</sup>. The concept of a great pan-Goddess, the so-called Mother Goddess, that preoccupies my interviewees and has been supported by scholars like Graves<sup>164</sup> and Gimbutas<sup>165</sup>, among others, has received much criticism by other scholars<sup>166</sup>. On the other hand, there are the more general assumptions of scholars of the 'ritualist' tradition, such as Fontenrose<sup>167</sup> and Harrison, who maintained that underneath the shiny surface of Homer, one can detect an entire substratum of primitive deities of a chthonic nature<sup>168</sup>. Papachadjis, one of Greece's major classicists, also points out that research has produced persuasive remarks on the chthonic nature of these early, 'pre-Hellenic', deities.<sup>169</sup> Finally, there is Nilsson, who believed that the origins of Greek mythology lie in Mycenaean cult. Nilsson distinguished between the 'official' cult of ancient Greece, and the cult of ancient Greek folk, and believed that the latter maintained its initial magical and chthonic character until the end of Antiquity<sup>170</sup>.

So, given the variety of scholarly opinions, the museological use of my

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<sup>162</sup> Uzzell, D., 'Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation', Uzzell, D., and Ballantyne, R. eds., *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation*, p. 14

<sup>163</sup> For example: Burkert, W. *Greek religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Dieterich, B. C., *The origins of Greek religion*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973; Rose, H. J. ed., 'Religion and mythology', *Year's Work in Classical studies* 34, 1945-1947, pp. 44-78; Eliade, M., *A history of religious ideas 1. From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

<sup>164</sup> Graves, R., *The Greek myths*.

<sup>165</sup> Gimbutas, M., *The goddesses and gods of old Europe*; Gimbutas, M., *The language of the goddess*; Gimbutas, M., *The civilization of the goddess*.

<sup>166</sup> Meskell, L., 'Goddesses, Gimbutas and "New Age" archaeology', *Antiquity*, 69, 262, 1995, pp. 74-86; Conkey, M. W., and Tringham, R. E., 'Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology', Stanton, D. C., and Stewart, A. J. eds., *Feminisms in the academy*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995; Hamilton, N., 'Can we interpret figurines?' in *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 6, 1996, No.2 (October), pp. 281-307; Georgoudi Stella, 'Creating a myth of matriarchy' in Pantel, P. S. ed., *A History of Women: From ancient goddesses to Christian Saints*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 449-463.

<sup>167</sup> Fontenrose, J., *The ritual theory of myth*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

<sup>168</sup> Harrison, J. E., *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922.

<sup>169</sup> Παπαχατζής, Ι. (Papachadjis, I.), «Αρχαία θρησκεία» ('Ancient religion'), *Ελληνική μυθολογία* (Greek mythology) I, pp. 225-239, (p. 226).

<sup>170</sup> Nilsson, M. P., *The Minoan-Mycenaean religion and its survival in Greek religion*, Lund: Biblio-Moser, 1950; Nilsson, M. P., *Greek folk religion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1940; Nilsson, M. P., *A history of Greek religion*, New York: Norton, 1964.

interviewees' speculations on the nature of pre-Hellenic mythology and cult could focus on the discussion of Gaea as a primordial and cosmogonic deity. This property of Gaea was discussed by Vasileiadis in his 'Mythography' (pp. 115-117) and can also be testified in the works of Hesiod and Homer. These two authors present the goddess Gaea in their cosmogonic traditions as being the source of the cosmos. She is Gaea *παμμήτειρα* (*pamétera*)<sup>171</sup>, which means 'mother of everything', and *πανδότειρα* (*pandótera*), that is, 'provider of everything'<sup>172</sup>. Mother Gaea was for Hesiod the force that triggered the shaping of the cosmos, the 'first-born' and 'self-born'<sup>173</sup>. The same conception of Gaea as the creator of everything was also articulated in Greek proto-science, which explained heavenly bodies as formations of Gaea's body vapours<sup>174</sup> and the sea as 'Gaea's sweat'<sup>175</sup>. For Aeschylus, Gaea is *πρωτομάντισσα*, i.e. the 'first seer'<sup>176</sup> and the first possessor of the Delphic oracle. In archaeological research, Gaea, or 'Mother Gaea', is a deity known from the Mycenaean pantheon, whose name appears on the deciphered tablets of Linear B<sup>177</sup>.

The works of Vasileiadis could assist the museum in discussing Gaea's primordial nature, in that they represent, in an illustrative and succinct way, the three versions of the cosmos' creation (Gaea and Uranus; Gaea and Ocean/Ophion; Gaea and Ether). Most importantly, though, they could help the museum 'flesh out' the abstract figure of the ancient goddess Gaea. Vasileiadis in his works chose to depict the goddess Gaea with her real face, i.e. as the globe and not as a human figure. In other words, he depicted the essence of the mythical figure, instead of its disguise. So, his works could explicitly show to museum visitors, that when ancient Greeks spoke of 'Gaea', they referred in essence to something that is familiar and relevant to us as much as it was to them, i.e. the earth, or the globe (in Greek, as in English, the same word can be used to define both the soil and the planet). This could be demonstrated in the museum with the use of a text panel, where the ancient goddess Gaea and the earth, the heavenly body, are juxtaposed and equated (Figure 170). Thus, all the praising epithets that the

<sup>171</sup> Ομήρος, (Homer), *Οδύσσεια (Odyssey)*, Καζαντζάκης, Ν. and Κακριδής, Ι. (Kazantzakis, N. and Kakridis, I.) trans., Αθήνα (Athens): Εστία (Estia), 1965, ε' 121-124; λ' 572-575.

<sup>172</sup> Ησίοδος (Hesiod), *Θεογονία (Theogony)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Ζήτρος (Zetros), 2001, lines 507-616; Ησίοδος (Hesiod), *Έργα και ημέραι (Works and days)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Ζήτρος (Zetros), 2001, lines 42-105.

<sup>173</sup> Ησίοδος (Hesiod), *Θεογονία (Theogony)*, lines 507-616.

<sup>174</sup> Ξενοφάνης (*Xenophanes*), Ομάδα Κάκτου (Kaktos Team), trans., Αθήνα (Athens): Κάκτος (Kaktos), 1994, 34-43 DK.

<sup>175</sup> Εμπεδοκλής (Ebedokles), *Περί φύσεως (On nature)*, Ρούσσος, Ε. (Roussos, E.) trans., Αθήνα (Athens): Στιγμή (Stigmi), 1999, 55 DK.

<sup>176</sup> Αισχύλος (Aeschylus), *Ευμενίδες (Eumenides)*, Μαυρόπουλος, Θ. (Mavropoulos, Th.) trans., Αθήνα (Athens): Ζήτρος (Zetros), 2007, lines 1-10 and 17-20.

<sup>177</sup> Morpurgo, A. ed., *Lexicon mycenaee graecitatis*, Rome: Edizioni dell' Ateneo, 1963.

ancient authors attributed to Gaea are automatically also addressed to the planet we live in and to the soil, whose fruits nourish us (Figure 171).

GAEA

and the artist

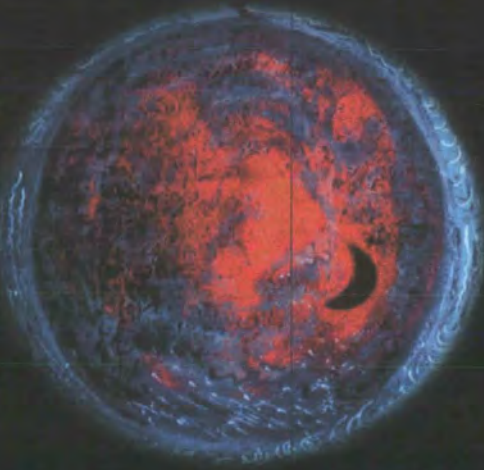


Figure 170. Mock-up text panel. Gaea as earth. Terracotta statuette from Tanagra, Greece. Date unknown. Museum de Borely, Marseille.

'Gaea, mother of all things,  
ever-respected'

Hesiod



Figure 171. Mock-up text panel. Earth as Gaea.

My interviewees maintained that the worship of the earth as the beginning and end of everything reaches its apogee, and is most explicitly manifested, in the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'. One of the few things that we know for certain about these mysteries is that they were dedicated to the worship of Demeter and the Kore, or Persephone. Demeter is today mostly known as the ancient goddess of agriculture. However, the museum could shed more light on the nature of Demeter through the etymology of her name, which is not well known to a wide audience. So, 'Demeter' is in fact etymologized by the Linear B 'Da Mater', which means 'Ga (Gé) Méter', in modern

Greek 'Gé - Metéra', i.e. 'Earth - Mother'.<sup>178</sup> The museum could point out then that Demeter is in fact the first-born and all-containing earth that was so much praised by the ancient poets. This could also provide a link to my interviewees' analysis of the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'. My interviewees quite accurately perceived Demeter as something more than an agricultural deity, and it was in this light that they also interpreted the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' as something more than an agricultural feast. My interviewees' opinion is confirmed by scholars who have pointed out that the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' were the absolute feast of life and death<sup>179</sup>. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the ancient Greeks celebrated life and death in strict association with Earth's processes. They celebrated efflorescence and the dawn of life, but at the same time they believed that 'the dead belong to Demeter', i.e. to earth. So, earth, the ground we walk on, is the beginning and the end; it is the fertilizing power that moves the cosmos; she is the 'containing' womb, whose surface offers food and life and whose depths shelter life after it has ceased to exist. More than that, though, she is the one who can nourish all living things with her fruits, as well as condemn them to death, once she deprives them of her fruits. This aspect of earth is also outlined by Hesiod, who refers to Gaea as the one who 'nourishes all things and gives all things ... and who kills all things'<sup>180</sup>. In this way, people in the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' acknowledged, and at the same time celebrated, the belief that their existence was identified with and bound to the earth.

Aggelakas stated that the primordial myths of the Greeks (in which he includes the 'Eleusinian Mysteries') spoke of the *experience* of the divine. '*They put God inside Man*', he said specifically. As Aristotle's informs us, the adept of the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' did not expect to learn anything, but participated in them only to experience the *vision* of their unification with Goddess Earth.<sup>181</sup> We also know that the preparative stage of the main initiation included, among others, the consumption of *kykeon*, the mythical drink of Demeter; thus the adepts mimicked Demeter and sought to be unified with her, to become like her.<sup>182</sup> The museum could make use of Aggelakas' opinion and combine it with the little factual information that we have on the Mysteries' ritual to reinforce and develop its discussion (Figures 172 and 173).

<sup>178</sup> Παπαχατζής, Ι. (Papachadjis, I.), «Αρχαία θρησκεία» ('Ancient religion'), Κακριδής, Ι. ed., *Ελληνική μυθολογία*, (Greek mythology), Ι, pp. 225-239, (p. 227).

<sup>179</sup> Harisson, J. E., *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion*; Otto, W. F., 'The meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries', Campbell, J. ed., *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks 2. 'The Mysteries'*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.

<sup>180</sup> Ησίοδος (Hesiod), *Θεογονία* (Theogony), lines 507-616.

<sup>181</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Ostwald, M. trans., New York: Macmillan, 1962, 1111a.

<sup>182</sup> Λεκατσάς, Π. (Lekatsas, P), *Διόνυσος* (*Dionysus*), Αθήνα (Athens): Εταιρεία Σπουδων (Etaireia Spoudon), 1971, pp. 23;38; 62; Otto, W. F., 'The meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries', Campbell, J. ed., *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks 2*, pp.14-31.

In the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' the adepts drank the *kykeon*,  
Demeter's drink, to be symbolically unified with her.

They were unified with the Earth

Figure 172. Mock – up text panel. The unification with Demeter through the kykeon.

*'In the 'Eleusinian Mysteries' people  
experienced the deity'*



They experienced the processes of the earth

Figure 173. Mock-up text panel. Aggelakas on the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'.

The discussion of earth as the primordial, cosmogonic and life-ruling power and the unification of the individual with earth could serve in the museum as a stepping-stone between mythology and contemporary life, upon which the museum could challenge its visitors to compare and contrast the past and the present. In particular, the museum could recall that Eleusina, the once centre of earth's worship, is today one of the most severely polluted areas of Greece.

'Thriassion Field (i.e. Eleusina) dies', newspapers and environmentalists have warned<sup>183</sup>. Heavy industries and the systematic violation of the law on waste management have caused irreversible ecological damage in the area<sup>184</sup>. In Eleusina, the change of attitude is evident more than anywhere else. In the past, Eleusina was the symbol of man's subordination to earth. Today, Eleusina is the symbol of earth's subordination to man and of earth's violation by man. Yet this has not been without consequences. Research has shown that in Eleusina the rate and normality of the growth of plants and animals has been interrupted<sup>185</sup>, and that the water is unsuitable for drinking or for any other use.<sup>186</sup> The once sacred soil bears now fruits that are atrophic, abnormal and unhealthy. The museum could pose a number of questions to its visitors, such as, 'How has Man's relation to earth developed?'; 'What is our vision of the earth today?' and 'Is this a case of ancient or contemporary naivety?', in order to encourage them reflect on the significance of the mythical vision and of the contemporary reality.

The museum could illustrate the consequences of man's disrespect towards earth through a mythological parallel, in order to further emphasize the value mythology still bears for the contemporary individual and in order to help visitors recognize mythology as something meaningful. So, the museum could mention that one of Demeter's epithets is 'Erinyes' ('Erinyes' is the Greek word for the 'Furies', the goddess of retribution). Demeter, then, can also be angry and fearful. This side of Demeter emerged on the surface when her cult was insulted or her rights violated. So, when Persephone (who, as we have previously seen is just another expression of Demeter), was raped by Pluto and abducted to his dark underworld kingdom, Demeter made the grass, the flowers and the trees die. Moreover, when the king of Thessaly, Erysichthon, cut trees from Demeter's sacred grove to build a palace, the goddess' fury was so great that she cursed the king to be hungry for eternity. Eventually, Erysichthon had to be nourished with his own flesh and tragically died in pain.

To make an environmental statement with an even greater impact, the museum could also recall the phenomenal ecological disaster that Greece witnessed in the Summer of 2007, caused by a chain of arsons all over the country. These literally changed the face of the country and, according to environmentalists, will bring further changes to the climate and people's quality of life in the future. The World Wide Fund

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<sup>183</sup> <http://magoulaonline.gr/?p=69>, [accessed, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2007].

<sup>184</sup> [http://www.thriasiopedio.gr/enviro\\_n\\_problems.htm](http://www.thriasiopedio.gr/enviro_n_problems.htm), [accessed, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

<sup>185</sup> <http://magoula.wordpress.com/2008/01/23/%ce%95%ce%ba%cf%86%cf%85%ce%bb%ce%b9%cf%83%ce%bc%cf%8c%cf%82-%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%82-%ce%b4%ce%b9%ce%b1%ce%b4%ce%b9%ce%ba%ce%b1%cf%83%ce%af%ce%b1%cf%82-%ce%b1%ce%bd%ce%ac%cf%80%cf%84%cf%85%ce%be%ce%b7/#more-124>, [accessed, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007].

<sup>186</sup> <http://magoulaonline.gr/?p=69>, [accessed, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2007].

(WWF) stated: 'the destruction by far exceeds our expectations, and is more dramatic and extensive than we imagined'<sup>187</sup>, 'yet we are not so much worried about what nature is going to do from now on, as much as we are worried about how man is going to cope'<sup>188</sup>.

Chadjidakis and Gatsos, two major personages of contemporary Greek culture have written a song entitled 'Persephone's Nightmare', which could assist the museum in discussing the severe contemporary environmental problem in mythological terms and to relate it to the topic of Demeter and the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'.

Persephone, who is also known by the name Kore is, in myth, the daughter of Demeter, who was abducted by Hades, the king of the dead, through a chasm in the earth, to the underworld. As the myth has it, Demeter spent many months looking for her daughter, during which the life-giving forces of nature came to a standstill. Eventually, Demeter found her daughter and, with the intervention of Zeus, it was arranged that Persephone could share her time between her mother and her husband: she could spend six months above ground and six months in the dark realm of the dead under the earth's surface. During the six months that Persephone spent with Demeter, the earth flourished and gave her fruits to humans. In the 'Eleusinian Mysteries', Persephone was worshipped along with Demeter, mostly as Kore (meaning maiden). Persephone's name does not appear to be Greek; however her worship was attached to that of Demeter in very early times.<sup>189</sup>

In terms of her interpretation, Persephone is rather obscure. She has been approached by various scholars in the context of various mythological theories, and the suggested interpretations are rather complex and hypothetical, mainly due to the cryptic nature of the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'.<sup>190</sup> It has to be noted, though, that most theories tend to accept that Persephone, or Kore, was another aspect of Demeter. Marcy Kokkinake has suggested to me one interpretation of Persephone and the triadic scheme of Hades - Persephone - Demeter, which helped me to understand the myth's rationale and function and therefore I adopt it here.<sup>191</sup> According to this interpretation, the interaction between Hades, Persephone and Demeter is a schematization of the

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<sup>187</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/sep/28/environment.conservaion>, [accessed, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>188</sup> [http://portal.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_kathglobal\\_30\\_27/09/2007\\_205336](http://portal.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_kathglobal_30_27/09/2007_205336), [accessed, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2007].

<sup>189</sup> Κακριδής, Ι. (Kakridis, I.), «Δήμητρα» ('Demeter'), *Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Greek Mythology)* 2, pp. 230-239, p. 230.

<sup>190</sup> For example: Otto, W. F., 'The meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries', Campbell, J. ed., *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* 2, pp.14-31; Mautis, G., *Οι θεοί της Ελλάδος και τα Ελευσίνια Μυστήρια* (The gods of Greece and the Eleusinian Mysteries), Αθήνα: Εκάτη, 2005 (Original French work: *Les dieux de la Grece et les Mysteres d'Eleusis*). Graves, R. *The Greek myths*, pp. 94-96; 45-46;57; 89-93.

<sup>191</sup> Κοκκινάκη, Μ. (Kokkinaki, M), personal communication via email, 14/02/2008.

blossoming procedure. Hades - or Pluto, which means 'rich' – symbolizes the invisible potent forces of nature that bring about the 'conception', and operate underground. Persephone is the embodiment of fertility, which begins under the earth's surface and gains strength there, with the help of Hades, or Pluto. Persephone, then emerges on the surface to meet her mother, Demeter, and her alter ego, who symbolizes the above-ground powers of blossoming, in other words the fertile ground, which is essential for the process of blossoming to be developed and to prosper. So, Persephone is the 'promise', the potential of blossoming and Demeter the power that sustains and develops it. They are complimentary and neither has meaning without the other, and so Demeter and Persephone are essentially the same 'person': they are the life-giving and life-taking earth. I believe that this interpretation could be effective in a museum context, as it transmits the myth's pragmatic substance in an explicit and easily understood way. I would also argue that this interpretation best serves the needs of the present discussion of earth's worship and deification.

The song 'Persephone's Nightmare' by Chadjidakis is addressed to Persephone as Demeter's alter ego and specifically as blossoming's potential, which gives promise and hope for life's maintenance. The song weeps for the mythical goddess and speaks in an evocative way of her place in the contemporary world:

Where pennyroyal and wild mind used to grow  
and the earth spouted her first cyclamen  
now peasants are selling out the concrete  
and the birds drop dead into the tall furnace chimney.

Sleep, Persephone,  
in the embrace of the earth  
Never come out again  
on the balcony of the world

Where the mystery's initiates used to join their hands  
in prayer before entering the sanctuary  
now the tourists throw out cigarette butts  
and go off to see the new refinery.

Sleep, Persephone  
in the embrace of the earth

Never come out again  
on the balcony of the world

Where the sea used to be a bountiful blessing  
and the bleating was a prayer on the plain  
now trucks are hauling to the shipyards  
empty bodies children of scrap metal and plate

Sleep, Persephone  
in the embrace of the earth  
Never come out again  
on the balcony of the world.<sup>192</sup>

The museum could present this song to its audience (Figure 174) and then invite its visitor's to translate its mythological message, by posing questions such as, 'Could the myth come true?', 'Will Persephone stay with us?'. A text-panel, where the ancient and the mythological is joined with the contemporary and the pragmatic, could illustrate and underscore the correlations that the museum could weave throughout its discourse (Figures 175).

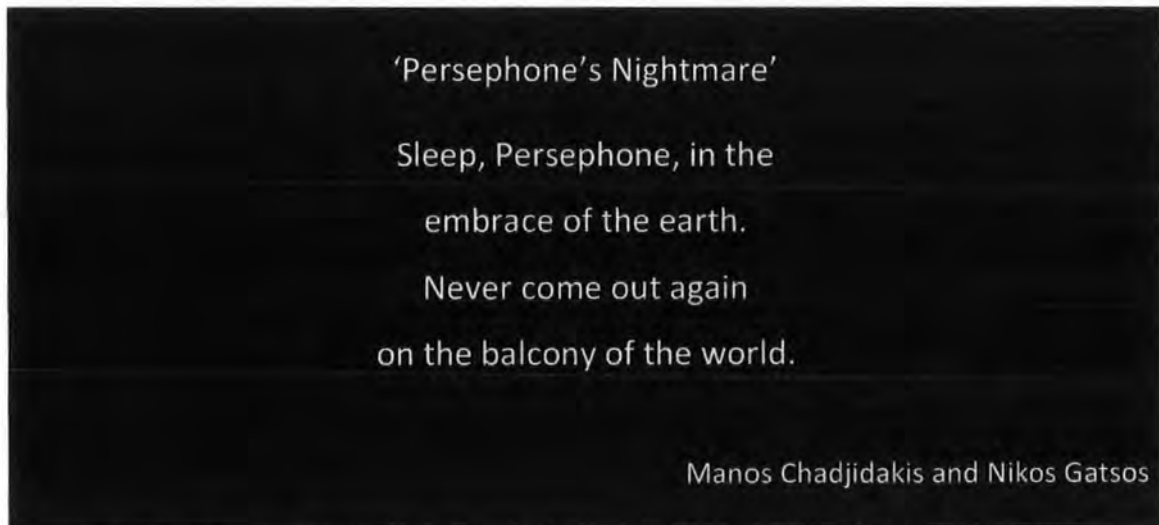


Figure 174. Mock-up text panel. 'Persephone's Nightmare', by Manos Chadjidakis and Nikos Gatsos.

<sup>192</sup> 'Persephone's Nightmare': Chadjidakis, M. (music); Gatsos, N., (lyrics). 'Persephone's Nightmare' features in the music album *Τα παράλογα (Ta paraloga)*, ΛΥΡΑ (LYRA), 1976.



'we are worried about how man is going to cope'

WWF

Could the myth come true?



The ancients knew that nature  
revenge.

Will ~~Persephone~~ stay with us?

Figure 175. Mock-up text panel. Translating ecology through mythology. Above: the Summer 2007 arsons. Below: The "Fleeing Kore", from the Archaeological Museum of Eleusis.

### Contemporary mythology: Urban myths in the archaeological museum

The last aspect of mythology's museological presentation through the eyes of contemporary artists concerns the concept of 'urban myths', which my interviewees incorporated into the broader concept of 'Greek mythology'. The museum could open this discussion by inviting his visitors to reconsider the concept of Greek mythology. This could be achieved by posing the simple question: 'Do you think that only the ancients had myths?'. In this way, the museum could draw the visitors' attention to the presentation and discussion of mythology in contemporary life. Zervoudakis, with his analysis of the topic and his comments, could frame the museum discourse. Zervoudakis emphasized the ultimate significance of the myths that 'reside' in contemporary people's urban environment and claimed, moreover, that they are of equal significance to the individual as the myths of the ancient Greek civilization.

Max Weber's theory on the world's disenchantment<sup>193</sup> provides the scholarly umbrella for Zervoudakis' analysis. Weber pointed out that the contemporary world has been deserted by the gods and is no longer inhabited by spirits, demons and all these supernatural creatures that 'participated' in the life of people of the past. He argued that it is man who chased the gods away by organizing his life around the ability to rationalize, predict and calculate everything. Weber claimed that the world's disenchantment has led to an increasing overestimation of the importance and necessity of politics in life, as well as a confusion or loss of values in the field of politics. However, it is not only the economic and political organization of modern societies that has been affected by the disenchantment of the world, but also the psychological and spiritual organization of the modern self. Contemporary man removed the possibility of metaphysical and spiritual explanations of the world, and, by doing this, he excluded from his life certain values, such as feeling and passion. Choosing scientific over non-scientific means of answering our questions and explaining the world has left us with a problematic void, since we remain spiritually unfulfilled. Weber, as Cosser points out, 'tended to assert that the chances were very great indeed that mankind would in the future be imprisoned in an iron cage of its own making.'<sup>194</sup> Likewise, Jung maintains that 'we have lost our superstitious fear for evil spirits and things that go bump in the night, but, instead, we are seized with terror of people who, possessed by demons, perpetuate the frightful deeds of darkness.'<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Weber, M., 'Science as a vocation', Gerth, H. H., and Wright Mills, C. eds., *Max Weber. Essays in sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946 pp. 129-156.

<sup>194</sup> Coser, L. A., *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 1977 p. 233-234.

<sup>195</sup> Jung, C. G., *Essays on contemporary events*, London: Keegan Paul, 1947, Chapter 18, § 1363.

The museum could use the scholarly opinions on the significance of the metaphysical for the individual's psychological and spiritual development and well-being to clothe the (commonly perceived) non-academic topic of 'urban myths' with academic kudos. Then, the museum could take advantage of the comments of Zervoudakis, who like Weber, noticed the absence of the metaphysical element from the everyday life, and pointed out that *'you do not hear about haunted places anymore, about spirits and fairies'* and pleaded for the reintroduction of the transcendental to our lives (Figures 176 and 177).

Max Weber warns:

The world has been **disenchanted**.

No **supernatural** creatures participate in our lives anymore.

No supernatural things happen in **our cities**.

We are passionless and spiritually unfulfilled without their magic around us.

Figure 176. Mock-up text panel on Weber and the world's disenchantment.

Zervoudakis wonders:



*'where are the haunted places, the spirits,  
the fairies?'*

and he pleads:

*'Let us enliven our **urban myths!**'*

Figure 177. Mock-up text panel. Zervoudakis on urban myths.

In Greece, 'urban myths' can be also found among the displays of archaeological museums. One example of an 'urban myth' with a mythological content is the so-called 'Las Incantadas', i.e. the Sephardic word for 'The Enchanted Ones', which are presented in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (Figure 178).



<p><b>Las Incantadas</b>          ("The enchanted ones" in Sephardic, the language of Thessaloniki's Spanish Jews) was probably located in the south of the Forum, and must have belonged to an elaborate complex of Imperial-Age baths.</p> <p>In 1864, parts of the monument were sold by the city's Turkish governor to the French consul and transported to France, in spite of heated opposition by all the city's inhabitants, whether Greek, Turkish, or Jewish. Nowadays, it is on display in the Louvre.</p> <p>We have an idea of its appearance from drawings and engravings dating to the 17th and 18th c.</p>	<p>The monument had two facades, and was nearly 13m. high. The pilasters, each of which had a height of 2.18m. and belonged to the 2nd storey of a colonnade, were decorated on either side. On one side were depictions of a Maenad, Dionysus, Ariadne, and Leda, while on the other were Nike, Aura, one of the Dioscuri, and Ganymedes with Zeus in the form of an eagle. These figures apparently told a myth that was popular in those days, for they decorated one of the most important public buildings in the city.</p>
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Figure 178. 'Las Incantadas' in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

'Las Incantadas' is the name given to the sculptures that adorned an arcade most likely erected in the time of Hadrian (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D) in the Roman Forum of Thessaloniki, as part of a complex of Thermae. The arcade was supported by Corinthian columns, on which stood four square pilasters, each one of which had on two faces a figure sculptured in relief. These figures were Dionysos, Hermes (or most probably

Dioscurus)<sup>196</sup>, Ariadne, Ganymede, Leda, a Maenad, a Nike and Aura. In all probability they depict a mythological incident, which is not known to us. Thessaloniki's people clothed these mysterious figures with new myths. The most popular among them is the following. When Alexander the Great was preparing his expedition against Persia, he called the king of Thrace to join him in Thessaloniki and continue the preparations together. The king came along with his family. Yet he soon became aware that his wife and Alexander were involved in a love affair. So, the Thracian king arranged one night for a spell to be put on Alexander, just before he left for the queen's chambers. Alexander found out about the king's plot and decided not to visit the queen that night. But, the queen got worried and went out to the arcade to meet him. Thus, the spell was put on her, instead of Alexander, and she was petrified on the spot. The same thing happened to the Thracian king and his entourage, who also went out after a while to check whether everything had gone according to plan.<sup>197</sup>

Today, the four pilasters are exhibited in the Devon sector of the Louvre Museum. The archaeological museum of Thessaloniki has on display large panels with engravings of the sculptures in the section that introduces the Roman Forum.

The museum could also identify for its visitors other 'enchanted' places of the city and present their history. This could be achieved with the use of an interactive urban map, like the one used in the archaeological museum of Thessaloniki, where the 'enchanted' places could be marked and information on them provided (Figure 179). Thus, the museum could help its visitors recognize the 'supernatural' aspect of the city in their everyday encounters with it. Furthermore, the museum could ask its visitors to contribute the urban myths they are familiar with, and invite them to describe the impact that these myths have on them. Zervoudakis' comment that, '*the myths of our cities are our contemporary mythology*' could summarize for museum visitors the significance of these places.

From a practical perspective, the museum could also contribute to the familiarization of its audience with the myths of the urban landscape of its city through guided theme-tours. In Thessaloniki, the Cinema Museum organizes every Spring and Summer 'navigable' guided tours of the city, using the boat 'Sophia Star', which has been declared a landmark of Thessaloniki by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, which introduces people to the monuments of the city and their history.<sup>198</sup> The Municipality of

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<sup>196</sup> Mazower describes it as Hermes, and Veleni as Dioscurus, In: Mazower, M., 'The travelers and the Oriental city, 1840-1920', *Royal Historical Society* 12, 2002, pp. 59-111, (p. 82); Βελένη, Π. (Veleni, P.), *Θεσσαλονίκη, νεράιδα, βασίλισσα, γοργόνα (Thessaloniki, fairy, queen, mermaid)*, Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki): Ζήτρος (Zetros), 2001, p. 143.

<sup>197</sup> Βελένη, Π. (Veleni, P.), *Θεσσαλονίκη, νεράιδα, βασίλισσα, γοργόνα (Thessaloniki, fairy, queen, mermaid)*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>198</sup> [www.cinemuseum.gr/guides/](http://www.cinemuseum.gr/guides/), [accessed, 07<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

Thessaloniki has also established the institution of the 'Open City Museum', in the context of the European Union program 'Interreg'. In the 'Open City Museum', visitors will have the opportunity to be guided on a bus to a variety of landmarks of the city, whose significance may vary from archaeology to gastronomy.<sup>199</sup> A tour of the urban myths of the city could be organized building on these two examples.



Figure 179. Interactive urban map in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

The discussion of the concept of urban myths as part of Greek mythology could have various museological benefits. First, as stated previously, the museum visitors could be encouraged to detect the mythical element in their cities and, by extension, in their daily lives. Second, the connection of urban myths to ancient myths and the declaration of the former as contemporary mythology could help to bring museum visitors closer to the distant and odd ancient Greek myths.

<sup>199</sup> [www.mathes.gr/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=12083](http://www.mathes.gr/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=12083), [accessed, 07<sup>th</sup> October 2007].

The museum could take this latter point even further and close its discussion of mythology by pointing out the affinity of myth-making to contemporary people explicitly, drawing on Pavlidis' comment that *'Greek mythology is being written now'* (Figure 180). This statement could have a significant impact on visitors as it contains the element of surprise and contradiction. Thus, the visitors could be left with a final vibrant statement to think about while leaving the exhibition, helping them to assess everything they learnt about mythology in the museum.

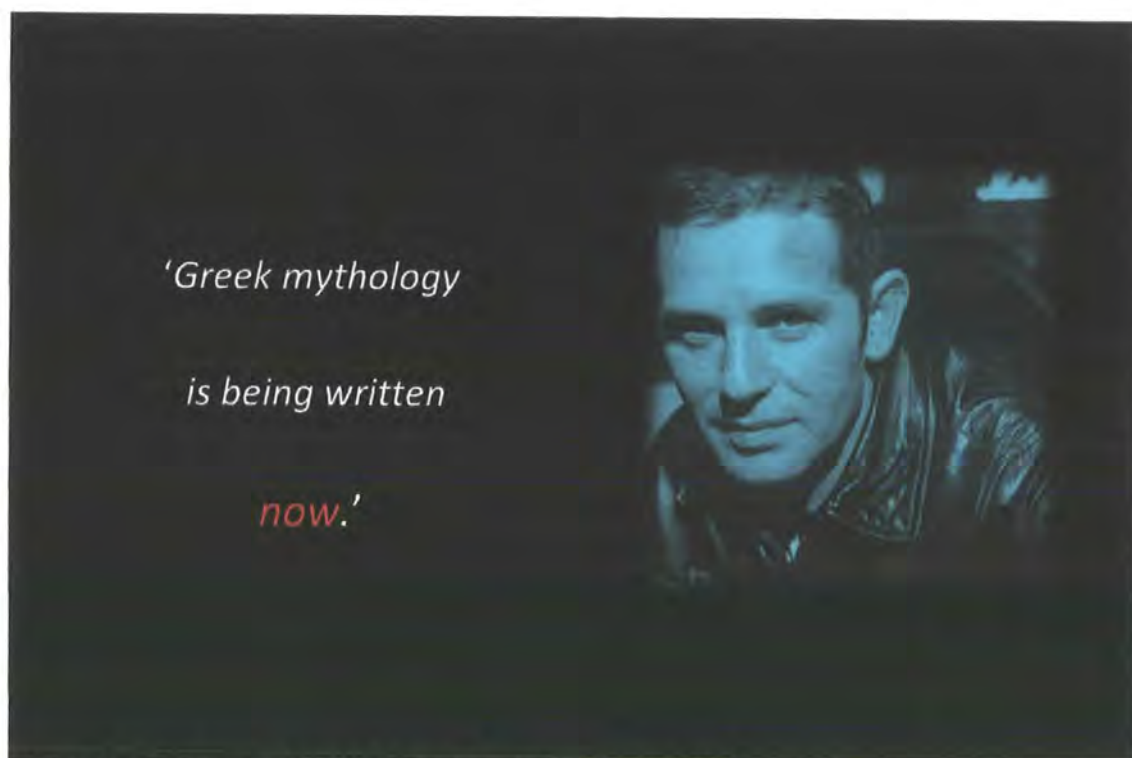


Figure 180. Mock-up text panel. Pavlidis on contemporary mythology.

### Summary

In this second section of Chapter Five, I have attempted in general and in detail, to address the main research question of this thesis, i.e. the potential contribution of archaeological museums to the development of a dynamic relationship between Greek people and Greek mythology, using the contemporary artists of Greece as a bridge. Each section has illuminated a different potential of this relationship. The first two sections suggested that museum visitors be asked to speculate on contemporary issues, such as immigration and racism, through the myths of Odysseus and Deucalion. The third section took mythology's discussion to a more personal level. The idea that myths and mythical figures represent psychological powers and tendencies was discussed and

it was suggested that museum visitors could be called upon to identify the myths that live inside them, as well as the myths in which they participate. The fourth section explored the relation of man to earth, and, by extension, to nature, through mythology and more specifically through Gaea and the 'Eleusinian Mysteries'. Here, it was proposed that museum visitors be asked to understand the cosmos in mythological terms. Finally, the fifth and last section suggested that the museum audience be challenged to think whether myth-making was exclusive to ancient Greek society.

The role of my interviewees, as contemporary artists, in answering my thesis' main research question has proved vital. One of their most important assets was their ability to 'humanize' mythology, through their analyses and comments. Moreover, they did so in a refreshing way, that potentially provides the museum with the opportunity to enable popular, non-academic (and often young) people to make meanings of an 'old' and academic topic. In addition, my interviewees' could provide, through their artworks, explicit applications of their mythological readings, thus, making abstract theories more concrete. Finally, my interviewees' comments often 'played' with the element of surprise and challenge, in the sense that they shed light on myths from a non-conventional angle. This could potentially trigger the learning mechanism in the museum, according to the constructivist learning theory.

## **7. Artists and mythology in museums: a practical assessment**

In this section, I briefly examine the downsides of the museological revivification of Greek mythology with the help of contemporary artists, thus tackling the tenth and last of my key research questions. The use of artists as interpreters in museums is a relatively new and restricted practice, with limited coverage in the relevant literature. Jane Morris has identified some pitfalls that may underlie any collaboration between museum and artists<sup>200</sup>, and here I have also contributed some practical challenges that are specifically related to the Greek museological situation.

One of the problems that I encountered in the case of Greek mythology's artistic interpretation is that artists sometimes speak of issues that a state administrated and funded museum would be reluctant to touch on. For example, the artists defend immigrants and their rightful place in Greek society, at the very time when the government takes measures for their removal from the country. Also, they attack well-established national imageries, which lie at the heart of national identity and are reinforced and promoted by official sources. For instance, Papakonstantinou used the

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<sup>200</sup> Morris, J., 'Artistic values', *Museum Practice* 31, Autumn 2005, pp. 44-45; Morris, J., 'The green light', *Museum Practice* 31, Autumn 2005, pp. 46-48.

myth of Deucalion as an example of mythology's trans-racial character. However, as Hamilakis points out, the official Greek education uses this specific myth in the opposite way, in an ethnocentric context, where humanity is equated with Hellenism and Deucalion's son, Hellenas, is promoted as the primordial human.<sup>201</sup>

So, the museum may have to face the problem of conflicting interests between the artists it chooses to work with and the state, i.e. its main, if not only, sponsor. As Morris points out, bad communication is one of the main sources of problems in the collaboration between museums and artists.<sup>202</sup> One possible solution would be for the museum to ask the artists to submit proposals, on the basis of which it could choose whom it is going to collaborate with.<sup>203</sup> However, I would argue that this method it is not the most adequate for the case examined in this thesis for two reasons. First, the museum should pay the artists a small fee for their proposals. Yet, since Greek museums (all museums – not only the archaeological ones) absorb just the 0.5% of the State Budget, this would be most likely chimerical, especially for the small museums on the Greek periphery. Second, my experience showed that when artists are asked to contribute their opinion on a topic that lies outside their field of expertise, such as Greek mythology, they are often hesitant. Therefore, I would argue that the help and encouragement of the curator are necessary and that these can best be ensured through open-ended interviews. Additionally, a face-to-face discussion with the artist is valuable for the detection of interesting undertones in the artist's ideas. Therefore, I believe that an initial brief, where, as Morris indicates, the aims and objectives of the exhibition, the roles, the tasks and the responsibilities of both the museum and the artists are clearly stated, would be a more feasible and effective way for a Greek archaeological museum to deal with this issue. I would argue that one of the most important points to be established is that the focal point of the exhibition is not the artist and the reinforcement of his image and his publicity, but the audience of the museum, as well as the museological subject matter, and the serving of their best interests. Also, it needs to be clarified that the museum is not a place for propaganda<sup>204</sup>, and that the artist should not work in this direction. So, lines and boundaries need to be drawn around the participation of artists in the museum, in order for failures, disappointments and frictions to be avoided. However, the success of such a project is also greatly dependent on the sensitivity and skill of the curator to bring out

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<sup>201</sup> Hamilkakis, Y., "Learn history!" Antiquity, national narrative and history in Greek educational textbooks', Hamikakis, Y., and Brown, K. S. ed., *The usable past. Greek metahistories*, London: Lexington Books, 2003, p. 48.

<sup>202</sup> Morris, J., 'Artistic values', *Museum Practice* 31, Autumn 2005, p. 45; Morris, J., 'The green light', *Museum Practice* 31, Autumn 2005, pp. 46-48.

<sup>203</sup> Morris, J., 'The green light', *Museum Practice* 31, Autumn 2005, pp. 46.

<sup>204</sup> Cameron, D. 'The museum, the temple or the forum', Anderson, G. ed., *Reinventing the museum*, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004, pp. 61-73, p. 71.

the poetry in the discourse and say the sharpest things in the softest way. A good example is provided by Fred Wilson's museum work, who spoke of colonialism and slavery in a way that was honest and affective, yet, as the curator pointed out, 'never crude, never merciless'<sup>205</sup>.

Another possible pitfall in the collaboration between artists and museum was identified by my interviewee and Director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Veleni. This concerns the hazard of the artists' 'canonization' and their promotion as authorities of knowledge. Duncan Cameron has also argued that the admission of an artist to the museum, 'even a swinging museum', equals his acceptance by the establishment<sup>206</sup>. Cameron's remark was made in a slightly different context to that of mythology's museological discussion, and concerns the need for the reestablishment of the institution of the forum in society, as a place of artistic experimentation and ideological confrontation. However, I would admit that, the hazard of the artists' 'legitimization' is possible in the case of mythology's artistic interpretation, which should not be about the expression of 'antiestablishment manifestations' within 'establishment institutions'. Indeed popular and respected artists, like my interviewees, could easily be perceived by the museum visitors as having been chosen because they are 'important', 'good' and, most importantly, 'real' in whatever they claim about mythology. I would argue that the key here lies with the way in which the museum uses artists. In a much-studied topic like mythology, the artists would not be invited to experiment and challenge academic interpretations, but rather to enliven them and reinforce them through their imaginative ways. So, as far as mythology's understanding by the visitors is concerned, the presence of the artists should not be confusing. As far as the impact of this practice on the artists' status is concerned, the museum could prevent the artists' 'sanctification' by using, throughout the exhibiton, language which emphasizes the point that the displayed artists are there to metaphorically 'discuss' their personal mythological interpretations with the public, rather than as representatives of Greece's 'ideological hegemony', to borrow a term from Marxist sociology<sup>207</sup>.

The third difficulty I identified is more practical and has to do with the fact that the majority of archaeological museums in Greece have a local character and deal with the ancient culture of a specific area. In addition, many of these museums function

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<sup>205</sup> Gascoigne, L., 'Case study: Fred Wilson', *Museum Practice* 31, Autumn 2005, pp. 57-59.

<sup>206</sup> Cameron, D. 'The museum, the temple or the forum', Anderson, G. ed., *Reinventing the museum*, pp. 61-73, p. 69.

<sup>207</sup> Suggested further reading: Jones, J. S., *Antonio Gramsci*; Evans, M., *Lucien Goldmann: an introduction*; Goldmann, L., *Lukacs and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*; Goldmann, L., *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*; Goldmann, L., *Power and Humanism*.

in conjunction with an open archaeological site. In any case, the visitors to these museums are interested in observing the culture of a specific area and its distinctive features. This automatically limits the variety and number of myths that are of relevance and could be presented in the museum. This could be solved by drawing on the local myths, given that most regions of Greece have been theatres of mythological incidents, have had their own eponymic founder-hero, or have been particularly associated with the worship of the one or another mythical deity. Pedro Olalla has produced an interesting mythological atlas of Greece, which gives a clear image of the distribution of myths in the country.<sup>208</sup> However, focusing exclusively on local myths could limit considerably the choice of artists, as not all artists are interested in or inspired by all myths. As a result, the local archaeological museum might have to adjust its criteria and make compromises that could affect the quality of the exhibition, as it might have to choose, not among the most interesting, imaginative, thoughtful and recognizable artists, but among those who have an interest in the local myths. With reference to the archaeological museums of the Greek periphery, it should be taken into account that there might be also a problem of space availability for additional displays, as they are frequently housed in small buildings.

For the above reasons, I would suggest that mythology's reading through contemporary art could be more easily mobilized in central museums with many galleries, such as the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, or the Archaeological Museum of Heracleion, to name a few. In the National Museum, a plethora of artefacts from all over Greece are on display; the museum of Heracleion is a particular 'local' museum, as it concerns the civilization of the whole of Crete, which is unique in character and rich in myths; the museum of Thessaloniki, the national museum of northern Greece, as the famous Greek archaeologist Manolis Andronikos used to call it, houses ancient culture from various areas of northern Greece and not only from the city of Thessaloniki. Subsequently, central museums like these could expand the discussion of a greater number and variety of myths, without being too restricted by the local character of their discourse, and they could potentially also find material culture with a mythological theme to illustrate mythology's discussion.

A fourth difficulty could emerge from the traditionally archaeology dominated character and operation of the Greek archaeological museums, which has only recently been revised both on an administrative and ideological level (i.e. through the redefinition of the role of the museum). Admittedly, the change of ideology in museums has not been an easy and straightforward process anywhere in the Western

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<sup>208</sup> Olalla, P., and Priego, A., *Μυθολογικός Άτλας της Ελλάδας*, Αθήνα (Athens): Road publications, 2001 (English edition: *Mythological Atlas of Greece*, London: Road publications, 2003).

world<sup>209</sup>, and, in Greece, the traditional intellectual authorities of the Greek archaeological museums (i.e. archaeologists) have proved rather reluctant to abandon their monopoly<sup>210</sup> on the cultural capital that determines and reproduces their professional identity.<sup>211</sup>

This is evident both in the hostility with which, as Voudouri comments, the suggested changes in museums' administration were met by the 'Association of Greek Archaeologists'<sup>212</sup>, but also in the archaeology-focused perspective from which the 'new era' of Greek archaeological museums has been frequently welcomed by Greek archaeologists. So, in this spirit, it is claimed that the visitor 'has now to be turned into a participant in the *archaeological experience*'<sup>213</sup> and the archaeologist is reassured that 'in any case he/she maintains the privilege of the first finder, (which he/she) can handle *magnanimously and constructively*'<sup>214</sup>, (because) the benefit remains, essentially, all of the archaeologist'<sup>215</sup>.

So, I would claim that there is a latent belief that archaeological collections somehow belong to the archaeologist and to the archaeological museum in Greece, despite the reassurance that 'the find is not a means of (the archaeologist's) self-assertion'<sup>216</sup>. I would argue that the shift of the archaeologist, from the status of a knowledgeable authority, to one of participant in a museological experience, which includes the archaeological object but not exclusively, has yet to be achieved. Additionally, as Veleni commented in her interview, the relationship between traditional museum professionals, such as archaeologists and museologists are still characterized by mutual distrust and lack of a common ground for a successful communication. Under this assumption, I would suggest that the potential difficulty identified by Morris of the museums 'to understand just how different the artist's perspective can be from that of the museum staff' seems to be increased in the strictly academic and 'unequal' environment of Greek archaeological museums.

Finally, it should be taken into account that the development of a

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<sup>209</sup> Ross, M., 'Interpreting the new museology', *Museum and society* 2, 2, Jul. 2004, pp. 84-103; Bernstein, B., *Class, codes and control 1: Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1971.

<sup>210</sup> Βουδούρη, Δ. (Boudouri, D.), *Κράτος και μουσεία. Το θεσμικό πλαίσιο των αρχαιολογικών μουσείων (State and museums. The institutional context of archaeological museums)*, p. 280.

<sup>211</sup> Ross, M., 'Interpreting the new museology', *Museum and society* 2, 2, Jul. 2004, pp. 84-103, (p. 98).

<sup>212</sup> Βουδούρη, Δ. (Boudouri, D.), *Κράτος και μουσεία. Το θεσμικό πλαίσιο των αρχαιολογικών μουσείων (State and museums. The institutional context of archaeological museums)*, p. 280.

<sup>213</sup> emphasis mine

<sup>214</sup> emphasis mine

<sup>215</sup> Σαατσόγλου-Παλιαδέλη, Χρ. (Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, Chr.), «Αρχαιολογώντας με τους άλλους» ('Archaeologizing with the others'), *Επτάκυκλος (Eptakyklos)* 10, September '98- January '99, pp. 33-35, (p.35).

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

meaningful discourse, where mythology is interpreted through the eyes of the artists may be a considerably time-consuming process. The collection, and especially the analysis and coding of the interviewees' mythological interpretations, can be complex process, in which the initial codings and conclusions may have to be given back to the interviewees for further clarification.<sup>217</sup> This means that it is process that requires a long-term commitment, in which the participating artists would need to be collaborative and easily accessible throughout the process.

## 8. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed a number of research questions and shed light on a number of issues concerning museums and Greek mythology.

The first half of the chapter was dedicated to the investigation of the nature of Greek mythology's relation to Greek archaeological museums. Attention was paid to the character and operation of Greek archaeological museums and, more specifically, to their attachment to the tangible aspects of the ancient Greek civilization within an ethnocentric spirit. In addition, the role of the discipline of archaeology in the formation of these museums' character was assessed. Greek archaeological museums, it was suggested, emerge as un-ideological and static temples of ancient art, rather than as dynamic places where ancient Greek culture is presented. This environment has proved suffocating for Greek mythology, which, mainly due to its intangible nature, is essentially absent from the museum's discourse. This peculiar status underlies series of misconceptions regarding what Greek mythology is, while reinforcing other stereotypical notions, attributed to Greek mythology through its uses and abuses by contemporary Greek society. So, the first part of this chapter established that the relation of Greek archaeological museums to Greek mythology does indeed need radical re-think.

The second part of the chapter linked this remark to Chapter Four and its concern with Greek mythology's status in contemporary Greek culture. In essence, then, this section sought to examine how Greek archaeological museums could revitalize Greek mythology by drawing on its meaningful contemporary interpretation by contemporary artists. The role of contemporary artists was investigated. The collaboration between Greek archaeological museums and contemporary Greek art to 'rescue' Greek mythology was then put into practice, through the presentation of a virtual museological exhibition of mythology, which draws on my interviewees' mythological interpretations, as presented in Chapter Four.

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<sup>217</sup> Kvale, S., *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, p. 190.

Contemporary Greek art, this chapter maintains, can indeed provide the basis for a radical re-thinking of the relationship between Greek mythology, Greek museums and Greek people. It can do so by helping to build an up-to-date, accessible and 'visitor - friendly' profile for Greek mythology and to build a museological discourse that is not didactic, but rather invites the visitor to *experience* Greek mythology and form a personal opinion on what Greek mythology may, or may not be.

Difficulties do admittedly exist, but I would argue that none of them is insuperable. Perhaps the most difficult of them is the conservative character of most archaeological museums in Greece, which do not leave much room for innovations. However, I would suggest that museums in large urban centres, like Thessaloniki, do indeed demonstrate a refreshing change of attitude and have made significant steps towards the incorporation of an up-to-date museological program in their discourse. Contemporary art as a means of enhancing museum interpretation has also made its appearance in this context and, according to the Director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, there could be space for further collaboration between artists and the museum. So, change in the landscape of Greek archaeological museums may not be sweeping, and may not affect all institutions, but it has begun and it leaves open many possibilities to be tried and tested in the future.

## 6. CONCLUSION

**D**o the relationships between Greek mythology, Greek museums and the Greek people require a radical re-think, using the bridge of contemporary artists?' This is the main question that my thesis has set out to investigate. A wide range of issues were revealed then and discussed during the exploration of this question, with particular reference to the additional research questions that were presented in Chapter One.

Greek mythology was identified in Chapter Three as an intellectual creation, whose nature and definition are flexible and inclusive. The diversity and variety of mythological theories presented in the first part of this chapter demonstrated that the exploration of Greek mythology's essence and function is not a closed case and that it is, moreover, a topic that can be approached from a number of different angles and in a meaningful way. Most importantly for the discussion in this thesis, the second part of Chapter Three established Greek mythology as an intellectual creation, whose development did not cease in antiquity, but which is still very much in progress. More specifically, the absurd figure of Medusa and the story of her appalling beheading served to analyse a host of diverse phenomena that connect the individual to the cosmos: it has been used to exemplify the capitalist economy, the relation of children to their parents and the latent sexuality that this entails, existentialist speculations, issues of moral corruption, gender conflict, etc. Medusa has also served as a role model for petrifying allure. It was in this light that the role of Medusa was adopted by Madonna and, through her, by thousands of girls and boys, who re-enacted the story of the ancient, mythical, monster on contemporary dance floors. So, myth is a living organism, which absorbs and reflects its social milieu and is open to elaboration and adjustment. In other words, myth is *living* heritage, whose cultural and intellectual dynamics appear to be inexhaustible.

In contemporary Greece, Greek mythology survives in various forms. First and foremost Greek mythology is present in society practically everywhere and the contemporary Greek individual has numerous opportunities to come into contact with ancient myths. Some of these opportunities are concealed in the most trivial aspects of the everyday lives of Greek people (e.g. in a friend's name, or in the brand name of a plastic salt container). Other opportunities are more evident and can be, in part, related to with nationalist discourses, which mix mythology with history in order to construct fictional theories that promote the primordial character and supremacy of Greek race. In these cases, that which is essentially adopted and reproduced by Greek society is not Greek mythology itself, but a simulacrum of it. In other words, Greek mythology is

approached as a metonymy of something else (i.e. antiquity, classical quality, Greekness, etc) and not as an individual and autonomous ideological system. Thus, it emerges as a precious but abstract absurdity.

On the other hand, there is the artistic production of contemporary Greece, where Greek mythology appears to retain its dynamics as an autonomous ideological system with significant intellectual and cultural potency. Greek mythology's status in contemporary Greek art was investigated in this thesis through a series of interviews with contemporary Greek musicians, authors and visual artists. My interviewees perceived Greek mythology as a window to the world, or rather as a window to life's substance. They perceived myths as containing hints and guidelines for dealing with life's circumstances, as stimuli for reflection on human nature, as well as a fertile ground for the understanding and discussion of active social issues, such as immigration. Overall, my interviewees demonstrated that Greek mythology can be an effective speculative tool for the contemporary Greek individual and that these absurd and distant stories and figures are in fact full of meanings and much more relevant to us, than what we are used to thinking. Therefore, this research detected in contemporary art an alternative to the empty and ultimately degrading way in which contemporary Greek people are familiarized with Greek mythology through the latter's mostly trivial adaptations by contemporary Greek society.

The official culture of contemporary Greece, and more specifically archaeological museums, as major institutions that represent ancient culture, are rather unconcerned with Greek mythology's communication to the general public. Here, one comes across the following oxymoron: Greek mythology is omnipresent, since a large number of archaeological museums exhibits depict mythological incidents and figures, yet, it is almost completely absent from the museums' discourse, and even the scarce mentions of it are epigrammatic and restricted to the mere description of the depicted scene. In other words, Greek mythology, as intangible culture in Greek archaeological museums, is thoroughly overshadowed by the tangible, and often impressive, object. Myths mostly come across as a decorative convention, as a repository of figures and incidents, whose only significance and role are to fill the object's surface. Myths themselves remain unexplored and all their dark aspects remain uninterpreted. The source of all this attitude is the environment of antiquarianism, ethnocentrism and aestheticism, which has traditionally characterized Greek archaeological museums. According to this, the ancient displays are by definition good, because they are ancient and moreover because they are ancient *Greek*. Seen in this light, the ancient displays are simply what they are, i.e. they appear to lack a second level of significance, apart from that which their obvious material surface attributes them with. So, Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums is nothing more than the obvious: a set of

absurd tales that stem from and were addressed to a very distant and very different society. With this assumption, Greek archaeological museums contribute and even reinforce - due to their character of official authority - Greek mythology's degeneration. In addition, any opportunity for Greek myths to be used as a thought-provoking tool for the benefit of the contemporary individual is lost.

My thesis maintains that Greek archaeological museums could enhance their relationship with Greek mythology and contribute to the development of a meaningful relationship between Greek mythology and Greek people, provided that Greek museums redefine their role and *raison d'être*. So, I have argued that, first, Greek archaeological museums need to loosen their attachment to the object and start to investigate the intangible side of their collections. In other words, they need to re-establish themselves as institutions that deal with culture, rather than with art (or, in its most narrow sense, typology and aesthetics). In addition, Greek archaeological museums need to broaden their perspective and redefine their position within and in relation to their social milieu. So, Greek archaeological museums need to function as part of Greek society and interact with it. In other words, they need to interpret their collections *through* and *in association with* the society which they are duty-bound to serve, instead of interpreting them *for* the society in a remote and high-brow mode. In addition, they need to rethink their collections in this spirit. In the case of Greek mythology, the conceptual framework for this is provided by UNESCO and its concept of 'intangible cultural heritage', which is a *living* heritage and can only remain alive as long as it is embraced and developed by society. So, Greek archaeological museums need to depart from the stance that exiles the past to the past and perceives Greek mythology as a closed case, which has nothing to give to the contemporary visitor. By contrast, Greek archaeological museums need to create the opportunities that could enable their visitors to see underneath the worn and clichéd surface of the ancient myths, and should transform them meaningfully, by discovering in them new, relevant meanings and potentials.

Contemporary artists have the credentials to support this change in the relationship between Greek mythology, Greek museums and Greek people. This argument is based, on the one hand, on the lively relation that my interviewees maintain with Greek mythology and on the imaginative way with which they re-signify ancient and worn mythical tales. On the other hand, my research has identified recognizable contemporary artists as potentially appealing interpreters in museums for four main reasons. First, they have the potential to demonstrate the openness and tolerance of the museum towards the opinions of non-experts, thus encouraging visitors to make their own meanings of myths. Second, the figure of a famous or beloved artist, who speaks of an unlikely topic has the potential to stimulate peoples' curiosity and

attract them to the museum. Third, the discussion of ancient myths by 'real' and moreover familiar people has the potential to bring out the human factor in them and create an appealing human context. Finally, the representation of Greek myths in contemporary terms has the potential to 'modernize' these myth, by making them relevant to the life experiences of the contemporary individual, and hence, more easily perceptible.

My research has, in addition, attempted to present a specific example of the way in which the dynamics of Greek mythology in contemporary art could be transferred into a museum context, by integrating my interviewees' mythological interpretations into the discourse of a virtual museological exhibition on Greek mythology. Unquestionably, the mobilization of such an innovative project for Greek museology would not be without pitfalls or difficulties, both practical and theoretical. Above all, for any museum to engage with this project, it would need to be prepared to challenge the traditional academic self-perception of archaeological museums in Greece, and the traditional attachment of these museums to the discipline of archaeology, which, over the years, has proved to be a constraining factor in the museums' effective operation.

Yet despite the various problems posed by the mobilization of the museological representation of Greek mythology through contemporary art, I have argued that none of them is unsurpassable. Moreover, I have maintained that Greek archaeological museums need to take risks and abandon the sterile security, within which they have been enclosed for so long. My final conclusion, then, is that the negotiation of Greek mythology in Greek archaeological museums is in urgent need of radical change and that contemporary art could prove an effective tool for this.

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