Chapter 3

ITALIAN ENCHANTMENT

Monologue

How is it to leave the yard of your home and open the way to the vast plain for the first time? This is how I felt, Michael Trivolis, the aristocrat from Arta, when I first set foot in Venice, the second Byzantium, as it were. And indeed, there were moments when I thought I was on Greek soil , and indeed in the era of Socrates and Pericles. Everywhere was worship for all that was ancient Greek. I felt proud of my ancestors and I was determined to be worthy of them. I took intensive classes of Latin and Italian and I became a devoted attendee of courses on the great Byzantine sages who had found shelter in the West after the fall of the City.

I found myself in the rich, beautiful Padua and a little later in Ferrara. But where I set down root was in Florence, the new Athens, as they called it then. At the side of most renowned Renaissance teachers, I learned the secrets of the ancient Greek texts. But there was no science that I did not taste.

But that's where my shock started! That thirst for learning went hand in hand with disrespect and disdain for all that was Christian, even for the Sacred Mysteries. Every Christian who wished to live according to the Gospel and keep true to the essentials of faith could expect mockery and ridicule. Even the priests blasphemed the Holy Dais, magicians and astrologers were the regulators of life for all social classes.

"Where was I?" I was wondered fearfully. "Here, I shall enrich my mind, but I will lose my soul." And while at the universities, the standard of studies was high, in the society chambers, even on the streets of Florence, conspiracy, crime and all manner of dishonesty reigned.

Then, amid the darkness of lawlessness, a monk called Ieronymos Savonarola, a new apostle, declared the great return to piety. At first it seemed to turn the tide. But it did not last long. He was condemned and executed as a heretic. But his preaching, his attitude and his unfortunate end, sealed my fate.

How could I know that, with what I later saw in Russia, that I would bring it to mind and that it would play its role in directing the decisions I made. There were times when Savonarola awoke in me a holy pride. As I later told my interlocutors, if a Latin monk struggled with so much with their zeal for holiness and justice, we were obliged to imitate him, not in doctrine–alas - but in his zeal, piety, and knowledge of the divinely inspired scriptures,

I spent ten years in Italy until I realized that nothing was keeping me there. I rejected all the suggestions of brilliant philosophers and great schools to stay forever in Italy. After so many years, I wonder: Did you make a mistake? What brought me back? The thirst for something that transcends human wisdom? Love for my country? Or is it this, the swan's feather, which at the time of our separation my father put in the palm of my hand and, in a voice as if he were Arachthos himself, said:

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ΤΟ ΜΑΓΕΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΙΤΑΛΙΑΣ¶
Μονόλογος¶
¶
Πώς είναι ν' αφήνει κάποιος την αυλή του σπιτιού του και ν' ανοίγεται στον απέραντο κάμπο για πρώτη φορά; Έτσι ένιωσα κι εγώ, ο Μιχαήλ Τριβώλης, το αρχοντόπουλο από την Άρτα, όταν πάτησα για πρώτη φορά το πόδι μου στη Βενετία, το δεύτερο Βυζάντιο, όπως το 'λεγαν. Και πράγματι, ήταν στιγμές που νόμιζα πως πατώ σε χώμα Ελληνικό και μάλιστα, την εποχή του Σωκράτη και του Περικλή. Παντού έβλεπες λατρεία για κάθε τι το αρχαίο Ελληνικό. Ένιωσα περηφάνια για τους προγόνους μου και βάλθηκα να φανώ αντάξιός τους. Έκανα εντατικά μαθήματα λατινικών και ιταλικών και παρακολουθούσα με προσήλωση τα μαθήματα μεγάλων Βυζαντινών σοφών, που είχαν βρει καταφύγιο στη Δύση μετά την άλωση της Πόλης. ¶
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Άγιος Μάξιμος ο Γραικός –ΜΟΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ 3

"Look no further!"

At the age of thirty-five, I returned to my beloved Arta, awaiting the seed in my heart to mature.

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