

LIVING THE MYTH OF GREECE

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Thanks to all co-disputants at

www.mythography.com for their help)

Introduction

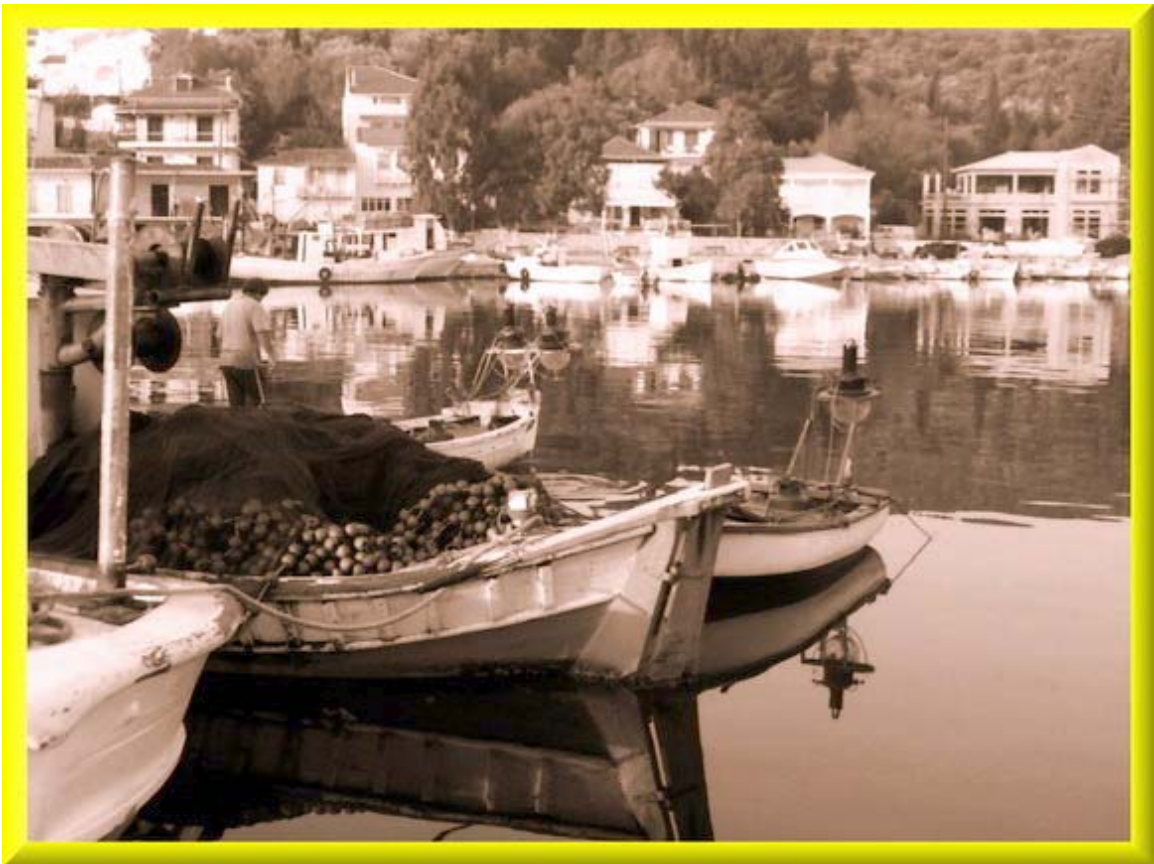
When in Greece, I am mostly interested in the primaeval elements of the environment; whatever this may mean. Making selection of photos from my archives, I've reinforced further this side. Thus, the following photo-essay is heavily biased and - in this sense, I may call it my own personal Myth of Greece. Also, take kindly into account, that the fountain-head of my "myth" lies high up among the "Minoan"- style modest chapels in the mountains. It has little to do with any filmic mythical glamour!! And if you are a native Greek; - I'd like to tell you that this little album is nothing but a fancy of an outlandish person; neither more nor less – so stay cool and keep smiling!! Yaso!!



An archipelago



A Harbour



I. FIRST ENCHANTMENT

Is it really so easy to recognize the first love of your early youth in a tawny and slim, harmonious beauty smiling at you with her glowing eyes, at a family reunion!?...
Whole landscape was soaked with a lingering song – as if a dialogue of some invisible suitors with a sensual and hesitating dark-voiced woman; dialogue underlined with dramatic turns of a string instrument melody line.



- “Yes, moussaka – ...and bottle of your wine, please!!” – I answered to a guessed question, drowned in the background of all those overwhelming images, sounds and tastes, never encountered before.

- “These are olive trees over there, yeess...willow-trees are more usual somewhere in the marshes...further north!!” – my host looked at me with amusement and nodded understandingly. I was sleepy...had just landed that late evening at the airport of Levkas but, in the good company – life was still bright and sparkling even long after midnight...



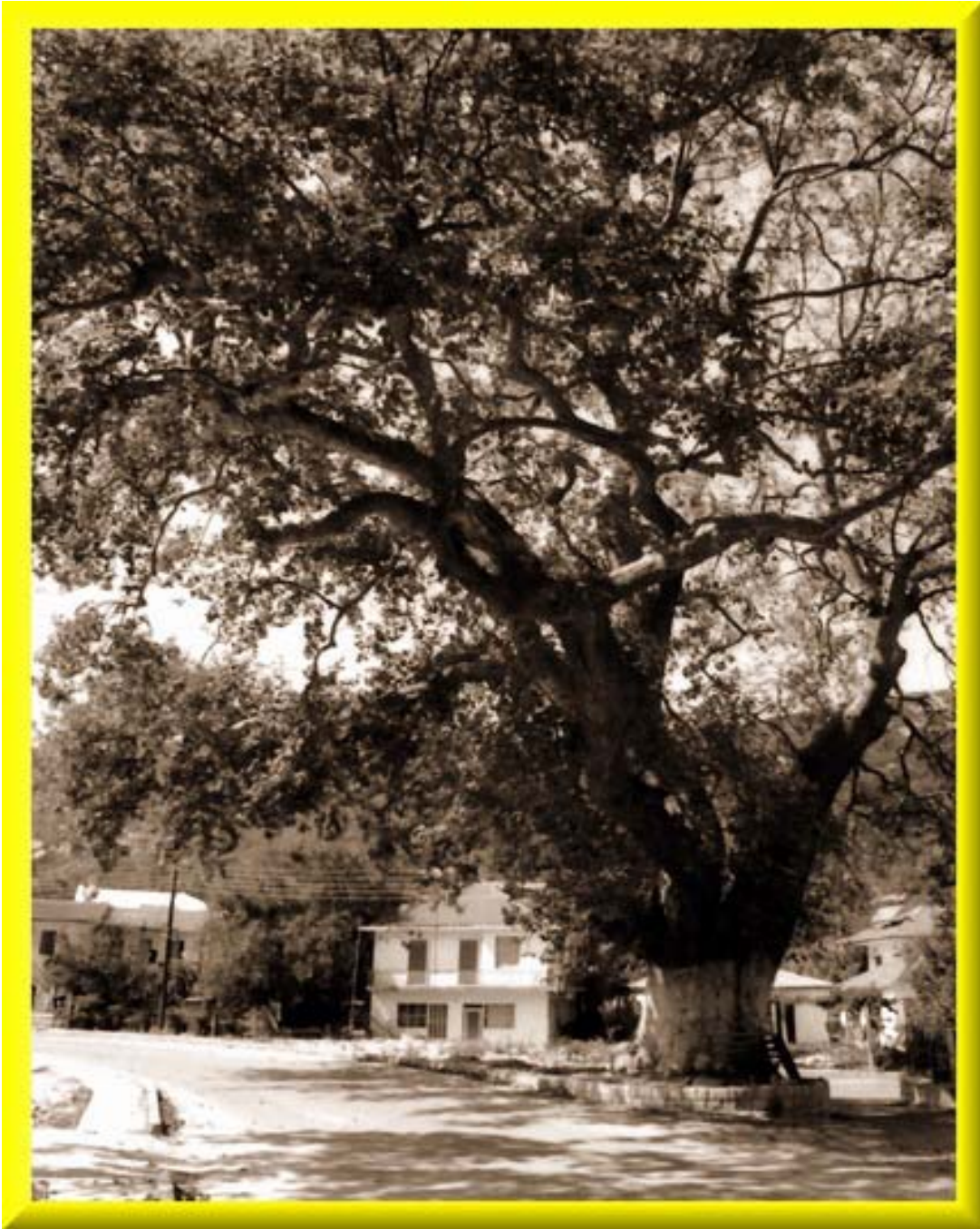


Next day, I'd hired a motorbike and hit the road...
All those aromas from the abundance of flowers and scents coming from the macchia
(scrub) along the road... let's stop for a while.

- “ Hey, look over there!!..these are goats feeding on young offshoots.” Deep in the impenetrable entanglement of thorns and resilient thin branches, goats` pursuit of nourishing essence was relieving waves of fragrance from resins, trickling down the fresh wounds.



Now, it's siesta; we'd better stop at some place and take much needed rest... maybe at this tavern under the old plane-tree!! Ouzo with icy water and strong coffee should do the wonder of keeping us alert through this scorching heat of the noon.



- “Our village has the best water in the whole island!!” It’s like “Fine weather we’ve got today, haven’t we!?” and you should nod very convincingly back, seeing your interlocutor straight in his eyes. You know, weather is always fine in Greece – for summer tourists at the least – but water in the countryside is not all the time in such an abundance as the exquisite local wines...



- “This narrow bay will do fine!!”... after swimming in the sea to avert slumbering, back to the hills in the afternoon sunlight and...yeah!! All is right, and I am inside of It!!

Even quite small islands in Greece boast of having at least 365 chapels on their territory. I fell for a nearby one – The Chapel of St.John–from–the–Peaches.



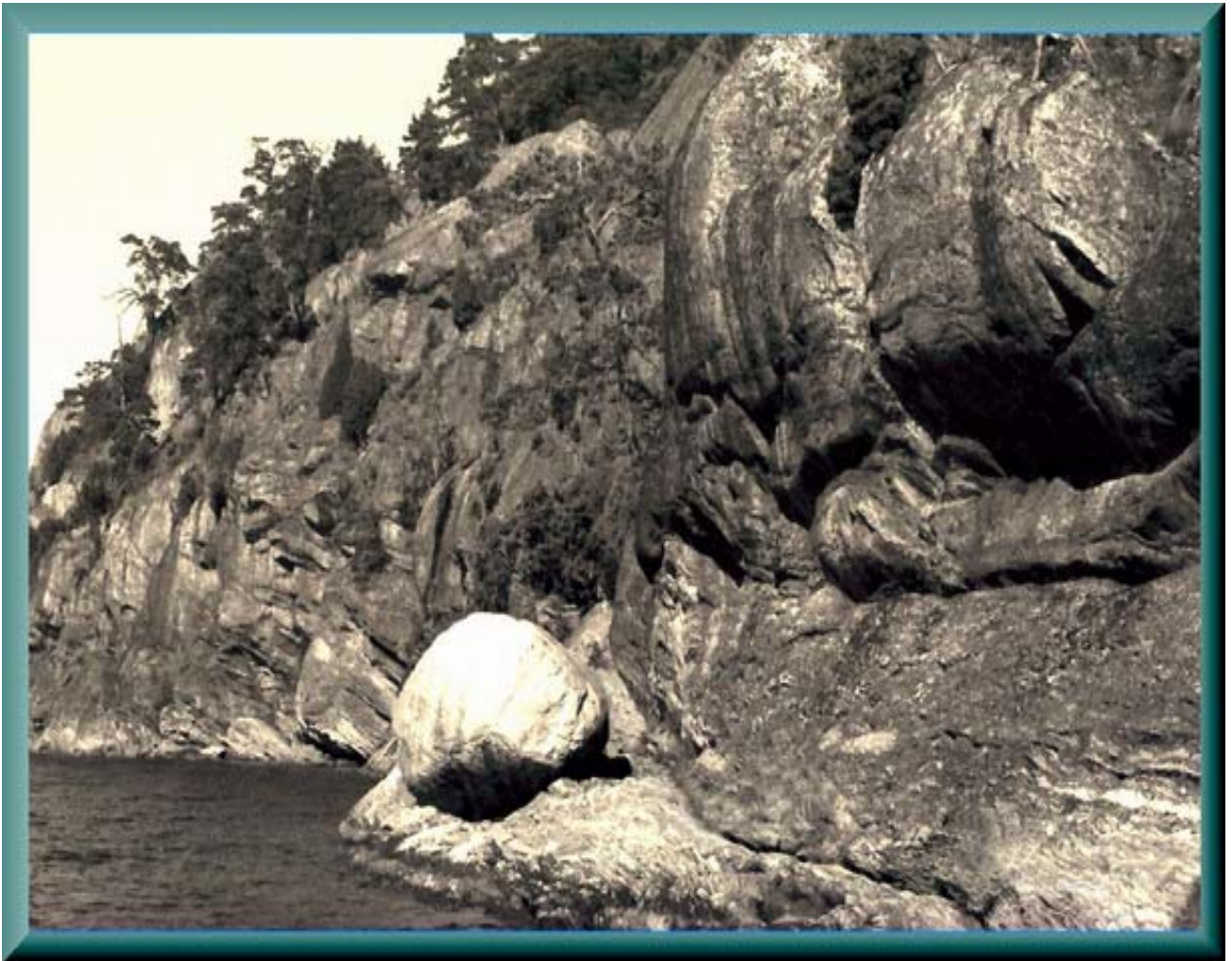
And they were there; wide-spreaded peach-tree orchards, as if slowly going down the hills... into the violet glow of the misty Ionian Sea.



Cap Levkatas

II. BEGINNINGS

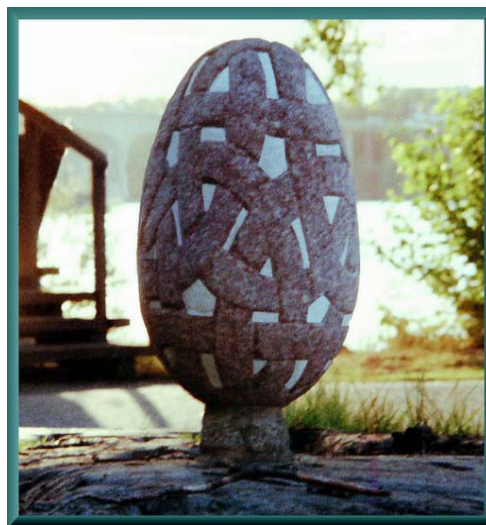
...And the whole story, according to Orpheus pupils, had started like this. In the beginnings of our time, Khronos-Aion (Unaging Time or Eternity) emanated from Her/Him the Aither (Light of the Upper Spheres) into the immeasurable Khaos. Then, Great Khronos fashioned in the Divine Aither the first Triad – a bright white Silver Egg and Female and Male Principle, to take care of it. The last two were in the likeness of Snakes – Eurynome and Her partner Ophion.



When Phanes Protogenos – the Firstborn Androgyne Giant – came out of the Silver Egg and emanated from Himself the next stage of creation, Eurynome and Ophion took part in this cascading process but at their old age united themselves at the end with Okeanos. However, their progeny is still watching over forces, which are moulding our fates even today..



Wait a minute...what's in this manuscript!?...ooh, yes... From the Egg of Night, first Okeanos, then Gaia and, after some time, Ouranos emerged. All further complications began with the love of the two; Gaia and Ouranos were inseparable like twins...



But real trouble started first when Zeus stepped up to the throne. Because of all unrighteous deeds of former heavenly Kings, the chain of creation was just beginning to crumble. Old Night (Nyx) had an advice for Him : - to begin with the Beginning.



So, Zeus merged His spirit with that of Giant Androgyne – Phanes, taking over His responsibility for the World. And He used to visit Him everafter once every 9 years, in the Idaian Cave of Crete, as even Minos did after Him. All our Sacred Kings should do so, for the prosperity of the Whole...
It's already dawn!! And it's not so comfortable to sleep on the cold stone floor amongst all the scrolls, in the old Library of Alexandria... - What a strange dream I had!?



III. NET

Starting from Rethymnon (Crete), I'd made for Mt.Ida; with no hurry, stopping my motorbike here and there, looking at this menacing bull's ridge, which pretended to be Mt.Psiloritis.



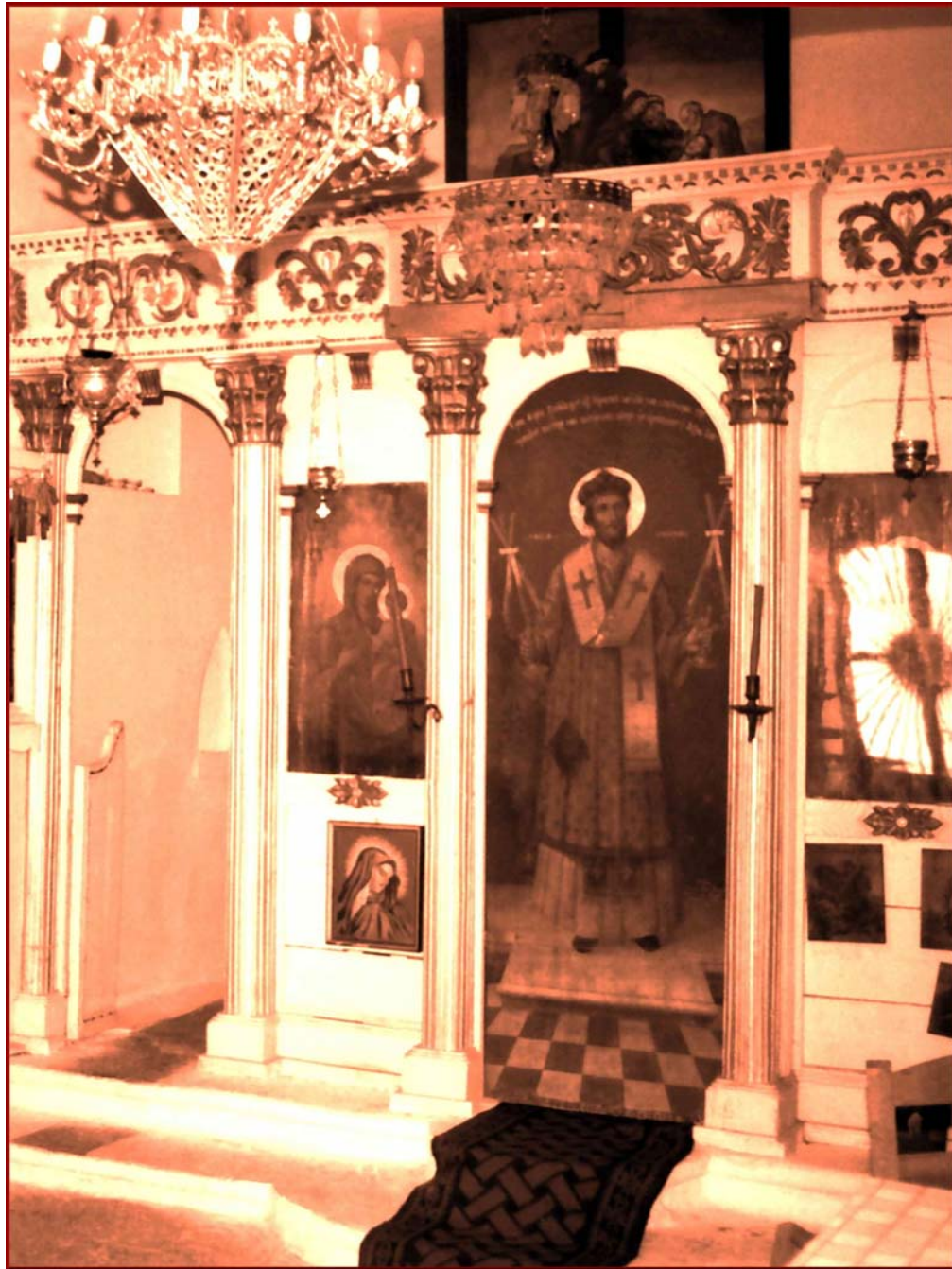
Valley of Amari

Just when picking wild herbs to enjoy in my choriatico salad later in the evening, I'd heard a faint voice, which was insisting on something very important. There was an old shepherd, dressed Cretan way and looking like Zeus Himself, sitting immovable in the scanty shade of some bone-dry acacias; a Zeus expelled!?!...



Up there - towering over us from the opposite slope of the mountain valley; petrified in waiting for winter torrents to come, - was a chapel.

Prophet Elijah (Profitis Ilias) was following me with His passionate deep eyes from the main iconostas, when I viewed through the icons, covering walls of the sacred enclosure.



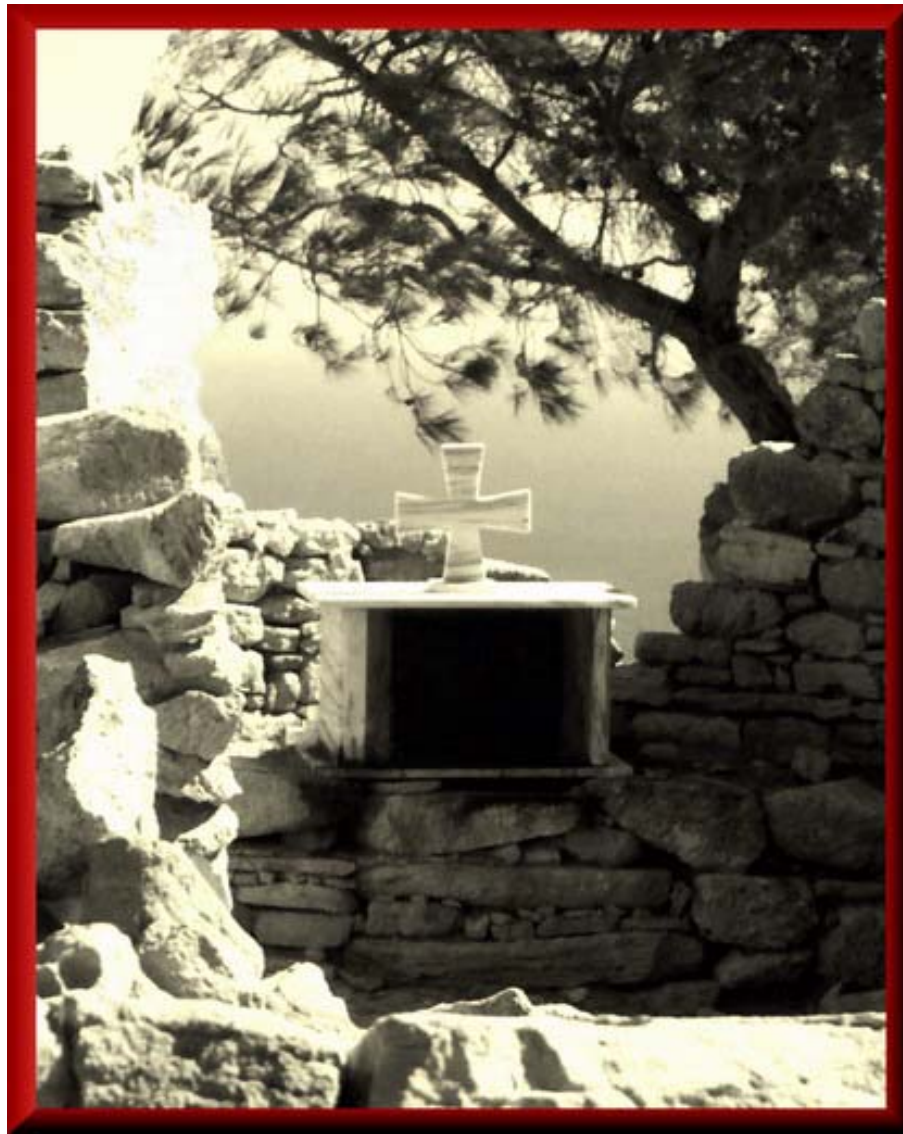
The Prophet is usually depicted with a bunch of thunderbolts (or candles) in each hand and the highest peaks - on most of the Greek islands, are sacrificed to Him.

Over there...look!! Another one...and yet another chapel...and the next right there!!
At any sacred place you stop, you can see 2 or 3 other chapels around.



It seems, as if people of Crete had no resort in their lives, tormented under thousands of years by internal strife and invaders, but to build out, down to the very last scrap, the “nodes” of the Sacred in their landscape and cling to them as their last retreat...

I didn't make it out so far as the Idaian Cave. Maybe, I was afraid of the Giants, who used to "tear" Dionysos - Zagreos (Cretan Zeus) - soon after His birth, into pieces there, to be given out to the followers of Him as a foundation of their fruitful lives. Anyway, they used to leave a heart as a germ for His resurrection!!



A "heart" left in a ruined chapel



But beneath Thronos, I did look into the churches of proud mountain villages and saw the holy men parading the frescoes. Patriarchs, knights, palikares - mountain insurgents in their spotlessly white knee-boots and eremites... - clothed in the Wind.

IV. GIANTS of the EARTH

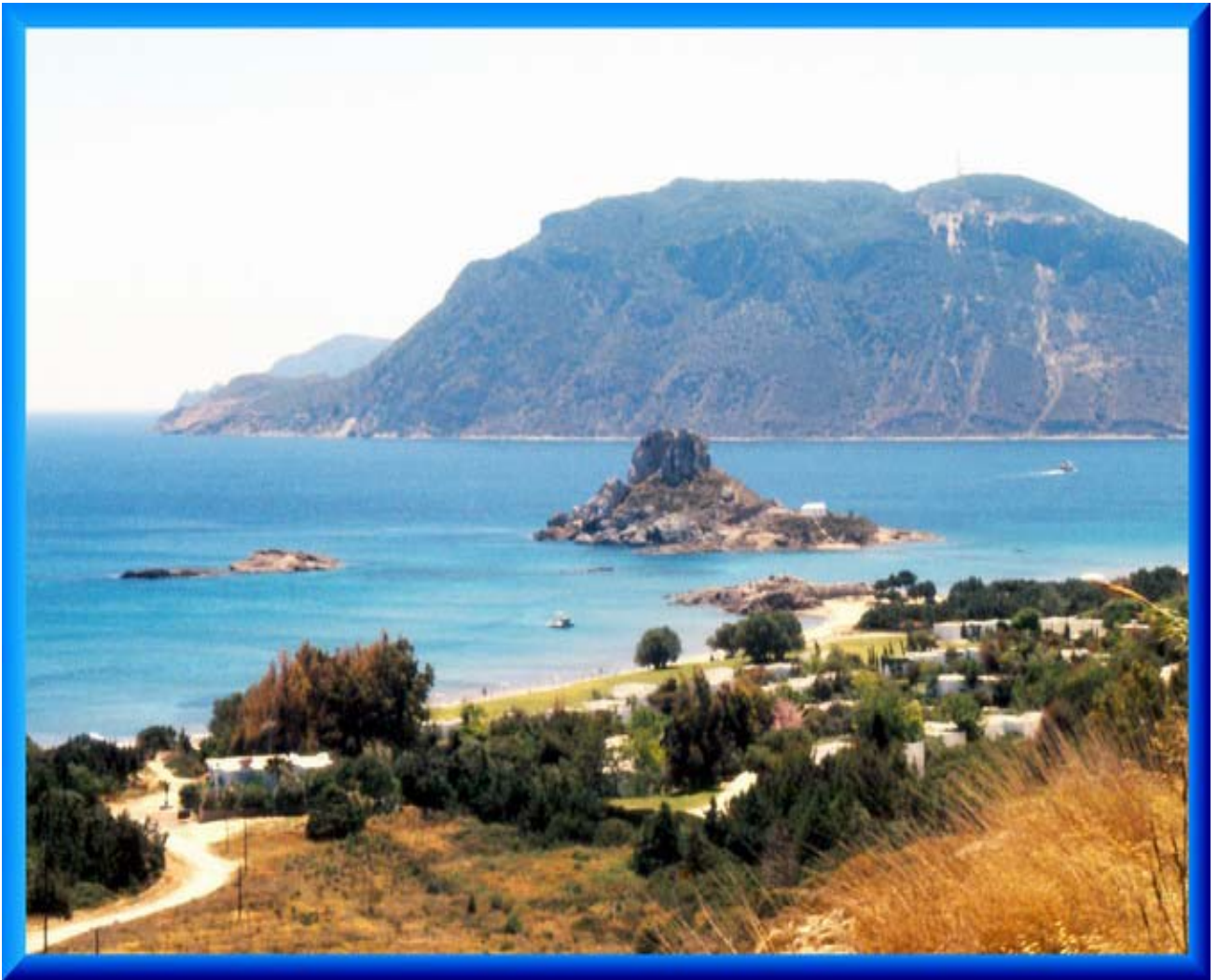
I'd heard a few things about Kos in the Dodekanessos from my friends, who used to spend vacations there. - "It's good for families with small children; those lengthy sandy beaches, you know... good food, nice people. It's fine, just fine..."



View from Astypalaia – site of the old capital town of Kos

So, let's see what Greek Myths has to say : -

...Hmm, it looks like the state of affairs depended heavily on who was residing on top of the sacred mountain – Olympos. So, who used to rule there!?! Well, Eurynome and Ophion (in the name of Phanes), which were then dethroned by Kronos and Rhea, who in turn were deposed by Zeus. And all those Titans and Giants, storming the Mountain!!



Eroded volcanic caldera

And here it is – from the last stages of Gigantomachy, about the island of Kos : -
“The rest of the Giants took fright and escaped down to Earth, pursued by the Olympians.

Poseidon broke with his trident a part of the Kos island off and threw it at Polybotes. In such a way the island of Nisyros was formed, under which the Giant lies buried.”
...Hmm, it doesn't sound like a place for peaceful family picnicks!?



Traces of a trident !?

But here is something from a guidebook : - “ Other Giants like Phoebus, Kinno and his brother Koios also took refuge on Kos and some scholars used to derive the ancient names of the island – Kynnis and Kos, from the two last names...” – What a cozy hole!? What's the trick, that could get all those Giants gather on Kos!?



But wait, here's something else - "...Other historians say that they were children to Giant Polybotes of Nisyros..." Now what!? He could sire progeny, even after having been knocked down by Poseidon with quite a big piece of a rock!? And we are not told, who the lucky mother was!? Have you ever heard something about any Gigantess, except maybe from Gaia herself - Polybotes' own mother!? Oh, let it be...it's family business...



A site of an antique temple of Dionysos

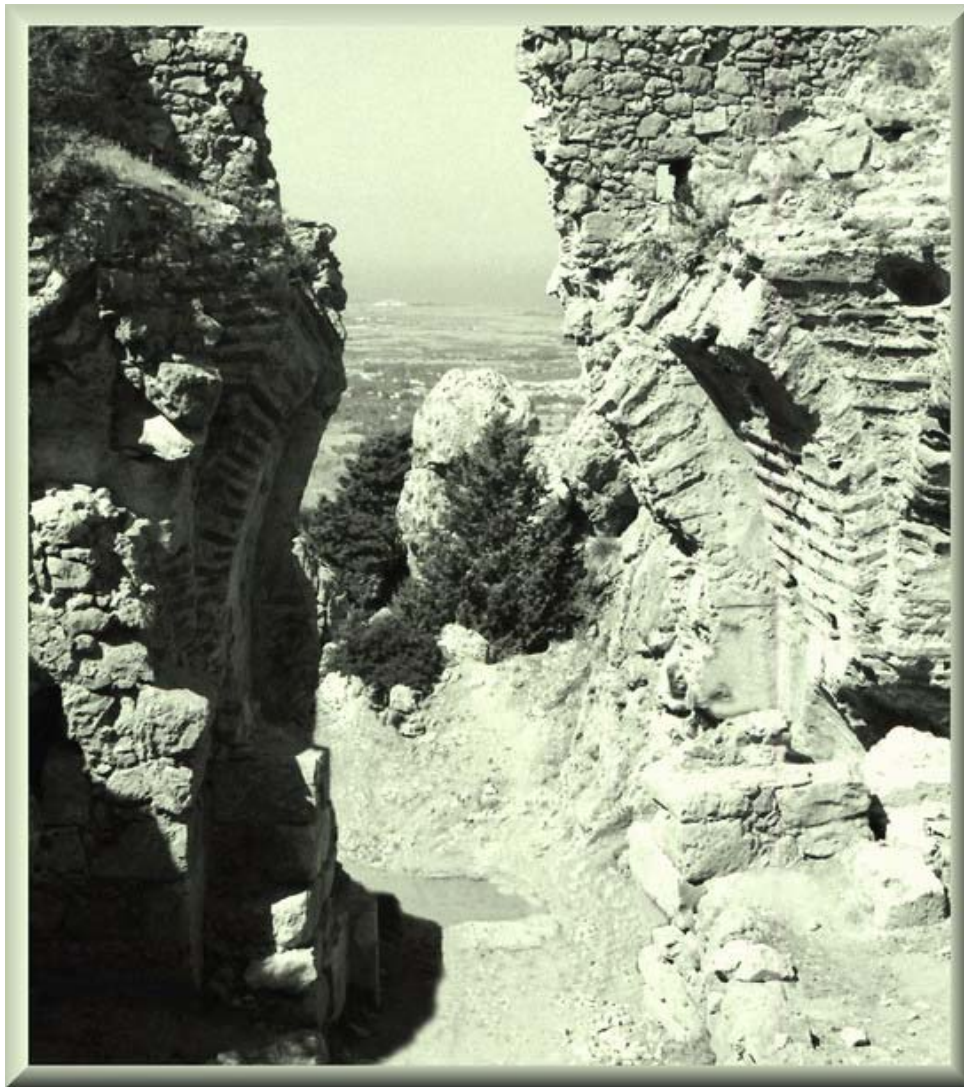
V. Heroes are taking over the land

It seems that the island of Kos could attract those days also the Ancestors. Here is something about them : - "...After his come-back from Tria (Sicily!?) with his boat...by the town of Antimacheia, Herakles met a muscular young shepherd named Antagoras, renowned for his strength, who was grazing his sheep there. Herakles wanted to have one sheep and Antagoras replied roughly, challenging the stranger to fight. Although Herakles was exhausted after the hardships of his voyage and half-dead with hunger, he accepted the challenge.



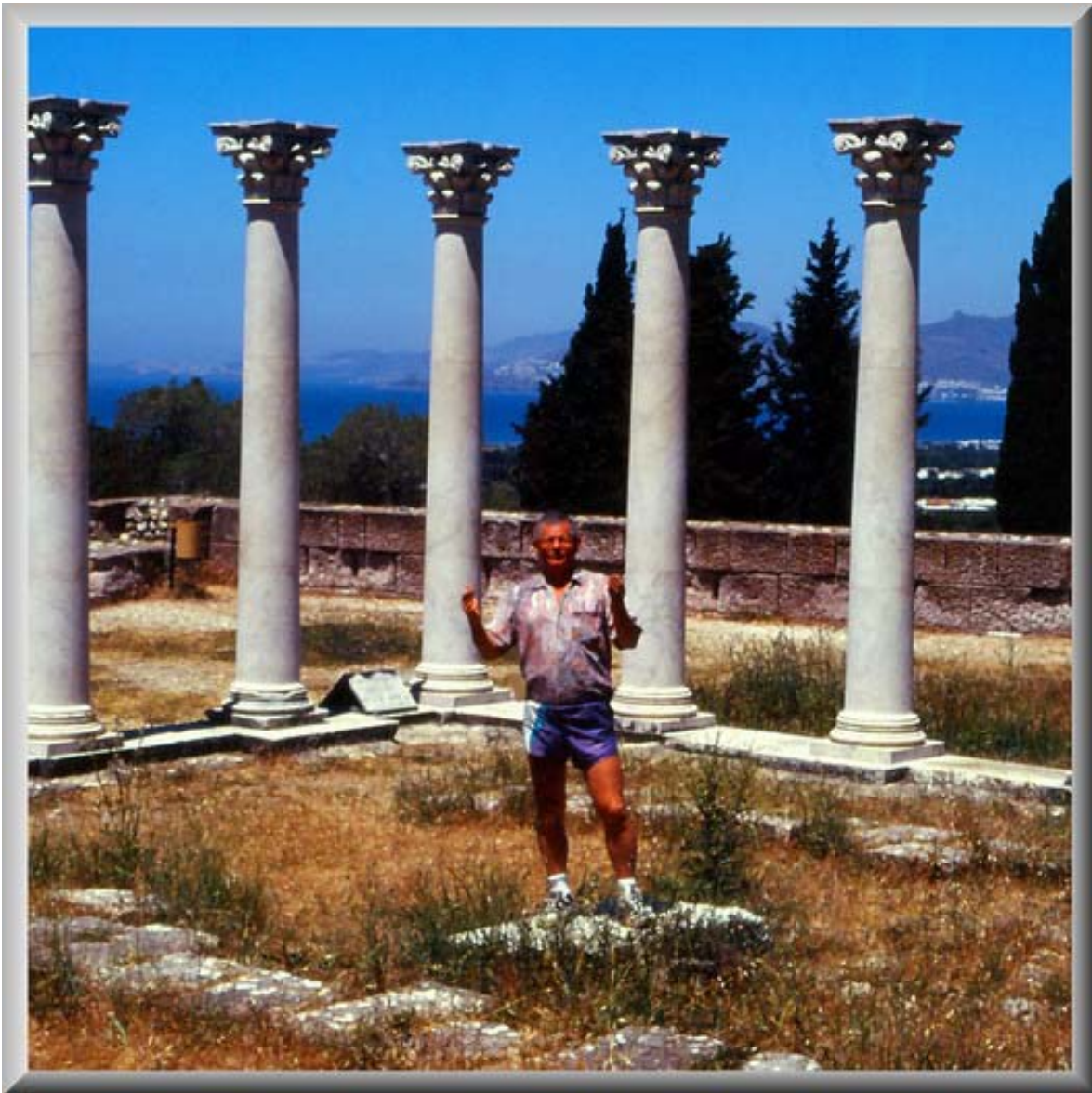
The wrestling bout lasted many hours and first Herakles, then Antagoras, seemed to be on the point of victory. In the meantime, news of the fight had spread and many islanders flocked to watch. Seeing Herakles gaining the upper hand, they tried to help Antagoras.

This enraged Herakles comrades and a general free-for-all wrestling developed. Feeling fatigued, Herakles took a shelter in a house of one friendly woman, where he put on feminine cloth and fled up into the mountains towards Pyli..." ("Gates"... of the Underworld!?). There's still his famous Club to be seen petrified outside the main gate of the castle of Phyxa (the Flight) – left razed open.



Ho, ho, ho...Herakles as a damsel in distress!! So it was a hell of a guy – this Antagoras. But the whole was probably - known from early Greek traditions - a ritual fight prior to a wedding with the Princess of the Underworld, which was to guarantee good crops and fertility to herds and people in a year to come. And when this ritual was about to commence, local spectators used to swarm together, thirsty to see the Beginnings, reenacted before their eyes, and eager to take part in them - wrestling, swearing and shouting...just like football hooligans...my...my...

In case of any harm, it wouldn't be too far to the sanatorium of Asklepieion – on the eastern slopes of the main mountain ridge, above the town of Kos. But the treatment there was quite a lengthy procedure. - First you should calm down yourself under a few weeks, through sleeping at a dormitory appointed for you, taking bath in local mineral springs and listening to lectures - held around the main square of Asklepieion, about the right way of life and the like, then offering to Asklepios and Apollo...no, no, who should have time for things like these!?



Would you like then to pay somebody else to become healthy in your name!? - Yes, just that!! I should maybe pass it to those “renovators” of Greek religion, who are looking nowadays for a good marketing idea!?

VI. DIKAIOS

Main mountain peak on Kos is named Dikaios (846 m). When I'd climbed it – missing my way many times, because of lack of visible signs, I found quite right a chapel bearing the name of Kristos Dikaios at the top. Is it a hint at the Second Coming of Christ in Apokalypse; Patmos of St. John not so far away!? The title “Dikaios” seems very old and – maybe – it was Zeus Dikaios (Zeus the Justful or Father of Dike), who ruled once over these heights.



Yeap... let's try to look out over the edge... Down there were cypresses heading for the Asklepieion; further out the town of Kos with its busy streets. To the right the darkening mass of Triopion promontory (another Asklepieion over there), with Knidos of lovely Aphrodite lost in the mists at the tip of its peninsula. But what was crouching over the horizon, due south... something like exploded mountain!? Suddenly, I realized that I'd become quite chilly – in the full sunshine of the day, and I felt as if invisible fetters had fallen upon me. Despair seized my heart. This mountain in the sea was Nisyros – home to infamous Polybotes, defeated by Poseidon but evidently not killed.

Even after having been crushed with this huge volcanic island, he'd managed still to stay alive and had sons, creeping up somewhere around - on Kos. Was his influence reaching even into the supposed Holy-of-Holies of our neighbouring island!?



Crawling from stone to stone downwards, I'd recovered soon and – this evening, deep flavoured white wine and fruits of the sea were tasting extremely well, - enjoyed in a tavern overlooking the straits towards Halikarnassos – home of Herodotos, father of history...or was it only anecdote!? What would you do in my place!? As for me, I boarded a ship bound for Nisyros the very next day!!

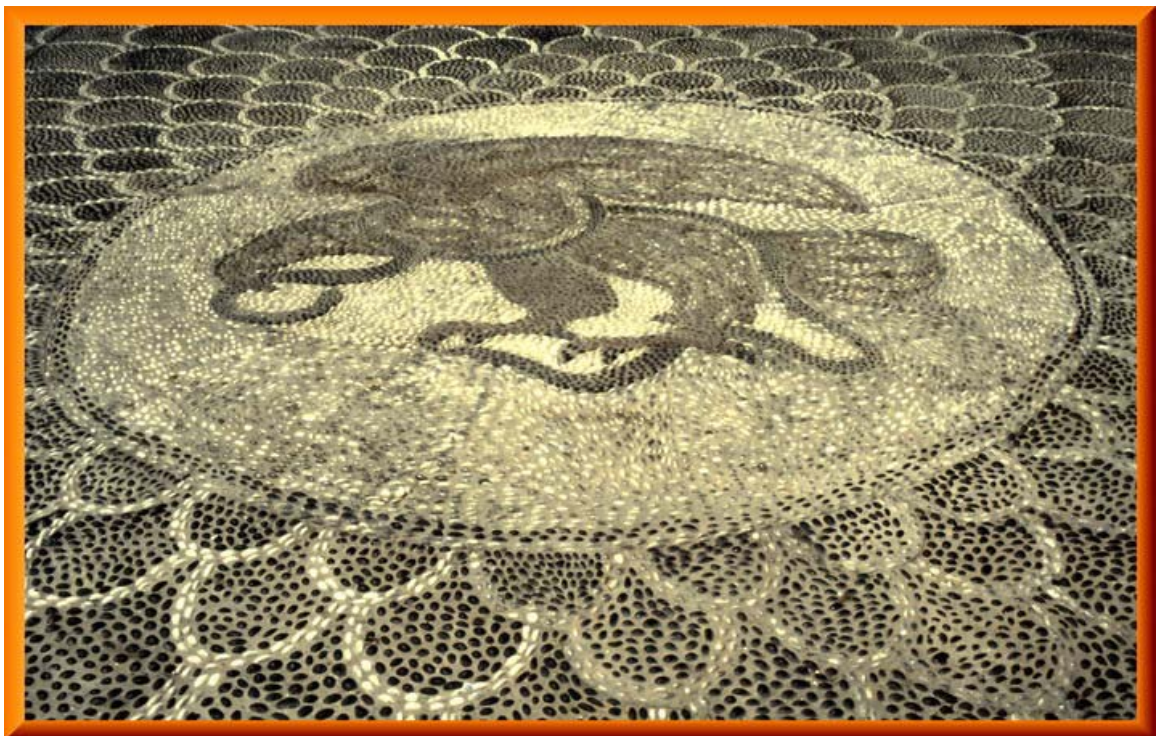


So, here we are at Mandraki - the main harbour of this volcanic island. But I've visited it already once before, so I'll stay at the landing-pier – together with this cat – to warm my bones in the sunshine and you should take a trip by your own...but beware of the snake-shaped Giants!! See you...















Panagia Spiliani – Chapel of Virgin.Mary in a cave within St.John`s Knights`castle.

VII. GAIA

Here, here...down these black volcanic sands, then through the gate between those boulders... and don't bruise your skin in the narrow passage!! Now only few hundred meters along that cascading, colourfully layered cliff, with darker holes here and there, as if caves burnt out by a fire from throats of some prehistoric creatures...and we are there.





My days on Kos went speedily on. In the mornings I used to spend some time plunged in a sort of a rock-walled enclosure, where sea-waves mixed randomly with the hot-spring, gushing forth from volcanic rocks, as a kind of a virgin water of Gaia.

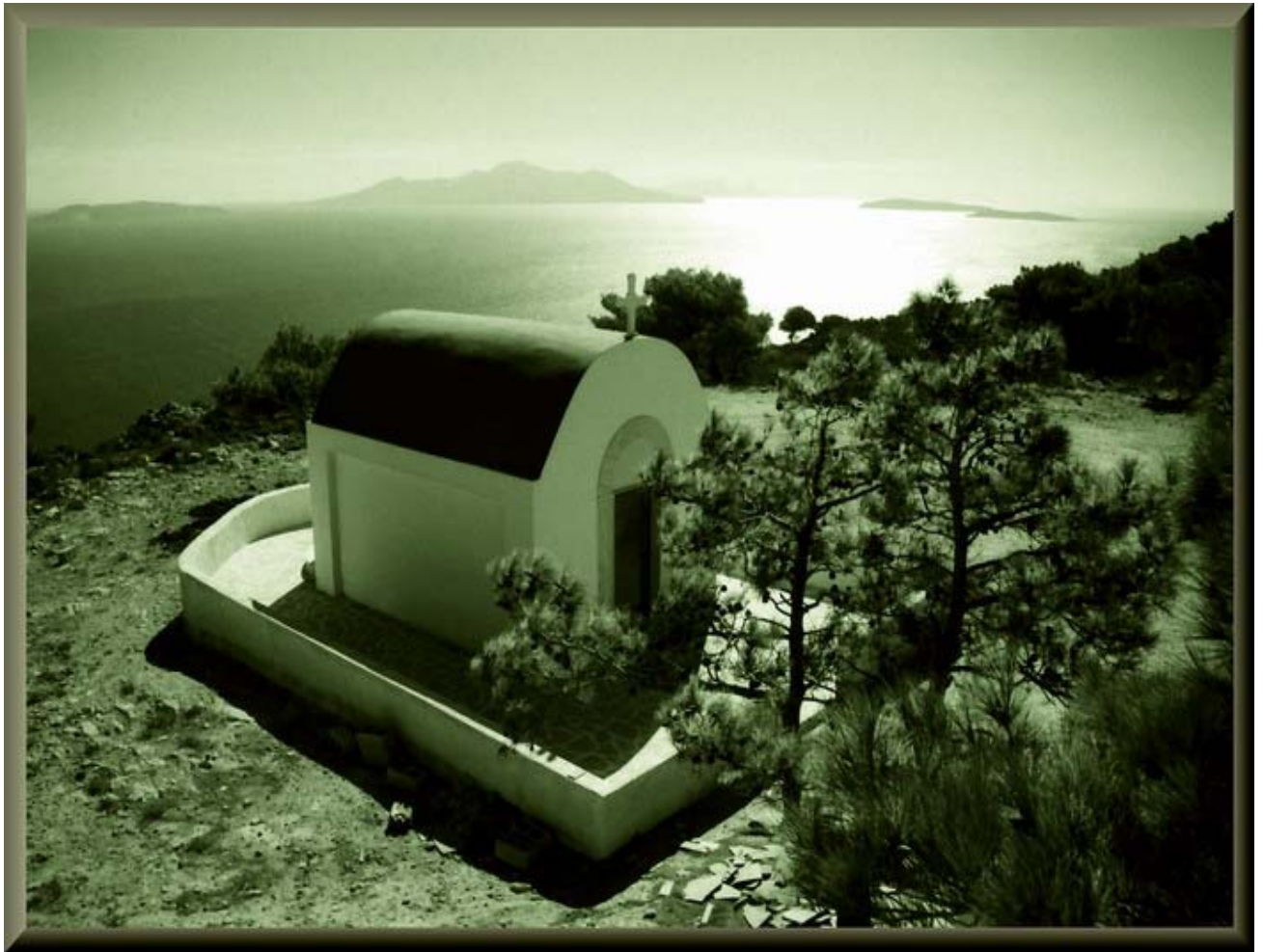


Once, turning home from the Spring, I'd come upon an old abandoned Eremitage of Prophet Elijah (Profitis Ilias) - on the slope of Mt.Dikeios





I began to spend my evenings there, looking over the city under my feet and big yachts of every provenience, manoeuvring in the wind further out to the sea.

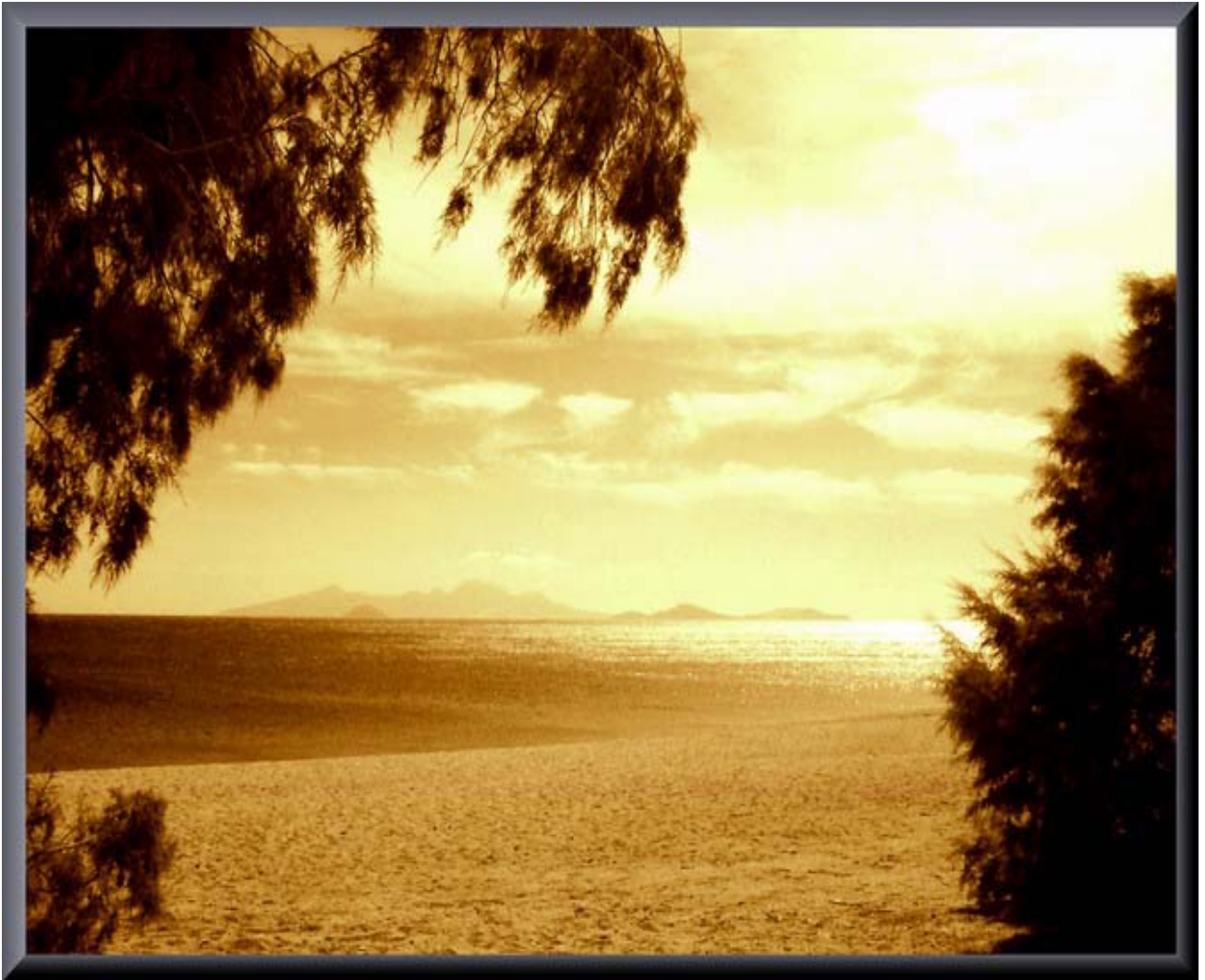


After one week of such a labyrinthine life, I'd happened to follow the luminous track of His lightning and came up against a Chapel of Zoodochos Pigi (The Life-giving Spring or maybe simply - the Womb).

She's given birth to a Child. And the three Giants of Kos have come with birthday presents. From Phoebus the Child has its radiance, from Kynnōs – energy, and intelligence from Koios.



The Child shall bestow these gifts on anyone, who will ask for them. Yet, those treasures shall stay unexhausted, because they are coming from the Source of Plenty...



On the shore, at the spring in the shade of old trees, seven Nereids were dancing. They whispered, only for my ears : "...Mmmm...stay with us, stay with us, stay...we let you know all the secrets of the world, but stay with us...see, how ethereally we dance among lights and shadows...move, move...catch us, catch us...Ha, ha, ha!!"



Should I better stay with my Calypso!? At the horizon, Polybotes – the patriarch of the Giants, looked good-humoured under his bushy eyebrows, and I had a vague idea, that he is slightly smiling at my thoughts.

- Yes, you are right, old chap!! Some nights I do dream of her, murmuring half-forgotten charms and coming over me with her glowing eyes and skin still warm from a day at the beach - just like a fragrant Sea-Wind ... full of meaning.