

Everything Funnels Back

Family History

Stathis Maternal-side Origins

Prelude: Parallax of Perspective

Everything funnels back to a point of origin, from which we, who have now been separated through much Time, can, by tracing the unfoldment of its 'big bang' beginnings, will in this endeavor, yet comprehend how we are still, throughout the reaches of the Earth, yet connected to one another.

Where is that big bang for all of us, and for whom does its spark have significance? Where was it first ignited?

In essence, it could be said, we owe all and everything to Lazaratos. Yes, Lazaratos himself!

Lazaratos?

Let's leave Lazaratos for a moment and go try to understand the inner-life perspective, the early experiential realm from which they originated, the early life of our ancestors.

An ocean separated the Old Country and the New. Distance and Time, especially over a century ago, were inseparable directly-proportional terms. To think that our Grandmothers on both our paternal and maternal sides came as young women, to start their lives as wives and mothers, came from their homeland, from their own mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters and everything to what family was to them, across the ocean to America, and that they never returned, is an era of life so far disassociated from the ease of travel today which would have enabled their sustained connection, so far back that we can only try to feel for a moment their sense of identity in connection to the old and the new.

But, mitigating this sense of who they were, the sense of the culture that made the values that they held deep, was another kind of connection between the old and the new. A steady stream of relatives (or those known to their relatives) emerged from the "old country" to the area of the new to which these of our family now lived and made their lives; the stream of new arrivals was enough to keep the semblance of connection, the sense of belonging, between the place of new life and where all had originated from. Ever, in thought, in feeling, in respectful remembrance, those who came for their new life across the ocean, would speak of their connection to the old, either to those still there, or their connection to those here with whom they knew they had original connection to from the old country.

1. Origins on Kefalonia / Origins in America

Now, back to Lazaratos, to whom the pinpoint in time funnels back to as causation for our origins.

Here's the scene:

No electricity, no electric light: light by sun and moon, candle, and oil lamp.

No radio, no television, no telephone: communication by word-of-mouth, news from the local café in this mountainous island in the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps there was a printed newspaper – if they could read – something of the world outside their villages transmitted in books that ‘some people’ had or from “school” to which some attended. And some news from the rare, odd, traveler from the outside world itself, the latter, most likely, the biggest and most powerful influence in igniting the spark, originating the thirst in the minds of the village people, for seeing for themselves far-away places, the places of such fantastic stories.

One can imagine these Greek men, and those not yet men, boys, listening to the conversations of the men, gathered at dusty small restaurants with rickety old tables, the owner-chef standing around in dirty apron listening too, as knowledge, the knowledge in the minds of the people of a given place is added to, bit-by-bit, from some source or other about other countries, other lands, other people. From their simple village lives, surrounded by olives, grapes, crooked rows of vegetables in small gardens, goats, sheep, dirt roads trespassed by donkeys, ox-carts, and a scattered horse-drawn carriage. For those of the family-half on the pristine island above the vast ocean of sun-bright sand, fishing boats, nets and fish, the odor –sea salt in the air, ocean life, part of life; what dreams did they have pausing on the hillside view and wondering what lay beyond?

Others went before them. Just ‘people’ from the village had already left. Somebody or other's cousin; so-and-so's uncle went-off on a ship to America and his first letter was just received by his mother. His mother read it to the other siblings of the brave adventurer. One takes it to the café and reads it to the men and boys gathered around with their baklava and ouzo, and they carefully listen. They joke about it, but some dream about it. This happens again and again over the years in the formative life of a young boy growing into teen-age masculinity, into young manhood. America, and not goats and sheep, and turnips and potatoes, is on his mind ever since he can remember. He asks questions: “How do you get there?” “A ship, my boy, that lives a month on the ocean....” He saves his coins. As the struggle for existence goes on around him in the household, sometimes they have enough to eat, sometimes less than enough. Sometimes it's the same food for a week; sometimes there's even enough for some wine from the next valley over. He works for the neighbors; he's got a secret cache. He fills-in a

brother or two about his dream (and the neighborhood boys whom he can trust with his secret). He says to them that when he gets there and makes money faster than can be made in 5 lifetimes in the village, he'll send for them – there in America they will have everything they need. So-and-so's son has been sending money to them from America for years and “see how rich they are! We'll help our families here like that too.”

His plan now several years in the making, is coming to fruition. His heart beats fast, he's hesitant, he's got tears in his eyes as he looks across the dirt road over to the ticket office. His brothers, and those close friends of his youth, are with him to see him off. They encourage him. They are his encouragement. He wipes away the tears from his eyes; he's feeling the power of his resolve: he tells them, “When I get there, everything will be fine. Save your money too. I'll send what I can. Take care of mother and father and the little ones. Look for my letter. Be ready to come.” “And me?” his little friend asks. “Yes, you too,” he promises. He goes and buys the ticket, remembering in earnest his promise to his brothers and little friend.

All through this strange trip on the ship he's looking forward, not back. Among all these strangers who have the same story as him, the same main story, but each so individual, he finds the Greeks. Some he finds have been to some of the same weddings and funerals; they speak the same language. And there they hear each other's family history and life-struggles. They're united. They can hear ‘the Italians’ talking over there; there's a couple of Albanians over there. They feel the strangeness of this conglomeration of young men from places unknown. This makes these Greeks bond all the more quickly. He makes special friends with this guy or that guy. Each tells how they have a relative, a cousin of an uncle of their grandfather's great-nephew, who's already “well-established” working in some warehouse in such-and-such a city in upstate New York. These few who have just made friends in the bottom of a boat, promise to stay in touch. One and a second doesn't have such a relative, or another realizes his distant relative has no idea of his existence and going with this new friend to see the latter's cousin of an uncle of their grandfather's great nephew, sounds more promising than his original idea, and so a few, when they hit the ground at Ellis Island stick together after their mile-long names are truncated at the immigration booth.

And so the cousin of an uncle of his grandfather's great-nephew receives these three teenagers and puts them on the floor of his furnitureless apartment, and says to his young wife: “Look who's here from the Old Country! And his wife, only in her twenties herself, becomes for these scared youth like their mother: “We're all Greeks after-all,” they say, “from the same village.” This is the idea of being Greek that gets transferred over the ocean. We're family. We're Greek. We help one another, like our ancestors have always done. This is their sense of their heritage finding new meaning in the New Country.

Back in Kouvalata, a 14 year-old boy named Angelo, pulling along his 12 year-old brother in tow, goes to the café where he's heard Lazaratos, his friend who left the year before, has written a letter to his brother who works at the café there. There's a document this brother is supposed to give to Angelo. Angelo returns home. He explains to his bewildered parents what "sponsorship" means. 3 weeks later, he too would be on a ship, he too, will later end-up on the floor of Lazaratos's cousin of an uncle of his grandfather's great-nephew. Two years later, so would his brother Pierros. This was their beginnings of life in America, for them and for all who came forth from them henceforth.