



# Historical FEATURES

## Toward the Promised Land

*Nikos Kazantzakis Journeys  
to Jerusalem*

Forward and notes  
by Rochelle Davis

Majdal, 1920.

*Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957) is best known for his literary works that include, Zorba the Greek and The Last Temptation of Christ. Born in 1883 in Heraklion, Crete, he went on to study law in Athens, and from 1907-1909 he was in Paris where he wrote a dissertation on Nietzsche. During his lifetime he constantly travelled around Europe and the USSR, writing, interviewing, lecturing, and making films. His literary and philosophical interests were equally wide-ranging and he wrote about Buddha, Jesus, Dante, the Odyssey, Nietzsche, Aeschylus's Prometheus, Russian literature, the Russian revolution, and his travels in Japan and China, among other topics. Like many of the intellectuals during this period, he was interested in socialism and communism and visited the USSR for extended periods, first beginning in 1925.*

*The essay reprinted below is compiled from articles Kazantzakis wrote about his travels of 1926 and 1927 for the Athenian newspaper Eleftheros Logos. During these commissioned trips, he travelled to Palestine during Easter of 1926 and Egypt, Palestine,*

*Italy and Cyprus in 1927. We have reprinted below two sections from the English translation of the account. The initial articles from 1926 and 1927 were published in katharevousa, the formal official Greek language. He rewrote all of these works for republication in demotic Greek with additional revisions shortly before his death in 1957.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Reading Kazantakis in 2005**

*Kazantzakis' essays reflect the views of the early twentieth century: European ideas of a stifled and backward 'East' combined with socialist ideas glorifying the 'common person'. His way of talking about people is likely to make the modern reader uncomfortable, and mirrors the language and descriptors used by European travel writers and colonial officials all over the world. The undercurrent of antipathy towards the "hordes" is tempered by his vision of world change as they throw off the yoke of their masters, an event his socialist sympathies laud as the resistance of the masses to their oppressors. Along the same lines, Kazantzakis' view of the class struggle encourages him to see the simplicity of faith among the unlettered masses as a romantic and idealized notion of what religion should be. He finds that their beliefs bring them security and comfort in their world, and in his writings on Greek and Christian pilgrims going to the Holy Sepulchre at Easter, Muslims at worship in the al-Haram al-Sharif, and Jews at the Wailing Wall, he finds their actions to be true and honest expressions of faith that can only be found among the unsophisticated masses. Much of this volume contrasts these believers with his own searches for this type of acceptance and serenity in life, but which seems to elude him because of his rational, doubting self.*

*The East is a place of both wonder and disgust for Kazantzakis. People - Christians, Jews, Muslims, Easterners (Anatolians he calls them also) - are dirty, grovelling (the translators into English use the word "unctuous" twice to describe Arab women) and Jews are shifty and greedy. It is as if he has what was used to describe another author writing about the East: a "tried and tested stock of familiar Orientalisms"<sup>2</sup> in which the Arab multitudes are lurking, animalistic, and yet mollified by religious devotional acts. His descriptions of places, on the other hand, are lyrical and beautiful, particularly the section on the "Mosque of Omar" [Dome of the Rock]. Describing it as a fountain rising towards the heavens and falling back to earth or sitting gleaming "brilliantly in the sun, sparkling, joyful, multicoloured, like a gigantic male peacock," his poetic descriptions bring new ways of seeing places overly described in travel literature, which in most cases are incredibly literal and dull. His place imagery defies the stereotypical metaphors he uses to describe people.*

*Also noteworthy is his account of spending the Saturday before Easter (the Day of the Holy Fire) in the Holy Sepulchre. Here he offers a unique description of the event through the eyes of an observer not concerned with the rituals; he searches for the human element behind the pageantry and finds people alive - cooking, sleeping,*



Nikos Kazantzakis

*flirting, convulsing, rejoicing, exclaiming - and this life as the face of devotion delights him. Rather than focusing on the event, he focuses on the peoples' reactions to the event, documenting their devotion and passion.*

*For him, the new modern world to which he belongs in Europe and the USSR among the lettered intellectual class signals the end of this type of simple faith and purity, the end of the simple folk. His essays comment on the unbelieving elite and the indifferent clergy who seem to perform religion out of duty rather than conviction. Likewise, his admiration for the Zionist enterprise, for their desire to change the 'desert' into a fertile land contains echoes of the socialist/communist enterprise he was so enamoured with in the USSR. At the*

*end of the essay, the two visions he has seen in 'the East' come into conflict - that of the idealized Zionist dream and what he sees as the "dark fanatical swarm of Arabs" waiting to throw them out. This essay is a strange and interesting combination of European racism, socialist class values, philosophical wonderings, and Holy Land wanderings. As a product of the early twentieth century, it is both indicative of an era and a product created by a master of observation and linguistic grace.*

## **A Letter**

[...]

Trudging through the desert at the end of Sinai I felt my heart pounding rhythmically, obstinately like the pounding of the stonecutter on the stone. This is how those hearts that passed through the wilderness thirty centuries ago pounded and carved God on the granite. A people in the grip of hunger, fear and revolt, a people with voracious guts, a skin that trembled and a heart that resisted, created Jehovah, the God that matched them. [...]

New agonies have been born and man's soul has broadened with enlightenment and pain. Millions of human beings hunger and are wronged, and from their tormented bowels a new direction of life takes shape as always, a new response - a new face of the unfathomable. This face, if it is to succeed in comforting and captivating men,

must resemble their face. It must be like the Labourer who is hungry, who works and rises up in revolt. This face must no longer be the leader of one tribe, but of the entire human race.

The “Exodus” from the land of bondage has begun. We cross the desert - we suffer, we grumble, we kill each other and create the new face of the Unfathomable, outside of every deity. But today’s desert does not resemble this desert of Sinai. It is much harsher - filled with machines, cities and people.

Here in Egypt I shudder as I follow the “Exodus,” the awakening, as the modern phrase goes, of a segment of the monstrous march. The Eastern peoples awaken, they organize, they exchange signals and set out.

Until now, the people in Egypt were submerged in the low, sunless strata of the animals: they laboured, they hungered, they kept silent. Now the Exodus from the animal has begun: they have acquired a voice, are becoming enlightened and organizing. They have climbed to the next level - they have become property owners, merchants, small businessmen, and they have learned to read.<sup>3</sup> They’ve expelled the foreigners who had been exploiting them. Some have risen even higher, uprooting everything. All the Asiatic and African peoples understand their brotherhood - and this is the most important reality of our time. Marching in the lead with them are all the people of Europe and America who suffer and are being exploited. The five continents and all the races - white, yellow and black - are in foment and stirring. And as always, a new world theory, contrary of course, to that of the leaders, goes before them like a cloud of smoke in the daytime and like a *pillar of fire* at night.

Crossing through the desert in Sinai, I saw the new “Exodus” of man. This vision, this mirroring of the desert, stands out as the most moving experience of my entire journey through the East. [...]

## **Toward the Promised Land<sup>4</sup>**

The sea that was taking the worshipers to Jerusalem was calm; the sky with its flimsy clouds had a curious mysterious softness. The seacoasts of Greece, the islands, the sea gulls, the playful dolphins, the small birds that fluttered and chirped amid the ship’s riggings - all had an exceptional warmth and charm for us today.

I look at my fellow-travelling pilgrims with curiosity. What kind of person is contemporary man who, after nineteen centuries, pursues and fulfils his deep longing to leave his home and begin the arduous and expensive journey to the East, in the midst of the Arabs, to worship at the unfathomable tomb of Christ?

They had come from all over Greece, in this sacred caravan; some with their luggage and hatboxes, others with simple bundles and baskets; and immediately upon boarding

the ship they separated into two worlds, the one half on the deck and the other half in comfortable cabins and salons with untuned pianos.

I walked back and forth among these two worlds. Colourful blankets and greasy coverlets were spread out on ropes next to the ship's machinery; a cluster of old women had opened their baskets and were chewing away - the whole world smelled of red caviar and onions. A ruddy-cheeked old man with long flowing hair was sitting in the middle of all this, reading aloud the chronicle of Christ: his life, his Passion, how the Bridegroom went up to Jerusalem, afterward how they ate the bitter Last Supper, how the traitor disciple left in haste and how Jesus went up to the Mount of Olives and the sweat poured from his forehead in drops of blood.

The little old women in their black shawls were listening contritely, shaking their heads, sighing, and all the while, chewing away quietly, passively, like sheep. God was again becoming man in their simple hearts, was again being crucified on the terrifying cross and again saving mankind. An old man with his back toward the women was listening, stooped over his shepherd's crook, upon which he was carving a bird's head.

Suddenly, at the part where Christ, parched from thirst, cries out, "I thirst!" a plump, youngish woman sprang to her feet excitedly and with unendurable tenderness let out a cry, "My son!" - and my heart wrenched violently at the profound maternal cry of this woman who called even God her son.

Dusk of Holy Monday arrived. A tall, lean village priest rose, removed his priestly head covering, let his grey hair fall to his shoulders and began to chant the evening vesper service over the sea.

By the next day, Holy Tuesday, we had left the Aegean behind us and were entering Anatolia. To our right was the still indiscernible Africa, and to our left, beyond the horizon, Cyprus. The sea sparkled, serene and warm. Two black butterflies with red spots were flitting above the ship's ropes; a tiny famished sparrow that was following us swooped down and ate one of the butterflies; two squeamish young girls screamed and a man yelled: "Stop it - that's the way it's meant to be. What do you think God is, some delicate lady?"

I was approaching with deep emotion this sun-scorched land where once upon a time the flame leaped out of a tiny humble house in Nazareth and seared and rejuvenated the heart of man. I remember that other pilgrimage I had made to Moscow a few months ago, to the new Jerusalem of the modern, turmoil-ridden heart. Snow, endless silent steppes, crows and grey airplanes in the skies, and on the earth below antlike swarms of people, labourers and peasants hunched from work and anguish, all races, white, yellow, black, had come to worship at another Holy Sepulchre.<sup>5</sup>

[...]

At dusk, while the sun was sinking into the quiet waters behind us and the full moon was rising from the east, serene and melancholy like a golden death mask, the bishop solemnized on deck the divine service of Holy Tuesday. I had heard the passionate, erotic cry of Kassiani to the Lord when I had chanced upon little mountain village churches in the springtime.<sup>6</sup> The anguished womanly lament was sweetly enchanting as I listened, gazing through the small crossed window into the open country beyond. But tonight this female lament that so passionately cries out to God to save her from the male spilled onto the sea with unleashed grief. The sea incites the heart, it raises disturbances and questions that fresh green grass appeases. I was looking at the people around me. The well-dressed were unmoved, showing neither joy nor sorrow; they'd stand up, then sit down again, look at their watches. The poor in third class listened apart, and their faces shone. Their hearts were skipping, and for a moment their faces, hands and shabby clothing glowed. When this Holy Week, in which the Lord suffered like them passes, they will again fall back into the deadly daily darkness.<sup>7</sup>

The moon had by now taken over the sky. Conversations were resumed; an old woman was telling her small granddaughter of the life and Passion of Christ. And the granddaughter was listening to the awesome story as though it were a fairy tale, tremblingly following the prince who was going to be killed. I, too, hiding in the dark, was listening, and it was the first time I understood the death march with such simplicity and such power. Rabbi Nachman, the great unsophisticated founder of Hasidism, once said: "When I get an idea, so greatly do I work on it within me that, involuntarily, when I begin to tell it to others I see that it has ceased to be an idea and comes out like a myth...."<sup>8</sup> The same had happened now. Only the grandmother, that great simple heart, could so profoundly work all these futile theological sophistries within her and elevate them to a myth.<sup>9</sup>

When I retired to my cabin and finally stretched out on my bed to sleep, I heard an unexpected conversation. Some fellow travellers were carrying on a heated discussion down in the ship's hold. One who, by the tone of his voice sounded very young, was vehemently enumerating with narrow-minded fanaticism the ignominy of our modern economic and social life - lies, thefts, injustices; the populace suffers, the great grow wealthier, women sell themselves, the priests have no faith; here, on this earth is where hell and paradise are; here is where we must demand justice and happiness, there is no other life. . . . Another was talking about Russia; in his excited imagination everything out there seemed right and holy. The fetishistic words "proletariat," "class struggle," "Lenin," rose from his entrails with apostolic fire, scorching his lips.

Cries could be heard, "Yes, yes, you're right! Fire and the axe!" Only one - I recognized the piercing voice of the deacon who was travelling with us - wanted to disagree; but his voice was drowned amid the shouts and laughter. The silent dance started suddenly to stir...

I leaped from my pillow and listened eagerly. In my imagination the hold of the ship was like a new catacomb where the modern-day slaves had gathered and were

conspiring again to blow up the Earth. With difficulty I choked back the cry of joy. We were on our way to worship the familiar face of God, the gentle, martyred face full of promises, of future rewards after death. The little old women were carrying gifts to him: candles, silver offerings, fervent prayers; the unbelievers in first class above were quiet, free of care, and spoke of money and politics.

And down below, in the hold of the ship, we were hauling a formidable gift, the sperm of a new, unformed as yet, infant theogony.<sup>10</sup>

I sensed again, deep within me, the transitory period we are living through. A sacred, cherished world is disappearing; another world, hard, brimming with blood, mud and fire, full of life, rises from the earth and the heart of man. It straddles all the ships and journeys on.

In the morning, through the milky mist, the Promised Land began to be discernible in the distance. At first just a line above the sea, then the low mountains of Judea appeared, gray at first, then soft azure and finally they drowned in the intense light of the day. Haifa seemed dark beside the blond spreading sand. To her left could be seen the new Jewish city Tel-Aviv, “the Crest of Spring.”

A few famished sea gulls from the mainland flew over us, the butterflies on the ropes grew denser, the old women rose to their feet, collected their bundles, tied their black kerchiefs around their heads, crossed themselves and began to weep.

Sand, gardens, unctuous Arab women, wild fig trees, date palms. Automobiles sputtering as they climb to the Holy City. Hearts pounding loudly. And suddenly, sun-drenched and steaming, the stony, unsmiling Vision is before us. Wharfs, battlements, fortress doors. White djellabas<sup>11</sup>, green and red shawls, the scent of Eastern spices, rotted fruit and human sweat, fierce thousand-year-old cries, ghosts rising from the tombs, blood-soaked stones all crying out as they come to life.

I stand at the entrance of the Holy Tomb with bulging, insatiable eyes. It is Holy Saturday. The Church of the Resurrection is buzzing like an enormous beehive. Feverish, bleary-eyed, Arab-shouting Christians, in *fezzes* and dirty multicoloured *djellabas*, are swarming over the tiles. Men and women who have slept the night here are stretched out on straw mats, rags or rugs, beneath the arches of the church, waiting for the awesome moment now at hand, when the divine light is going to leap out of the baldachin of the Holy Tomb.<sup>12</sup> Gray water jugs with orange Arabic motifs, soft drinks, sherbets and lemons pass from hand to hand through this human maze in the church encampment.

Coffeepots boil on portable burners under the great icons; mothers bare their breasts in front of the crowds and suckle their infants. A heavy, sour, human stench fills the air; hot wax, oil and women’s hair emit a nauseating sheep-like smell. The rank odour of goats drifting up from the Arab men is unbearable. Laughter, tears, shrieks. Some are

chanting, others are idling away the time with their wives under the motley blankets in the dark corners of the church; and as you pass through the heavy-scented darkness you catch sudden ripples of laughter coming from the young girls who are being titillated.

An Abyssinian lord, lean and slender as a palm tree, strides through the crowds, wrapped in a green silk mantle; an Arab woman comes and kneels opposite me, fat, unctuous, with the dark eyes of a river animal. Her breasts hang flabbily and touch her stomach. Breath after breath comes wafting over me in a jumble of odours - some from wine and garlic, others from burning candles and frankincense. Now and then there is the unexpected fragrance of the divine April roses; you turn - a *fellaha* has just gone by carrying a rose to the Tomb.

Suddenly the sweating, black-haired throng swells into a stormy sea of worshipers. New Arabians are pouring into the courtyard with their six-winged cherubs and their lanterns and enormous candles, the size of their bodies. The rigid, indifferent English raise their canes to shield their heads. But the Arabians continue their frenzied shrieking. An old man, foaming at the mouth, climbs on the shoulders of the human maze and jumps from shoulder to shoulder waving two unsheathed swords in the air. He dances atop the shoulders, shrieking; only the whites of his eyes show, and the candles which coil around his waist are melting and dripping in the intense heat.

In a little while the Armenians descend upon the scene, their banners waving in the air; the young choir boys dressed in yellow shirts raise their fresh voices in the dense atmosphere. Next come the Copts, the Syrians, the Abyssinians, the Bedouin shepherds, the Maronites, five or six flaxen-haired Russians from the vast regions of Russia, and a few cold Americans, looking comical in this flaming Asiatic furnace. The women of Bethlehem come with their high cone-shaped headbands and their stark white shawls. An onslaught of multicoloured waves, a brisk polemic rhythm, like the arrival of troops.

The church has overflowed with worshipers who have climbed up the columns and straddled the pews and are hanging over the women's section. All eyes, excited, ecstatic, are riveted on the centre of the church, on the small baldachin which the Patriarch has already entered, and out of which, any second now, the divine light will leap forth.

A *fellah*, whose head is tightly bound with strips of camel hair, jumps upon the shoulders of an Arab, waving a huge white taper with red ribbons in the air and frenetically starts calling out to Christ to emerge. The masses, all in a body, go wild. Swarthy arms thrash about, the silver bracelets on the arms of the women jangle, their henna-painted nails glisten like droplets of blood. All the Anatolians - Arabs, Bedouins, Abyssinians - heads craning upward, are shouting, laughing, sighing. A young man faints and soldiers lift his wooden body and lay it in the courtyard. A lean old Maronite priest, dressed in a stark white robe and red sash, falls on the tile floor,

foaming at the mouth; and in a sudden surge a mob of old women, their arms and chins tattooed with crosses, mermaids, and quotations from the Bible, fling themselves upon him ... they press forward, shrieking, and touch the epileptic. In their primitive souls they think that an awesome invisible power has suddenly descended upon this convulsed body.<sup>13</sup>

The huge marble slab that covers the ground where Christ was laid after his removal from the cross is licked and worn away from the kisses. For centuries, the human masses have been falling all over it, kissing and eroding it. They touch the marble lightly with their palms and then rub their face and neck three times. If every thousand centuries, says Buddha, a peacock feather is passed over a granite mountain, the day will come when the mountain will be eroded away and will disappear. Similarly, the innumerable feet of the faithful have worn away the tiles of the church and the courtyard, the Tomb of Christ, the cliff of Golgotha, the Stone the angel rolled away; all have been eroded by the lips of the people.

An orthodox priest next to me looks with yellow hatred at the Copts, the Latins and the Armenians. He bends over and speaks to me with a choked voice:

“This entire church belongs to us, the Orthodox. All the sacred shrines are ours. The heretics, whom God has damned, want to take them from us; but we’re fencing off the disputed areas with iron bars and won’t let anyone set foot inside! Look at what we gave the Abyssinians, a rock. Come what may, we’re not giving them another inch. Now we’re going to throw the Armenians out; they’ve over stepped their boundaries and are standing on our ground. Whatever the Latins tell you is a lie. All their shrines are fakes. I hope to God the day comes when we can throw them out!”

“I hope to God the day comes,” I answered, “when your hearts will fill with love. When the divine light no longer comes down to your candles but into your dark, anti-Christ mind!”<sup>14</sup>

A wave of fellaheen passed between us and separated us. They were sticking their tongues out, whistling, laughing; their eyes were corroded from trachoma, their teeth were gleaming white. The men were tall, lean, nimble-bodied; the women were fat, ugly, their foreheads tightly wound with ropes of copper coins; their lips glistened ebulliently.

But now a sweet melody is heard from the altar. The ushers are beating rhythmically on the tiles with their long silver-handled canes; they slowly advance and open a path. The children’s choir moves forward, the metropolitans and bishops follow in their gold vestments. The Patriarch, with his snow-white beard, enormous weary eyes and stark-white, long tapered fingers, appears on the threshold.

The litany begins, the bells toll, a violent wind of sanctity and frenzy blows over the multicoloured heads. I feel once more the warmth of the almightiness of the heart of

man. Hands reach upward, feet dance, the heart leaps and cries out to the Saviour. The air fills with an invisible presence. Surely, if the priests and cultured people had not been present in the church the *fellaheen* would have resurrected Christ. They would have forced him to condense in the air and come down to earth, no longer as an idea or a phantom, but in the form of flesh and voice. They would give him fish and honey and he would eat. They would touch him and their hands would be filled. And when he'd walk, the tiles would echo. "God had no ear," says an Indian philosophy. "God could not hear; but man, who was in pain, cried out and God was compelled, by force, to create an ear to hear the woes of man."

Looking at the *fellaheen* today, I understood in what manner the heart of man created heaven and earth. It brought down the invisible powers and dressed them in flesh and gave voice to mute infinity.

The Patriarch bent down and entered the holy baldachin of the Sacred Tomb alone. A hush fell over the trembling, multitudinous throng. Mothers raised their infants to their shoulders so they could see, the *fellaheen* gaped with mouths drooping, the Europeans raised themselves on tip toe and stared with curiosity. The seconds were falling thickly on our heads; the air strained and cracked like the skin of a drum. And all at once a brilliance leaped from the low door of the Sacred Tomb; the Patriarch emerged holding a big cluster of white lit candles. In a flash, from floor to ceiling, the church flooded with flaming candles. Everyone had surged toward the Patriarch to receive the light. Some were carrying thick white tapers and others held thirty-three white candles. They put their hands in the flame and quickly rubbed them over their faces and breasts. They poured out into the courtyard, their hands curled around the flame of their candles, and ran to their homes.

The church emptied. All this stupendous din, the frenzied throngs and the motley rags seemed like an outlandish, improbable dream. But as I bent down, in the course of my lonely wandering in the church, I knew that all this Anatolian vision was real; because there on the tiles I saw the remains of the awesome apparition: pumpkin seeds, orange peels, olive pits and broken pop bottles.

## **The Mosque of Omar**

The two great Annunciations, the Christian and the Greek, sparkle in my mind and unite in a mystic synthesis:

In the one, the ethereal, vigorous Angel swoops down from heaven with a lily in its hand; and the Virgin, fascinated and trembling, turns with her whole body toward the door that has just opened. In the other Annunciation, the Swan, a dazzling creature, rises from the muddy waters and anchors itself intimately in the age-old custom on the female body. And the woman bends with abandon and horror over the long swaying

neck, the palms of her hands raised beseechingly, like a creature in pain and ashamed, but unable and unwilling to resist the animal...

Today I saw a third Annunciation: the angel does not descend from heaven nor does the animal rise from the muddy waters; upon this earth, ardently and humanly, man brings the “good news” to woman.

I walk around the Mosque of Omar<sup>15</sup> and my heart beats carefree, like a kid on the cliffs. I don't stretch my body toward heaven - this earth looks good to me. This country of mine is made especially for my soul and my body. I am reminded of another day when I was wandering, tired and restless, in Kurd-besieged Eriban, in the heart of Armenia. The doors were bolted, the streets deserted, the women and children wailing behind the heavy shutters. I wandered alone, full of agony and exasperation. And suddenly, in the midday heat of the burning sun, another sacred mosque unexpectedly rose before me, covered from the foundation to its cupolas with green and blue porcelain and coral flowers. My blood at once grew calm, my mind rejoiced, and as I sat beneath the pointed Arabic arch in the cool shade all seemed good and right to me and death but a cool shadow after a blistering march.

Similarly today, after upholding the Christian ideal to scorn the earth and leave it behind, this Mosque of Omar comforts and reconciles my heart with the soil. It gleams brilliantly in the sun, sparkling, joyful, multicoloured, like a gigantic male peacock.

I stride hurriedly across the great square over the ancient quays of Jerusalem. I walk around the magnificent mosque for hours, delaying as long as possible entering the dark door and plunging into the refreshing cool marvel. I look through the embrasures at the surrounding vision of Jerusalem. Beyond, the Moab Mountains steam gently, they sway slightly and shimmeringly disappear in the sun. The Mount of Olives is before me, parched, thirsty, covered with dust; and below lies the city, eroded by the burning sun, its bald houses with their black window holes resembling skulls. Camels pass, one behind the other, swaying rhythmically, indestructible, as though they had set out thousands of years ago.<sup>16</sup>

This is the peak, I reflected, upon which Jehovah stood with distended nostrils, accepting the sacrifices and smelling the blood. Here is where the great Temple of Solomon rose, impenetrable fortress of the stiff-necked God; and I relived all its bloody, hate-filled, polemic history. The hard, sunburned heads, the hawk nose, the narrow unrelenting forehead, the rigid neck, the burning rapacious eye of the Hebrew race.<sup>17</sup>

But as I was wandering through this bloody cesspool of Israel, I turned. The Mosque of Omar was rising in the sun, like a fountain of sculpted precious stones, climbing, playing a little in the air, circling, giving way and coming back to earth. It did not want to leave.

I approached fascinated. The Arabic letters, plaited like flowers, were turning into maxims of the Koran, intertwining like creeping vines on the columns, blooming, grasping the dome. Thus they embraced and captivated God in the blooming, wild vineyard of earth.

My eyes were refreshed as I crossed the threshold and plunged into the multicoloured, mysterious shade of the temple. At first, as I came in from the raw light, I could not distinguish anything. Only a sweetness spilled over me and relieved me, like a bath; first my body and, immediately after, my mind. I walked on, trembling with joy and anticipation. This is how the faithful Moslems must walk in the dark, after death, in the cool paradise of righteous recompense.

I moved ahead with arms outstretched and little by little my eyes became adjusted. The windows rose before me like constellations, the dome, all gold and emerald, softly filled with light; the details began to appear, dancing ahead in the azure shadow - the lines, the decorations, the quotations from the Koran that were lying in ambush like insatiable, amorous eyes, behind profusely flowering branches and ethereal animals.

A believer, kneeling on a straw mat with his face turned toward Mecca, was praying. He remained for a long while with his forehead touching the ground, trustingly, like an infant on its mother's bosom. Then slowly he lifted his head, sat up and gazed high into the golden green strip of the dome. His eyes ecstatically pursue the hidden, slippery quotation of Mohammed in the midst of the intricate lines and patterns. As though in a dream pursuing the mysterious doe. And what joy when he finally understands that all these narrow, intertwining lines are not an idle game of fantasy but a high, austere commandment of the Prophet!<sup>18</sup>

Only the believer can distinguish and fit together the unmatched difficult outlines, integrating the great message into a mystical synthesis in his heart. He does not scorn the apparent, nor does he seek the essence beyond the apparent; nor does he restrict himself only to the visible palpable world, without yearning for anything more. The phenomena are what create the essence. All this life - water, bread, woman, mountains and animals - are *γράμματα* (education and alphabetical outlines); and joy to the heart that can fit them together and find the phrase to grasp the meaning.

Christ commands: "Scorn the earth and its riches. Beyond the phenomena is the essence, beyond this transient life shines immortality." Apollo stands firm on the marble and commands: "Harmonize your heart with the earth, calmly rejoice in the ephemeral, solid order of things; outside the harmony of your mind is chaos." And Buddha, with his deep, seductive, serpentine eye, looks at us smilingly, finger in mouth, and drags us into chaos.

Today, inside the Mosque of Omar, wanting to discipline the anxieties of my heart, I struggle to harmonize whatever I love deeply in this world: the sober mind and burning imagination, geometric solidity and precision, and at the same time, not

beyond, but within, the mystical flame of anxious yearning. I gaze at the dome of the mosque for hours, like a believer: the Arabic capers transform the animals and plants into decorations, the decorations into letters, and they uncover God - and we see him as we see a lord through the thick foliage of his garden.

I sit in a corner of the mosque, on the straw mat, over-come by an indescribable sweetness. The rigid, austere outline of the Parthenon suddenly looms in my mind. Similarly, the pure divine countenance of Beatrice must have risen in the mind of Dante at the moment he was surrendering, exhausted, to the warm, earthly embrace.

I know you have always served as a lesson in balance, hardness and discipline in a rhythm superior to me. You set limits to my desires, you set a barrier around the disorderly energies of my youth. You found concise words without tenderness, commanding, like orders to an athlete in order to open a path for me. In the beginning you seemed to me the rigid achievement of abstract thought, and my heart did not want to follow you. But little by little, in time, with love, I understood. You revealed yourself to me like an airy ripple, subordinated to the straight line; a violent passion which from its abundant strength binds itself to a superior health, a geometry pulsating like music. And slowly I understood, sitting at your feet, O Parthenon, that serenity is the resultant of all storms. That the highest mission of man is in faithfully continuing the formless struggle of matter, to liberate it by subordinating it to solid human form.

For the first time on this earth, it seemed to me the chaos of the heart subordinated itself with such grace, and with out renouncing its riches, to the austere outline of the mind. The victorious mind, assembling infinity on a dry, sun-baked skull-like cliff, gave it a broader kingdom to rule. Just as, when in the midst of chaos, man finds the law that governs a series of phenomena and strictly encloses it in the Word and the world becomes calm and the contradictory forces are regulated, similarly in the anarchy of natural forces, the Parthenon rises soberly and legislates the chaos.

But today, recalling this victory of logic, constriction and rage beleaguer my soul. My heart is not pure, my mind has shattered the old equilibrium. Today, whatever balance holds the rebellious forces in divine serenity seems foreign to me, narrow and false, and I do not understand it. Great concerns have been born, Lucifers have risen from the earth with arms full of dangerous gifts, with lips that twitch from smiles that are inscrutable, mocking, perplexing. The helmet of Athena has shattered and no longer can hold the head of the world.

An irresistible instinct urges me to dig under the foundations of the serene temple. I know this unsparing marble syllogism has its foundations in the passionate Caryatids, with the high, agitated breasts, the painted lips and dark, dangerous eyes.

With difficulty I struggle to make clear my emotions. The contemporary Caryatids who convulse our souls do not have the enchanting visage of this ancient harem. They

look more like the Furies and the Fates. One is called Hunger and she walks ahead and countless men follow her. Aphrodite never had so many lovers as this sallow, flat-chested, unsmiling, unconquered Amazon. The others are called Revenge, Rage, Freedom.

What Parthenon, what mosque, will be built upon these Caryatids? I sit in this cool corner of the mosque and realize that all my joy has left me. Life has become oppressively heavy. Today, every moment that passes cannot satisfy us, either with its joy or with its sorrow. We push it aside roughly, in haste to see the next moment.

In another age, man would surely be happy to continue to remain in the austere certainty of the Parthenon; or to sit cross-legged and glorify God in the cheerful Mosque of Omar that exudes a faith of flesh and aroma. Today, the heart beats impatiently, it cannot be contained, it fights to make distinctions - and more important, to participate in building the future temple of its as yet faceless, fermenting God.

I pass hurriedly through the dark covered streets of Jerusalem. The Hebrew eyes gleam sarcastically, restlessly, covetously; the Moslems are calm, deeply confident in Allah's care; they watch you with indifference and aloofness as you rush by.

I hurry through this dense, human maze, fascinated by the colours, scents and din of dirty, wonderful Anatolia. I am anxious to reach the ruins of the wall of the Temple of Solomon, where for over eighteen centuries now, the Jews lament their lost country and call on Jehovah to come down and again glorify his temple.

The sun is finally setting as I pass through filthy narrow streets; for an instant a crimson glow floods the archways under the vaults, like a stream of blood issuing from the setting sun. The dark, slight Arabic faces take on a metallic gleam and for a moment even the cheeks of the pale Jews acquire a ruddy flush.

As I turn the corner I notice two elderly rabbis walking hastily ahead of me. They are dressed in the most improbable, ostentatious coats; one is a canary yellow velvet and the other a lush green. These two old men shine like stars in the dimly lit dirty streets of the Hebrew quarter. I follow them, surmising they have dressed in their formal vestments to appear before their God at the ancient ruins and begin their lament.

We walk down the slippery, cobbled streets and suddenly I hear a synchronized wailing chant of male voices. I stop, fascinated. The dirge sounds so sweet to me, soft, persistent, like spring rain, an intermingling of tears and laughter. I walk on a few paces and find myself before the renowned wall, the only remnant of the Temple of Solomon. A very commonplace wall, with heavy stones, set without asbestos cement. Up high the stones are covered with moss and down below, as high as people could reach, the stones have been worn away by the handling, the kisses and caresses of the Jews.

About fifty worshipers, Old Testament in hand, are leaning on the wall, wailing. A rabbi with coarse whiskers, wearing a black silk robe and heavy fur cap on his head, is swaying back and forth from the waist, chanting rhythmically, monotonously, through his nose. There's a young man next to him shouting. Another, with a greenish black redingote, a hard hat and yellowish goatee, has removed a rope of hair from his waist, belts it over his redingote and begins to rock back and forth. An old man is crying silently with his face pressed against a crack in the wall.

They keep coming, they kiss the walls, rub their faces on the stones, breathe deep sighs. A hunchback dwarf with a red fez, a black turban and a raven-black shiny beard paces back and forth despondently. There are rabbis in orange-coloured mantles, others in blue, white, violet - like has-been old actors. The faithful cluster around them and begin their droning lamentation. Two children, about eight or ten years old, begin to cry as they kiss the lower part of the wall, and the dwarf approaches them and begins to cry, too.

The women stand in a corner at the left. A young girl with curly, jet-black hair, a yellow shawl, long dangling earrings and painted lips leans against the wall and looks sideways, smiling at the men. Her eyes are still red from crying but she is relieved now and the force of youth has overtaken her. She has forgotten the divine curse, the devastated temple, the Diaspora and the martyrdom of her race and looks at the men with erotic, covetous eyes. She well knows that only love can save her generation and multiply the Jews and rebuild the Temple of Solomon.

But the old men and women weep. I live through this strange moment with indescribable agitation. An old man is trying to tear himself away from the wall but cannot bear to leave, and falls upon it once more. The Jews have gathered here from the four corners of the Earth, to merge and weep together. They have come from Galicia with their long redingotes and curls that dangle at their temples; from Arabia in their white djellabas, from Poland, short and red-haired; from Babylonia, tall and majestic like biblical Patriarchs; from Russia, Spain, Greece and Algiers. A man who looks Chinese, with a sparse, turned-up moustache, sits cross-legged, moving his head and upper body rhythmically, slowly, mournfully reading without stopping, like a tired weeping child.

The curse of the terrifying God falls upon all these heads. And I shall ravage them, and give them to eternal ruin and lamentation and mockery. And remove from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the scent of myrrh and the light of the lamp. They were scattered over all the Earth in sunless Jewish ghettos. In the Middle Ages high walls separated them from the rest of the city. The doors opened in the morning and closed at night. They wore a mark of disgrace, a strip of red or yellow cloth on their shoulder, breast or head. In northern medieval France they wore a yellow cap, in Germany a hood and cap of red or green. This was so that their tormentors could single them out and abuse them or

beat them with impunity. And when they would take them up to the pyres they dressed them in a black robe, embroidered with crosses and flames of hell and demons, and this is how they walked through the chanting crowds who cursed them.<sup>19</sup>

In the throes of their dishonoured life and martyrdom of death, this simple wall, eaten away from all the kisses, gleamed before them like a high bronze shield. On the snow-covered steppes of Russia, or sun-baked Spanish plains, Zion, “the acme of virtues,” rose up in their cries like a heavenly rainbow. For over eighteen centuries now they weep with their face turned toward this wall, and they call out: “Lord, Lord, behold our misfortune! Others have seized our inheritance, strangers have taken our homes. We must buy the water we drink and the wood for our fires. Joy has left our hearts, our dance has changed and become mourning, the crown has fallen from our heads!”

This is how the Hebrews lament these many centuries, searching out, caressing, kissing the ancestral stones. Uprooted, without land, they roam the earth. Their great leader is no longer Moses the lawgiver and general, but the ragged, homeless, inconsolable Wandering Jew.

For so many centuries now they have been sending representatives, the poor, the aged, the laughingstock of all nations, to this wall so that Jehovah could see to what depths his Chosen Race has fallen and that it is finally time for him to remember and to keep his word. Had he not promised them all the Earth? Had they not remained faithful for thousands of years? Had they not been dishonored, killed, martyred, for his sake? How long must they wait? So ask the envoys, and cry out for their rights. They are like lenders who have loaned out their tears and love at interest, and God is the debtor. The Hebrew usurers demand, unremittingly, with tears and exasperation, that they be paid.

The Jewish spirit wants to conquer the Earth, to subordinate all nations to its rhythm, to crush the present, because the Earth cannot contain it and smothers it. This is its profoundest characteristic. The Greeks love to harmonize opposite forces, they rejoice in and easily fit into every ephemeral moment. They brought balance to the world. The Jews battle ceaselessly to upset the balance and agitate the heart of man. Reality can never contain them; beyond each ephemeral moment they demand the absolute.<sup>20</sup>

The sun had finally set; the star of Aphrodite and Astarte glittered, suspended over the dark blue mountains of Judea. The rabbis closed their books, at peace with themselves, their aged hands slowly, falteringly caressing the wall as they filed out. In their imagination the temple had been rebuilt. Zion had risen again, completely new, and the Messiah entered once more through the fortress door of David, as tradition would have it, on a white ass.

A Hebrew friend was with me, a modern atheistic adventurer who was all efficaciousness and logic. He turned to me and, nodding ironically, said:

“They think that their shouts in the air are going to rebuild Jerusalem. Only mass production and the just distribution of wealth will create a perfect mankind - the new Jerusalem.”

“Comrade,” I answered, peevishly, “these voices that you ridicule are always the forerunners that sow seeds in the air. After a thousand or two thousand years you sociologists, you labourers of logic, come along and reap. The mystical preparation of reality has always been this way. The heart suffocates, cries out and wants to escape; it becomes a voice and storms the air; it finds other hearts; it sets the brains and hands into motion and mobilizes the visible and invisible powers. This is the only way the word can become flesh and walk the earth.

“What does it need to become flesh? Only this: to have its cry sustained in the air for many years.”

I heard this cry - the Source - throughout the many weeks that I wandered through Judea. My eyes burned from looking at the steaming desert. From Jerusalem to the Jordan and the Dead Sea, four hundred meters below the sea level of the Mediterranean, not a single flower grows, not a drop of water rises from the parched earth. The mountains are desolate, austere, inaccessible. Perfect for an artist who loves the abstemious tragic beauty of this world. Perfect for the prolific procreation of prophets in side their ascetic nakedness. But for simple, virtuous people who want to build houses, plant trees and have children, all this smouldering, silent wilderness is unbearable.

A light, azure flash of madness hotly licks your mind as you pass through these uninhabited grey mountains, without a bird or a single green leaf. Only the unexpected sound of a hungry crow fluttering overhead or the howl of the jackals close by at night as they dig in the sand.

Jericho smiles for a moment before you, like an oasis. Orchards of blooming pomegranates, banana trees, fig trees, mulberry trees, surrounded by tall, slender date-palm trees - charming as Ionic columns or gushing water spouts. Your eyes and body are rested and refreshed. But quickly the oasis disappears as though swallowed by the sand.

The same pleasantness surrounds Haifa, with her renowned orchards brimming with orange and lemon trees. And below, in Hebron, the ancient town of Abraham, the earth is tranquilly tamed by the ploughshare of man.

In Samaria and Galilee the mountains take on a more hospitable appearance. Birds, water and trees domesticate the landscape. But fevers from the mire kill the people. “Even a bird flying overhead will die,” says an old Arabic parable.

In biblical times Palestine flowed with milk and honey and the grapes were so

heavy that two men were required to lift them. Today, Palestine's appearance is unrecognizable. The Arabs have brought their ancestral desert with them.<sup>21</sup>

Yet a new breath, the ancient Jewish spirit, blows in again over the devastated plains and valleys of Palestine. The Jews are back, ploughing the land, channelling the waters, planting, building. They fight in the noblest manner, fructifying the earth in order to conquer her. They fight to bring a little light and sweetness and joy to their fallowed country.

A Jewish rabbi in one of the new agrarian communities was speaking to me:

“Each man has a certain set of things he must free: his animals, his land, the tools of his trade, his body and his brain. He has a duty to liberate all these. How? By using them and cultivating them. If he does not liberate them he cannot liberate himself. Likewise, every people has a certain periphery - lands, traditions, ideas - that it must set free, if it wants to be free. The Jewish people have Palestine.”<sup>22</sup>

We walked along the broad, dusty road bordering the Valley of Josephat at the foot of the Mount of Olives. The tombstones on the Jewish graves, deeply imbedded in the ground, were drowned in the glaring noonday light. The little village of Gethsemane, just two paces ahead, was blotted out in darkness, so blinding was the brilliance of the sun. Unexpectedly, there among the graves, two camels filed silently by, one behind the other, their necks swaying slowly. For a moment their patient black eyes, with the long lashes, gazed at us gently and my heart lightened as I felt the presence of a warm living thing moving through this inhuman wilderness.

Walking and breathing easily beside me in this furnace was a young Jewess, a teacher named Judith, who had come to show me a garden for Jewish children. She was about twenty years old, short, lissom, with hooked nose and restless jet-black eyes. Her hair was curly and coarse, her chin broad, firm, wilful.

“How did you happen to become a Zionist?” I asked.

“I was studying medicine. I had no ties to either religion or country. People had always interested me. I felt compassion and pity for all mankind, knowing how every one shares in illness and joy and grief. But I was restless. All of Europe seemed old and familiar and archaic to me. I was thirsty for something new. And so I came to Palestine.”

“Why didn't you go to Russia? They say a new world is being created there . . .

“Because there's no freedom there. A small, harsh circle governs all the others. The fact that this circle is the proletariat didn't comfort me at all. I wanted freedom.”

“And you found it here in Palestine?”

“Here we work free. We try, we experiment, we search to find. You can meet people here and work together according to your individual temperament - from the most revolutionary to the most conservative. Freedom. Here, for the first time. I feel alive, strengthened, able to love the earth that I had never even noticed in Europe, and able to feel joy that I am from the Jewish race.”

“You are beginning, in other words, to lose your freedom. You’re beginning to tie yourself down to a certain corner of the Earth, and to constrict your heart; first it had room for all the world, now it’s beginning to distinguish and choose and to accept only the Jews. Don’t you feel the danger?”

The Jewess protested angrily, slightly fearful:

“What danger?”

“What danger? I’ll tell you: The leader of the gypsies forbids his people to build houses or plant trees or put up fences. They prop up their tents on the ground for a while and then move on freely. One day, as they were taking down their tents, a young girl was bending over the earth and tarrying. The leader approached and saw the girl had broken his order and had planted a sprig of basil at the entrance of her tent. And now the little sprig of basil had blossomed and the young girl was crouched over it crying, reluctant to leave it. In a rage, the leader uprooted the basil and trampled on it. He struck the girl with his riding whip and shouted: ‘Why do you break my order? Don’t you know that whoever builds a house is tied to it and whoever plants a tree is tied to that tree?’

“We don’t want to be Wandering Jews any longer!” the Jewess cried out.

“But that is exactly the danger I’m talking about; you don’t want to advance any longer. If the purpose of life is happiness - to eat well, to sleep in peace, to live in security - then you are justified in wanting to escape the persecutions and scorn and take roots finally in your own country. Although I’m encouraged by the belief - thank God - that you will not find happiness and security here in Palestine!

“But if the purpose of life, and especially the purpose of a people, is much harder: to struggle to convert as much matter as possible into action, thought and beauty; to climb upward with agony - then, without a doubt, the Zionist movement is contrary to the highest interest of your race.”

“Why don’t the English or French or Greeks undertake this role of the Wanderer? Or could you possibly think that their contribution to the Whole was lessened because they had a country?”

“Every race has its special virtues and vices and, consequently, its special road to reach its summit. The Jews have this supreme quality: to be restless; not to fit into

the reality of the time; to struggle to escape; to consider every status quo and every idea a stifling prison. With this poignant quality of theirs they save mankind from his contrived efforts at contentment - that is to say, from his impasse. This spirit of the Jews shatters the equilibrium, pushes evolution further, sparks off the proudest element of life: never to be satisfied, never to stop anywhere, to leap from plants to animals and from animals to man and again to torment man, as though wanting to go further still."

"Our fathers in the land of Canaan were farmers; rooted to their country they created their civilization."

"That was the nature of your race then. The Jews didn't always have the Lucifer quality of rebellion. They acquired it. The persecutions, slaughters, scorn, exile, all the things you call Diaspora, hammered away at the Hebrew race for two thousand years and forged it, against its will, by force, into the leaven of the earth."

"By force?"

"Does the word annoy you? Isn't it true that force is the most secret law of history? Many races would have wanted to escape their bloody and glorious fate and live without History, happily - clandestinely. But economic necessities, wars and some prophets who are born in their midst don't leave them alone. With force and with the lash, they prod them upward.

"Thus, scattered over the world for so many centuries, the Jews suffered, trembled and were killed. And this dyed their soul indelibly and created in them the hatred for every tyranny - either from individuals or from systems or ideas. This is why they agitated nations, undermined the status quo and set fire to all the old ideas. This is their fate; without them the world would rot."

Judith laughed. "Thank you for the role you assign us. I must confess we are greatly honoured to be slaughtered, to be forever restless, to make others restless. But we don't want to any more."

"You're tired? But the historical necessity that pushes the races doesn't ask you. It prods you relentlessly, whether you want it or not. And this modern Zionist movement, too, is a mask that your unsmiling Pate wears to deceive you for an instant. This is why I don't fear Zionism: how many of the fifteen million Jews will be able to squeeze themselves in here? You will never find security here. Behind you, don't forget, you have the dark fanatical swarm of Arabs.

"And so, like it or not, you will become the instruments of the spirit of our age. And our age is an age of revolution. That is, a Jewish age. Someone once said: "The twenty-second of March, 1832, when Goethe died, an era closed and a new one opened: the era of the reigning of the Jews." And it's true. Goethe was the last

complete representative of Harmony; after Goethe our contemporary age truly begins the violence, which is equally valuable, to rupture the old harmony and create a new one. This is why the Hebrew race prevails today, because its substance is precisely this rupturing of every harmony. This is why the highest intellects and leading men of action are Jews. Why all this flowering? Because you are restless, scattered all over the world in a transient age that destroys. Diaspora is your country. In vain you struggle to escape your Fate and you seek out happiness and security in this out-of-the-way province. I hope I hope, because I love the Jews - that sooner or later the Arabs will drive you out of here and again scatter you all over the world.”

We had finally arrived at the children’s garden. Blond, brunette and raven-haired Jewish youngsters were playing beneath the trees, chirping away like birds. I caressed their soft curly hair with unexpected emotion; a sudden, tragic foreboding overwhelmed my heart.<sup>23</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The English translation of Kazantzakis’ book appeared as *Journeying*, translated by Themis Vasils and Theodora Vasils (Little, Brown and Co, 1975). It is from their introduction to this volume and the official Kazantzakis website (<http://www.historical-museum.gr/kazantzakis/index1.html>) that the information on his life was taken.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Almond, “Borges the Post-Orientalist: Images of Islam from the Edge of the West” in *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol 50, no 2 (Summer 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Kazantzakis’ ignorance of Islamic civilization is lamentable. Egyptians have “learned” to speak, and thus are no longer animals; however, it is really not that they have learned to speak, it is that they can speak the languages of their colonial dominators and are now arguing against their own oppression. That they were reading, writing, protesting, and revolting in Arabic is irrelevant and unknown to him. Worse still is his statement about them “climbing to the next level” and becoming “property owners”, etc., which reveals Kazantzakis’ ignorance about trade in the Mediterranean and Islamic world which flourished throughout history. In this paragraph, it is as if the Egyptians are animals and have suddenly learned how to be human. The animal qualities of the ‘Eastern masses’ will be referred to again when he arrives in the Holy Land.

<sup>4</sup> Here Kazantzakis is on the journey by ship that takes him to the Holy Land during Easter of 1926. His essay comments on two groups: the peasants and poorer people traveling on the deck and the wealthier passengers who have their private cabins

below. Most of his time he spends on the deck, documenting his wonder and amazement over the devoutness and the simplicity of the pilgrims, all the while dismissing the unemotional reactions of the elite to the same religious occasions, whom he thus calls unbelievers. Again the simple people are described in animal terms, the women listening to the chronicle of Jesus’ life while chewing their food “passively like sheep.”

<sup>5</sup> Kazantzakis, freshly returned from his trip to the Soviet Union, is comparing his two journeys, both pilgrimages, as sites where intense feelings, hopes and great beliefs are expressed by people from all over the world; the Holy Land, as a religious place, the Soviet Union as an ideological place. In a sense, he seems to suggest that only through communism can religious feelings and faith be overcome and directed into productive ideology.

<sup>6</sup> The Hymn of Kassiani is chanted during the evening service on Holy Tuesday. “One of the few liturgical texts in the orthodox canon written by women, *The Troparion of Kassiani* literally bursts at the seams with emotion and feminine energy. It is a confessional by Mary Magdalene to her Master as she pours myrrh over His head just before His Passion, an act that was met with criticism by the disciples and particularly Judas who after that incident decided to part company with His Master and the rest of the group. Maria Magdalene’s predicament was in some ways similar to the author of the text, Kassia a ninth century poet, composer and abbess; the first woman composer in history whose work survives today. According to tradition Kassia was

shunned by emperor Theophilus as a possible bride during an imperial bridal show because of her response to a sexist slur of his (he said that women were the source of sin, implying Eve, and she responded that women were the source of salvation, implying Mary the mother of Christ). Rejected by men, both women found solace in God. In exploring Magdalene's emotional state, Kassia is in fact exploring her own and the result is powerful and sublime at the same time." <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~chatzis/Troparion.htm> The words, from this website, are as follows:

*Sensing your divinity Lord,  
a woman of many sins,  
takes it upon herself  
to become a myrrh bearer  
and in deep mourning  
brings before you fragrant oil  
in anticipation of your burial; crying:  
"Woe to me! What night falls on me,  
what dark and moonless madness  
of wild-desire, this lust for sin.  
Take my spring of tears  
You who draw water from the clouds,  
bend to me, to the sighing of my heart,  
You who bend the heavens  
in your secret incarnation,  
I will wash your immaculate feet with kisses  
and wipe them dry with the locks of my hair;  
those very feet whose sound Eve heard  
at the dusk in Paradise and hid herself in terror.  
Who shall count the multitude of my sins  
or the depth of your judgment,  
Saviour of my soul?  
Do not ignore your handmaiden,  
You whose mercy is endless".*

<sup>7</sup> Kazantzakis' reading of class comes through clearly here where the 'dullness' of the lower classes is evidenced in their clothes and unquestioning behaviors, their simplicity and goodness evident in their willingness to believe - he finds their naivety wondrous and admires their ability to be moved by simple stories, comparing their reactions to the bored, unmoved reactions of the moneyed class.

<sup>8</sup> "Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (sometimes called Bratzlav, Breslau or Bratislava) was one of the most creative, influential and profound of the Chassidic masters and the founder of the Breslover Chasidic sect. Breslov is a town in the Ukraine where Rabbi Nachman spent the end of his life. [...] From his youth, he followed a path of asceticism and prayer, though he warned his followers not to abuse themselves physically. He

emphasized living life with joy and happiness." <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Nachman.html>.

<sup>9</sup> For Kazantzakis, it is the unsophisticated and simple who have the power to transform religion into belief and reality. This theme echoes throughout this part of his writing as can be seen later when he talks about the power of the rough and simple Arab peasants shouting for Christ's return in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

<sup>10</sup> "Theogony means 'birth of the gods.' This thousand-line poem comes from the end of the eighth century BCE. Most generally it is a hymn to Zeus, king of gods and men, but it encompasses the origin of the world (cosmogony) and of the other gods." <http://www.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/theogony.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Djellabas* are the long shirts (*thob*) worn by men and women.

<sup>12</sup> Holy Saturday is also called the Day of the Holy Fire (in Greek *Hagion Phos* [Holy Light] and in Arabic *Sebt an-Nur* [Saturday of Light]) A number of others have written in more detail about the ceremony, such as in John N. Tleel's autobiography *I am Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: 2000) 140-151. The following website has a great deal of information and accounts from different eras: <http://www.holyfire.org/eng/index2.htm> Kazantzakis' account is one of the few that writes about the reactions of the crowd (reverent and irreverent) and the general chaos, with such attention to detail; most descriptions are highly respectful and focus on the religious events.

<sup>13</sup> Kazantzakis describes people in very animalistic terms - full of passion, lacking restraint, smelling of goats, consumed by desire, food, and frenzy. It seems to conform to his ideas of an Asiatic, animalistic culture, so different from the Europe he knows, and even from the simple Greek peasants who came with him on the ship.

<sup>14</sup> Kazantzakis' contempt for the unforgiving, un-Christian behavior of the priest reveals Kazantzakis' belief that the educated, elite believers, like this priest, are not the true face of the religion, which is instead expressed in the surging peasants who faint and shout, know and feel Christianity more truly. That being said it should also be noted that the very real squabbles and tensions of the various Christian denominations over space in the Holy Land churches are well-known.

<sup>15</sup> The appellation "Mosque of Omar" was used by foreigners incorrectly for years to refer to the

Dome of the Rock [*Qubbat al-Sakhra*], which is not a mosque but a shrine and was not built by Omar but by the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd el-Malik in 687 on the place where ‘Omar ibn al-Khattab prayed.

<sup>16</sup> It seems as if Kazantzakis is embellishing here, either for effect or because he forgot the facts much later on when he rewrote the Greek. First, it is impossible to see the mountains of Moab from al-Haram/Mosque of Omar, because the Haram lies lower than the Judean hills that separate Jerusalem from the Jordan valley and the mountains of Moab (the Madaba and Karak area in Jordan). Thus looking east from the Dome of the Rock one sees only the Mount of Olives and not the distant Moab mountains. Second, “quays” mean docks or piers and it is not clear what the author or translator is referring to, as there were never waterways in Jerusalem.

<sup>17</sup> This passage is one of a number of places in which Kazantzakis relies on European physical stereotypes of Jews to describe the Jews living in Jerusalem. It reveals a number of things - first, how our modern conventions have moved away from using physical stereotypes to describe people in ways that were common at this historical period; second, how Kazantzakis uses characteristics that his European/Greek readers would be familiar with to describe the people he encounters - the Jews are rapacious, greedy, hooked nose; the Arabs are groveling, dirty, and smell of goats. In this way, he taps into the whole body of Orientalist and Holy Land travel literature, as well as European racialized stereotypes that preceded him.

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Kazantzakis did not realize that the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock are from the Qur’an and not “commandments of the Prophet”, which do not exist in Islam.

<sup>19</sup> Kazantzakis here describes the Jews in the context of their lives in Europe, not in the Middle East.

<sup>20</sup> Again, Kazantzakis makes the modern reader uncomfortable with his wide-sweeping generalizations and racial and religious stereotypes that are indicative of the age in which he wrote (early twentieth century) and the European racialized mindset that he brought to his travels.

<sup>21</sup> Kazantzakis brings a modern industrial view of the land to his opinions here, one that he likely learned from his Zionist companions, and one that sees Palestine as a desert that needs to be tended to by industrious people, and those people are not the Arabs living on the land. The neglect of the land idea also ties into colonial and socialist ideological views used to justify the take over of the land from the indigenous farmers.

<sup>22</sup> He reflects the Zionist ideas here about Jewish liberation through connections to the land and labor. See Gershon Shafir’s *Lan, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1996) for more on the subject.

<sup>23</sup> This conversation between Kazantzakis and a Zionist Jewish “pioneer” reflects how Kazantzakis perceives Zionist perspectives, socialism, and his own ideas about human nature. For the Zionist, her idea of freedom is a state, a collectivity that represents her. Kazantzakis replies with the idea that the new Soviet state includes everyone and does more by giving its members compassion for others through socialist principles; she replies that this freedom and compassion comes through being with one’s own people. Kazantzakis suggests that being tied to a land and a state is actually a loss of freedom, not a gaining of freedom, because then one is no longer a citizen of the world. He expresses what he believes to be the essence of living - not just happiness, peace and security but the ability to climb upwards with action (complacency versus adversity). He justifies his ideas by saying that the Jews are the ones who have been best at this type of living, as the intellectuals and the leading men of action. Kazantzakis talks in a combination of old racialized terms and post-nationalist language, as if there is one type of Jew, one larger thing that binds them the world over, a race, and socialist ideal where everyone is a citizen of the world. The Zionist speaks in much more practical modern nation-state terminology. One also wonders how much of this conversation was re-worded/re-written in the environment of the 1950s (post-1948 but prior to 1967) when he was preparing this manuscript for republication.