

ANGELOS SIKELIANOS

The Delphic Endeavour

Selected Writings

Translated and with an Introduction by David Connolly



IKAROS

THE DELPHIC ENDEAVOUR

© 2023, Ikaros Publishing

Translated by David Connolly

Editing: Vassilis Douvitsas

Production: MITROPOLIS S.A.

Republication or reproduction of this work in whole or in part in any way, as well as its translation, adaptation or use in any way for any reproduction of a work of literature or art is forbidden in accordance with Law 2121/1993 and the Berne and Paris International Conventions, as ratified by law 100/1995. In addition, the reproduction of the layout, cover and general appearance of the book, through photocopies, electronic or any other means is forbidden, in accordance with article 51 of Law 2121/1993.

Published: March 2023

ISBN 978-960-572-565-5

IKAROS PUBLISHING · 4, VOULIS Str., 105 62 ATHENS

T.: 210 3225152 · www.ikarosbooks.gr · info@ikarosbooks.gr

ANGELOS SIKELIANOS

THE DELPHIC ENDEAVOUR

Selected Writings

Translated and with an Introduction by David Connolly

IKAROS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	11
PRELUDE	
DELPHIC DISCOURSE: I. "SEMINAL DISCOURSE" (1921)	19
FIRST DELPHIC FESTIVAL (1926-1927)	
DELPHIC FESTIVAL 1927	30
MY ENDEAVOUR AT DELPHI: THE REAL MOTIVES (1926)	33
DELPHIC APPEAL 1927	45
THE GENERAL SPIRITUAL OUTLINES OF THE DELPHIC ENDEAVOUR (1927)	52
THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF THE DELPHIC ENDEAVOUR (1927)	64
THE INEVITABLE RETURN OF THE MOTHER-IDEAS (1928)	120
DRAFT FOR THE DELPHIC UNIVERSITY (1929)	131
THE DELPHIC FESTIVAL 1930	
ANNOUNCEMENT (1929)	154
THE DELPHIC APPEAL 1930	157
[OPENING SPEECH] (1930)	166
COMPOSITE PROPOSAL CONCERNING THE DELPHIC ENDEAVOUR (1930)	168
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	171

INTRODUCTION

Come, then, my brothers in Spirit and help me that we may build together this first small Temple to man's Renaissance. Come and fearlessly step forward with me on this rough path of Cronus, for, according to the Orphic teachings, as the soul proceeds, it becomes ever younger and stronger. Help me that we might liberate mankind from this second, this third and this fourth memory, which, from rung to rung, has made mankind's mind sink lower than that of all the animals. Help me to make it regain the great memory of the Muses, the God-Memory within its own self.

Angelos Sikelianos

Sikelianos was one of Greece's great poet-visionaries in the vein of Walt Whitman or W.B. Yeats. He was a close friend of another spiritual giant of Greek Letters, Nikos Kazantzakis, with whom he was jointly proposed for the Nobel prize for Literature. His literary presence exerted a great influence over his contemporaries in the first half of the 20th century and he was a significant if subtle influence in the work of Greece's two Nobel Prize-winning poets, George Seferis and Odysseus Elytis.

Apart from his stature as poet, playwright and essayist, he was also extremely well versed in the global literary and social movements of his times as well as in the world's ancient cultures, particularly the culture of ancient Greece and the ancient Greek mystery religions. He considered the Orphic tradition to be "the Nation's most composite and purest spiritual orthodoxy". And it was on the basis of this spiritual tradition that his Delphic Endeavour was envisaged and

proposed as a solution to mankind's contemporary problems. It must be remembered that his lifetime encompassed the Balkan Wars, the Russian Revolution and two World Wars and he was painfully aware of the social and political problems of the troubled times in which he lived. He deeply felt the "unavoidable need, buried in the depth of the inevitable conflicts, for a universal illumination and elevation of the essence of life" and undertook the realisation of this spiritual renaissance of mankind as a personal mission in the form of his Delphic Endeavour.

What, we may ask, was the nature of the Delphic Endeavour? Sikelianos firmly believed that lofty spiritual principles had been revealed in ages past by enlightened leaders and legislators, but that these had been forgotten over the centuries or hidden from men's eyes. Nevertheless, as he asserts, "it is inevitable that they should shine once again with their initial value and power when it happens, as is happening in our age, that humanity is everywhere covered by gloomy clouds". He was expressing, in other words, a universal truth that learning or, perhaps better, spiritual awakening is stimulated by suffering and, elsewhere, he asserts that without this awakening, history is doomed to repeat itself.

He envisaged a new order, or rhythm as he calls it, which would illumine human history with a single spiritual vision and in which the peoples of the earth would find within themselves the lofty point where they actively meet other peoples and, after having risen to that point, would strive to restore that single vision on earth. This was not a personal utopian vision, but a universal need that, in his view, all peoples were beginning to feel. He repeatedly underlines the nostalgia – albeit subconscious – felt by the peoples of the world that "mankind might once again be able to find its authentic spiritual expression, beyond the temporal factors of history, and once again surrender its governance once and for all to these spiritual principles

INTRODUCTION

which in the course of the human race produced universal and inexhaustibly creative results”.

This, then, was the goal or direction that, as he says, he decided to enclose in a phrase accessible to all, namely, the “Delphic Endeavour”, or Delphic renaissance, and which, he stresses, did not comprise simply his personal ideal or solely a Greek ideal, but, rather, included the resurrection of all peoples and was, in its essence, of a universal character.

And because of its universal character, an equally important aspect of the Delphic Endeavour was the appeal to like-minded individuals from all over the world to join Sikelianos in his spiritual mission. For if he was convinced that the need for a spiritual renaissance was already being felt subconsciously by peoples all over the world, he was equally certain that there were individuals in all countries who were clearly conscious of this need and who had more or less clear ideas about how such a renaissance might be accomplished: a veritable spiritual vanguard. He writes: “This then is the central aim of the Delphic Endeavour: to gather together all those elements necessary for this enormous synthesis; to unite as many select and initiated individuals as are ready and want to work to form this higher spiritual autonomy that our age is seeking; to create the atmosphere in which this autonomy will gestate organically and spontaneously as the model of a physiological and intrinsically universal Teaching.”

He separates these “seekers of God”, as he calls them, into two categories: those who seek God, driven by a huge anthropocentric pull (by the pull of all the conflicts and of the suffering masses), and those few who set out on paths that appear distant and foreign to the common expectation of the world and who “[...] having found a ‘seed of God’ deep within them, are struggling to reopen it in the darkness, rendering their spirits and bodies worthy to gaze fully, and not faintly and hazily, on the Divine”. There is no doubt in Sikelianos’

mind that it is only through such individuals, armed, as he says, with will power, with vision and with a single method, that history might undertake to know itself, to rise, to be enlightened and uplifted.

The creation of a nucleus comprising such individuals would be able, in his view, to produce what entire peoples not linked by a common spiritual vibration could not produce and he refers to similar experiments during the course of world history to support his view. He writes: "The creation of such a nucleus constitutes the goal of a spiritual endeavour represented for centuries by whatever most pure and most proud the history of the Earth has to show [...]. The entire higher spiritual generation of the world, from the time of the dissolution of the ancient Mysteries and the Pythagorean communities to Giordano Bruno, who, in the Middle Ages, rediscovered the Orphic and Pythagorean ideal in the Sicilian tradition, down to Nietzsche, dreams of the stable historical creation of such a nucleus and is completely imbued with this vision. [...] And the concept of the spiritual alliance, the concept of the higher spiritual family, despite the enormous impediments of our times, is today trying to reflourish more vitally than ever before on the ruins of a world and to regain its rights – of which the prime and most sacred is: to be able to gather around a free and pure centre its many scattered members from all over."

So given that the need for universal spiritual principles was the most pressing demand of his times (a subconscious demand of all individuals and peoples, as Sikelianos believed), and given the existence of a spiritual alliance of individuals seeking to satisfy that demand, the sole problem that remained was how it might be possible to establish and organise this endeavour. For such a nucleus of like-minded individuals requires a single centre if their separate individual endeavours are not to be constantly confounded as to their extent and intention. And it was Sikelianos' belief that Delphi provided such a centre.

INTRODUCTION

Delphi was widely regarded in ancient times as the spiritual centre of the world. The myth is well-known concerning how Zeus, in order to find the centre of the earth, released two eagles from opposite ends of the earth and how these two eagles met in Delphi. But also, its very name, meaning 'womb', from which comes the Greek word 'adelphos' (from the same womb, i.e. brother) means that Delphi lends itself as a centre for a spiritual fraternity. Delphi was once, of course, the meeting-place for the Amphictyony, a league of city-states and an ancient forerunner of the League of Nations founded in 1920, at the time that Sikelianos was conceiving the Delphic Endeavour, making it an obvious choice for the new world spiritual amphictyony that he envisaged.

He explains that he chose Delphi because, being totally timeless, free from every cause of discord and irregularity and maintaining solely the glow of an important spiritual heritage, it lent itself to the universality and clarity of his goal. "I chose it," he says, "in order to call to its arena the conscious currents of our age, because, from the times that it was immersed in the farthest realms of myth down to its last historic spark, it was always imbued with a single universal spirit." And he is keen to point out that his choice of Delphi as the centre for this spiritual nucleus is not based on nationalistic considerations. He proposed Delphi as a first centralised support for the spiritual alliance of individuals in order that, later, in keeping with the entire spirit of the endeavour, "*a world spiritual and academic union* might be promoted".

It is perhaps interesting how he links Delphi with another of the earth's great spiritual centres: the Himalayas. He writes: "Mount Parnassus is spiritually framed by the Himalayas and, from any one of its peaks, the initiates can gaze upon the entire horizon of the Earth. And it is then that the universal Temple of Apollo begins to rise, splendid as never before and once again as the impeccable model for all pure spiritual associations on Earth." And, undoubtedly, it

was the ancient sanctuary's ability to unite within it all the currents coming from both East and West that led him to propose Delphi as a world spiritual centre for "all the peoples who would strive to achieve an inner mastery and a universal well-intentioned disposition".

And what of the role of the Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930? The two festivals staged in Delphi included the presentation of tragedies by Aeschylus, athletic contests, the exhibition of traditional craft-work, folk dances, etc., but their purpose, as Sikelianos repeatedly points out, was "no more than the prelude to the organising, in those magnetic surroundings, of prestigious gatherings during which envoys from all Nations will investigate the higher spiritual means in order that they may secure a moral life and a deeply social affinity between peoples". Their deeper purpose, then, was to draw together the spiritual vanguard from all over the world. They were organised to highlight the endeavour, but the aim was much deeper and Sikelianos more than once expresses his concern that the deeper spiritual motives may be hidden in some way by the first levels of their outer presentation and application. Perhaps this was the case since the Festivals undoubtedly achieved a fair amount of success, but the deeper spiritual aim was not realised. And yet, perhaps they succeeded simply in laying the foundation stone. Sikelianos would have been satisfied. "If the Delphic Endeavour manages to lay a foundation stone for this Work," he says, "this will be sufficient as to my own personal responsibility. Nevertheless, I hope that this stone will be laid and that it will be laid firmly."

Perhaps he might be accused of utopianism. Perhaps he was simply ahead of his times. But he believed that there had never been an age more suitable than the one in which he lived for what he calls "the universal outburst of this spirit". He believed that the very pressure of events in his times would of necessity bring this about. "This occurrence is synonymous," he says, "with the awakening of mankind's

INTRODUCTION

true religious spirit, corresponding each time in depth, in extent and in clarity to the degree of the intensity of the various conflicts surrounding it.”

It could be argued that our present age is, in fact, more ready than his was for a universal outburst of spirit. Almost a century has passed since Sikelianos’ Delphic Endeavour. Writing of the individuals comprising the spiritual vanguard of almost a hundred years ago, he says: “When, if not at this moment, would be the right time for them to attribute to this spirit all of its significance and mission? What other moment will they find more favourable in order to raise from the masses mankind’s consummate memory, to awaken the vast dynamic that is sleeping within them and to give it once again its own rhythm, dignity and beauty? What greater moment exists for wresting the human soul from all the slavery and fanaticism, for bathing it again in the sense of universal fate, for imbuing it and cultivating in it its pure worldly relations?” His words ring even more true today and remain equally relevant. Never has there been a greater need for a World League of Nations founded on spirit, in which every nation and every person, guided by an enlightened consciousness, will play a necessary part.

We are living in an age in which, in a very short period of time, global consciousness of spiritual principles has increased immensely. Perhaps now, after the pioneering efforts of Sikelianos one hundred years ago, the conditions are riper than ever for realising the Delphic Endeavour.

David Connolly

PRELUDE

DELPHIC DISCOURSE:

I. “SEMINAL DISCOURSE” (1921)

My spiritual catharsis would never have been complete without the emotional shock which, from the very beginning of my clash with the currents of our age [–some fifteen years ago–], suddenly gave rise to the particular Rhythm that, as a kind of conscious spontaneity, awoke in the very depths of my being.

*

It was the time when my soul, deeply stirred by the Muses, was radically re-fathoming itself and when the lands, the elements and the centuries were all crying out in one voice that, in spite of the times and their own decline, they would unexpectedly merge once again through the one invincible spirit. And it was the time when they cried out in my soul:

“If you know others, regardless of whence they come, whom you feel, should they open their mouths, will project their voices, their souls and their hearts in perfect harmony to everyone and everything – to the waves, to the Earth and the stars, to the flowers, to animals and to people, to the centuries and the cycles of centuries – so that their discourse might lead everything to a purposeful encounter, then humbly prepare yourself to welcome them.

But if you feel that they are slow in appearing, that they hesitate to set out and rise up with You, then get up and go forth and call out to them to hasten.”

At such times, my soul found itself in a vast nebula filled with the pollen of countless seeds that flew up and scented the air, like the efflorescence that rises from flowers and trees in the breezes of May.

I admit that at that time I was unable (I say that then I was unable whereas now I know that I am unwilling), completely unable, to have a different sense of Nature, a different sense of history, a different sense of my own soul. Yet far from this bringing confusion to my mind, on the contrary, the vortex of all these forces determined and invigorated my inner Rhythm.

Just as the initiate in the Dionysian mysteries was obliged, bounding towards the centre of the temple, to arrive at a hanging stamen full of pollen – a symbol of man’s cosmogonic role –, and, on reaching it, to sprinkle the pollen all around him and on the others, so too, at that moment, my soul bounded to the centre of the global anguish, longing to seize from above – rather than cowering before the influences all around – the seminal beginnings of a new cycle of life.

It was not wholly Apollo who was speaking in my soul then, but the Dionysiac Apollo, who awoke deep within me all the intoxication of that vibrant moment.

Thus, one day when my mind, completely immersed in the Frenzy of the global shock, soared in a vision, it saw around it all those who would begin to give me their hands, and thus the abundance of my heart spoke, from the Frenzy in which I was immersed, to all of those:

That history might know its summer, it first requires people who will discover it entire within themselves. Not those who, in our current times, appear to have clearly promoted it, but others who, setting out from afar and somewhat foreign to the deep expectation of the world, will one day see it emerging from everything and from their own souls.