

THE NIGHT PLAY OF THE MACEDONIAN SUN IN THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA

This is a place I have never been before. I have never breathed its air, never heard its language. Its wind has never touched my skin, and I have never burned beneath its sun. I do not even know what it feels like to walk through its streets. I have never tasted its grapes, seen its vineyards, or drunk its wine. I have only read about it in history books and stories... I have always closed my eyes and imagined it.

What would it have been like to live in a city of pharaohs? To exist there as a woman—would I have managed?

Ridiculous as it sounds, I probably would have been killed because I could not obey. Or perhaps the male-dominated world would have feared me because I was too rational. I do not know.

In my imagination, I have belonged to every nation and every civilization. I have lived in Rome, then in the Ottoman world. I have gone to Egypt and fled from Japan. Living in imagination is beautiful. You only have to concern yourself with the scenery. But once history and lived reality enter the picture, I

do not even know enough to decide which place and which period of the world would have been the best to live in. I cannot even bring two comparable options to mind.

Even as an artist, you see, my imagination is very limited.

Anyway.

This is Alexandria. The city Alexander the Great had designed after conquering Egypt, on the island of Pharos. The place I am in did not exist in Alexander's time. Of course, one could hardly expect such a bloodthirsty man to have had time for a place this magnificent.

And the building I am inside is the Library of Alexandria, founded by Ptolemy I Soter, son of Lagus and one of Alexander's commanders. The name behind the idea of establishing such a library was Euclid.

Alexander was born in the fifth year of his father King Philippos's reign, on the sixth day of the month of Loios*. This corresponds to the twentieth day of July in 356 BCE. When I learned that, like Caesar, he was a Cancer, I placed the two side by side and was not particularly surprised. In terms of what they did, they do resemble one another.

Plutarch wrote of Alexander's education at the age of thirteen:

“He not only received lessons in ethics and politics, but also learned from Aristotle certain teachings and secrets that wise men transmitted orally, without committing them to books, and which were unknown to most people.”

Alexander’s teacher was Aristotle. The famous Aristotle we know: the son of King Philippos’s physician, raised in the Macedonian court, who went to Athens to study philosophy with Plato, later settled in the Persian city of Assos, and specialized there in zoology.

One of the most precious things in Alexander’s life was his horse. Most of us know this. Plutarch’s anecdote about how Alexander first met his beloved horse helped me form several impressions of him:

“Philoneikos of Thessaly once brought a horse to King Philippos. He asked thirteen talents for this horse, named Boukephalos. They went down into the valley to test him. The horse appeared ill-tempered, disobedient, and extremely difficult to manage. Although he seemed to hear the commands of Philippos’s men, whenever anyone approached him he kicked and reared.

Annoyed, Philippos realized that the horse could not be controlled and ordered his men to take it away, saying that he did not want it.

Alexander, who was present, said, 'They are losing such a magnificent horse because they are too incompetent and ignorant to know how to control and train him.'

His father said nothing at first. But when Alexander repeated the same words insistently, raising his voice and almost losing control of himself, Philippos angrily rebuked his son:

'Why do you criticize your elders? Do you think you know how to handle a horse better than they do?'

'I do not know about other horses,' Alexander replied, 'but I can certainly manage this one better than anyone else.'

'And if you cannot do what you claim, what penalty should we give you for speaking so recklessly?'

'By Zeus,' Alexander replied, 'then I will pay for the horse myself.'

Those present began to laugh, and father and son made an agreement about the money.

Alexander immediately ran toward the horse, took hold of the reins, and turned the animal's head toward the sun. He had understood why the horse

was frightened. Each time it saw its own restless shadow on the ground, it panicked and became unruly.

Alexander stroked the horse's head and walked beside it for a while. The animal was seething within, burning like fire. Realizing this, the prince quietly slipped off his cloak, leapt onto the horse in a single movement, and seated himself firmly.

Without hurting the animal, he gently drew the reins and adjusted the bit without injuring its mouth. When he saw that the horse had calmed, was no longer afraid, and was eager to run, he loosened the reins and let it move freely. Encouraging it with words and touching it lightly with his heels, he sent the animal racing forward.

At first, the king and those around him waited in fearful silence. But Alexander turned the reins aside, made a wide curve, and galloped back.

Everyone rejoiced and applauded excitedly. His father swelled with pride; they even say that he wept with joy. When Alexander dismounted, his father embraced and kissed him and said:

‘My son, seek a kingdom worthy of you, for Macedonia is too small for you.’”*

His father was absolutely right.

When the kingdom passed to Alexander, neither Macedonia nor Anatolia was enough for him. Even destroying the vast Persian Empire was not enough. He continued conquering every place he stepped into, all the way to India.

We know that these conquests were also accompanied by enormous massacres. According to Diodorus, Alexander launched a brief campaign against the Mardi in the region of Hyrcania after they stole his horse Boukephalos:

“Because the animal was perfect, the king went mad with rage at the loss. He ordered every tree in the region to be cut down and, through interpreters, announced to the inhabitants that unless they returned his horse, he would leave not one stone upon another in their cities and would begin a mass slaughter.

Seeing that his threats were immediately being put into action and terrified by what was happening, the locals returned the king's horse together with priceless gifts. They also sent fifty men to beg the king's forgiveness. Alexander kept the most important of these men as hostages.”

I immediately remembered something Prof. Dr. İlber Ortaylı said in a program about Mehmed the Conqueror:

“In August 1462, Mehmed crossed into Asia at the head of a small Janissary unit. He first went to the Meander Plain and visited the ruins of Troy, the legendary mound of Achilles, and the mound of Ajax. Following the convention of historians of the period, Kritovoulos records a speech he claims Mehmed delivered. In this speech Mehmed praises the Trojan heroes; he criticizes the Greeks, Macedonians, Thessalonians, and Moreans for destroying magnificent Ilium. But he says that he punished their descendants for the crimes their ancestors committed against the peoples of Asia.”

Alexander the Great, remembered for slaughter and destruction, is also remembered for his power and victories. I, however, always think of him not only as someone equipped well enough to accomplish all of this, but also through his relationship with philosophy, mathematics, science, and poetry, alongside his brutality.

I even imagine him in the form of an owl, in the Library of Alexandria that carries his name, washed in moonlight in the middle of the night.

Because I imagine myself touching the works resting on those shelves.

Even if they are only copies, how ancient they are.

And how real.

While I am speaking about such an important subject, my Kashmir interrupts me.

Because until this point, while writing, my daughter had been here with me. I had been feeling the cashmere softness and warmth of her between my hands, and between the lines I would look at her beautiful face as though I had not seen it in years, gently caressing her with my eyes.

At this exact line, she is no longer here.

She left.

This is the clearest reflection of the sorrow I feel toward the past.

Just as time covers over old pain, it also separates me from those I love and leaves me in the arms of completely new griefs and longings that I must learn to endure.

And Chopin's *Nocturne No. 20*, which accompanies me through this writing now just as it did yesterday—how much pain has it lived through with me? How many traces of my grief have seeped into its notes?

It seems that its fate, too, was to be washed in my sorrows again and again.

In Greek mythology, Athena is the goddess of wisdom, and an owl is always beside her. Like Athena, the owl symbolizes wisdom and intelligence. Yet its

voice and gaze have also been associated with ill omen. It is even said that owl calls were heard before Caesar was assassinated.

Alexander carried philosophers with him. Although bloodshed was undoubtedly one of his most dominant characteristics, I still cannot stop myself from thinking about him through the intelligence, knowledge, and intuition that later drew leaders born in other lands and living in other times into pursuit of his ideas and achievements.

In this sense, wisdom and ill omen take form in his existence just as they take form in the owl.

I am in the library.

There are notes on the shelves.

This is my inner world.

This is my subconscious.

My twelfth house in astrology.

Everything behind the closed doors of my mind is in this room.

Every one of us carries our own darkness within. Even if I am aware of much of mine, I can place some of it here.

That is why moonlight falls across these shelves and this library.

That is why I gave birth to the Moon within this night.

There is something here from the work of Aristotle, Alexander's beloved teacher:

"Put briefly, I killed my own mother;
did I do so willingly because she wished it, or
did I do so unwillingly when she did not wish it?"¹

There can be no reason for this to occupy a place in my subconscious other than my desire for justice—the sensitivity through which I constantly question, measure, and evaluate everything around me.

Then, on another shelf, washed in moonlight, I immediately see his teacher as well: my beloved Plato.

"There may be the power of sight in the eyes, and their owner may try to use it; color may also be present. But unless there is a third thing, naturally adapted specifically for this purpose, nothing will be seen and the colors will remain invisible.

— What is this thing you are speaking of?

— What you call light, of course."²

When our subject is precisely light...

When a night has just risen inside me...

There are also some lines from Homer, whom Alexander loved dearly. When I chose these lines, I had not yet internalized these words of Odysseus so deeply:

“You have spoken foolishly, stranger; you resemble a reckless man.

The gods do not give every beautiful and good thing to one man:

beauty, intelligence, and mastery of speech are not all gathered in one person.

To one man a god may not grant beauty,

yet when he speaks, all eyes turn toward him;

with measured words he wins the affection of the people,

and wherever he walks they look upon him like a god.”³

Ah, I almost forgot.

Just now, with my fresh pain, this too has become visible between the parchments:

“Why do mortals blame the gods for so many things!

They think all their troubles come from us,

yet through their own recklessness

they bring suffering upon themselves beyond what fate has allotted.”⁴

This must simply be the voice of the suffering I have inflicted upon myself in this world.

Sunlight or moonlight conceals no darkness.

Just as mathematics defines things and makes them comprehensible.

And now Euclid seems almost to define my pain:

The Idea of Equality

1. Things equal to the same thing are also equal to one another.
2. If equal things are added to equal things, the wholes are equal.
3. If equal things are subtracted from equal things, the remainders are equal.
4. If equal things are added to unequal things, the wholes are unequal.
5. Things that are doubles of the same thing are equal to one another.
6. Things that are halves of the same thing are equal to one another.
7. Things that coincide with one another are equal to one another.
8. The whole is greater than the part.
9. Two straight lines do not enclose a space.⁵

Strange.

My mind is at once completely aligned with the certainty of mathematics and entirely in conjunction with the emotions and sorrows of these words.

For these lines revealed by a light that may not be as masculine and powerful as the Sun, but is feminine and powerful like the Moon, I am deeply grateful—to the moonlight, to the library, and to myself.

My subconscious is not made up of this small piece of writing alone, of course...

There are many more things waiting for the right time to come out.

(1) μητέρα κατέκταν τήν ἐμήν,

βραχύς λόγος.

ἐκῶν ἐκοῦσαν, ἢ <οὐχ> ἐκοῦσαν οὐχ ἐκῶν.

(2) Ἐνούσης που ἐν ὄμμασιν ὄψεως καὶ ἐπιχειροῦντος τοῦ ἔχοντος χρῆσθαι αὐτῇ,

παρούσης δὲ χρώας ἐν αὐτοῖς, ἐὰν μὴ παραγένηται γένος τρίτον ἰδίᾳ ἐπ' αὐτὸ

τοῦτο πεφυκός, οἶσθα ὅτι ἢ τε ὄψις οὐδὲν ὄψεται, τὰ τε χρώματα ἔσται ἀόρατα.

Τίνος δὴ λέγεις, ἔφη, τούτου;

Ὅ δὴ σὺ καλεῖς, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, φῶς.

(3) ξεῖν', οὐ καλὸν ἔειπες· ἀτασθάλῳ ἀνδρὶ ἔοικας.

οὕτως οὐ πάντεσσι θεοὶ χαρίεντα δίδουσιν

ἀνδράσιν, οὔτε φυὴν οὔτ' ἄρ' φρένας οὔτ' ἀγορητύν.

ἄλλος μὲν γάρ τ' εἶδος ἀκιδνότερος πέλει ἀνὴρ,
ἀλλὰ θεὸς μορφήν ἔπεσι, στέφει, οἱ δέ τ' ἐς αὐτὸν
τερπόμενοι λεύσσουσιν· ὁ δ' ἀσφαλέως ἀγορεύει
αἰδοῖ μελιχίῃ, μετὰ δὲ πρέπει ἀγρομένοισιν,
ἐρχόμενον δ' ἀνὰ ἄστρῳ θεὸν ὧς εἰσορόωσιν.

(4) ὦ πόποι, οἷον δὴ νῦν θεοὺς βροτοὶ αἰτιόωνται:

ἐξ ἡμέων γάρ φασι κάκ' ἔμμεναι, οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὑπὲρ μόνον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν,

(5) Κοιναί ἔννοιαί θ'

α' Τὰ τῶ αὐτῶ ἴσα καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἐστὶν ἴσα.

β' Καὶ ἐὰν ἴσοις ἴσα προστεθῇ, τὰ ὅλα ἐστὶν ἴσα.

γ' Καὶ ἐὰν ἀπὸ ἴσων ἴσα ἀφαιρεθῇ, τὰ καταλειπόμενά ἐστὶν ἴσα.

δ' Καὶ ἐὰν ἀνίσοις ἴσα προστεθῇ, τὰ ὅλα ἐστὶν ἄνισα.

ε' Καὶ τὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ διπλάσια ἴσα ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν.

ς' Καὶ τὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἡμίση ἴσα ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν.

ζ' Καὶ τὰ ἐφαρμόζοντα ἐπ' ἄλληλα ἴσα ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν.

η' Καὶ τὸ ὅλον τοῦ μέρους μεῖζον [ἐστίν].

θ' Καὶ δύο εὐθεῖαι χωρίον οὐ περιέχουσιν.

seha