The folklore museum of Tsamantas

The museum is located in the village of Tsamantas, which lies in the prefecture of Thesprotia in Epirus, northern Greece. It was established in 1983 by the folklorist, writer and poet Kostas Zoulas, who was born in the village. A meticulous collector of traditional tools and other items used by his ancestors, he founded the museum for the benefit of all those in Greece and elsewhere who are interested in the region's cultural heritage.

The museum is housed within a traditional building that was once a site of learning: the village's primary school. Now approaching its 20th birthday, it fulfils an important role in relation to maintaining, preserving and promoting folkloric traditions and culture. The museum has also developed an educational role, providing students, researchers and scholars with a valuable insight into the evolution of Greek cultural heritage. It has contributed to many national and international exhibitions, seminars and other cultural events, thereby promoting its rich legacy.

Constitutionally, the museum is a non-profit-making organisation officially called the Society of the Folklore Museum of Tsamantas. It is a private legal entity, managed by an executive committee, but is recognised as a museum by the Greek Ministry of Culture. However, the Ministry's funding meets only a very small part of its needs, which are multi-faceted. This lack of resources has also constrained promotion of the museum and precluded its further development – a lamentable situation, given the fact that it is so well-known, not only in Greece but also the rest of the world, as shown by the many thousands of people who have expressed their admiration for the museum in its visitor's book.
The executive committee is therefore seeking financial assistance and other types of support from the worldwide community, in order to continue its service to mankind for the foreseeable future.
This brief presentation of the Folklore Museum of Tsamantas was written by its founder Kostas Zoulas and translated by Dimitrios Konstadakopulos.

Photos from the folklore museum

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ΑΙΘΟΥΣΑ
ΠΑΡΑΔΟΣΙΑΚΩΝ
ΑΝΑΠΑΡΑΣΤΑΣΕΩΝ

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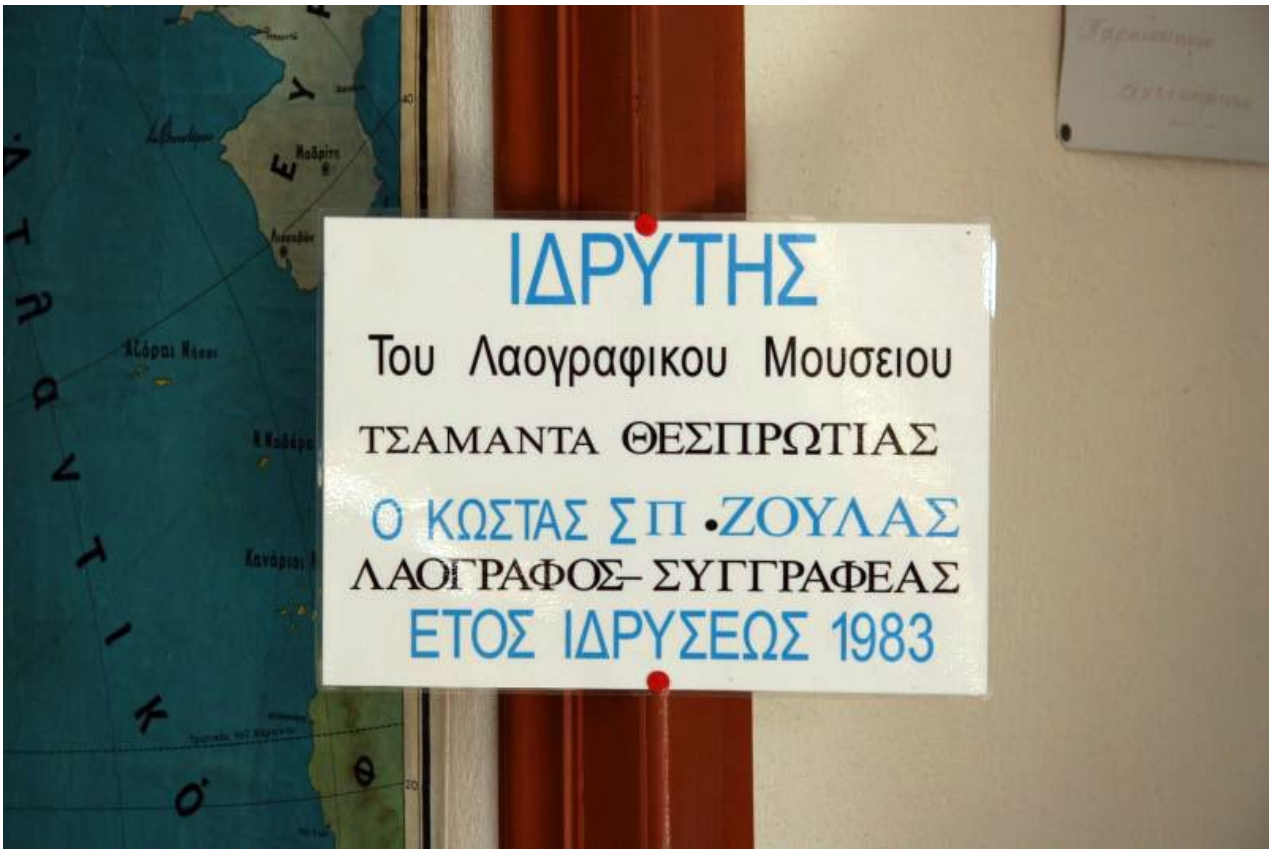
ΑΝΑΠΑΡΑΣΤΑΣΕΩΝ


ΘΕΣΠΡΩΤΙΚΑ ΝΕΑ
ΜΕΤΡΑ - ΣΤΑΘΜΟΣ


ΙΔΡΥΤΗΣ
Του Λαογραφικου Μουσειου
ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ ΘΕΣΠΡΩΤΙΑΣ
Ο ΚΩΣΤΑΣ Σ Π •ΖΟΥΛΑΣ
ΛΑΟΓΡΑΦΟΣ– ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΑΣ
ΕΤΟΣ ΙΔΡΥΣΕΩΣ 1983


ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΣ
ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ
ΙΔΡΥΤΗΣ


Παρακαλούμε μην αγγίζετε


Διακοσμητική
ξυλόγλυπτη
φιγούρα για το
καλό δωμάτιο
του σπιτικού


ΠΑΡΑΔΟΣΙΑΚΗ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΙΑ
ΦΟΡΕΣΙΑ ΜΑΛΟΥΝΙΟΥ
ΔΩΡΕΑ ΑΔΕΛΦΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΜΑΛΟΥΝΙΟΥ
ΣΤΟ ΛΑΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟ ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟ ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ 1991
ΚΑΤΑΣΚΕΥΗ: ΠΕΤΡΟΣ Γ. ΜΟΥΚΑΣ - ΜΑΛΟΥΝΙ


ενδυμασίες και
διάφορα είδη
γυναικείου
ρουχισμού για
νιά, μεστή και
την γριούλα
μας των περα-
σμένων μας
καιρών περίτε-
χνα φκιαν


Το δεσποτικό της μητροπολίτικης μας εκκλησιάς (της Παναγιάς) με τα καντήλια του Αγίου Μάρκου και πολύ παλιάς χρόνων εικόνες αγίων

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Βαρέλα για το δροσερό νερό

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Πώς ντύνονταν
η νύφη μας τα
περασμένα


Παρακαλο
μην εγγίζε

ΕΝΩΣΗ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ ΛΟΓΟΤΕΧΝΩΝ

ΣΤΑΣΙΝΟΠΟΥΛΕΙΟ ΒΡΑΒΕΙΟ

Το Διοικητικό Συμβούλιο της ΕΝΩΣΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ ΛΟΓΟΤΕΧΝΩΝ

ΑΠΟΝΕΜΕΙ

Αυτό το δίπλωμα χρυσό μετάλλιο του ΣΤΑΣΙΝΟΠΟΥΛΕΙΟΥ ΒΡΑΒΕΙΟΥ για το καλύτερο βιβλίο
στο λογοτέχνη κ. Κωστα Ζουλα
για το βιβλίο του με τίτλο ΕΞ ΑΚΑΝΘΩΝ το ρόδο
που κρίθηκε σαν το καλύτερο των έργων του και την ίδρυση δυο λαογραφικών Μουσείων.

ΑΘΗΝΑ 8 Μαρτίου 1995

Ο Πρόεδρος
ΝΙΚΟΣ Α. ΣΤΑΣΙΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ

Ο Αντιπρόεδρος
Κ. ΜΙΚΟΛΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ

Γραμματέας
ΡΟΖΙΤΑ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ


SLOVACCHIA
VIENNA
AUSTRIA
BUDAPEST
UNGHERIA
ROMAÑIA
Alpi Transilvane
Bucarest
Odessa
CRIMEA
Mar d'Azov
Sebastopoli
Costanza
Mar Nero
Trieste
Venezia
Bologna
Firenze
IUGOSLAVIA
Belgrado
Balcani
BULGARIA
Varna
Burgas
COSTANTINOPOLI
Adrianopoli
Monti Ponti
ITALIA
M. Adriatico
ROMA
NAPOLI
Bari
Taranto
Sardegna
M. Tirreno
ALBANIA
Tirana
Salonicco
Olimpo
GRECIA
Angora
TURCHIA
Smirne
Tauro
Palermo
Messina
Sicilia
Catania
Mare Ionio
Malta
La Valletta
C.Passaro
C.Matapan
Candia
Rodi
DODECANNESO
Scarpanto
Cipro
Larnaca
Beirut
Aleppo
MEDITERRANEO
G. di Gabes
Tripoli
Gerusalemme


Η ΠΡΟΤΗ ΑΔΕΛΦΩΤΙΤΑ ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΙΩΤΩΝ
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Ο ΖΗΚΟ ΚΟΝΤΟΥΛΗΣ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΠΗ ΚΟΚΤΟΣΗΣ


Η ΝΙΚΗ
Η κήρυξις του πολέμου
Ζωντανές μνήμες
σε μουσείο - θησαυρό
Η ΝΙΚΗ
The New York Times
ΑΚΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ
ΚΥΜΗ
ΘΕΣΠΡΩΤΙΚΑ ΝΕΑ


Δημοτικον Σχολειον
«Τσαμαντα» 1928


Σχολείο του Τσαμαντα του 1937 - 1938

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1937


ΚΟΥΜΠΑΡΑΣ
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ΤΟΜΟΣ 4


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ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ ΗΠΕΙΡΟΥ
ΤΟΣ ΙΔΡΥΣ ΩΣ 1983
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ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ Δ. ΜΠΕΛΛΟΣ
ΜΕΓΑΣ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΗΣ
ΤΟΥ ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ
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ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟ ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ
ΕΤΟΣ ΙΔΡΥΣΕΩΣ 1983

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"Papa Peschos and the lamp of St. George"

by Kostas Zoulas, writer and folklorist

Preface

The drawing of the Greek-Albanian border by an International Commission, on behalf of the world powers, was a matter of the utmost importance to south-east Europe. In 1913, many village communities found themselves in the middle of the disputed territory. This was the case for the people of Tsamantas, an historic village lying below the southern slope of Mount Mourgana. The drawing of the border, based on ethnological issues, was a lengthy and disputed affair subject to extensive international adjudication. Moreover, it brought about unbearable isolation and economic stagnation to the border communities of Epirus. This short story – eloquently told by the folklorist Kostas Zoulas – is based on local narratives. Our aim is to make an important piece of literature more generally available by translating it into English

Dimitrios Konstadakopulos.
Bristol, January 2004

For days now, heavy black clouds had loomed above the villages near the famous Mount Mourgana, in the northerly region of Epirus. They symbolized the serious threat to freedom which had tortured the souls of the locals for such a long time. The villages were only a very short distance – just a leap across the landscape – from their sisters in what is now southern Albania. The year was 1923, and the drawing up of the Greek-Albanian border was taking place. The world powers had sent a commission from all corners of the globe to fix the border from end to end: over on that side, Northern Epirus, where our unredeemed brothers lived; on this side, Greece, whose people were determined to preserve its territory.

In every struggle over borders, those living close to them suffer the most and make the greatest sacrifices, and the people of Mount Mourgana were no exception. With the dawn of each new day, uncertainty as to where they would end up living – whether in Greece or in Albania – was their main preoccupation, and made them afraid and very anxious. There was particular concern about the Italian member of the International Commission, since his country was opposed to Greece's territorial claims, and was backing Albania in order to gain it as a protectorate. Rumours had been circulating in every village that the Italian was a poisonous snake, working against the interests of our country.

Again and again the Commissioners and the army authorities climbed Mount Mourgana, measuring along its backbone with all their various instruments, in case just a single centimetre was given unjustly to one state or the other. Aware of the gravity of their task, in setting the border between two nations, these men were doing their job extremely carefully, and taking plenty of time. But at last they finished, and all was ready to be signed. There could be no going back on their decision. The members of the Commission were very tired by now and asked for respite in the village of Tsamantas, known for the warmth of its hospitality and its cold, refreshing waters.

Meanwhile, word had passed from mouth to mouth that the villages at the foot of Mount Mourgana would end up being part of Albania. Evidence in support of this was the joy they saw on the face of the Italian. It was ironic that so many foreign powers, deeply envious of Greece, had made attempts at various points in history to destroy her, when they had gained so much from her ancient civilization. Of course, nothing was certain yet; but the very idea of losing their newly gained freedom, after four hundred years of Turkish occupation, was just too awful to consider. And yet the villagers felt encouraged by the fact that God had always protected them; this was widely accepted by everyone in Greece, and in particular by those that guarded, day and night, the national borders. They needed His intervention now, to ensure their villages stayed in Greece. And He didn't let them down.

This is the story of how He granted their wish. The man He chose to act as His executor was Damianos Peschos, who served as Abbot in the Monastery of St George in Kamitsani, Tsamantas; and the victory was achieved by means of one of the Monastery's kantiles – the priceless oil-filled vigil lamps that hang before the iconostasis.

Now, the head of the International Commission was a German. His country, of course, was distant from our own, although spiritually very close, since its children studied ancient Greek history with tremendous respect and eagerness. Not that the German was expected to do us a favour; but at least he didn't spread fear amongst the villagers, as the Italian did. It happened just by chance – or could it have been divine intervention? – that the German was by profession an archaeologist, and as such would have studied our nation's history, and also learned our language. He heard about the Byzantine Monastery of St George and expressed a desire to see it, telling the other members of the Commission that they could accompany him if they wished. The Monastery was still in all its glory, and its Abbot (who was destined to be its last) was Papa Peschos, whose former secular name had been Dimitrios. He had succeeded Abbot Ignatios, known before as Stavros Alexiou, who had also been a native of Tsamantas.

Let us acquaint ourselves more fully with Papa Peschos, a humble servant of God who enjoyed the privilege of being one of His agents here on earth. Born in Tsamantas in 1840, he was a good-hearted man and a talented diplomat, full of love for his neighbours. He was also very just and wise and clever, and all of these attributes remained with him throughout his life. He entered the priesthood and in 1898 was made head of the Monastery, initially with the title of Commissioner. Although he was fundamentally mild by nature, he could nevertheless be tough in order to benefit the Monastery or help sinners to redeem themselves. He earned respect for himself, and was eventually made Archimandrite, taking the name of Damianos; and finally he was granted the title of Abbot, which he held until his death. The Monastery thrived during his administration and increased in prosperity, and through the wisdom of his management its wealth was put to good effect in helping the suffering. He made the Monastery famous, not only throughout the region but also in the rest of Greece, and ran it – with only a two-year absence from 1915 – until April 23rd 1927, when he departed this world and went to join the Lord.

But let us now continue on the path we left …

The members of the Commission went to the Monastery, followed by the people of Tsamantas, and were enchanted by the beauty of its location – which was only to be expected, since its founder was a man of artistic disposition, with a keen eye for aesthetics. At the central gate of the Monastery, the Abbot was waiting with his entourage, and was pleased when the German introduced himself in reasonably good Greek. Everyone entered the church, and having admired the many religious treasures, eventually they left, with the exception of the German archaeologist. He remained frozen in front of the Orea Pyli – the 'Holy Gate' – with his eyes fixed on one of the three priceless vigil lamps. This particular one was a gift to the Monastery from the Patriarchate in Constantinople, and was of the utmost religious and artistic value. He couldn't stop staring at it, and when Papa Peschos – in a customary gesture to his guests – provided a feast for the members of the Commission, the German failed to appear.

The Abbot was not surprised by the archaeologist's absorption. The German, he said to himself, must recognize the worth of all he saw there, and would want to admire and study the treasures. He was clearly in his element. But as time passed, and he still could not avert his gaze from the most beautiful lamp of the three, the Abbot decided to approach him; and finding him quite unconscious of his presence, he coughed discreetly. But even when the German became aware of the Abbot, he still couldn't tear his eyes away from the lamp. It was clear that he so appreciated its beauty and value that he was keen to own one.

The astute cleric was very quick to perceive this. Given his guest's profession, it was only natural that he should covet what he saw. His intuition was proven to be correct when he heard the German's strangled, pleading voice: 'Father, I must have one of the lamps. Whatever you want in return, I shall give it. Do you hear me? Whatever you want.'

The Abbot, of course, had heard him very well. And now, once again, he showed his expertise in psychology and diplomacy. Like his villagers, he had been eaten by anxiety over the border agreement, shortly to be signed; and in a flash, a clever idea came to his mind, as bright as a ray of sunshine. A plan began to develop, but he could see that he would need to tread carefully, and offer the German plenty of encouragement, in view of the difficult bargaining that lay ahead. Eventually, though, he answered him.

'My son, I would gladly discuss this with you. And if it were possible, I should give you the lamp you're so eager to acquire. But as you know, I am only a humble servant. My master here is first of all God, and then St. George, to whom this Monastery is dedicated.'

The blood drained from the face of the archaeologist, as if his life were ebbing away. The Abbot had made it clear that the owner of the lamp was St George himself, and that for him, Papa Peschos, to give it away was not an option. 'I don't see how I can help you,' said the Abbot, 'as merely a servant here.'

'The lamp, Father, the lamp,' repeated the German, 'in exchange for whatever the Saint would wish.' This was exactly what the shrewd Abbot had hoped to hear: the German asking the Saint now for something that appeared to be impossible. He could see the man was aching to possess it, and was hanging on the Abbot's every word, in the hope of being the happiest of men; and it was clear that he'd do anything to own it.

The cleric murmured softly to himself: 'The villages must be left as they are, and the borders set beyond them.' But it was still not quite the time to say this openly.

'The lamp, Father, the lamp,' persisted the German. And now the old man thought to himself: Enough. No more pleading, in case he becomes discouraged and loses interest. So he said to him: 'Very well, my child. I shall do you a favour and ask St George, and whatever he says I shall obey. You must sit here till I return.'

He entered the sanctuary now and started to whisper something between a psalm and a prayer, in a manner that would be incomprehensible to the German. He stayed there for half an hour, and when he emerged he looked half-joyful and half-sad. He had his reasons for showing such contrasting emotions. Standing in front of his guest, he gave him the good news first. 'My child, I have done as much as I could, and pleaded with the Saint with all my heart. He listened to me attentively and said he would agree to give you the lamp.' Then he lost his expression of joy and replaced it with sadness. 'The problem is,' he said – and here was the crucial part of his plan – 'in order to grant you the lamp, he requires a favour of you'.

'Whatever he wants, Father. Truly, whatever he wants.'

Still looking sad, Papa Peschos continued. 'The favour he asks is an enormous one, and perhaps beyond your capabilities.' The archaeologist repeated his willingness to do what was asked of him. 'Your eagerness, my child, to obtain the precious vigil lamp has made you ask the impossible. But I shall tell you what was said, and then it's up to you to make a decision. St George told me he would let you have the lamp if only you would fix the borders far enough from our villages to keep them in Greece.'

The German froze on hearing the favour requested of him. As head of the International Commission, he knew very well that it was the intention to give these villages to Albania. Knowing that what had been asked went against these plans, and that he might not get his lamp after all, he went very silent. When he responded, though, his tone was quite decisive. 'Your Reverence, the favour requested by the Saint will be granted. I shall draw the border further away to the north, towards Albania, so that all of the villages lying below the mountain range – the 'villages of Mount Mourgana's root', as you rightly call them – will stay forever Greek.'

He hurriedly opened his briefcase, unfolded a map of the border area, and with a thick red pencil drew a line; and bending over anxiously, the cleric saw that he had put our villages – Povla, Lintigia, Tsamantas, Bambouri, Lias and Lista – on the Greek side of the border. A bittersweet tear ran down the deeply wrinkled face of the humble cleric: bitter because the Monastery would lose a priceless vigil lamp for ever, and yet so sweet because his people would stay in Greece.

The agreement was final and irrevocable. They both came out of the church feeling joyful, and sat down to share in a meal of celebration. And then, quietly and inconspicuously, the Abbot left his guest and entered the church. He knelt in front of the 'Holy Gate' and spoke in a trembling voice. 'Thank you, God Almighty. And to you, Saint George, I offer thanks as well.'

The Commission later approved and signed the agreement on the borders, with Tsamantas driving like a wedge into our unredeemed land in Northern Epirus. The German – despite the reaction of one of his colleagues in the Commission, the stubborn Italian – kept his word, and granted the favour asked by St George, as had been the will of God. And so, thanks to the sacrifice of one of the treasured vigil lamps, and the skills of Papa Peschos, the villages of Mount Mourgana's root have remained in our country to this very day, like dew-covered branches of the eternal tree of Greece. The bells there ring out joyously, and the people breathe the healthy air of freedom.

To the memory of our immortal fellow villager, Papa Peschos.July 1991.

Translated from the Greek by Dimitrios Konstadakopulos. Freely adapted to idiomatic English by Phil Wood.

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