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THE BYZANTINE GIBRALTAR – IMPRESSIONS OF MONEMVASIA IN KOSTAS OURANIS' *TRAVELOGUE*

ABSTRACT: Kostas Ouranis (1890–1953), a Greek poet and essayist, lesser known abroad, was regarded as one of the first to introduce “travel writing” in Greece. As a correspondent of different newspapers, he travelled to many countries in Europe and abroad and recorded his impressions in travel books, of which the best known is his travelogue on Spain, *Sol y sombra* (1934). However, the book that is of special interest as regards the Greek perspective of the writer, is *Travels in Greece* (*Ταξίδια στην Ελλάδα*, 1949), where Ouranis describes impressions from his travels in his homeland which took place in 1930. In the present paper, basing on the brief chapter on Monemvasia from the above-mentioned book, I will shed some light on the reception of Byzantium in Ouranis' view, trying to answer, among others, the question whether the writer conveys any specific knowledge of the subject. In my opinion, his view of Byzantine heritage deserves special attention as regards the broad framework of the European approach to the legacy of the Eastern Roman Empire. Firstly, because his impressions on this Byzantine town constitute a vivid example of a clearly Greek perspective in this regard, which is relatively poorly known. Secondly, his deeply personal account on Monemvasia reveals the general attitude of the Greeks to their legacy and as such it may be regarded as a characteristic miniature which, like a lens, focuses their approach to the past.

KEY WORDS: Kostas Ouranis, reception of Byzantium, Byzantine heritage, modern Greek reception of Byzantium, Peloponnese, Monemvasia, Greek travel writing

As Kostas Ouranis (the pen name of Kostas Nearchos, 1890–1953) notes in the prologue to his travelogue *Travels in Greece* (*Ταξίδια στην Ελλάδα*, 1949), he by no means regards himself a journalist and his account at the very root has nothing to do with a documentary aimed at depicting Greece between the two world wars. On the contrary, he explains his highly personal attitude to Greece – which is rather obvious, and which a Greek reader would probably expect from his compatriot – underlining the prevalence of his subjective impressions over the exact description of what he saw:

These are impressions clearly subjective and, mostly, emotional. The emphasis in them is not on what I saw but what I felt while I was watching. They express “the movements” of the soul and of imagination that the places I visited evoked in me. (Ouranis 2008: 5)¹

During the course of the *Travels in Greece*, one should always remember this highly personal Ouranis’ perspective of visiting different regions of his native land since it determines the whole description. Ouranis’ travel book, astonishingly rarely examined within the framework of Greek travel writing and, as far as I know, never translated into English or any other foreign language, is yet worth taking a closer look at for the reasons that might not be initially obvious. In my opinion, Ouranis’ account on Greece shows a lesser-known Greek perspective as regards the attitude not only to ancient Greek legacy – that belongs to the common heritage of Western civilization – but, more importantly, to medieval Byzantine legacy, the West European approach to which was highly ambivalent throughout the ages.

Although Byzantium and its reception in subsequent periods was a subject of detailed studies, including not only literature, but also music, art and pop culture,² the Greek approach to the Eastern Roman Empire is undoubtedly less known and astoundingly rarely discussed. And it definitely should not be omitted because it remarkably differs from stereotypical views based on the longstanding misinterpretation of Byzantium as exotic and degenerate.³

¹ All translations from Ouranis’ travelogue are by the author of the present paper.

² Marciniak, Smythe 2019.

³ Liakos 2008: 207; Marciniak, Smythe 2019: 1–5. It should suffice to remind here that for the Greeks, the Byzantine Empire is something they are very familiar with due

In the present paper, basing on the chapter on Monemvasia (more specifically: *Maleas and Monemvasia* – Μαλέας και Μονεμβασία), I will shed some light on the reception of Byzantium in Ouranis' travelogue, trying to establish, on the one hand, if it fits to the ideological view of Byzantine legacy after the 1922 Asia Minor disaster or, on the other, to what extent it is significantly marked by the above-mentioned personal Ouranis' view and becomes merely his highly intimate vision of Greece. Thus, in other words, on the example of Monemvasia I will try to determine if the writer conveys any specific and meaningful image of the Byzantine past or if his account is to such an extent imbued with memories and filtrated by his enchantment by the beauty of the landscape that it does not bring anything of special interest in this regard. Due to the fact that the chapter devoted to Monemvasia is short, merely a few pages, as a consequence, my paper focusing on it will be also brief for obvious reasons. Yet, I hope it may somehow contribute to research on the oeuvre of, as it seems, slightly forgotten Greek author, especially as regards his account of his homeland that he described as no one else had tried before.⁴

When Ouranis travelled through Greece in the 1930s, he was already a recognized writer known especially for his already published collections of poetry, full of reminiscences of the poems of Charles Baudelaire and other French symbolists: *Spleen* (1912) and *Nostalgies* (*Νοσταλγίες*, 1920).⁵ The echoes of his poetry that may be described in general terms as full of despair and recurrent recollections from childhood, as it is sometimes stressed, we also find in his travel accounts. What is worth underlining, as regards all of his works, is that he tends to seek fairly

to the fact that they are Orthodox Christians but, more importantly, because throughout its existence the Byzantine Empire's official language was Greek. Moreover, they described themselves as Romans (Romaioi, Romioi) until the early 19th century, and their language as 'Romaic'. They started to use the term 'Hellene' (Ellinas / Έλληνας) after the 1821. See Beaton 2019: 7–9.

⁴ Bien suggests that it was him who invented this genre in Greece, but it was Kazantzakis who established it as a literary genre. See Bien 2007: 17. See also Hatzantonis 1980: 74.

⁵ Argyriou 2002: 759.

elusive happiness in the world of dreams rather than reality, which is also clearly evident in his travelogues.⁶

Importantly, Ouranis, who, starting from 1919, published many travel articles from his trips to Europe, is regarded as the one who in fact invented the travel genre in Greece.⁷ His accounts that he wrote for different Athenian newspapers (*Eleftheros Typos*, *Eleftheron Vima* etc.)⁸ were later incorporated into volumes of travel accounts that include: *Sol y Sombra* (*Sun and Shadow*, 1934); *Sinai, the Mountain Walked by God* (Σινά, το Θεοβάδιστον Όρος, 1944); *Azure Roads* (Γλαυκοί Δρόμοι, 1947); *Travels in Greece* (Ταξίδια στην Ελλάδα, 1949); *Italy* (Ιταλία, 1953); *From the Atlantic to the Black Sea* (Από τον Ατλαντικό στη Μαύρη Θάλασσα, 1957).⁹

He used to visit Greece as often as he could,¹⁰ as he always found there something that no other place, however beautiful, could offer, as he confesses in the opening chapter of his account:

There is a mysterious relationship between us, and what I like more than its form is its soul. It is a calm soul [...]. A calmness that is wisdom. That is why there is nowhere else [...]. The landscape of my homeland has a form of eternity. (Ouranis 2008: 9)

Every time the writer came back to Leonidio, a small town in Arcadia where he spent his childhood and where one can still visit his family

⁶ Vitti 2004: 359.

⁷ Before he became a journalist, he was the Consul General of Greece in Lisbon from 1920 to 1924. Bien 2007: 17; Arampatzidou 2012: 181.

⁸ Argyriou 2002: 758.

⁹ Due to the fact that there are no English translations, I give the English equivalent of the title together with the year of the first edition. The only holistic approach to Ouranis' travel writing is still an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Tsouchlis who gathered all available information as regards also the articles that Ouranis published in newspapers and that were not included in his travel books. His extensive monograph is a detailed study regarding different aspects of Ouranis' accounts from his trips to Europe and more exotic places. See Tsouchlis 2010.

¹⁰ Tsouchlis differentiates six main regions of Greece that Ouranis describes: Attica, Central Greece, Thessaly, Mount Athos, the Peloponnese, Greek islands. See Tsouchlis 2010: 298.

home,¹¹ he made shorter or longer excursions throughout the Peloponnese, especially during Easter of 1928 and in the summer of 1930.¹² The first trip brought him, among others, to the ruins of Byzantine Mistras, the former capital of the Despotate of the Morea where the Palaiologan Renaissance once flourished.¹³ Ouranis, characteristically, pays more attention to natural landscape than to the monuments, contemplating the stones and flowers growing wildly where once there was a powerful and significant city full of life:

Our wandering among stony and uphill paths of Mistras continued the fable instead of dissolving its magic. Because there was only silence, light and flowers that enveloped everything else. They filled the big empty spaces of the ruins, ornamented the yards, climbed onto the battlements of the walls [...]. Our eyes left those flowers to discern other flowers, marbled, carved on a door, on a balcony, on a window of a Byzantine house. (Ouranis 2008: 118)

Through the Spartan plain, Ouranis gets to another magnificent Byzantine town on the east coast of the Peloponnese, Monemvasia, picturesquely situated on the steep rock that, from the distance, may give an impression of floating on the sea surface. The description of Monemvasia that follows is a highly subjective vision, in which childhood memories mingle with the observations that the writer made *in situ* during his trip. From the very beginning, the author assures the reader that, to him Monemvasia has always been a special, mysterious place that haunted his imagination while he was a child:

¹¹ His mother Angeliki Yannousi came from Leonidio, his father from Constantinople, where Kostas Ouranis was born. The writer attended elementary school in Leonidio, and high school in Nafplio. See Argyriou 2002: 757–758.

¹² Tsouchlis 2010: 326; 332–344.

¹³ While Nikos Kazantzakis was contemplating the ruins of Mistras some years later, in September of 1937, this former Byzantine city evoked in him imagery related to the end of the Byzantine Empire as well as, simultaneously, of “new Hellenism”. The Cretan writer, apart from admiring the unique frescoes of the churches of Mistras, seems more interested in some renown personages connected with the lost Byzantine city: the Neoplatonist philosopher George Gemistos Plethon and the last Byzantine Emperor Konstantinos XI Palailogos, known in folk imagination as “The Marble King” who will resurrect one day when the city is Orthodox once again and returns to the Greeks. As for the legend, see especially Nicol 1992: 95–120.

Its name I encountered for the first time while I was browsing through the pages of an old book, under a drawing presenting it in a way that medieval cartographers used to sketch the seaside towns. I watched a huge rock, bare and steep, and, pinned down onto one of its slopes, a small town surrounded by walls, battlements and towers. Around the rock, the sea stretched out – endless [...]. A bridge connected this rock with the mainland. From then on, I imagined Monemvasia as a Byzantine Gibraltar that survived its age like Mount Athos. (Ouranis 2008: 211)

In order to understand why Ouranis calls Monemvasia “The Byzantine Gibraltar,” although it was known rather as “The Gibraltar of Greece”¹⁴ (as for instance in Nikos Kazantzakis’ account of the city), we should go back in time, until at least the period of the Komnenos dynasty, when the town became an important and well-known trade and maritime centre in the Byzantine world.¹⁵

At that time, Monemvasia, called Malvasia by the Italians and Malvoise by the French,¹⁶ became truly a “guardian of the western gate to the Aegean” of extraordinary importance.¹⁷ The bridge to the town and the narrow road that was “the only entrance” (μονή εμβασία) – hence its name,¹⁸ – additionally secured the town, tightly enclosed by walls on three sides. The fortress withstood many Arab attacks and, especially, Norman invasions in 1147.¹⁹ William II Villehardouin took it in 1248 after three years of siege²⁰ and acknowledged some of the pre-existing privileges.²¹

¹⁴ Miller 1907: 230.

¹⁵ More on the history of Monemvasia – see the still up-to-date monograph by Kalligas 2010 and respectively: Miller 1907; Wittek 1957.

¹⁶ Wittek 1957: 601.

¹⁷ Miller 1907: 229; Wittek 1957: 601; Kalligas 2010: 22. It was, among others, the seat of a Greek bishopric. See Miller 1907: 229.

¹⁸ As such, the name is explained in the chronicle by George Sphrantzes (also: Phrantzes, 1401–1477), a witness to the Fall of Constantinople. Yet, there surely existed an older name: Monovasia. See Wittek 1957: 601. See also Miller 1907: 231.

¹⁹ Kalligas 2010: 118. The church of the Hodegetria known today as Saint Sophia was built then as a dedication after the successful repulsion of the enemy. See also Miller 1907: 230.

²⁰ Miller 1907: 231.

²¹ Kalligas 2010: 33.

After the battle of Pelagonia in 1259, Monemvasia was captured by the Greeks led by the emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, who in the summer of 1261 re-conquered Constantinople. The emperor secured and renewed all the privileges of the Monemvasiots.²² From then onwards dates the importance of Monemvasia contributing to the great rock's famous name of the "Gibraltar of Greece."²³ Monemvasia remained a significant part of the Byzantine Empire until 1460. It was the seat of an imperial governor as well as a landing place for operations of the Byzantines against the Franks.²⁴ It is worth reminding that the main product that Monemvasia became famous for in mediaeval times, was Malmsey wine (known also as Malvasia/Malvazia), which was abundantly exported from its port, especially in the early thirteen century, and which became desirable for the pirates who attempted to attack the city on many occasions.²⁵

Thus, as regards Monemvasia in Byzantine times, the above-mentioned phrase in Ouranis' account seems substantively justified and needs no further clarification. However, the writer seems to be content with confining himself to such a somehow irrelevant mention of the Byzantine past of the place. In fact, we shall not learn from Ouranis' travelogue anything particular of the Byzantine glory of Monemvasia. He does not develop the subject but, on the contrary, focuses on the concept of imagination and memories that influence the actual view of the city that, to the writer, "survived his epoch" (επιζούσε της εποχής του, Ouranis 2008: 211). Besides, the city, as he suggestively expresses it, seems somewhat timeless, not belonging exclusively to the past or to the present, as it «had been fixed in the eternity of death in an essential moment of its whilom life» (είχε στερεωθεί στην αιωνιότητα του θανάτου σε μια ουσιαστική στιγμή της αλλοτινής ζωής της, Ouranis 2008: 212).

Thus, Monemvasia does not merely belong to history with all its Byzantine and Frankish monuments that accentuate the complicated history of the place. To Ouranis, who from the deck of his ship watches the small city (μικρή πολιτεία) shining whitely in the moonlight like «marble tombstones» (κατάλευκη σαν [...] τα επιτύμβια μάρμαρα, Ouranis

²² Kalligas 2010: 31.

²³ Miller 1907: 232.

²⁴ Miller 1907: 232.

²⁵ Miller 1907: 232; Kalligas 2010: 163.

2008: 212), Monemvasia appears as a «flower [...] white cammelia» as he remembers a verse of a well-known Greek demotic song in which the city is compared to a flower (λουλούδι).²⁶

From the distance, the rock of Monemvasia surrounded by huge walls looks deserted in Ouranis' eyes and reminds the writer “a giant keel of a ship” (τεράστια καρένα καραβιού, Ouranis 2008: 213) that gives the city a military appearance. Yet, some traces of the past are visible right at the entrance, above the low stone gate, where the writer pays notice to the Byzantine cross engraved in a form of most widely used Christograms (ΙΣ ΧΣ ΝΙΚΑ) that, to him, gives an impression as if he were entering a monastery.

In the city, as Ouranis calculates, there is a population of about three hundred inhabitants²⁷ who live in few houses “glued to each other one by one” in narrow streets in which only two men can pass. A wretched state of the city manifesting itself in almost all the houses being in ruin,²⁸ con-

²⁶ The song of unknown origin, widespread throughout Greece, starts with the words: “Λουλούδι της Μονεβασιάς / και κάστρο της Αθήνας» (The Flower of Monemvasia and the fortress of Athens) or otherwise «Λαλούδι της Μονοβασιάς». There are some suggestions that in the latter, supposedly earlier version, the word λαλούδι does not mean «a flower» (in standard Greek λουλούδι or in dialectal form λελούδι) but «a rock» which makes more sense. To a great probability, the word was misunderstood and associated with the flower and as such came into the common memory. On the discussion about the meaning of λαλούδι/λαλλούδι as a rock, see especially Kinga 1985.

²⁷ As Vounelakis estimates, basing on reliable data, the population of Monemvasia counted respectively: in 1920 – 483 inhabitants, in 1928 – 638, in 1940 – 638. As he adds, in the last decades of the 20th century population seems to increase significantly. See Vounelakis 2001: 68.

²⁸ Vounelakis 2001: 68. There was no system of water supply then, and collected rainwater was stored in cisterns. The problem of water supply was solved in 1964. The electricity will appear no earlier than in 1974. See Vounelakis 2001: 68. Fotis Kondoglou (1895–1965), a well known Orthodox painter and writer, who visited Monemvasia in the twenties, attests the same information: “Up in Monemvasia, there is no drop of water. In the city, they drink rainwater collecting it in cisterns”. I translate the passus from Vounelakis 2001: 70. The relevant citation comes from the following edition, unavailable to me: Φώτης Κόντογλου, *Ταξείδια σε διάφορα μέρη της Ελλάδας και της Ανατολής, περιγραφικά του τί ακούμε από τα χρόνια των Βυζαντινών, των Φράγκων, των Βενετσάνων και των Τούρκων*, Αθήνα 1928. As Kondoglou adds, the majority of the inhabitants, circa 400, are shoemakers, and the lanes are so narrow that only one man can pass. See Vounelakis 2001: 72.

trasted with its majestic walls reminding of its importance in medieval times, gives the writer a pretext to contemplate the glorious past. Once again, facing the stillness of the place inhabited by “poor shoemakers,” he is haunted by the vision of a rich and populated city, yet without offering any specific historically based information.

On that occasion, he cites a fragment of the illuminated chryso-bull of 1301 by Andronikos II, a significant document of the epoch,²⁹ in which the emperor calls Monemvasia “an illustrious city” (περιώνυμον ἄστυ), where «there is a lot of inhabitants and richness and nobility of the city and developed arts; and abundance of goods» (πλήθος μάλιστα οἰκητόρων καὶ πολυολβία καὶ πολιτείας εὐγένεια καὶ τεχνῶν ἀσκήσεις· καὶ ἀγορᾶς δαψίλεια).³⁰ All of the above allows Ouranis to conclude that the city does not belong to our age, and in fact it is still the «Byzantine Monemvasia,» yet at its last «stage of apathy and decline» (του μαρασμού και του ξεπεσμού, Ouranis 2008: 213).

The ruined fortress that dominates the rest of the city, where, as he suggestively writes, «death is more lively than life in modern Monemvasia» (Ouranis 2008: 213), once more evokes the memories of a distant past, when the city had to face the siege of the crusaders of the fourth Crusade.³¹ Ouranis, as an illustration, quotes the fragment of an anonymous *Chronicle of Morea*, a 14th century text of great historical value,³² written in political verse, narrating the events of the Frankish establishment of feudalism in mainland Greece. Forced by famine, the inhabitants of Monemvasia found themselves in a dead end with tragic consequences:

²⁹ Kalligas 2010: 161–163.

³⁰ Miklosich, Müller 2012: 156.

³¹ After the death of the first Prince of Achaia, Geoffrey de Villehardouin, his successor, Geoffrey II wanted to capture Monemvasia but his attempt was unsuccessful. This undertaking was realized by his brother William II twenty years later when he started the siege in 1247. See Kalligas 2010: 28–29.

³² The first edition, based by Codex Parisianus 2898, was made by J. A. Buchon in 1825. The book gives the French translation of the chronicle with one exception – the prologue given in Greek. See Schmitt 1904: xix.

εφάγασι και ποντικούς, ομοίως και γατία.

Το τι να φαν ουκ είχαν, μόνον ο εις τον άλλον [...] (*Chronicle of Morea*, 2931–2932)³³

[they ate mice, as well as cats. Since they had nothing to eat, they ate each other]³⁴

Apart from the cited fragments that he leaves without any comment, as it was mentioned before, Ouranis does not give any specific historical details regarding either the abandoned fortress or the whole of the city. Instead, he contemplates the images of death and life intertwining in this very place, symbolically manifesting themselves in the vivid contrast between the ruins and the wildlife that, characteristically to Mediterranean landscape, tends to appear everywhere with an unceasing impetus for growth.

His vision of this historical place is entirely dominated by personal feelings and permeated by nostalgia, which is expressed in a series of impressionistic, somehow petrified, images, having more in common with the art of photographing than painting. Monemvasia, with its “stilness” (ακινησία) and recurring shadow of death, turns, in Ouranis’ eyes, into an everlasting symbol of bravery. Thus the «Byzantine Gibraltar» becomes more of a-historical place, not related to any particular historic period but treated merely as a point of reference evoking personal connotations.

Interestingly, Ouranis seems to almost completely ignore the churches that draw so much attention of other visitors to Monemvasia. About the Church of Hagia Sophia situated on top of the plateau, the only surviving building in Upper Town, he notes only that «one Byzantine church raises its dome above that warlike, reaped by the time, plain» (Ouranis 2008: 214). Neither will we find any mention about other churches – Byzantine Church of Christ in Chains (Christos Elkomenos), Church of Panagia

³³ I cite the fragment in monotonic system. Ouranis does not give the exact verses so I add them using Schmitt’s edition, in which he used both the Copenhagen and Paris manuscripts. See Schmitt 1904.

³⁴ The translation is mine. The cited Greek fragment in Ouranis slightly differs from the version in Schmitt: instead of γατία we have κατσία, which both mean «cats». The last verse is also rendered differently: ουκ είχαν πλέον το τι να φαουν, μόνον και τα κορμιά τους [they have nothing more to eat except their bodies]. See Schmitt 1904: 196 and also Kalligas 2010: 28.

Chryssafitissa, or the 18th century churches of Agios Nikolaos and Panagia Mirtidiotissa – that were described by travelers who visited the city at a similar time, Fotis Kondoglou and Nikos Kazantzakis.³⁵

To sum up the above-mentioned brief notes concerning the description of Monemvasia, Ouranis' attitude to the legacy of Byzantium obviously may not be placed within any ideological frames that at the time of his travels through the Peloponnese were present in political discourse.³⁶ Together with the catastrophe of 1922 and the uprooting of Hellenism in Asia Minor, the attitude to Byzantium and to its spiritual capital, Constantinople, inevitably changed. Then, the Greeks could merely look back with nostalgia at the Byzantine glory that inextricably belonged to their common legacy and of which the ruins of Monemvasia and other Byzantine cities in the Peloponnese were a kind of a significant reminder.

Interesting in this regard is also the case of Nikos Kazantzakis that I have already alluded to. The author of *Zorba the Greek* as a correspondent of "Kathimerini" and other Athenian newspapers, travelled to the Peloponnese some years later than Ouranis. One may have an impression of wandering among the ruins of Byzantine Monemvasia not to find the relics of the former glory of the Empire nor treating the city as a stimulus for evoking hidden distant memories, but searching for the signs of life. In other places, such as Mistras, where there are no inhabitants, the writer notices merely the life of vigorous figures from the Byzantine frescoes. Yet, when he gets to Monemvasia, he is especially astounded by the fact that it is still inhabited. In the 'Gibraltar of Greece,'

³⁵ Vounelakis 2001: 73–87. There are also many later accounts of Greek travelers to Monemvasia of which it is worth noting here Stratis Myrivilis', who visited it in July 1959 and published his account in the periodical Πελοποννησιακή Πρωτοχρονιά in 1960 or Ilias Venezis' account, Μονεμβασιά, το Γίβραλταρ της Ανατολής, which appeared in the periodical «Lakonika» (Λακωνικά). For more details see Vounelakis 2001: 89–92.

³⁶ It should suffice to remind here that, for instance, according to the Kathimerini's policy, Kazantzakis' texts had a clear goal: to familiarize the Greeks, at least those living in Athens, with their native land, showing some parts of the Peloponnese within the context of historical and ideological framework. See Karalis 2011: 264. The accounts Kazantzakis contributed to 'Kathimerini' were inseparably connected with the newspaper's policy of publishing the cycle of articles about the province with the clearly propagandistic aim of winning the support of the peasants and Asia Minor refugees for Metaxas' dictatorship. See Dimadis 2018: 291.

the past and the present constitute for him the hope for the future that manifests itself in different aspects of life he encounters there. He has an impression of the same reconciliation as if he watched the frescoes of the Pantanassa Monastery in Mistras:

Shadowy arcades, labyrinthine medieval lanes, ruined churches; life rambles again among the ruins, deep-rooted like ivy – with crying babies, laundry, and the shrill cries of poverty [...]. (Kazantzakis 1965: 154) I sat amid the ruins and rejoiced [...] watching three goats with gleaming black hair climbing the red rock, directly above the sea. (Kazantzakis 1965: 155)

Many years later, one of the most famous Greek poets of 20th century, Yiannis Ritsos (1909–1990), who was born in Monemvasia and devoted countless poems to his native city, will express perfectly this highly personal Greek attitude to the Gibraltar of Greece, as meaningful and symbolic as it was for Ouranis. Let the poetical metaphor of a petrified ship may be the punch line of Ouranis' view of the magnificent, lonely rock that once used to be such a powerful and recognizable sign of glorious Byzantine past:

Κυρά Μονοβασιά μου, πέτρινο καράβι μου. Χιλιάδες οι φλόκοι σου και τα πανιά σου.
Κι όλο ασάλευτη μένεις να με αρμενίζεις μες στην οικουμένη.
(Τρίστιχα Γ')

My lady Monemvasia, my stone ship. You have thousands of masts and sails.
Yet you remain immovable, taking me on a journey throughout the world.
(Tristychs, III)

Nowadays, Monemvasia does not seem to have lost its unique beauty as it preserved the balance between history and modernity. Byzantine buildings, restored carefully and with the utmost reverence to medieval tradition, from the distance seem to be suspended in time, yet they hide modern apartments and luxurious hotels inside. Thus, the past visually joins with the present offering more than just a highly nostalgic travel in time and proving that Ouranis' vision of the timeless city turned out to be true.

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