

DE INSULA CRETA
BY HIERONYMUS ARCONATUS (1533-1599)
AN ELEGY ON SIXTEENTH CENTURY CRETE

Στόν πιστόν υἱόν τῆς Κρήτης
καθηγητὴν Στυλ. Σπυριδάκη
ἐπὶ τῆ εὐκαιρίᾳ τῆς προαγωγῆς του

Since 1897, the end of Turkish rule, Crete has attracted in increasing numbers archeologists and tourists from all over the world. From 1204, when part of the island was bought by the Republic of Venice under the name of «Candia», to 1669, when the last stronghold of Candia was conquered by the Ottoman Empire, Crete was an international gathering place of a different kind. Soldiers and diplomats destined to rise in the ranks of armies and diplomatic corps involved in the century-long wars between the courts of Central and Southern Europe and the Sublime Porte would often earn their spurs on the island of Crete. Count Leopold Kolonitsch (1631-1707), for instance, fought first as a Knight of the Order of St. John on Crete. Then, he became chamberlain of Emperor Leopold I in Vienna, 1669 bishop of Neutra in Hungary, 1672 bishop of Wiener Neustadt as well as minister of finance and president of a «chamber» at the Austrian court. In 1683, during the Turkish siege of Vienna, Kolonitsch took charge of the hospital care in the beleaguered city. As the Turkish tide receded, Kolonitsch was made archbishop of Raab and cardinal (1685), archbishop of Kolocsa (1691), and finally primate of Hungary in Gran (1695). In 1697, he headed a commission charged with the re-organization of Hungary along Austrian lines. Throughout his rise into the highest councils of church and state, Kolonitsch dealt with military, diplomatic and spiritual matters concerning the Christian-Turkish conflict, and he had received his basic training in Crete.

A lesser example of such a career are the life and works of Hieronymus Arconatus, a Silesian Renaissance poet and soldier of fortune¹.

1. On the life and works of Arconatus, see Alfred Rűffler, Hieronymus Arcona-

Arconatus, was born on April 27, 1553 in Löwenberg, Silesia, as son of a master mason from Milan, Italy, who had settled in Breslau, the capital city of Silesia, and died in 1575 as a fortress builder under Emperor Maximilian II (c. 1564-1576) on the Turkish frontier in Croatia and Slovenia. Not only Arconatus' father, Hieronymus Sr., but also two of his brothers, Franz and Johannes, were connected with the military and diplomatic encounters between the Holy Roman and Ottoman Empires. Franz served as an «Imperial soldier of some rank» (*Miles Caesaris haud minimus*) in Hungary, and accompanied an embassy to Constantinople. Johannes apparently succeeded his father as an Imperial fortress builder, was captured by the Turks, and executed in Pest by Vezier Sinan Pasha about 1584.

Hieronymus Jr. had gone to Latin school in Breslau where another native of Löwenberg, Haunold (1558-1626), for whom he wrote *De Insula Creta*, was a fellow student. In 1570, Arconatus enrolled at Padua, the university of the Republic of Venice. When the war of 1570-1573 between Spain, Venice and the Turks broke out, he enlisted in the army of Doge Alvise Mocenigo I, fought at the battle of Lepanto (October 7, 1571), and then was stationed for two years on the island of Crete. In Crete Arconatus composed a poem on the battle of Lepanto which he dedicated to the Venetian patrician Alvisius Lollinus (1557-1625) who later became the commander of Candia¹. In Crete, he had also his first profound and prolonged love affair which found expression in his lyrics with a woman named Flora².

After the peace of 1573, Arconatus left Crete and enlisted at Naples in Spanish service. During the Winter of 1575/76, he stayed in Paris during one of the Huguenot Wars. He also sojourned in Switzerland and Holland. He finally ended his grand tour of Europe as a lover and a soldier in London where he entertained a passionate relationship to a certain «Lisa». By 1578, Arconatus had returned to his widowed mother, Elisabeth née Richter, in Breslau. Here, he joined the Humanist circles of his former teachers and schoolmates, prepared his poems for

tus, ein schlesischer Dichter des 16. Jahrhunderts, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens* 71 (1937) 211-234.

1. The pertinent poems are to be found in Arconatus' *Carminum hactenus non impressorum farrago, cum Elegia et epistolio Casp. Stolshagii*, Vienna 1592, Nr. 9 and 10.

2. *Ibid.*, Nr. 18.

the printer, composed *epithalamia* for his friends as they got married, and published an *Oratio ad Deum pro bono Ecclesiae et reipublicae Christianae statu*, in which he prayed for the protection of church and state from further Turkish expansion.

In 1579, Arconatus went from Breslau to Vienna where he was appointed secretary *ab epistolis bellicis* to the president of the Imperial war council (*Hofkriegsrat*). The year from April 1584 to April 1585, he spent in Constantinople as a member of a diplomatic mission. After his return, Arconatus married a Viennese widow, Anna, called Nigella in his poetry, with whom he had two sons who died young. About 1594, he was promoted to «secret secretary» (*a secretis bellicis*) or *Secretarius bellicus*. A similar post was being held by Arconatus' countryman Haunold to whom he addressed *De Insula Creta*¹. Until his retirement to Vienna in 1597, where Arconatus owned a house and garden, he journeyed back and forth between Vienna and Prague where Emperor Rudolph II (r. 1576-1612) held court. Arconatus was at home in the Humanist circles of both cities, and also kept in close touch with his family and friends in Silesia. As a poet, Arconatus enjoyed the special favor of the Emperor, and accompanied outstanding events in the Imperial household with his songs². During the last decade of his life, Arconatus, who died in Vienna on June 18, 1599, exhorted the Emperor in a series of political poems to take more decisive steps against the Turks. His life-long experience as a soldier and diplomat had convinced Arconatus that the Ottoman army was not invincible. It was in this context that Arconatus recalled and re-edited his poetic impressions of the battle of Lepanto, the conquest of Famagusta on Cyprus, and his fond memories of Crete³.

Before we review and reprint *De Insula Creta*, a few words must be said about Arconatus' merits as a poet. The neo-Latin poetry of Silesia received the highest praise from Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), the Humanist-Lutheran *praeceptor Germaniae*⁴, as well as from Justus

1. On Haunold, see J. H. Cunradus, *Silesia Togata* (Liegnitz 1706), p. 108.

2. See Rüdfler, *op. cit.*, 229 f.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 231 f.

4. Melanchthon reiterated at least three times (1521, 1526 and 1558) in regard to the Silesians, *Non alia gens in Germania habet eruditos viros in tota philosophia... multi etiam ad poesin et eloquentiam idonei sunt*. Quoted after Karl Weinhold, *Die Verbreitung und die Herkunft der Deutschen in Schlesien*, Stuttgart 1887, p. 177.

Lipsius (1547-1606), the Erasmus of the second half of the sixteenth century¹. Among the Silesian poets themselves, Arconatus was regarded most highly, although he never received the crown of a *Poeta Laureatus Caesareus*². The reason for this lack of official recognition may have been the «modern» quality of Arconatus' poetry which was autobiographical rather than impersonal and paradigmatic as required by the canons of Petrarcism. Arconatus stated his kinship to, and practice of poetry in an elegy to a Breslau friend:

*Steinbergere, parens rerum natura, poetam
Me fecit, fateor, sim licet arte rudis*³.

The last two words according to which Arconatus' art was «rude» have to be taken with a grain of salt. There are hardly any formal flaws in his epigrams and elegies. Arconatus' *ars versificatoria* consisted in concealing the art (*ars est celare artem*). This is especially true of *De Insula Creta*. Poetic topography or chorography was a favorite *genre* of the German Renaissance⁴. The sole comparable *sujet* in Italian Humanism would be *De rebus Corsicis* by Peter Cynnaeus (1447-1506). Arconatus, however, escaped the contemporary conventional form which would celebrate the culture of a landscape, the splendor of its cities, the virtues of its people, and the fame of fellow poets who were born among them. With his paramour Flora, with Crete's fortified monasteries, towns and seaports, its towering mountains, military heroes, and late sixteenth

1. Lipsius wrote in a letter of August 3, 1594, to Johann Fersius, Breslau, ... *testimonium hoc Silesiis et Vratislaviae vestrae reddo, non esse excultiorum oram hodie in ambitu Europae*. Quoted after A. G. E. Th. Henschel, *Iatrologiae Silesiae specimum primum exhibens brevissimam medicorum Silesiorum notitiam...*, Breslau 1837, p. VII.

2. Arconatus himself confessed in *Poematum recentiorum volumen*, Vienna 1591, p. 106, quoted by Ruffler, *op. cit.*, p. 229, that he treasured the Emperor's favor more highly than titles and laurels. His countryman Andreas Calagius (1549-1609), whom Arconatus accompanied back to Silesia in 1592 when the latter was crowned poet laureate in Prague, reported in his *Epigrammata*, Frankfurt a. O. 1602, p. 130, that Rudolph II, had granted Arconatus a more splendid coat-of-arms.

3. As quoted by Ruffler, *op. cit.*, p. 222. Nicolaus Steinberger (1553-1616), a fellow poet, was principal of St. Elisabeth-Gymnasium in Breslau.

4. On Germany in general, see Gerald Strauss, *Sixteenth-Century Germany: Its Topography and Topographers*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1959; on Silesia in particular, see Manfred P. Fleischer, *Silesiographia: The Rise of a Regional Historiography, Archive for Reformation History* 69 (1978) 219-247.

century painters (Michael Damaskinos worked in Venice; Doménikos Theotokópoulos, born 1541, left Crete for Spain 1566), Arconatus might have had sufficient source material for a traditional treatment. Instead, he was overwhelmed by the discrepancy between the grandeur of Crete's «mythological» past and the present fallen estate of the island. Therefore, his elegy became a resounding echo of Seneca's *Moral Epistle*, LXXI, 15:

«Crete who once deserved to be called the homeland of Great Jupiter, who spread her fame on the wings of Daedalus throughout the universe, and equalled that of a hundred cities, what is the island now? A shadow of her former self. There is nothing magnificent, nothing beautiful, nothing praiseworthy here anymore. The iron tooth of time has devoured everything, and ground to black ashes cities, fortresses, towns, and temples. It even changed, although this staggers the imagination, the course of the rivers. Where once ships came and went, the farmer walks now with dry feet.

«O change of things, o process of aging, how cruel can you be! Metal must yield you, and marble cannot withstand you for long. If Minos returned from the dead, he could not resume his ancestral reign. Theseus could not find the site of the many-mansioned palace at the bay. Perhaps even Jupiter would not want to be put here into the cradle anymore as a tender infant.

«Thus will Austria someday also succumb, no matter how victorious and secure she seems to be now. The city of Vienna is bound to be cast aside. Prague will not escape destruction, no matter how high her houses rival the splendid roofs of Rome. Yes, bright Nicolaus, although tied to me since boyhood with bonds of love, even beautiful Breslau, once our common nursemaid, will perish like this together with other outstanding cities which are thriving now, but at the same time grow in apprehension of their fate. Nothing on earth lasts forever, but rushes towards its end together with yours. Only virtue remains for all times».

After this free translation, let us record the original:

DE INSVLA CRETA AD

*Nicolaum Haunoldum*¹

*Quae quondam meruit Iouis vocari
Magni patria, quae polum labore*

1. This reprint follows the orthography in *Poematum recentiorum volumen*,

Aequans Daedalo per vniuersum,
 Orbem clara fuit, sibique famam
 A centum orbibus inclitam parauit
 Quid nunc Creta? decoris umbra prisci.
 Nil hic magnificum, nihil venustum,
 Dignum laude nihil, vorauit atro
 Tempus omnia dente, dissipauit,
 Et nigrum in cinerem redegit vrbes,
 Arces, oppida, templa, quin stupendum
 Dictu, flumina perdidere cursum.
 Qua quondam ratis ibat & redibat,
 Nunc sicco pede transeunt coloni.
 O rerum variatio, ô vetustas
 Quantum saeua potes? tibi metalla
 Cedunt, marmora nec diu repugnant.
 Non Minos reuocatus inferorum
 Vrna diceret haec auita regna.
 Theseus multiplici domum reflexu
 Non agnosceret hoc situ, nec ipse
 Forsan Iuppiter hic iacere vellet
 In cunis iterum tenellus infans.
 Sic ô sic aliquando nunc triumphans
 Securè Austriaco solo, Vienna
 Vrbs dicetur ab exteris fuisse,
 Non Praga effugiet necem, superba
 Quamuis aedibus aemuletur altis
 Romae splendida tecta: Nicolae
 Candissime, vinculoque amoris
 Coniuncte à pueris mihi, venusta
 Vratislauia sic peribit, altrix
 Quondam nostra¹, aliaeque ciuitates
 Insignes, validae, & metu carentes.

in quo continentur Epigrammata, Elegiae et Carmina heroica, Viennae Austriae, typis Nic. Pierii 1594, pp. 95-97. However, the peculiar abbreviations for «que» have not been used, but spelled out according to the edition of the poem by Johann Christian Kundmann, *Von einer zu edirenden Historie der Gelehrten in Müntzen...* Liegnitz 1742, pp. 553 f.

1. The following numerological speculations have been made with the preceding three lines:

*Nil hic perpetuum est, sed assequuntur
Finem cuncta suum, superstes una
Virtus durat in omne tempus aeui.*

Davis, California

MANFRED P. FLEISCHER

	VenVsta	— —	10
VratIsLaVIa sIC perIbt,	aLtrIX	— —	226
qVonDaM nostra.		— —	1505
	Summa:		1741

The number derived from this calculation was the year at which Breslau changed from Austrian into Prussian hands. See Kundmann, *op. cit.*, p. 552.