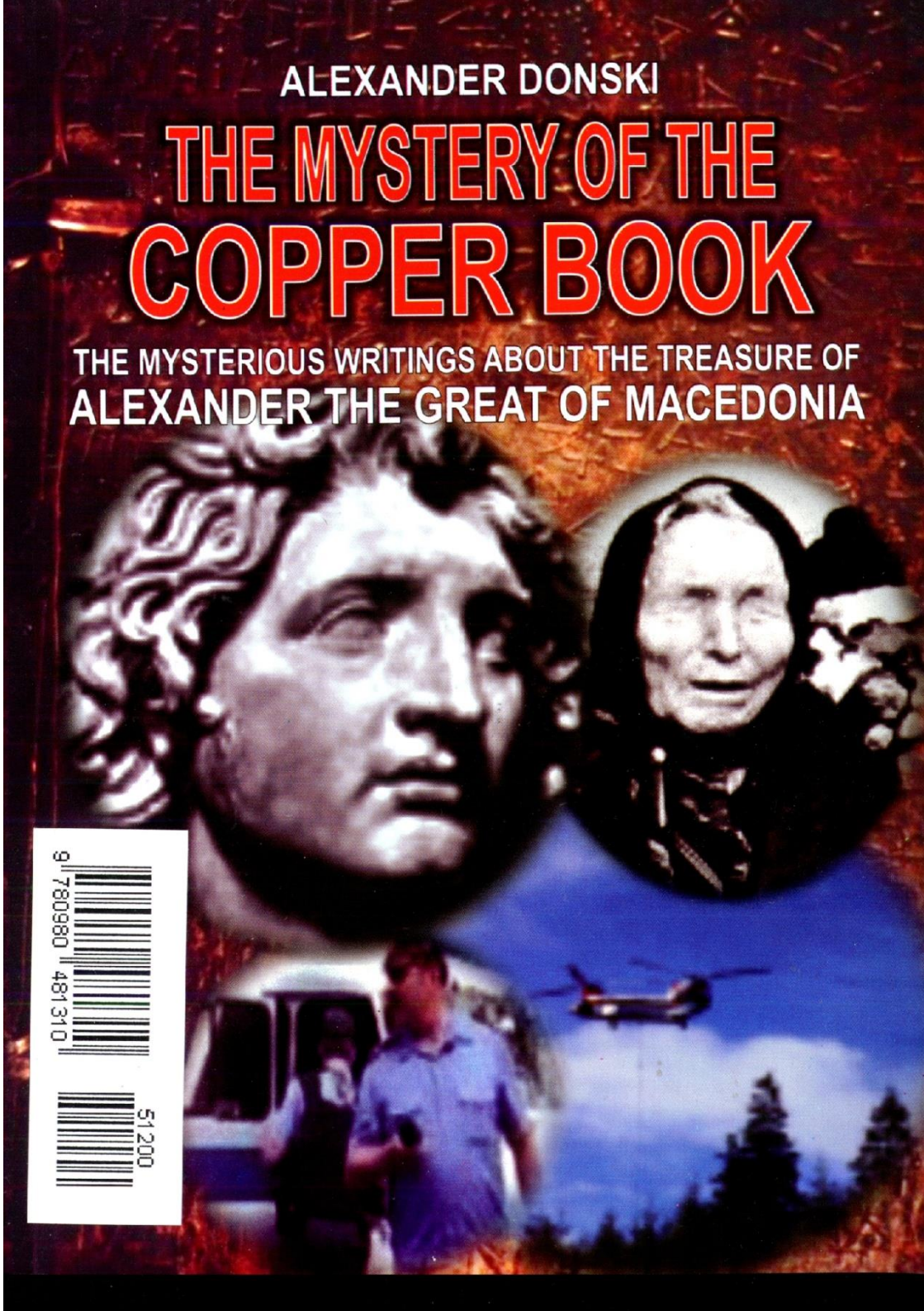
ALEXANDER DONSKI

THE MYSTERY OF THE COPPER BOOK

THE MYSTERIOUS WRITINGS ABOUT THE TREASURE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT OF MACEDONIA



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What great secrets does the mysterious Copper book contain? A book which truly exists and which today is part of a private Macedonian collection.

Could this book hold the key to great mysteries concerning Alexander the Great?

These are the historical facts:

In 199 BC the emperor, Septimius Severus, decided to transfer the casket of Alexander the Great to some secret location, along with: "*…all of the books that contain secret knowledge, so that no one in the future would be able to view Alexander's remains or read what the books say.*" (Dio Cassius, History of Rome, 76,13).

In 1979 the world-renowned prophetess Granny Vangia declared that the stone sarcophagus, in which the secret writings were hidden, were secretly transported from Egypt by slaves with camels "*to our land*" and that the secrets contained therein were beyond the comprehension of present-day people. (Krasimira Stojanova: *Vangia*, Sofia, 1989).

In1989 a representative of the Vatican visited the government leaders of Yugoslavia and probably showed them certain secret writings from the Vatican's library. Not long after that, units of the Yugoslav army partitioned off sections of the Belasitsa Mountain Range. That same year there was a secret attempt by authorities on the Greek side of the border to tunnel under Belasitsa to the Yugoslav side. Eight Greek workers were reportedly killed in the attempt and the project was cancelled. (Source: a classified file of the Yugoslav State Security Service.).

… The explanation for all of this may lie in the pages of the Copper book!

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Aleksandar DONSKI

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- Historical thriller, inspired by real events -

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He stood alone in front of the dimly-lit imperial palace. Not another living soul was about. He felt some strange presentiment. Some nameless fear gnawed at him. Suddenly, huge black clouds filled the sky to the east. They had approached with such speed as if pulled by swift chariots. Day was transformed into night. The first lightning bolts lit up the sky. They struck mercilessly at his palace. It began to tremble and then to crumble before his eyes. The walls fell away as if they were mere shards of wood. He stood helplessly by, rooted in place. He watched the terrible scene, powerless to intervene. Thunder and lightning, raging black sky… Horror! He wanted to cry out. But he could not utter a sound. In no time the walls of his luxurious palace were reduced to rubble… But that was not the end of his troubles. He felt some unknown presence. He turned to look… He felt a shiver rise up his spine. Suddenly the visage of an ancient black-robed crone rose up before him. Her harsh and terrible gaze cut into him like a knife. His eyes were glued to her. He had no idea how she had come here, but he had no doubt that she was connected to the terrible disaster he had just witnessed. This old woman with death's face. She appeared to have something to say to him, as she extended a fleshless hand with long fingernails. She pointed to her left. He turned and then… He saw it! The very same stone sarcophagus! With the same name carved on it! It glowed brightly in the gloom. There was something spring-like in the atmosphere. There was the wild lightning and thunder, but there were also flowers blooming nearby him, as if preserved by the

light. And again he glimpsed the same mountain… There in the distance… With the same signs on it… Then it seemed to come to him… A terrible cackle from the withered mouth of the granny in mourning black cut through him for an instant. She gestured menacingly in his direction. She wanted to seize him by the throat… To choke the life out of him. To make him pay for his disobedience. He felt her cold nails around his tender throat. This was the end! Aaaaah!...

The Roman emperor Septimius Severus woke up screaming and the two guards rushed into his room like furies. But the emperor already realized that it was just a dream. Drenched in sweat, without looking their way, he waved them out of the room.

He sat on the bed deep in thought. This was already the third time he had had this same dream. Worry gnawed at him like a dog at a bone. He had to do something, but what? … He stood up and began to pace the room. Now he was certain that he knew the meaning of this dream. It was a message from the gods, which he must heed. If he wished to avoid disaster… Again he called to the guards and he ordered them to bring the royal seer to him. After a time they reported back. A tall old man with a weathered face, a long white beard and hair entered. Dressed in a long tunic almost touching the ground. He bowed deeply and uttered sharply:

"Vestri maiestas". (*Your wish your majesty*).

"Same Iterum." Same somnium. Ego sum perturbo. (*Again the same. The same dream. I am troubled by it*) - said Septimius Severus.

The royal seer considered the matter, then uttered:

" Nuntius ex filiolus." (*A sign from the gods*).

" Sic." (*Yes*) - replied the emperor.

"Quis peror vos intentio?" (*What do you have in mind*?).

"Vos iam teneo… Vos mos perago is officium." (*You already know. You will complete the work*.)

The seer grew pale and looked with fear at the emperor. He glared back at him with a look that made it clear that there would be no discussion. The seer tried to compose himself and bowed in obeisance.

"Ego agnosco vestry maiestas. Ego vadum tribuo meus optimus." (*I understand your majesty. I will do your will to the best of my ability*.)

"Es vos certus super montis?" (*Are you certain of the mountain*?)

"Filiolus pluo is volo… In vestri somnium vestri maiestas." (*The gods have shown me… through your dream, your majesty*.) - the astrologer answers, still visibly frightened.

"Valde bonus. Vado quod paro. Ego vadum tribo necesse ordo." (*Very good. Go and prepare. I will give the necessary orders*.)

The seer bows and goes out. The emperor Septimus Severus sighs deeply. He pauses to think and then goes out on to the terrace. Although it was still morning, the sun already baked the earth. In front of him spread the hazy outline of one of the most beautiful cities in his realm, Alexandria in Egypt.

*

The Roman province Macedonia, 196 A.D. (three years before Septimus Severus's dream).

Angel (or as the Romans called him, Angelus), was busy, preparing a sheepskin with a sharp skinning knife. He had only finished one side when he heard a strong knocking at the gate.

The knocking grew more insistent, suggesting that something was not right. His neighbors and friends never knocked this way. Since he was working only a few paces from the gate, he stood up and made his way to let them in. At the same time his wife, Lika, had also heard the insistent knocking from inside the house and had anxiously stepped out to see what was the matter. Her hands were still busy tying up her long black hair that she had been in the process of arranging at the time. Her blue eyes turned to Angel with anxious look. He motioned to her to remain silent as he stood by the gate. He secretly hoped it was merely some prank.

"Patefacio ianua!" (*Open the gate*!), he heard from beyond the gate.

It meant that it was one of those who only spoke the Roman language.

"Iamo expecto!" (*Wait. I'm coming*!), Angel answered in his own broken Roman speech. He was not happy with the Roman occupation of his land, but they had been there for a long time. They were mainly located in the towns. They only ventured out to his small settlement when they wanted to collect taxes. He knew that he hadn't yet paid this year's tax. He opened the gate before the rapping could start up again.

Two legionnaires and a civil servant entered the yard. One legionnaire was tall and dark. He reminded Angel of a dried plum. The other was more “normal” looking. He had brown hair and eyes, with no features that stood out. The civil servant was short and bald with a broad nose. He also spoke in broken Roman speech, which meant that he was probably a countryman in the service of the Romans. He hated such people.

" Angelus?", asked the civil servant.

" Sic." (*Yes*).

"Vos non persolvo miseratio!" (*You haven’t paid your taxes*!)

"Ego teneo. Ego vadum persolvo." (*I know. I’ll be paying them*.)

"Vicis est sicco. Nos praecipio vos!" (*The time has passed. You were warned*.)

"Meus parvulus eram peius. Ego tribuo viaticus pro curatio... Ego vadum persolvo." (*My child was sick. I spent the money on medicine. … I’ll be paying*...)

"Adveho nobis!" (*Come along with us*!)

"Tamen quare?" (*But why*?)

"Adveho quod haud scisco!" (*Come along and no questions*!)

Angel resists, but the two legionnaires grab him by the arms. At the same time his wife, Lika, approaches them and cries out:

"Solvo meus maritus!" (*Let my husband go*!), she shouts in broken Roman speech as she pulls at the uniform of the dark, withered-looking legionnaire.

He lets go of Angel and with one swift, powerful punch he fells her like a scythe would a stalk of dry wheat.

When he sees this, Angel frees himself from the legionnaire who holds him by the arm and strikes the man who hit his wife, with his own fist. He falls to the ground. Blood flows from his nose. The second legionnaire reaches for his sword, but Angel knocks him to the ground as well with a powerful blow to his leg. When the man tries to rise, Angel strikes him again, this time kicking him in the head, after which, the man lies unconscious. When the civil servant sees all of this, he flees out the gate and begins to shout for help. In an instant six more legionnaires storm through the gate with swords drawn. Angel realizes that he doesn't have a chance and he raises his hands in surrender as the legionnaires surround him. While some go to the aid of their comrades, others bind Angel's arms firmly behind him. His wife begins to wail incoherently. A child can be heard crying from the house. Angel tries to tell her that all will be well, but she isn't consoled. They practically lift him by the arms, as he is led out the gate…

They take him directly to the town of Bilazora, where he is immediately beaten and then thrown into a prison cell. Two days later he is led before the praetor, who announces his sentence, to be sold into slavery. Normally, anyone who would dare strike a legionnaire would receive a sentence of death, but because he was reacting to seeing his wife struck, and the fact that his wife immediately came and paid the tax the very next day, his sentence was reduced. He listened to the words of the sentence in abject silence. He could not know that the most terrible days of his life were about to unfold.

After that everything occurred as if in the most awful of dreams. They did not even allow him to see his wife again before he was transported in a large cage

mounted on a cart to the port at Thessalonica. There, he and some fifty other prisoners of various ages and ethnicities were loaded onto a galley, where they were held on the open deck, in iron chains and under constant guard. For days on end they slept and ate there, until they lost count of the time… The weather was mild. They had the benefit of the summer warmth. But their unknown fate made all of the prisoners anxious. Angel rarely spoke. He mourned secretly for his lost home. He could not understand how such a calamity had befallen him. Would he ever see his family again? How to escape? The thoughts raced through his confused mind. After a while it became easier to talk with his fellow prisoners. They also had their sad stories to tell. Besides his fellow countrymen there were people from various other lands and ethnicities. Some were from more northern lands, and others were dark-skinned people from the south. All were enslaved at some particular time and place and brought to that same port and loaded on that same vessel, to be shipped to some unknown destination.

They were able to converse among themselves in the Roman language that everyone more or less understood. Thus, they were able to share their knowledge of distant lands and peoples. Despite their diverse backgrounds they were brought together by their shared suffering. Although they were all from far different individual homes and families, everyone had suffered at the hands of the Romans for their rebellion.

Their journey seemed to go on forever. The sea appeared endless, and the weather grew warmer as the clouds grew rare. They could tell that they were being transported to the south. But where? No one knew and no

one dared ask the legionnaires who guarded them. All they ever received from them were threats and warnings to remain quiet during the voyage.

Conversations among the prisoners only provided a temporary distraction from their mutual despair. Over the course of the endless days some vague instinct for survival kept hope alive. Despite his present misery, Angel believed that this too would some day pass. He had learned patience from his grandfather. He had passed on his faith in Jesus Christ as saviour. That is how he came to be named Angel. He kept his faith to himself. He knew that it was strictly forbidden. People such as he, called Christians, were tortured and killed by the Romans. All the same, this new faith continued to spread. Angel felt buoyed up by his faith. He had his true saviour and protector, while others lived and died in ignorance and darkness. He knew that his God would not abandon him. Secretly and silently he would pray to Him as he had been taught.

In this way the days passed. At times he would despair when he thought of his wife and child. At other times he would distract himself in conversations with his fellow prisoners. And at times he would draw strength from the thought of his God, who would certainly help him. There were moments when he could barely resist the temptation to share his faith with the others, but he knew that that could be dangerous.

The galley continued on its way over the sea. A seemingly endless voyage. The days passed without any sign of an arrival. There was only the water, the waves, the splash of an occasional fish, Nothing else appeared on the horizon day after day. Thus the days passed in conversation, in silent prayer and in occasional despair…

And once again in water, waves, the rare splash of a fish… the legionnaires, eating… water…

One evening as they were drifting off to sleep on the deck, a hoarse voice broke the silence.

" Lux lucis! Ego anim adverto lux lucis!" (*A bright light! I see a glowing light*!).

A shudder of excitement ran through the crowd of people. Everyone's eyes fixed on the direction of the light. Angel instinctively joined in. A vague glow could be seen on the horizon. What it exactly was no one knew, but it certainly was not a star on the horizon of the dark night sky. While the prisoners tried to contain themselves, the sight made the legionnaires ecstatic. Some began to shout in joy. Others danced about. The prisoners sensed from the excitement of the legionnaires that they were approaching some city. It seemed to evoke some happy anticipation among the soldiers and crew. It meant an end to their terrible voyage. At that moment no one could begin to think about what would come after.

But the light remained far in the distance as they continued to sail. Who knew how long they still had to travel? Their destination was not so near. Slowly the sense of euphoria receded and everyone returned to their sleep. At least they would soon be arriving somewhere.

And so it was that they arrived the next day when the sun was already high in the sky. One of his fellow prisoners woke Angel.

" Excito! Vultus is!" (*Get up. Look at that*!).

When Angel had collected his senses, he peered off into the distance where all eyes were fixed.

A great structure, tall as the sky, had suddenly appeared in front of the galley. It was situated on an island, and the

dock of the great city lay beyond. Angel had no idea that such wonders existed. He learned from his fellow prisoners that the great structure was a lighthouse and that its beacon was the light they had seen the night before. They grew silent as the galley approached and then passed by this great wonder. Angel stared at it. He tried to memorize every detail. The lighthouse had three stories with a tower on top. At the very top of the tower they could barely make out the place where the beacon fire burned. It was tucked away in a cupola that held an enormous mirror that reflected the sun's rays and guided ships during daylight hours. At the very top of the roof of the cupola gleamed a great statue, probably of some god. People swarmed all over lighthouse. Most were on the lowest level, which was still taller than most buildings. There was even a walkway surrounding the octagonal tower, which allowed visitors a grand view of the country roundabout.

It soon became clear that the lighthouse was more than a hundred feet tall.

Not long after they had passed the lighthouse, the galley arrived at the dock. There were dozens of galleys tied up at the dock and hundreds of smaller boats. And a great many people were present as well: soldiers, citizens, slaves… To Angel it seemed as if the entire world was gathered into this one incredible city. The prisoners were so caught up in the sight that they forgot for a moment their sorrow. No one spoke. They just stared in rapt silence, not knowing what would happen next. Finally the galley pulled in to the dock. Their long journey was at an end. The commander of the legionnaires addressed them. He told them that they had arrived in the great Roman city of Alexandria, where they would serve their sentences. They

were then arranged in one long line, which slowly disembarked from the ship. The bright and varied colors of the diverse population greeted their eyes at every turn. Angel had never seen such a sight before. They were then loaded onto prison wagons and transported to the city jail.

They passed several nights there, and then they were brought to the slave market. It was a large open space, where various business was conducted, but there was a special place where slaves were bought and sold. Angel was becoming inured to the endless humiliations he had to endure. He hardly reacted to his own “sale.” He was more interested in the crowds of people that surrounded him. He stared in fascination at their various shapes and dress. There had been marketplaces at home, but nothing like this lively scene. The entire marketplace hummed with activity. People engaged in a lively banter as they bought and sold their wares. One short, stout prison official, who was continually fanning himself in an effort to find some relief from the midday heat, oversaw the sale of Angel and his fellow prisoners.

He had told them earlier that they would be sent off to do hard labor, and that they must follow all orders that they were given. If they failed to do so, they would be returned to the jail and their sentences would be increased. If they continued to resist orders they could be sentenced to death.

A number of potential buyers stopped to look at them. From their dress and appearance and the servants who accompanied them, they appeared to be local lords. One of them purchased two slaves and departed. For hours after that no one showed further interest in buying the slaves. Only the occasional curiosity-seeker would stop

to look them over. Then finally, when it appeared as if there would be no more buying that day, an older man, probably in his late fifties, appeared along with his wife. Two armed guards accompanied them. Unlike the previous shoppers, who were mostly interested in the muscles of their potential purchases, these shoppers stood back and studied the prisoners. The obviously wealthy man gestured with his hand for the jail official's attention. The stout jailer stumbled over to him in a great haste to please. He first bowed to the man's wife and then the man began to explain his intent. The stout jailer nodded his assent and hurried back to the line of prisoners. He stopped in front of Angel, drenched in sweat from his exertion, and spoke to him:

" Vos es Angelus?" (*Are you Angel*?).

" Sic, dominus." (*Yes, sir*.).

The stout jailer took out the papyrus scroll that was draped over his right shoulder, studied it, and without looking at Angel, asked:

" Vos teneo laboro per tergus?" (*Do you know work with leather*?).

" Sic. Is eram meus negotium." (*Yes, that was my trade.*) , Angel immediately replied.

The stout jailer, without the least glance at Angel, again hurried over to the wealthy purchaser. They talked briefly, and then he returned to Angel and commanded him:

" Vos mos prosecutus is vir. Sit vestri vinco iam. (*You will go with this man. He will now be your lord master*.).

Angel silently approached his new master. The man appeared pleased with his purchase. While Angel

detected some hint of sympathy for him from the man's wife.

He was ordered to come with the couple and their armed guards, and they then left the market. They climbed aboard a wagon and after a time they arrived at his new home.

In fact, Angel had been brought to work for a rich Alexandrian, a Roman named Antonius Civilis. He was a merchant who provided supplies to the Roman military in Egypt. That is why he had purchased Angel. He was a rather reserved man, still strong and able. He obviously paid careful attention to his appearance. Angel thought him likely to be a hard master, who cared about his business and family but not much else.

And so began his slave's life in Alexandria. Angel was housed in a separate servant's quarters in his master's house, along with other servants and slaves. Angel slept in a large room with some thirty others. The leather shop where they worked was located right next door. He spent nearly the entire day working there. He tried to focus on his work during the day. It was a great source of satisfaction in his life. The craft was something that he had inherited as part of a family tradition. When evening came they were returned to their quarters to rest, and after dinner they retired to their beds for the night. That was the hardest time for him. When night came he never failed to dream of his wife and son. That dreaming was the only shred of connection to them that was left to him.

He mainly had to contend with the shop overseer, Didimos. He was a harsh boss. He was not a prisoner himself, but a paid employee. He came from the neighboring land called Libya.

The lord master often came by to observe the work. He would only converse with the overseer, who would give him information on the work. Then he would give the man some brief instructions and depart. Angel had learned that the master himself came from the capital of the empire, Rome. His father had escaped the intrigues of the capital by moving to Alexandria. Here he had begun production and trade in leather goods. After his father's death, Antonius had succeeded in expanding the business. His success had allowed him to build their beautiful house in the wealthy district of the city known as Soma. This also allowed him to hire or purchase many servants and slaves, including the armed guards who watched over the estate, including the large walled courtyard and included the slave quarters. There were other guards around the perimeter of the estate. It was difficult for Angel to even imagine some means of escape. And if he were to manage to escape, where would he go? How could he ever make his way back over the sea? He did not know if there was some land route that could lead him back to his home in the province of Macedonia.

And so three years passed.

One day the master again came to visit the workshop. But this time he was not alone. He was accompanied by a beautiful young woman. Word spread among the slaves that she was the master's daughter. Her name was Livia. She had spent a long time living away from home, but now she was back.

The younger slaves could not resist stealing a glance at her as she stood beside her father, curiously gazing around the shop. While her father carried on a conversation with the overseer, Angel also stole a glance

at her. He was painfully aware of his pitiful state. Dirty and drenched in sweat, smelling bad, with nothing tohis name… While she was a rich, beautiful, sweet-scented and pampered child. Angel smiled to himself as he considered the gulf that separated them. After that he returned his attention to the leather work in front of him.

Livia was twenty two years old. She had long blond hair gathered up and tied back in the Roman fashion of the times. She wore subtle and beautiful ornaments, that served to enhance her already striking good looks.

When at work Angel never paid much attention to his own appearance. It seemed to matter little to him how he appeared to others. But after the sight of the beautiful young woman that afternoon, he went to some trouble to clean himself up when he returned to his quarters that evening. He could not quite explain to himself why he did that. Perhaps she had reminded him of the fact that he too was still young and handsome. And of some quality… Who could say?

Whether by accident or design, the master's daughter began to frequent the workshop with her father. And Angel and the others would watch her on the sly. Perhaps she enjoyed their attention. Once her gaze met Angel's. He thought that she had intentionally looked his way. And he had looked her way? Immediately he banished such thoughts from his head and determined to keep his mind on his work.

But, as it sometimes has a way of doing, fate intervened in their lives in a way that no one would have imagined possible. One day Didimus ordered Angel to accompany him, along with an Arab and a Goth slave, who were hardened criminals but also skilled leather crafters.

The two of them were boon companions, who took one another part in fights among the workers. Angel had had his own run-ins with the two of them. No one liked the two men, who were an odd pair, the one being dark-skinned, while the other was a very pale white.

Didimus told them that there was leather that needed to be loaded for shipment. They entered a beautiful courtyard, which separated their own quarters from the two story main house. There were pallets in the courtyard loaded with cured leather. Several Roman legionnaires stood next to two wagons in the yard. Didimus ordered the three workers to load the leather in the wagons. Others had done this chore in the past, but for some reason these three were chosen this particular day. Angel assumed that the legionnaires were there to pick up the usual order of leather goods that the army had ordered from his master Civilis. Angel, along with the Goth and the Arab, began to load the wagons.

As they were finishing the job their master, Antonius Civilis, emerged from the house. The commander of the legionnaires offered his greetings. They stood some distance from the wagons. They talked briefly, and then the commander ordered one of his men to fetch a small box from a wagon. The legionnaire did as he was told. The Goth and the Arab and Angel watched as the master opened the box, counted the money in it and then closed it again. He then nodded his agreement to the commander, who stood by his side.

Angel placed the last of the leather goods into a wagon and paused momentarily to catch his breath before returning to the others.

- Persolvo tergum. (*They have paid him for the leather*.) - he heard a whisper in broken Roman speech beside him.

He turned and there was the parched face of the Goth, who winked at him. At that same moment the Arab emerged from the wagon. And he laughed at Angel, while concealing his gap-toothed mouth from him.

Angel never said a word, he just stared at both of them and silently stepped back from the wagon.

"Livia!" - he heard the master call out for his daughter.

When Angel came back around the wagon he could see the beautiful Livia standing at the balcony above.

" Sic abbas!" (*Yes, father*!) - she answered the master.

" Adveho hic!" (*Come down*!) - Antonius shouted, pointing to the chest with the money.

" Ego agnosco." (*I understand.*) - Livia answered him.

After a short time she came down from the balcony and took the small chest from him, speaking softly with her father. After which she disappeared again into the house. Not long after that the loading was finished and the legionnaires said goodbye to Antonius and left. Didimus then ordered Angel and the Arab and Goth back to the workshop.

That same night, which was warm like most summer nights in Egypt, Angel was unable to sleep for a long time. He was thinking about his wife and child again, and the thought tortured him. He tossed and turned in the bed, not knowing how to get to sleep. Suddenly he heard an unusual noise. Although it was the middle of the night,

the room in which he slept was lit up by a lamp that glowed from out in the courtyard. Cautiously he moved to the window and peered out to where the noise had come. Two of the slaves from among the thirty some who slept in the room with him were outside, whispering quietly to one another. It was not unusual for one or another person to get up in the night and use the toilet. So Angel assumed that to be the case this time as well. But the minutes passed and they didn't return to their beds. There was an armed guard out in the yard, but he didn't hear him calling out to the men to return to their quarters. This seemed strange to Angel. Because he was unable to sleep, he decided to do a little exploring on his own. So he went out to see what was going on. If he ran into the guard he would tell him that he just got up to use the toilet. And if everything was alright he would return to bed.

The door to the sleeping quarters was unlocked so that they could get to the toilets. There were other buildings right next to the slave quarters and to the left of them was the wall that separated them from the main house. There were guards posted all around the high outer wall and others in rooms in the main house. Angel rose and slowly made his way out. He had no idea what was happening, though he imagined anything was possible in this strange world he had fallen into. He silently made his way past the snoring servants and out of the suffocating stench of the room and into the shadows of the courtyard. There were several lamps burning at the main entrance to the yard. Angel listened for any sound of activity, but all he heard were the sounds of snoring men and the barking of dogs in distant yards. He peered in the direction of the wall that divided his quarters from that of the master's. He was

surprised to see a wooden ladder propped against the wall. There was no sign of the two men or the guard. There was just the ladder. He called out softly:

- Suspector! (*Guard*!).

But no one answered. He called out again, but still no answer. He instinctively grew hushed as he cautiously approached the ladder. He hesitated momentarily as he considered his next move. When he had convinced himself that there was no guard nearby, he started up the ladder. He would have a view of the master's house from there, and maybe then he would see what was going on.

He hurried to the top. From there he could see that the house was lit up, but there didn't appear to be anyone about. At first he didn't notice anything unusual. Then his attention was drawn to a light that glowed in one room on the upper floor with the balcony. He kept peering at it until it occurred to him that that was the daughter's room. Then he heard a choked cry from the room. The shocked realization came to him that the two slaves were in her room! It didn't make any sense. What were they after? He was sure that Livia was in considerable danger. They might be forcing themselves on her and afterward they might even kill her and then flee. Well, it wasn't his problem… But why had they chosen to enter her room at such a risk? Angel didn't particularly like his master, but he had nothing against his daughter, and she had always looked so nice… All of these thoughts raced through his head as he leapt over the wall and then hurried across the yard and up onto a box that had been placed below the balcony to permit the intruders entry from the ground floor. He could hear further sounds of struggle from the open window of the room as he approached. In one enormous leap he was up on the

balcony. Then he deftly made his way through the open window and into the room. In the dim lamplight of the room he was stunned by the sight that greeted him. Livia was sprawled across her bed. One of the intruders held her down and had a hand pressed firmly over her mouth, while the other was busy at her feet, pulling her dressing gown off. She was struggling, trying to break free, but she couldn't resist the two strong men. Muffled cries could be heard coming from her smothered mouth.

"Quis es vos effectus... Dementis!?" (*What are you doing? Are you mad*!?) - Angel shouted without thinking.

The two attackers immediately turned his way when they heard Angel cry out.

He knew right away who they were. It was the Arab and the Goth. The Arab was nearest to him. He was the one who was in the process of pulling off Livia's dress. When he recognized Angel his face took on a twisted sort of smile and he said:

"Angelus? Adveho quod suo nos. Nos vadum attero is meretrix! Is mos persolvo pro panton. Exinde nos vadum subterlabor! Viaticus est nobis." (*Angel? Come join us. We're going to snuff out this bitch and get some pay back for everything. Then we'll get out of here! We've got the money*).

"Es vos rabidus? Discedo!" (*Are you crazy? Get out of here*!) - Angel shouted at him.

"Iuguolo is quisquiliarum!" (*Kill the bastard*!) - shouted the Goth.

The Arab let go of Livia and leapt at Angel. His face still had the terrible twisted smile on it. In an instant they were locked in a deadly struggle. The Goth continued to hold Livia down with his hand clamped over her mouth,

but she kept twisting and turning in order to see the fighting men. The Arab used all of his strength. But Angel was ready. He lowered his shoulder and rammed it into the Arab's chest. At the same time he seized him by the neck with his left hand and twisted his legs out from under him with his right. He knew this move from the days when he had wrestled in competitions back home. And so the Arab found himself lifted off the ground. But the man was quite heavy, so Angel's knees buckled under the weight and he began to fall backwards toward the balcony. Angel managed to catch himself in time, but the Arab was carried by inertia on over the edge of the balcony and fell to the ground below. There he lay, moaning. Angel returned to the bedroom. When the Goth saw him he let go of Livia's mouth and prepared to fight. She immediately shrieked, and he hit her hard with his fist. This sight immediately reminded Angel of the fist of the Roman legionnaire who had struck his wife. It was as if the Goth must be made to pay for that brute blow as well. He set upon him in a fury. The Goth was driven to the window, and after that both men fell out the window and tumbled down to the ground below. Angel regained his feet first and continued to beat her attacker. Blood poured from both the Goth's mouth and nose. Livia's father entered her room at that moment with a lamp in hand and accompanied by two armed guards. Not knowing what had happened, they drew their swords and were about to slay Angel as well as the Goth who lay at his feet, when Livia, who looked on, cried out:

"Consto! Is servo meus vita!" (*Stop! He saved my life*!).

The very next day Angel was called to the master Antonius Civilis. He thanked him for saving his child's life

from the attackers who had already murdered the guards in the yard before they had gone after his daughter in order to get the money earned from the sale of the leather the previous day. The criminals had planned to buy their escape from Alexandria with this money. Now they were back in the jail awaiting the most severe of punishment. Antonius Civilis sincerely wanted to know how he could repay him for his actions. He promised Angel that he would be given easier work and money, and later he would see what he could do to obtain his complete freedom. Angel thanked him and departed.

The next day he was informed by the overseer Didimus that he would no longer be assigned to the workshop, but from now on he would work in the main house for the master. So he came to do lighter work in the house. He tended the yard, fed and groomed the horses and camels. He carried water and did various chores that he was asked to do. He was even assigned sleeping quarters in the house, along with two other house servants.

One day while he was washing up in the yard, Livia came by and stopped and asked him about his home.

"Ego sum ex provincia Macedonia vinco. Ex unus vegrandis locus." (*I am from the province of Macedonia, your ladyship. From a small provincial town*).

“Vere? Ego eram nunquam illic." (*Really? I’ve never been there*). - she replied with a smile.

Angel wanted to describe it to her, but her smile suggested it was not a serious interest on her part. He was momentarily disturbed by his thoughts, then, quietly went back to his washing.

After that Livia would often, as if by chance, find herself in his company. Whole days seemed to pass when

she did not leave the house and spent her time in the company of Angel and a few other servants. So they began to have long conversations. Angel began to pay more attention to his personal appearance and cleanliness. Livia told him about her marriage to a Roman soldier two years before, and how he had been killed in a war in Asia. That explained her absence from the household until recently. Angel saw her as a lively and engaging person who had suffered a harsh fate. He also shared his thoughts about his work, his people and his homeland. She had asked whether he was married, and he had responded honestly, confessing to his sorrow at the separation from his wife and child. Livia expressed her sympathy for his misfortune, but there was also something else expressed by her eyes. Some spark was growing in intensity inside of her breast. Or so it seemed to her. In order to avoid the obvious, she continually repeated to herself that he was only a slave and she an upper class lady. And that was that!

But there was some instinctual attraction that was not to be denied. One day when he was working alone in one of the horse stalls, Livia suddenly appeared. She touched him gently on the shoulder. He turned to her. He drank in the beautiful eyes, which were fixed on him. He was utterly captivated by her gaze. It was like nothing he had ever experienced before. A powerful love burned like a raging fire inside him. At that moment Livia took his hands in hers. Angel's legs began to tremble like a lovestruck teenager's. Their mutual attraction was undeniable. He felt as if he were in heaven. He had saved her, but now it was she who was his saviour. Their lips met. But as suddenly, Livia pulled away. She told him that she had to go. And left the barn. Angel did not sleep that night. He was obsessed

by her face. He could barely wait to see her again the next day.

Thus, several days passed with secret meetings of the two. They would gaze in each others eyes, hold hands and kiss. Angel felt like he was in a dream. But this elation was short-lived. It was not long before his conscience began to bother him. After all, he had a wife and child. And his love for them was not to be denied. Where were they now? He tried to suppress his feelings for them, but they were always close to his heart and in his thoughts. It made him somehow feel as if he were betraying them, and Livia too. He was at war with himself. There was his love for the beautiful Livia on the one hand. Her presence utterly filled him with delight. But the next moment he was filled with remorse as his thoughts returned to his beloved wife and child.that he had left behind in Macedonia. He was tossed back and forth between his fond thoughts of them and the presence of Livia. He prayed to Jesus to help him resolve this inner turmoil. But there was no solace to be found there either. Thoughts of Livia seemed to consume him, and thoughts of his wife and child grew ever more faint with the passing days. Livia's physical presence was far more powerful than the fading images in his mind of his distant family. Livia's captivating gaze drew him to her like a powerful magnet. It was as if he were under a magic spell. But this situation must somehow have a resolution. When he was alone, he would try to think things through, to make some sense of it all? What if he were to be freed? Her father would never give her to him, even if he had saved her life. What could come of their love, even if she chose to run away with him? He a slave and she a wealthy lady. She was accustomed to comfort and privilege. What kind

of a life could she possibly have with a poor working man? To support her he would have to put in long days of work, days in which they would be apart. Maybe their love would suffice, for a while, but then what? Poverty would eventually create a crisis for their love. She was accustomed to the luxury accorded a wealthy lady. How would she handle a poor commoner's life? He would have to spend long days apart from her, earning his living, and she would likely feel neglected by him. She would also have heavy chores to perform at home that were completely unknown to such a lady. She would soon discover what she had sacrificed in order to be with him. He imagined that love would not suffice. She would soon tire of such a hard life and beg her father to take her back in his luxurious home. But that was just one aspect of his problem. There was his wife Lika and their child. They would always be first in his heart. How could he abandon all hope of ever returning to them? God would never forgive such faithlessness. His conscience would torment him. If he should marry Livia he would no doubt always be haunted by the memory of his family. He knew that it would not do to lightly cast off what he had been given in life for the sake of some new or exotic experience. If he lived by that logic he would no doubt some day abandon Livia when he grew tired of her and perhaps return to his wife and child. Then he would have transgressed against Livia…

The beautiful Livia completely understood his dilemma. Thus the two of them were tossed on a sea of emotions that ran from deep passion to equally deep despair. They would often float in a sea of love, exchanging loving gazes, kissing and then holding each other's hands. However, the uncertainty about their future

cast a pall over their relationship. Angel grew silent and withdrawn. Something had to give…

It was announced that the Roman emperor, Septimius Severus was visiting Alexandria. He rode the streets in a fine carriage and crowds of people came out to catch a glimpse of him and to greet the ruler of their great empire. But it was said that he was afflicted with a terrible malady. He was plagued by nightmares…

It was not long after, that two Roman civil servants visited the home of Antonius Civilis. Angel was in the yard when they arrived at the house. He later learned from the house servants that they had asked for something from the master, but they had not learned what it was.

That same night Livia secretly sought him out during his chores in the barn. As usual, she took his hands in hers and they kissed. Just when Angel thought that she was about to depart, she made it clear that she was his, if he wished. It was the first time that they had ever made love. It was during their lovemaking that Angel made his decision. He would make her his wife. Their fates would be forever after intertwined. When they rose from their bed of straw, he prepared to make his declaration. But before he could say a word, Livia announced, and it hit him like a bolt of lightning, that:

"Is est nostrum permaneo nox." (*This is our last night together*).

Angel reeled in confusion. It didn't seem possible. But the expression on her face told him that she was deadly serious. All manner of thoughts raced through his head. Had she found another? Perhaps she was going away on some business? Or perhaps he had been sold by the master to another?

"Tamen quare meus diligo?" (*But why, my love*?).

"Ego certus." (*I've made up my mind*.) - was her sharp reply and she added - Vestri locus est praeter vestri uxor quod filius. (*Your place is with your wife and child*).

Angel was completely taken aback. He wanted to say something, but before he could she added:

"Cras vos mos vado." Vos mos vado domus. (*Tomorrow I will be leaving here, and you will be going home*).

"Quod…"(*No*…). - Angel managed to say.

"Per." (*Please*). - she added, placing her index finger to his lips. She gazed at him with teary eyes, then turned and left the horse stall. Angel just stood there stunned.

That night his mind raced with troubled thoughts of all that had occurred. After making love with Livia he was convinced that he was madly in love with her. On the other hand, the thought that he might actually soon see his home again, elated him. The terrible contradictory feelings that engulfed him denied him any sleep until late in the night…

The next day, to his surprise, he was told to prepare for a trip. Where, why or to whom, he was not told. He was strictly warned to keep silent about all of this. He only knew that this was somehow connected to the visit of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus, and that all of this had some connection to the visit of the emperor's men the day before. A slave was chosen from each of the wealthy homes to participate in the coming journey.

Angel was quite amazed by it all. His conflicting emotions still plagued him. It gave him a new sense of hope that he would soon be leaving this place, while he wept at the thought that he would likely never see Livia

ever again in this life. At the same time he kept remembering Livia's words, although not from any official source, they told him that he would be going home.

He was told to skip work that day and rest up for the journey, which suggested that they would be traveling at night. The need for slaves suggested that they would be carrying some burden, because he was ordered to rest the entire day. He thought that their night march would not be short. He did as he was ordered, but he kept an eye out for Livia, whom he expected to appear by his side any moment. Livia could at least bid him a final farewell, he thought. One of the house servants told him that it was at her insistence to her father that he had been chosen by the master for this journey. He should at least have some final opportunity to thank her for that. Even if all they did was weep together at their parting. But he thought all of this in vain, she did not appear.

That evening two legionnaires came for him. As he left the house he paused to peer up at the balcony by her room. But no one appeared, either on the balcony or at the window of her room. He only saw the least movement of the curtain. She no doubt stood behind it, and watched him for the last time, but he would not see her. Her face would only remain in his memory. Would he remain in her memory as a lost love? As one faint glimmer of light in the darkness of life? He longed to see her one last time… In vain, it seemed. He climbed into the wooden cart and they drove off.

There were five slaves in the cart, all strangers to him. Apparently they too had been chosen for the journey. Three of them were dark-skinned Africans. All of them were muscular. The cart made its way down the streets of

Alexandria. Angel stared about him in wonder. Suddenly he thought that maybe all of this was not the great tragedy he had imagined. Once he was free, he imagined that he might even be able to return here some day. Why not? No matter how unlikely that was, the thought somehow eased his mind. He felt the need for some kind of conversation with someone. He didn't know who among his fellows on the cart to strike up a conversation with. He thought about the city. He wanted to tell someone that the great founder of this city came from his homeland. He wanted to brag about that, to tell them all about it. To have some kind of conversation. So that he wouldn't think about his sorrow. Or the uncertain future… But from what he could see, they were all preoccupied with their own concerns. None of the others appeared to want any company. By evening they were beyond the city limits. There seemed to be slaves from all over Alexandria and even from other regions of Egypt. They were lined up and given leather back packs to carry. In the almost dead quiet, by the dim light of the great lighthouse, there was only the muffled clopping sound of the horses' hooves on the pavement and the occasional command of a centurion to the legionnaires, who would then pass it on to the slaves. The centurion finally rode out in front of the column on his horse and announced the most amazing news.

He spoke briefly and to the point. He told them that they had been chosen because they were the finest slaves that the emperor could find in all of Egypt for this important task. They were to travel together without any questions as to their final destination. The journey would be long and difficult, but when it was over they would be free to return to their homes. The final words of the

centurion were met with universal jubilation. The slaves were brimming with such excitement, like a group of school children out for an outing, that the centurion called for order. Angel's first reaction was to shed tears of joy at his good fortune. He would be going home! Could it really be? God bless the emperor Septimius Severus.! God bless Livia, who was responsible for his being chosen for this! He didn't know if it was out of gratitude or sorrow for the loss of Livia or joy at his going home that he was moved to his tears. He swore to himself that someday he would return and find her. But first he must return home.

After restoring order to the caravan, they moved on.

Angel took up his back pack, and next to him marched a Thracian slave, with his pack. The Thracian was a bit younger than Angel. He had long blond hair and a muscular build. They did not speak. Their packs were relatively small and light, and his muscular companion barely felt the burden of it. Their packs contained mess kits for meals, toiletries and additional clothing. There were other slaves both in front of and behind Angel. They were accompanied by a huge wooden cart that carried a large wooden box that resembled a casket, though much larger. No one seemed to know for certain what it contained, although one slave who accompanied the cart had hinted that he had glimpsed some kind of stone sarcophagus inside the wooden box. A team of oxen pulled the wagon. Additional teams of oxen and horses pulled other wagons loaded with wooden boxes in a train behind the main wagon. There was the occasional tinkle of metal within some of the boxes as the carts bounced over the rough road. This led some of the slaves to speculate that perhaps

they were transporting chests full of gold or silver treasure. Wherever the path was too treacherous for the wagons to pass, the slaves would have to transport the boxes on their shoulders. This was apparently one of the reasons for their presence. To see that the boxes made their way even where wagons could not go. The great wooden box caused them the most misery. They had to suspend it from long sturdy wooden poles that the men would carry on their shoulders.

The journey was difficult, but they were provided plenty of nourishing food and drink and adequate rest along the way. The Romans apparently wanted the slaves to be in good condition for the entire journey, so they were not mistreated. They were just warned not to raise their voices in loud conversation among themselves and to remain at their places in the column. There were also a large number of camels carrying loads in the caravan. Angel tried to count everyone in the caravan. He counted about a hundred slaves, two centurions and about a hundred and sixty legionnaires. There were some twenty camels, ten oxen and horse drawn wagons. At the head of the column was a centurion accompanied by an old man with a wrinkled face, who wore a tunic that nearly reached the ground. He had long grey hair and beard. He carried a cloth bag over his shoulder that never left his side. The Roman legionnaires and centurion called him “the seer,” and they treated him with great respect.

The journey seemed to go on forever… They traveled both day and night and rested in out of the way places, far from villages or towns. It was clear to Angel that this journey was a secret assignment under direct order of

the emperor. They encountered many obstacles and had their triumphs over the course of the journey.

After much travel they arrived in the land of Judea. This was a source of considerable excitement to Angel. This was no ordinary place to him. It was the land of which he had heard so much from his grandparents. It was the land of Adam and Moses and Samson… But also the land of the son of his God, Jesus. He had heard so much of the courage and tenacity of the people of this ancient land, and here he was among them. Judea was a Roman province at that time. There had been many revolts against the Romans, but all of them were brutally crushed. The Macedonians had ruled Judea before the Romans, which made him imagine that he might even meet one of the descendants of his own countrymen here… But, in fact, there was no one quite so interesting, just farmers working fields and laborers under Roman command out repairing the roads.

The journey continued. One evening while Angel sat by a fire with other slaves, a legionnaire approached them. He asked if any of them would like to participate in a wrestling tournament. At first no one said a word, they just looked at him in astonishment at such an invitation. Then the legionnaire announced that there would be a cash prize for the winner. When they heard that several of the men agreed to participate in the competition. Angel was one of them. It was not so much for the money as it was due to his delight in wrestling. He had always loved the sport. And it had been a long time since he had had the opportunity to wrestle. Roman soldiers also participated in the tournament. They competed in a series of elimination matches. The winners of each match would then wrestle

against other winners. This went on for three evenings of five rounds each, due to the large number of contestants. Legionnaires and soldiers alike formed a large circle of spectators around the ring in which the contestants wrestled. They built a large fire in the center of the ring to provide light. The wrestlers competed according to strict rules that forbid boxing of any kind. Judges oversaw the matches. A contestant who succeeded in pinning his opponent on the ground would be declared the winner. They wrestled nude from the waist up.

Angel's first opponent was a slave from Athens. He defeated the man rather easily and moved on to the second round of the competition. He was then pitted against a Roman soldier. The man was not quite so muscular as Angel, but he was quick and clever in his moves. He just barely managed to best the man in a hard fought match. The next day, in the third round of the competition, he was pitted against a black wrestler. He was as big and strong as Angel, but he wasn't as skilled in the sport of wrestling as his previous opponents. The black man wrestled hard, using all of his strength, but Angel knew a few special tricks that allowed him to best the man. Angel was becoming a favorite among the contestants. They began to cheer for him, calling out "Macedonis" whenever he wrestled. Then came a particularly challenging match. His opponent was an Armenian called Tigranes, who proved especially skilled at wrestling. They were quite evenly matched and the contest lasted for a considerable time. He was apparently used to defeating his opponents rather quickly, so the long match began to wear the man out. Utterly exhausted by the end, he eventually had to admit defeat. Thus Angel advanced to compete in

the final round of the competition, which would take place the following evening.

His opponent in the final round was the most powerful of all the men there. He was a famous Roman legionnaire named Apius. They met in the final match of the evening. Those present were clearly divided on their favorite wrestler. The slaves all favored Angel, while the legionnaires favored their own, the soldier Apius. The judge signaled the start of the match. The legionnaire tore in to Angel with all of his considerable strength, hoping to overwhelm his opponent with this sudden attack and pin him quickly. But Angel was not so easily outdone. He employed an old and well-rehearsed trick, the same one he had used on the Arab in Livia's room. To everyone's surprise, he managed to lift the legionnaire off his feet and at the same instant he succeeded in slamming the man to the ground and landing on top of him. The legionnaire gasped as he was slammed to the ground. Angel managed to use the element of surprise to his advantage, expertly pinning his opponent to the ground. The judge announced him the winner. A loud shout went up from the crowd. The final match had lasted mere seconds! Angel stunned them all by his success. No one had imagined that he possessed such prowess. Everyone present began to shout: "Macedonis! Macedonis!".

The judge raised Angel's arm in a sign of his victory. After that Angel approached the legionnaire, who still lay in the dust stunned, and he extended his hand to help the man get up. He accepted the hand and graciously congratulated Angel on his victory. Then the centurion awarded Angel the promised cash prize. He raised the prize money above his head for all to see.

The journey continued. They passed into the land known as Phoenicia. There he had another interesting encounter.

One day while they were resting in a small wood a legionnaire came by and asked Angel to accompany him somewhere. He gave him an empty water jug, so Angel assumed that he would need to fill it somewhere. He took the jug and went with the man. The legionnaire who guided him was young and handsome. He was maybe twenty three years old. He had blond hair and brown eyes. Once they were out of sight of the others he suddenly blurted:

"Tu es ex provincia Macedonia? Mancipium dico vos Macedonis." (*You are from the province of Macedonia. The other slaves call you the Macedonian*.).

Angel was surprised at this. The legionnaires rarely spoke to any of them, and this one mentioned his native land. Angel wanted to stop and talk, but the soldier gestured with his sword for him to continue on. Perhaps he didn't want the others to see them talking? Angel took a few more steps and then turned and said in his best Latin:

"Sic. Ego sum ex Macedonia. Ex Phoinikos, Bylazora." (*Yes, I am from Macedonia. From Voinitsa, near Bilazora*).

They continued on in silence until they arrived in a meadow.

In the distance there appeared a large tree.

The legionnaire called out:

"Consto!" (*Stop*!).

Angel stopped. The legionnaire approached him and pointed toward the tree and suddenly blurted:

"Darvlo, v'di." (*Tree, water*).

Angel could not believe his ears. He had just heard words from his native language! It was a southern dialect, but nonetheless, his language. He meant to tell him that there was water by the tree. They stepped over to the tree. But, where had a legionnaire learned these words?

He wanted to respond in his language as well, but he wasn't sure how that would be received. So he chose to continue in his broken Latin speech:

"Dominus... Quam yoi teneo meus lingua?" (*Sir, from where do you know my language*?).

The legionnaire studied him. As if he was making up his mind whether or not to answer the question, but finally he said:

"Meus parentes es ex provincia Macedonia, ex Bisaltae. Ego sum prognatus in Alexandria. Ego teneo aliquantulus ex vestri lingua." (*My parents are from the province of Macedonia, from Bisaltia. I was born in Alexandria. I learned a little of their language*).

This filled Angel with indescribable joy. This was the first time in years that he had seen someone with a connection to his own people. Although he had been born in Alexandria, his roots were in Macedonia, in Bisaltia. That explained his limited speech. Bisaltia was to the south of his own home. If they had been in some other circumstances, he probably would have hugged his countryman in joy. But the legionnaire was not one to do that. He may have been a countryman, but he was also a soldier of the Roman Empire, which set him apart. Angel nodded his head and turned to fill the jug at the spring, which was located at the base of the tree, in the underbrush. They drank their fill, and then the Roman Bisaltian ordered Angel to fill the jug. The whole time he

watched Angel carefully, in case he should try and run away. Angel was already used to being treated in this humiliating fashion. Once the jug was full, the Roman Bisaltian again gave the order for Angel to walk in front of him. Angel turned and began to walk back to the camp. He had barely taken two steps when he heard a shriek from behind him. When he turned to look he spied the legionnaire sprawled on the ground clutching his foot. Angel instinctively began to scan the area for danger. Then he spotted the cause of the man's distress, opposite his swollen ankle, he could just make out the tail of a snake as it slithered off into the grass. Angel dropped his load and hurried to the legionnaire's side. But the man apparently had misinterpreted his intentions, because he drew his sword in order to defend himself. He could barely hold the sword in his hand, due to the pain of the snake bite, but he managed to warn Angel away with the sword.

"Dominus, ego succurro vos." (*Sir, I only want to help you*). - Angel shouted.

The Bisaltian shook his head. He refused to believe him.

Angel called out again, more urgently still:

"Haud vicis! Vos can intereo!" (*There's no time! You could die*!).

The man's hand trembled, but he continued to wave the sword menacingly while clutching his wound with the other hand. His breathing was growing more difficult.

"Tribuo mihi vestri mucro!" (*Give me the sword*!). - Angel shouted at him.

The legionnaire refused to give it up. Then Angel rushed to his side and easily overpowered him, taking the weapon from his hand. The legionnaire stared at Angel as

if he were about to butcher him. Angel simply urged the man:

"Tendo vestri crur! Festino!" (*Give me your foot! Quickly*!).

The man was still reluctant, but he extended his wounded foot to Angel, who took hold of it and said:

"Verto! Is mos vulnero!" (*Turn away now. This is going to hurt*!).

The man turned his face away. Angel gripped the foot tightly while he expertly made a crossed incision with the sword. The legionnaire grimaced in pain. Angel placed his mouth to the wound and began to suck the poison out. He would suck and then spit out the poison. He repeated this procedure until he was certain that he had rid the wound of poisonous venom. Then he bound up the wound with clean cloth from the soldier's kit bag. The legionnaire had remained silent the entire time, with his teeth tightly clenched. After that Angel helped him stand up and then braced him as they slowly made their way back to camp.

When the others saw them approaching, they rushed out to help carry the injured man back. Angel was ordered to return to his place among the other slaves. That was the end of this strange incident. He didn't even know the name of the soldier that he had helped. Later, Angel saw the soldier again, much better after treatment with healing herbs.

The caravan lengthened as the months passed… Angel faithfully bore his share of the burden, alongside the Thracian slave. Occasionally a slave would fall ill. Those who faltered would disappear, but no one seemed to know for certain whether they had been freed or simply killed by

the guards. It made them all anxious. Angel was determined to endure until the end.

He never shared any further words with his countryman among the legionnaires. The man seemed to be avoiding him. He was probably ashamed of the fact that he had had to be rescued by a slave. Maybe he would have liked to thank Angel, but he may not have wanted to do so in front of the other legionnaires.

The journey continued. Angel lost all sense of the passage of time and distance. There was just the road and more road. During rest periods they would bathe and then fall right off to sleep. Angel was able to endure alongside the other slaves and the Roman soldiers in the caravan because he had learned, from a member of their party who could read their direction from studying the stars, that they were proceeding in a northerly direction, the direction of his home. And the weather grew colder day by day. When they eventually set out in boats to traverse the sea passage that would bring them to the continent of Europe, he could barely contain himself. He couldn't believe that he would soon be seeing his native land again. He learned from the other slaves that they would land in Thrace. Soon after the mountainous coastline of Thrace appeared, they landed the boats and set up camp on a meadow. They slept late the next morning, and when they awoke they discovered that nearly half of the caravan of slaves and Roman legionnaires were gone. Where they had gone, no one seemed to know. They remained on the meadow another night. Angel awoke very early the next morning. He was unable to sleep. He noticed several figures stood at the edge of a cliff at one end of the meadow. It was the centurion, the seer and two legionnaires. When the first

rays of the sun began to appear on the horizon the seer raised his arms in a sign of exultation. Then he pointed to a point somewhere on the polished rock. One of the legionnaires immediately marked the site by carving a mark with his sword. Angel had no idea what they were doing, how many marks they had made or what they represented. He was mostly concerned that the missing members of the caravan had not yet returned. There was little he could do but wait to see what would happen next. The Thracian slave was still beside him in the remaining caravan as well as the giant wooden box. The centurion gave the order for them to fall in to line. The journey continued. Although he was tired by days end, he had trouble falling asleep at night. His excitement at being so close to home overshadowed all other thoughts and feelings. It wasn't long before they passed over into Macedonia. They eventually came upon people, tending fields and herding livestock. They stared in wonder at the passage of the caravan and Angel was moved by the sight of his homeland and his fellow countrymen, that he had not seen for so many years. He wanted to rush over and hug them to him… He was so happy, but he was also saddened at his powerlessness. It seemed incredible that he should be so close to his home. He had never felt such strong emotions. He was filled with a joy and also plagued by doubts. It seemed that he really was back in his homeland, and he would soon see his own home. But when would he be freed? Could the Romans have lied to him? Maybe he should try and escape? But how could he? There were guards posted all around the slaves both day and night. They would cut him down at the first sign of his

trying to escape. He decided that he would just have to wait and see what would happen next.

Once they had entered Macedonia they turned off the main road and proceeded along a side route. Then they turned off that road onto an even smaller path. They passed through the crumbling remains of an abandoned city and a burial grounds. They eventually arrived at one particular mountain. Word spread that their journey was at an end. The countryside roundabout was totally devoid of human life. It was early evening. They tied the camels up at the base of the mountain and the slaves proceeded to transport their cargo up the slopes of the mountain on foot. They placed all of the boxes at a particular place on the mountainside. The transport of the one enormous box caused them the most grief. They managed to move it once again with the aid of long carrying poles. They worked under the direction of the old royal seer, who consulted papyrus scrolls and then passed orders on to the centurion, who saw that they were carried out.

A group of Roman soldiers were put to work clearing the brush on the slopes with their short swords, in advance of the transport. After a time they stopped their work at what appeared to be the entrance to a cave. The slaves were ordered to bring their loads on up to the cave. But first both their hands and feet were bound so that they could only take small, halting steps. They were then ordered to enter the cave and leave the boxes there. A legionnaire accompanied each pair of slaves and lit their way with a torch. However, Angel noticed something strange. The first two slaves that had entered the cave with their box, never emerged. Nor did the next pair. The others began to grow anxious. The centurion noticed this and

shouted for them to pay attention. He told them that there was an exit at the other end of the cave where the first slaves would depart, and that they would be free to go where they chose once they had passed out of the cave. These words reassured them, and they calmed back down. All the same, the uncertainty continued to plague them. The moment came for Angel to enter the cave with his box, alongside the Thracian. A Roman soldier followed them in with a torch. The Roman just happened to be the man whose family came from the Macedonian area Bisaltia, the one that he had saved from the snake bite. At first the path was so narrow that they had to almost crawl with their load. Then it opened up into a wondrous chamber of glowing limestone rock formations. They panted from the exertion of carrying their load over the crooked, slippery cave floor with its weird, twisted formations of stalagmites. They were unable to peer about much, however, because they had to pay such careful attention to their footing. They traversed several hundred yards of the cavern in this way, passing from room to room, greeted by fantastic patterns of stalagmites and stalactites at every turn.

Finally the legionnaire ordered them to halt. With the aid of the torch they could see that the previous loads were all stored at this location. They set their own load down among the others. Angel felt relieved. Perhaps it was true that the others had exited by another route. The Roman soldier then ordered them to proceed in front of him. Angel led the way with short, halting steps due to the bindings on his hands and feet, and he carried the torch. The Thracian followed him a few steps behind, and the legionnaire followed him. They continued on at least another two hundred yards through narrow passages

further into the cave. Angel counted some dozen more chambers on the way. There were objects abandoned by the previous slaves, all along the route. There was a continual drip of water onto their hot, sweat-laden skin from the cave walls. Their breathing grew hushed as a small light appeared up ahead. A sense of relief and joy filled Angel. It meant that they really would not end up perishing there in the cave after all. His joy at this almost immediately was replaced by some vague fear that settled deep in his bones. As the light grew larger and the entrance to the cave finally appeared in front of them, the Thracian smiled. The soldier ordered them on. Angel emerged first. The evening gloom clouded his gaze at first. The smiling Thracian followed him. Suddenly he froze. The smile on the Thracian's face froze as well. As soon as he stepped out the soldier drove a sword into his ribs. Angel turned and saw the smile of the Thracian turn into a death mask. He realized immediately what had occurred. This is where they would die… He tried to escape, but his legs were still bound. He could only take little steps as he tried to escape into the brush. He eventually fell and sprawled on the ground. But it wasn't really the ground, he felt but something soft under him… It was the dead bodies of the slaves who had gone before. They had all been murdered here. The legionnaire flew after him. He soon caught up. He raised his bloody sword to drive it into Angel's body, sprawled on the ground before him. This was the end!... As the sword rose above him, Angel's eyes bore into the eyes of the legionnaire. He managed to say: in a rasp:

" Bonus. Socius paganus." (*Farewell. Countryman*).

The legionnaire's arm froze. Several unendurable moments passed. They exchanged glances. The killer and his victim. They could hear the voices of the other legionnaires nearby, who had already emerged from the cave and killed their slaves. They were waiting down below for the legionnaire. They were close by, but they couldn't see them through the thick brush. They called out to him. Angel simply lay there in his helplessness. The legionnaire hesitated, then called out:

"Hac sum!" (*I'm over here*!).

At the same time he whispered to Angel:

"Vos exsisto per!" (*Be quiet*!).

Angel stared at him in astonishment.

The legionnaire's face trembled. He stood up and said: "Iacio hic quod non permoveo! Simulatio ut vos es mortuus!" (*He's fallen over here and seems to be dead. I just wanted to be sure*!).

Angel couldn't believe it. But there was no time to lose. He nodded his head. This was all he could do to convey his gratitude. The legionnaire gestured for him to smear himself with blood and lie as still as possible so that they would think that he was dead. Angel did as he was told in a daze. Barely aware of what he did, he smeared the Thracian's blood all over himself and then layed down alongside him. The soldier waited to see that Angel was set, and then looked to the heavens as if he were praying to the gods, before hurrying off to join the others, who continued to call out to him.

Angel remained still. Not long after, the body of another dead slave fell alongside him, then another and another… He wanted to cry out… It seemed better to be killed himself, than to lie like this, buried in a pile of dead

bodies. But for some reason the smiling faces of his wife and son appeared in his mind's eye. He clenched his teeth and resolved to endure it all… He had no idea how much time he passed in this hell. He tried not to think about what was happening around him. The bodies kept piling up. He could hear the voices of the legionnaires who had collected nearby down below. When would this horror end?... He had to hold on! It was a terrible struggle.

On the one hand, there was the powerful urge to get as far from the dead as possible, and on the other, the knowledge that if he tried to flee and the legionnaires saw him, he would join the other slaves in death. And he would not be the only one to suffer death, the soldier who had spared him would likely be executed for that as well. And what about his wife and child? And Livia? He had to endure for all of them... And finally there was an end. The bodies quit falling on the pile. The noise of the gathered legionnaires began to recede and then finally disappeared altogether. They must have left the site. He waited for a time to be sure. Once he was completely confident that he was alone, he began to struggle his way out of the pile of bodies. He glanced about him warily as he did so… His skin crawled as he stared at the butchered bodies that surrounded him. He was horrified. He staggered across the site in a daze. He became disoriented and began to wander the brushy slope in confused circles. He finally got a grip on himself.

He slowly collected his wits. He felt a sudden childish thrill at the realization that he had cheated death. He wept in gratitude to his God, Jesus… And to the beautiful Livia…, He was certain that he would see her again someday. No matter how remote the chance, he

would manage to find her again… He once again thanked the legionnaire, from his own people, who had spared his life. May God bless him and his family… But now he had to think about the reality of his situation. He would have to be extremely careful not to fall into the hands of the Roman soldiers again. He listened carefully for any signs of danger. He breathed a sigh of relief. It appeared that he was completely alone.

He found a sharp stone to cut the bindings on his hands and feet. He thought about the cargo they had delivered to this mountain. What had the boxes contained? Once he had convinced himself that he truly was alone, he went back to the entrance of the cave. He searched for it, but he could not find a thing. It was as if it had never existed. He paused to think for a moment, and then he began to rip away the brush with his bare hands in search of it. Eventually he realized that it was hopeless. The entrance no longer existed. There were great stones piled there by the Roman soldiers, who had obviously been ordered to destroy all trace of the cave entrance. It was all part of the plan. To hide their cargo and kill the slaves who were witnesses to it all. They had killed them in such a manner that there had been no opportunity to resist. There was nothing more for him to do here. He decided to flee this place and try to make his way home, to his wife and child. He was beginning to feel an urgent need for food and water. So he felt a sudden joy when he spied a well up ahead. How was that possible, up here on the mountain? No matter, he felt such good fortune to be able to slake his thirst. But something was wrong. The well was dry. But again his luck turned as he found a patch of wild blackberries. He greedily ate the fruit. Then he pushed on.

His legs were exhausted. He had traversed over a half mile of rugged mountain terrain. He climbed up to a vantage point where he could see a flock of birds circling a particular spot. It was about a hundred yards away. He listened carefully, but there was no other sound than the calling of the birds. He considered the situation. He was exhausted and could use a rest, but he was also terribly thirsty again. The berries hadn't quite been enough. He wondered if there might be a spring down where the flock of birds were. If there were people about he should be able to hear them before they spotted him. He didn't think there would be any danger. And his thirst was growing stronger. He decided to go down, but he would be careful. He made his way slowly and cautiously, using the brush for cover until he was within fifty yards of the circling birds. He stopped and studied the area. There was something strewn about in the grass there. He waited and watched until he was once again convinced that there was no one about and then proceeded to approach the site. He was reassured by the presence of the birds. They would have flown off if people were there. When he reached them, he strode into the flock, which seemed reluctant to flee. He began waving his arms to chase them away. Here again, to his shock and horror, there were dead bodies strewn about the clearing. He counted tens of them. But these were not slaves. They were soldiers. Roman soldiers. Legionnaires. The sight astonished him. What had happened to the Romans? Who were they? He studied the bodies more carefully. Suddenly he recognized one of the men. And then another… And another… He realized that these legionnaires, some stabbed, some shot with arrows, were

the same ones who had traveled with him for so many months in the caravan.

They were the same men who had killed all of the slaves. They had met the same end. Incredible! Who had killed them? He picked up one of the arrows and examined it. There was no doubt. These were Roman arrows. It meant that the Romans had killed their own… He remained for a time among the murdered Romans, kicking and stabbing at them. He did not regret their deaths, after what they had done to him and his fellow slaves. But why were they murdered? It must have to do with the contents of the boxes in the cave. This eliminated the last witnesses to the secret burial of whatever they had placed in the cave. The realization made him tremble. The Roman soldiers who had killed these men must have done so on strict orders without the least knowledge of who they were or what they had done. They had probably been told that they were rogue elements of some unit that had fled to the mountains. He even spied the body of the centurion among the men. He had three arrows in him. They wanted to make certain that he was dead. The royal seer lay next to him, his dead eyes fixed on the heavens. He would be waiting for the dark to once again study the stars. He had been stabbed in the stomach by a sword. From what he could see, this massacre had occurred quite recently. The soldiers would probably return soon with slaves in order to bury the bodies. That meant that he needed to move on right away. He started to hurry off, but then stopped. He wanted to find the Bisaltian among the legionnaires. The man had saved his life. He would be forever indebted to him. He searched among the bodies. He finally found him a few paces to the right of the seer, Why hadn’t he seen him

earlier? The man lay with his face buried in the grass. He was already half-buried in the earth of the lost homeland of his parents. An arrow had pierced his ribs. Blood still flowed from the wound. He turned the man over.

To his astonishment, the man was still breathing! Angel rejoiced. He might be able to help him. He braced the soldier's head with his right hand.and slapped him gently on the cheek. But he realized that there was little he could do for him. The man was on the verge of death. He opened his eyes and swallowed.

"Ego vadum addo vos aqua…" (*Can I bring you some water*…) - Angel said as he searched about for the soldier's water flask.

The Bisaltian gripped Angel's tunic with all of his remaining strength, to hold him there. Then he pointed with a trembling hand toward the dead seer who lay nearby. Breathing hard and staring with eyes filled with despair, he finally managed to whisper through his parched lips in their own Macedonian tongue:

" Hlamida... Hlamida... Knuman... bago, balayo…" (*The shoulder bag, the bag… the blessed… the Great one*…).

He never finished the words. His eyes clouded over. The hand that pointed in the direction of the seer froze in place. He died in his arms. Angel shook him gently in the vain hope that he might regain consciousness. It was too late. The soldier was gone. He laid him gently back down on the earth and closed his eyes. He knelt by his side and lifted his gaze to the heavens and prayed for the soul of the departed. He considered burying the man, but thought better of it. If he did, those who returned later would see the grave and know that someone had been

here. They would possibly find his tracks and follow him and maybe catch up with him. He decided that he would just have to find some other way to honor the man who had saved his life. He didn't even know the man's name… Then his gaze fell upon the royal seer. What was the Bisaltian Roman soldier trying to tell him about the man? It must have been something important. But what?

He approached the body. He knew that he didn't have much time. He noticed that the seer's bag, that had accompanied him everywhere he went, was gone. The Bisaltian had referred to the shoulder bag that every Roman soldier carried. Was there some connection? Angel turned the seer over and there was a shoulder bag. He guessed that there was something important in the bag. He searched the bag and discovered a side pocket that contained a papyrus scroll. Suddenly he heard voices. People were approaching. Angel leapt to his feet. He didn't have a moment to spare. It was the Roman soldiers returning with slaves who would collect the dead. He scoured the site with his eyes, he didn't see a weapon to carry off, but there was a water flask that he grabbed on his way out of the site of the massacre.

Once he had found a safe hiding place at some distance, he sat down and rested, while considering his next move. He took out the papyrus scroll. The etched symbols and words swirled before his eyes. It took all of his concentration to read them. He thought about the last words of the Bisaltian. They were spoken in his native Macedonian language. What did he mean to say to him?... Suddenly it came to him! Why hadn't he understood immediately? The terrible truth that the dying man had tried to utter. It all made sense with what he could make out of

the message contained on the papyrus scroll. There was no doubt left in his mind that the soldier was on the verge of telling Angel what he had learned when he had died. The great secret! That had caused the deaths of so many ordinary people. And the soldier had wanted to tell Angel the secret, to try in some way to betray those who had betrayed him after so much faithful service to the Roman Empire. Treated like a dog of no further use after he had fulfilled his task. And so the man had tried to reveal what he knew. In the native tongue of his parents, that he could not easily speak. A last bit of rebellion against the Romans. To reveal their secret, and at the same time to do it in the language of their conquered enemy. And there it was, the papyrus scroll that was hidden in the pocket of the shoulder bag. At the time of the massacre the two of them had been near each other. The Roman soldier, knowing that he would soon die, must have reached in to the pouch and taken out the scroll, in order to at least know the secret that had led to his death. The secret that he had then hidden in the shoulder bag. He had died, but the papyrus scroll had survived, in his bag. And he had managed to convey the great secret to Angel in the end. This knowledge staggered him. If they would kill so many to keep the secret, it frightened him to imagine the lengths they might go to silence anyone like himself who had stumbled upon the secret. It took him some time to finally regain control of himself.

Angel spent another night up on the mountain, and then he made his way down to where shepherds grazed their sheep in the surrounding hills and learned from them the way home. A few days later he arrived home. To his village on the outskirts of Bilazora. He waited until nightfall

to knock at his own door, utterly exhausted, but also filled with joy. His wife opened the door and when she saw him she almost fainted in amazement. She gathered him in her arms and guided him to their bed, where she nursed his wounds and gave him food and drink. They wept together long and hard. And their son was there by their side, alive and well…

When he had regained his health, one of the first things that he did was to study the words and the symbols on the scroll. He knew how to write, and he made his own ink and used a certain reed to make a pen, in order to add a message that explained how to find the cave on the mountain. Then, because he felt some special need to honor the memory of the Roman soldier from Bisaltia who had saved his life, and not knowing his name, he simply wrote "BISALTAE."

Angel, or Angelus as the Romans called him, pondered the meaning of the message on the scroll for the longest time. He managed to interpret most of it, based upon knowledge of their writing that he had gained from the Egyptians that he had known during his stay in their land. Some of the message was rewritten in a code meant to confuse anyone who might gain access to his copy of the scroll. So that it wouldn't easily lead them on a search for the cave on the mountain…

Angel never returned to the mountain where the massacre had occurred. He died suddenly not long after his return. His son was too young at the time to understand his father's secret. His wife, Lika, had come to know some of the story of what he had experienced on the mountain. But he had never managed to tell her everything. His premature death had prevented that. So no one had

learned all of the details of his great secret. Lika would eventually share what she knew with her son, who as an adult, would try to rediscover the cave, but without success. He was simply unable to completely decipher all of the secrets of the message on the parchment scroll that was his legacy from his father. But the mysterious parchment scroll remained, together with the fading memory of Angel…

*

…on whose left and right side stood two unfamiliar soldiers. They were prisoners like him. One of them was short with puffy cheeks and he was wailing like a baby, while the other one, who was thin with a taut pinched face, shivered as if it were the height of winter. Angel was uncertain whether he should try and calm them down or whether he too might begin to weep. They were arranged in an endless column…. It was the year 1014. The wind here at the foot of Mt. Belasitsa howled like a banshee. One after another they led one after another over the rugged stone ridge that was some 20 yards away. Terrible screams filled the air from beyond the ridge. It was impossible to endure. Angel had no idea what they were doing, but waves of fear ran through his body with each new scream that pierced the air.

As he was having these thoughts, the time came for his companions. The two enemy soldiers grabbed the wailing, heavy-set prisoner like wolves in a sheepfold. He tried to resist them, although they held him firmly… He cursed and begged them not to take him over the ridge. To no avail… When they found that he was too heavy for them

to move by themselves (even though he was bound) one of the soldiers called for help.

They rushed over and immediately began to beat him. Angel heard some speaking Greek, while others spoke his own language. He wanted to shout at those who spoke his language, but one of the enemy soldiers stopped him from intervening by laying the blade of his spear to his neck. Angel instinctively backed off and then turned away. The endless column of captured soldiers occupied his attention. They were arranged in rows of three. They wore long tunics and they were bound with heavy rope. They were surrounded by a ring of enemy soldiers. Some of the prisoners looked his way when he turned in their direction. Fear and confusion reigned. Time seemed to stand still.

"Siamo mì izgìbati!" (*We will die here*!). - the thin, weathered man shouted in a frightened and trembling voice. Strangely, Angel's thoughts suddenly abandoned the reality around him. Angel thought about the fact that the man's speech clearly suggested he was from the southern part of the land. He wanted to ask him where exactly, but the harsh reality forced itself on him again. Two enemy soldiers thrust themselves between him and the line.

"*A hundred! … This one gets lucky"*. - laughed the one, a tall, slim parched-looking man.

"Gresti sto!" (*Go on, you're the hundredth*!) - the other soldier said, as he pulled Angel along by the elbow. This soldier was unremarkable in his appearance.

They moved. Angel felt his legs begin to tremble. The two fierce soldiers led him over the ridge where the terrible screams could be heard. Although it was still daytime, it felt like night had descended unnaturally. For an

instant his thoughts fled from the reality once again. The one soldier who appeared more normal had spoken in his own language, in a southern dialect. He wanted to ask the man some things. To have a short conversation. To tell him that the captive soldier who had caused them such trouble was also from the southern districts. … Then he thought that he would like to say something to the Roman soldier. The one who looked like a dried prune. He knew some of his language as well… But he didn't seem capable of uttering a single word. The enemy soldiers gripped him under the armpits and silently conducted him on to the site of the horrors.

Suddenly it was as if the earth opened up under his feet. The site that greeted Angel was more horrible than any nightmare. If there was a hell on earth, this was certainly it, this parcel of earth at the foot of Mt. Belasitsa in the cursed year of 1014 A.D. There was a clearing just over the ridge Hundreds of men were sprawled on the ground, prisoners from his army, who wailed and moaned in a continual dirge. At first he couldn't tell what the source of their misery was. Then it became clear. Incredible! Each man had his hands clutched to his eyes.

Blood dripped from where their eyes had been. Some of the men lay curled up on the ground like so many wounded birds. Others lay unconscious or dead from the shock, with blood-smeared faces.

Enemy soldiers were busy herding those who tried to break out of the circle. As if they should fear their escape… They merely needed to kick them away and they would retreat… It was clear. His fellow soldiers were being blinded. He was awaiting the same fate. His legs felt like jelly. He could barely stand, but somehow his knees held

him. Even so, the two fierce soldiers who held him by the armpits would have kept him standing.

The figures around him suddenly grew distant and small. The earth spun before his eyes. He felt a terrible pain in his gut. He couldn't contain himself. He threw up. The soldiers who held him shifted away from him in order to avoid the mess. Then they grabbed him by the armpits again. They hurried him over to another monster, a sweaty brute of a man, who fed a roaring fire. The brute wielded at red-hot sword. Suddenly another brute grabbed Angel by the neck and held him in a vise-like grip. He could only see that the man was shorter than himself and bald…

He couldn't move, even if he'd had the strength. He knew what was coming. He didn't want the face of the brute who blinded him to be his last sight on this earth. He looked to the heavens. He was reminded of the Lord. Too late. Not even time to cry out. The brute thrust the red-hot blade into his face. Horror. Unendurable pain. A shriek. Darkness…

He had no idea how long he lay unconscious. He could feel how someone was trying to shake him awake. His face was grotesquely swollen and blood-streaked, as he had his first glimpse of the world through his one remaining eye.

"Sergeant!" - shouted a hideous one-eyed face, shaking his head.

Angel couldn't quite remember what had happened to him. Who was shouting at him? He slowly came to himself. The aching from his one eye still burned like fire… Wait! He remembered it all. The monsters! But, he wasn't blind. He could see, but it was strange somehow… He used to see things differently… All of these

thoughts in an instant rushed through his mind. Then he began to understand what had happened. The distorted face of the one-eyed man was that of one of his own soldiers. He quickly explained it all to him. The monsters had blinded all of the prisoners. Thousands of men… They left one eye on every hundredth man. And then they left them. They left them blind to return to their emperor. The one-eyed ones were meant to guide the others on the road. That is why they called out to him. They needed every one of the men who still had an eye to help the others. They would have to guide them. To help them get home.

After he was helped up by the one-eyed man, Angel had no desire to go on. All around him there were terrible cries and shouts and there were men who were starting to help their comrades. It was unbearable! The wounded men were still in shock. They couldn't even begin to rouse themselves. Some hid themselves among the others. Others clung to each other. Some began to help, calling out the names of those near them. The majority of the men with one eye began to help as best they could. The first thing that needed to be done was the binding up of the wounds, to avoid further injury from infection. They tore strips of cloth from the clothing of all the men and used it to bind the wounds to their eyes. Then they arranged the blinded men in lines. But some refused to join the lines. They were probably out of their minds. They waved their arms, while others sought to help them. They were forced to leave them to their fate in the end. There were others who could better benefit from their help. And Angel set to work once he understood the situation. He was used to commanding men, and there was work to be done. First of

all, he bound up his own wound, then he started to bind up the wounds of the men who had been blinded. He told them to conquer their fear. He was their commander and he would see that they made it back to their homes. There were some who reacted to his words with curses and angry shouts. For them he had no help to give. Some died from the shock right then and there. It took hours to establish order among the survivors. They created a frightening spectacle as the column of blinded soldiers began their march home.

Two days passed with Angel leading the grim column of men. His wound began to scab over, but the terrible pain persisted. Yet, in the midst of his suffering he was consoled by the fact that he still had his sight. Unlike his men. That explained the enemy monster's joking voice, telling him that he was the lucky hundredth man…

He would occasionally peer back at the column. The winding line of blinded men, the burned flesh of their wounded faces still suffering terrible agony. The scene made him turn away quickly each time. He had no idea how many men were in the column. So many… The terrible sight was made even worse by the awful wailing and screams of the blinded men… The stench of the burning was almost unbearable at first, but after a while it seemed only one more element in the overall horror... They made their way back to their emperor… As if he could save them… As if their sight would be restored in his presence…

The blinded men clung to each other's shirts during the entire trek. The one-eyed men guided them as best they could past obstacles and rough places. All the same, the blinded men often stumbled and fell. They

immediately lifted themselves up and continued their journey. There were those who fell, never to rise again. They left their bones to on the path. Others abandoned the column in their madness. The one-eyed guides would attempt to bring them back. Sometimes they succeeded, others times they did not. But they could not abandon the column for these unlucky ones. It was a horrific task to try and provide food and water to the men. The Roman army had left the men flasks of water. They had wanted them to return to their emperor alive. The blinded men carried these flasks, and the men who could see would occasionally refill the flasks when a spring or brook would appear along their path. They would also occasionally harvest fruit or nuts from the trees and bushes along their way and feed them to their blinded comrades. It was never enough, but it sufficed.

During the whole time of the hellish journey Angel was sustained by the thought of his beloved Rada. His beautiful fiance that he had become engaged to only two days before going off to war. Rada was a cousin of the emperor himself and one of the most beautiful ladies of the royal court. He had met her at the time of a royal visit to the town of Prilep. He had been present as one of the leading commanders of the emperor's army. Although he came from a humble leather worker's family, he had risen through the ranks of the army to the post of commander. Thus, he was called before the emperor to discuss military matters that day. It was there he saw her for the first time. Rada. The emperor's cousin. During one outing their eyes met. Angel's legs trembled like those of a lovestruck boy. And she had not been so even-spirited either. He had invited her for a stroll and she had accepted. It seemed as

if there was an instant bond between the two of them. It was already dark when they returned to the palace. He had hoped to kiss her, but she retreated from him in embarrassment. She told him that she had to go. Angel was unable to sleep that night. He was obsessed with the image of her face

He could barely wait to see her again. Thus passed two weeks in secret meetings of the two. They would simply gaze into each other's eyes and hold hands. Angel lived it as a dream. Every detail of her presence engaged his interest. Her being captivated and drew him in as a bee is drawn to a flower.

It was at this time that he learned that an army of the Roman Emperor Basil the Macedonian had entered their territory. It meant the invasion of the realm. Angel could not understand the hatred that this emperor had for their land. He had fought with them for many years, although Basil was a Macedonian, as he had heard...

Not long after that, two of the emperor's servants came to the room where he was staying. They told him that a great battle was coming against the Roman army. That same evening, as they had already agreed, Angel would ask for Rada's hand in marriage. As was the custom, he would go to her parents and ask their permission. He lived in a small settlement in a beautiful house with his mother. His father was dead. He wanted to settle his new bride in their house. He received the blessing of Rada's father for their marriage. Angel's joy knew no bounds. He imagined that his life was complete now that he had Rada. They would be married in the fall. For now they were just engaged. The next day he left for war. He must defend the land.

The unit that was stationed in Prilep, which included local recruits, prepared for the march. The parents of the soldiers stood along the streets. They kissed and bid their sons good bye as they marched off to war. Angel, who was mounted on a horse, worked along with the other officers, to maintain order. The whole town came out to see the soldiers off. Concern shown on every face, both for those who were going off and for those who would be left behind. And Rada came out also… They hugged and kissed… He wanted to have a talk with her, but there was no time. She only told him again that she would go to her uncle's house in Ohrid until he returned. And so Angel left, along with the other officers and soldiers. To meet the enemy… After that everything happened as if in a horror story. After a long march, the army arrived at Mt. Belasitsa, to meet the Roman army. There they awaited them in ambush. It was a real massacre. It still hurt Angel's head when he thought of all the terrible things that had happened to them. And then they had been captured and blinded… The cursed column of soldiers now made its way back to their emperor. In his troubled mind the question kept recurring: why is the wolf punished so severely? It was as if the whole people had been cursed… But mostly he thought about Rada. To him at the moment she seemed like a spring of cool, clear water in a parched desert. But a worm of doubt was gnawing at him. They were not yet officially married. She was young and beautiful, and he was now ugly, deformed by the wound on his face. What if she decided to leave him? What would he do then? Such thoughts filled him with despair. His feelings were a mixture of competing anger and despair during the entire journey.

Somewhere near halfway home to Prilep, they met the first unit of their own army. The upset soldiers, as soon as they saw them, helped the blinded men on their way. The worst cases were put on stretchers, while others were put on the backs of their horses. They were given fresh food and water. So they made their way to the capital… To the emperor… Both old and young came out to meet them in Prilep. The women tore their hair and wept… The children trembled in fright, and the men hurried to help the wounded soldiers. Someone immediately informed the emperor of their arrival. Angel, who led the men, went to the emperor's palace. He entered and fell to his knees before his shocked master. He barely managed to utter: "Emperor!" and then collapsed into unconsciousness.

Then the intense pain of his wounded eye brought him back to awareness. Rada arrived from Ohrid shortly after that. She wept uncontrollably when she saw him.

They remained for a time in Prilep. Angel had one more meeting with the emperor. They had always had a good understanding and relations. Three months before Angel had given the emperor his most valuable possession. The priceless relic passed on to him from his ancestors. It had been preserved and recopied by them for generations. A message from a distant past… He had hoped that it could somehow serve the empire.

But it came too late. Not long after the tragic battle on Mt. Belasitsa, the emperor collapsed and died. The shock of the terrible cruelty inflicted upon his soldiers had killed him. Before he died he called Angel to his death bed… Alone… He gave him a wooden box. To his faithful servant and defender he returned that which he had been given. But now it had a new form… He told him that he did

not trust his heir with this gift… Angel should preserve it for the future… And he told him something else, that Angel would remember for the rest of his life. It had been his intent to deny the Romans the Mt. Belasitsa region. It hid a great secret… So his wise advisors had told him. That is why he had sent the army there. To keep the Romans out of the region, before it was too late… These were the emperor's last words to him. Angel wanted to know more, because it still wasn't clear to him what the emperor had meant, but it was too late to ask… Soon after that the emperor went to meet his maker. He died, heart-broken by the tragic fate of his soldiers…

Angel would often study the object in the wooden box. It still contained the ancient text he had previously given to the emperor. But now it was preserved in a new form. It had been reworked into an unusual and more permanent form. Was this strange text somehow connected to the mysterious words of the emperor on his deathbed? He didn't really know, but he resolved to keep this secret safe within his family… So long as they should last…

After the emperor's death, Angel took Rada to his home in Voinitsa. He also took the box and hid it well. Rada never showed the least sign that Angel's mutilated eye bothered her. But they decided against having the grand wedding that they had once planned. The following year they had a son. Angel was no longer separated from his family. He had left the army and returned to the family trade as a leather worker. He was disfigured by the enemy soldiers, but Rada was always faithful and loving to him. She had no faith in the Emperor Samuel's heir, and so she had no contact with him. And, in fact, in less than four

years after the death of the emperor, the state fell. The Roman army completely conquered the land. There was strangely no attempt made to seek revenge. The Roman soldiers did not enter his village, but when he visited the market place in town he encountered members of the army that he had fought against. The majority of them were his own countrymen…

And so Angel lived his life with his work and his wife and child. Twenty years passed. His son grew up and got married. Angel continued to work with leather. One day, at the market in Stipion, he had an experience that shook him to his core. The day went well. He sold all of his leather goods. Just as he was preparing to leave for Voinitsa, making his way through the crowded market, suddenly he felt a tug at his shirt. He turned reflexively. A ragged and weathered old crone stood in front of him.

"*Mercy.*" - she cried, extending her open palm to ask for alms.

Angel thought about how there was no peace from these beggars. Some, of course, deserved ones sympathy, but there were others who made a game of it. Nevertheless, he gave something to each of them. As he reached into his pocket and searched for a coin, he noticed a man behind her. He looked at him more closely. Suddenly the shock hit him. He swayed on his feet, his composure lost. He must have been the woman's husband, also a beggar. Dressed in rags, with a long beard and hair. He clung to her dress for support. He was blind. Both of his eyes showed signs of the mutilation that Angel had experienced.

Angel shook off the woman and stepped back to study them both. In the ragged and filthy clothes of the

man he could still see traces of the proud military uniform of his army… Angel felt a lump in his throat… Tears poured unchecked down his cheeks.

"*Mercy, lord*!" - the woman repeated, still extending her hand for alms.

Angel was brought back to the present reality. As he looked at her he instinctively reached in his pocket for a coin to give her. The beggar woman's eyes lit up with joy at the thought that she would receive alms from him. Angel stared at the coin in his hand, but instead of giving it to her he withdrew his hand and returned the coin to his pocket. The beggar woman stared at him in surprise. Suddenly he reached into his inside pocket and took out the pouch that contained all of the money he had earned that day, and he thrust it into her hands.

- *Take this and hide it well*!

The beggar woman stared at him in astonishment. The blind beggar still stood there quietly, not knowing what had just occurred. The beggar woman bowed her head to kiss Angel's hand, but he wouldn't allow it. He turned away and disappeared into the crowd.

He returned home all upset and told Rada about what had happened to him. She listened in silence.

Many times, out of sight of his family, he had taken out the box that the emperor had given him. As he studied it, he was reminded of past times, of his youth, his military career, and the glory of the emperor and the fall of his empire… Of all that he had lost… At least this object had some magical power, to return him to those glory days. If only in his thoughts… So thought Angel…

*

…didn’t notice the two policemen as they grabbed him by the underarms. It was as if they had appeared out of nowhere.

"Come with us!" - one of them shouted.

What do they want from me now, the bastards!, Angel thought to himself, staring in disbelief at first the one, then the other policeman. One was slim and dark-skinned. He looked like a dried prune to Angel. The other was more ‘normal’. With brown hair and eyes and no special features. Angel barely noticed him. They just grabbed him and lifted him to his feet. Then they shoved him forward, to let him know where he had to go. He was certain that something terrible awaited him. There were no words exchanged between them. He just went along obediently. He was prepared to endure whatever abuse or humiliations they had prepared for him without reacting. Once he had finished the year of 1951 he would still have five years to serve in the infamous isolated prison of Goli Otok (barren island) in the Adriatic Sea… Then he would be returning home. It was the thought of his wife and their toddler son Borche that had sustained him during his time in prison. Willing himself to follow them, he made his way to the camp commandant’s barrack office. He was exhausted after a day spent hauling stones on the rough quarry paths. But he knew that he had to endure. Step by step with gritted teeth, he trudged along. As he neared the office his legs felt like lead weights. But he didn’t dare falter with the two policemen just two steps behind him. He entered the office and stood in front of the single desk in it.

"Comrade commandant, I am here as ordered." - said Angel, barely able to maintain his feet.

The commandant of Goli Otok, Ante Rashtegorats, never bothered to look up. He continued to write something at his desk. Angel knew that this was just the usual way they had of humiliating him, so he just remained silent. But Angel had no idea why he had been called in. The commandant suddenly set down his pen. He stood up and approached him. He stopped only a pace away, his face poked into Angel's. Angel knew that this was likely to be trouble, and he braced himself for the worst. Ante Rashtegorats was a hard, cruel man. Angel could only imagine what he might want from him. It wouldn't be long now.

"You have once again maligned our communist party? You traitorous bastard!" - roared the commandant Rashtegorats.

"I have not maligned anyone, comrade commandant…" - Angel protested.

"Hold your tongue, you animal! You spoke against our party. Isn't that so?"

Angel bowed his head in silence. He knew that it was hopeless. In fact, the day before he had talked politics with two fellow prisoners. Those two had attacked the Yugoslav communist party in the sharpest way. He had said that not all communists were to blame, just some of them. He hadn't called them traitors, he just said that some of them were narrow-minded. He didn't believe that that would get him called in for punishment. After all, the two men had been his fellow countrymen… But it occurred to him that they had been provocateurs, who had pretended to attack the party just so they could hear what he would say. So he had offered a 'half-criticism' to them, and this is what it had earned him, a visit to the commandant. Now he

knew that nothing he might say in his defense would have any effect. He decided to simply remain silent. But that only made Rashtegorats even angrier.

"This isn't the first time… You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You slander the party that lifted you out of the mud and sent you to school… Damn you… Get this troublemaker out of here! You know where to take him…" - the commandant shouted to the police guards.

The two policemen grabbed him by the arms again and hauled him out of the office. They had arranged for his return to the sixth barrack where he was posted. Angel could barely stand up. He slowly made his way back with the two policemen at his heels. It felt as if he had to carry them like a heavy weight on his back. The sun still burned fiercely. Buckets of sweat poured from Angel. He struggled to walk over the hot sharp stones on the walkway. As he approached the barracks the gates of hell suddenly opened up before him. A gauntlet of a hundred prisoners was arrayed in front of the barrack building. This was the usual method of punishment for "troublemakers". The prisoners themselves were forced to beat their fellows who had broken camp rules of the guards or commandant. The prisoners were arranged in a double row to form the gauntlet that the transgressor had to pass through. Each one in the rows was expected to punish him with hands or feet, while spitting and cursing. All the while they were being watched by the guards. If anyone failed to punish the transgressor, then they would be ordered to run the gauntlet as well. Angel had first encountered the gauntlet upon his arrival at Goli Otok, immediately upon disembarking from the ship "Punta". All of the new arrivals were greeted by a gauntlet. They had to strip naked and

were forced to run through a “tunnel” of raging prisoners, who beat them mercilessly.

Angel stopped a few paces in front of the gauntlet of prisoners. There was a bloodthirsty look in the eyes of his fellow prisoners. They could barely contain their rage against him. As if he were the cause of all their suffering. There was a momentary silence. The calm before the storm. There was an explosive pressure in the air.

"Come on, troublemaker!" - shouted one of the prisoners in the gauntlet.

Suddenly they were all shouting at him. A chorus of shouts and curses in a number of languages assaulted Angel’s ears: “Bastard, scum, traitor!”

Angel moved. He tried to run, but the soles of his feet hurt him terribly. The first pair of prisoners in the gauntlet hit him. They struck the back of his neck. Then he was struck in the face, and the temples. He was kicked and spat upon. Twice more he was hit in the head. Then kicked in the ribs… He no longer knew where he was. The punches and kicks came from everywhere. He was covered with spit and bruises. He could see the familiar faces of all of his barrack’s mates. Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians… They no longer looked like human beings, they had been transformed into raging beasts. They all beat on him and screamed at him. But no one hit him as hard as his fellow Macedonians. His countrymen. Their blows slowed his progress. The prisoners took advantage of that to add further abuse. The blood flowed from his nose and temples. Time seemed to stand still. He was still several steps from the barrack’s door. He didn’t think that he could go on. If he fell, he would be finished off. Just when he thought that he could

endure no more, he suddenly felt a powerful force hit him from behind and drive him on his way. He turned to see what it was and caught a glimpse of his friend, Suad, who grimaced at him. A final blow from Suad suddenly propelled him through the last few steps of the gauntlet.

Inside the barracks the building chief Marko Egich still waited for him. He was a hardened criminal who had been condemned to death, but his sentence had later been commuted to twenty years in prison. Now he had been assigned the task of beating up the latest “troublemaker” (as they liked to call the political prisoners at Goli Otok) in his unit. By taking on the role of building chief, men like Egich could earn credits that could result in an earlier release date from prison. Egich let Angel enter the barracks and pass by him before he suddenly struck him a fierce blow to the kidneys. Angel remained on his feet. He endured the blow from the cursed Egich… He didn’t turn to look. He just made his way to his miserable bed at the far end of the building and sat down on it. Meanwhile, his tormentors were returning to the barrack building. They had done their job. They had beaten up one of their fellow sufferers.

He was utterly exhausted. His whole body hurt. He tried to staunch the flow of blood, but he had nothing to help him in this. He raised his head. There stood Suad. The one who had forced him the final few steps through the gauntlet. He was his best friend in this hell. An Albanian from Tetovo. Imprisoned on account of some informant’s report. He was shorter than Angel. He had a shaven head and scars on his face. Probably from beatings.

"Take this." - Suad said abruptly.

Angel silently accepted the moistened cloth. He placed it against the open wound on his temple. He sighed deeply. He wanted to thank him. Too late…

"Suad, report to the commandant immediately." - said one of the policemen who had suddenly appeared at Suad's back. It was the one who resembled a dried prune.

The Albanian stared at them in disbelief.

"But why?"

"You helped the troublemaker! You know that that is not permitted."

"But all I did was give him a handkerchief…"

"Don't pretend this is about a handkerchief. Don't play the fool with us… Everyone saw what you did."

"I don't understand…"

"You helped the troublemaker escape the gauntlet. You're just like him."

"I didn't help him comrade policeman. I struck him from behind…"

"We'll see what the commandant has to say. Come on, hurry!"

Suad knew that nothing he could say would help. Before leaving he glanced over at Angel one more time. Angel nodded his head in the least sign of his gratitude. Not a half hour passed before the more "normal-looking" of the two policemen returned. The other prisoners relaxed once the man had passed them by. He slowly made his way up the aisle, past the men. Each wondered as he passed, where would he finally stop? He passed by all of the others before he finally stopping in front of Angel's bunk.

'*What could it be now*?' wondered Angel. Why would they be after him again? He hadn't done anything

more… A ludicrous thought crossed his mind. Maybe they wanted him to testify against Suad. He laughed to himself. The policeman had a stern look on his face. Though it was strange that there didn't seem to be the same animosity in his look that he had felt before. Angel was perplexed. The policeman again ordered him to accompany him:

"Angel, come with me…"

There was silence in the barrack. Angel walked ahead of the policeman. He passed through the double row of prisoners again, but this time they sat quietly as he passed by. They exited the barrack. They were silent. The policeman noticed that Angel could barely walk. He held him up. Angel couldn't believe it. Why was he helping him? What was going on? They met Suad on the way. He was returning to the barrack by himself. It meant that he had escaped punishment. Good. Angel gave him a smile as they passed one another. They didn't dare exchange any words, but he at least wanted to transmit some small sign of recognition. He was surprised at the strange look that Suad gave him. As if he were sorry. But why? The beating was over. He had escaped punishment. Why should he show regret? When he passed by Suad continued to look back at him and the policeman. They arrived at the barrack office of the commandant. The policeman led the way. According to protocol, Angel stopped and stood before the desk. The policeman retreated to the doorway. Angel expected a few minutes to pass before the commandant took notice of him again. But that wasn't what happened. The commandant suddenly stood up, picked up a piece of paper off the desk and walked over and handed it to him.

"A telegram has arrived from your home…"

Angel couldn't believe his ears. What kind of telegram? From whom? Why? He knew that any correspondence with family was forbidden at Goli Otok. Why was he being made an exception? All of these thoughts flew through his mind. He stared at the commandant in confusion as he took the the telegram from him. It had been removed from the envelope, but it was still folded in half. He opened it and began to read to himself:

"*Our Borche has died*." It was signed: "*Christina*."

The earth under his feet seemed to collapse. The room spun around. His legs felt cut off. A lump formed in his throat. For an instant he imagined it was some cruel joke. Could they be that cruel? "*I pray to God that it is*…" In vain. It was a vain attempt to escape the truth. The image of his two year old son Borche floated before his mind's eye. Unwelcome tears came to his eyes and began to pour down his cheeks. As if in a dream he heard the words of the commandant:

"Accept my regrets."

Everything turned dark before his eyes. He tried to control his voice, but he began to weep uncontrollably.

"Take him out!... Give him seven days relief from work…" - said the commandant.

The policeman conducted Angel out of the office. Angel wept like a small child all the way back to the barrack. The policeman was silent. He only seemed to want to be rid of this unpleasant duty.

As soon as he entered the barrack building, he felt a strangeness. His chest felt as if it were in a vice. His hands grew stiff. He couldn't seem to breathe. He saw Suad looking at him in distress… Suddenly everything went dark…

The next day he woke up in the infirmary. The doctor Nikolich told him that he had suffered a minor heart attack. Too bad. Better that he had died. He had fallen into a depression. He could not mourn his son, nor could he be by his wife Christina's side to help console her in her loss. He considered suicide. No. No, he must not do that!... Christina! That would be too much for her!...

And so slowly he recovered at the hands of the great healer - time. But sorrow and rage were never far from his being. After a time he was discharged from the infirmary and returned to his work. He spent long years at Goli Otok. He had to endure! For Christina… He must…

*

I am aware that some of the readers of the story that follows will doubt its authenticity. I understand their scepticism. If I were in their place, I would probably react similarly. What I am about to describe is unlikely enough that it could certainly stretch credibility. But what I am about to describe is the truth! I have only changed two names and omitted several others for reasons that will become clear later. The text describes actual events with only minor authorial intervention that is clearly explained and easily recognized. On the other hand, there are facts presented that the reader can verify for himself. Finally, I would mention that I didn't write this book with the idea that it would be readily believed, I wrote it because I felt that I had to tell what I knew, a story that would not leave me in peace…

According to my notes it all began on the 20th of January of 2005. That was a period of frenzied activity in my life. I was working on several books simultaneously. I

was working on my book on the language of the ancient Macedonians. At the same time I was overseeing the translation into English of my book on the genealogical connections of British Queen Elizabeth the Second and the dynasty of Tsar Samuel, and I was arranging for its sale. I was also involved in creation of a book on Macedonia's holy enlighteners, that would be produced by the publishing house Diakoniya headed by Bishop Agatangel. And I was having to deal with my usual daily correspondence by e-mail (which always takes significant time in my day) as well as an article on a historical theme for the "Australian Macedonian Weekly" in Melbourne. Besides all of that, I was working on our large home aquarium and the transfer to DVD's of films that I had ordered from Skopje. Looking back on it all now, I can't imagine how I managed all of that… Since I don't have state-sponsored work (and to be honest, I've never wanted it), I have earned my living selling my books. I've also collaborated with our immigrants, who have chosen to have their works published here, and I receive some royalties, and the like, as well. Mainly I've sold my books through direct-order mailing. Mostly I receive orders by telephone and occasionally by e-mail. There is the occasional reader who shows up at my house unannounced, and I try to be gracious to them. But at the time, as I've mentioned, I was swamped with work, and I was hard-pressed to deal kindly with those who took up my time needlessly. I found it particularly difficult to be patient with those who would simply call to have a conversation about history or politics… These were mainly older folks who probably had a lot of free time. Rightly or wrongly, I was sometimes not altogether kind to such callers. To be

honest, I would have liked to just hang up on them. I think what often annoyed me were some of the fantastic idle speculations on history of some of the callers. You should understand that this only applied to certain callers. Others who shared my interest in historical themes were a delight to converse with, and even a pleasant diversion from some of my more demanding work.

But to return to the 20th of January of 2005, Croatian TV was airing my favour quiz show “Millionaire”. My wife Zagorka and our two kids Ljubica and Ljupche were on a visit to my mother-in-law’s house at the time. The quiz show had just posed a question that I was sure I knew the answer to be choice “C”, but the contestant was still pondering the choices. I was already composing the correct answer in my mind and awaiting the contestant’s response, when the phone rang. Absorbed in the quiz show, I let it ring a few times, even though I was only steps away.

"Yes." - I asked, still distracted by the quiz show.

"Good evening, is this the home of Mr. Donski? Alexander Donski?"

"Yes, what can I do for you?" - I said, hoping it was someone calling to order books. I glanced around for my pen and the notebook in which I recorded orders. They were nearby.

"You see, I’m calling from Skopje. We haven’t met, but I would like to make your acquaintance. I am a regular reader of your articles, and I’ve read a number of your books…"

"Thank you." - I interrupted, and then let him continue, all the while glued to the television, still wondering if the contestant was going to get the right

answer. "*It's 'C'. Can't you figure that out*?" - I thought to myself.

"You know… I would like to meet with you… To have a conversation… I am quite the history buff. I also know of some things that no one else has heard of…"

"*Damned if it isn't someone out for an idle conversation*…", I thought and I was already trying to figure out how to cut this short.

"My final answer is 'C'"! - announced the contestant on "Millionaire." "*Good job. That's the way to go.*" - I thought to myself, and right after that I voiced my previously rehearsed response in such cases:

"Fine. No problem. When I'm in Skopje I'll look you up…"

I expected that to end our conversation since I'd responded "positively" to his question, but he continued:

"But I really must see you. When will you be coming to Skopje? Is it possible some time next week?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm very busy, but first chance I get, I'll certainly give you a call. Just leave me your number."

"You haven't understood my intention Mister Donski."

Suddenly my second line started ringing.

"Excuse me, please. I have a call on my second line. As I said, I'll call you when I make my next trip to Skopje. Give me a call when you can. Or if you're in Shtip, you can come by." - I continued in my usual manner with such callers.

The second line stubbornly continued to ring, interrupting his words. I only heard: "Fine. I'll be in touch."

"Thank you and excuse me. Bye now… Hello? Who is it? Is that you, Ane? I couldn't answer right away. I

was on the other line. What is it?" - I blithely answered my second line. It was the master carpenter Ane Volchev, who had renovated our apartment a year and a half ago, and we had become friends. His daughter Kika had been a friend from school as well.

"Alexander, Kika tells me that you've got a DVD with "Deep Purple" on it. Could you send it over some time for me to make a copy?"

"I've got three… Which were you looking for?"

"One with some of their old hits on it."

"All of them have old favorites… One is a concert in Copenhagen from 1972. I found that one just recently. It's a riot!"

"And do you have 'Led Zeppelin'?"

" Just the concert in New York… The one in 1973. I've also got three dvd's of 'AC/DC'. One that friends brought me from Germany."

"Great, send them over. I'll copy and return them." - continued Ane in his bass voice.

" See you. Ciao."

" Ciao."

About then my wife and kids came home, the quiz show ended, and that was all there was that first evening of contact that would eventually lead to the strange events that followed.

The next day, around 9 o'clock in the morning, the phone rang again. My wife answered it. She was courteous as always:

"Yes, Good day. Yes… Please… One moment! Alexander, it's for you."

And she handed the phone to me.

"Yes." - I said.

"Mr. Donski, I am the person who called last night… Do you have the time for a brief conversation now?" - asked the same voice from the night before.

"Yes, that would be fine."- I said as kindly as possible. I now felt a bit bad about having cut him short the previous evening. Whether I am occupied with my own concerns much of the time, it is only fair that I hear people out, when they bring their concerns to me and ask for a brief conversation… The man was showing me a certain respect by wanting to discuss themes of my work, shouldn't I be willing to hear him out? All of these thoughts rushed through my mind. I was prepared to have a lengthy conversation now. Before he could answer I said:

"First, let me apologize for the interruption last night. I was pre-occupied at the time, and then the second line rang. I have a lot going on at the moment…"

"That's fine. I understood that you were busy last night, that's why I called back today. I hope that I'm not annoying you." - continued the voice at the other end, already addressing me in a familiar way.

"No, you're not annoying… Please, tell me what interests you?"

After a brief pause and a sigh the man continued:

"It would be better if we could meet in Skopje. This isn't something I can discuss on the phone."

"But, I told you yesterday. I don't have a trip to Skopje planned for the foreseeable future. When I do come there, I'll contact you…" - I told him while beginning to feel the resistance to him that I had felt the night before. I should mention that I, in recent years, simply hate to travel. Every trip for me is an unpleasant task. I can't really explain why. I did a considerable amount of travelling as a

young man. I visited England, Germany, France, as well as a number of other European countries, and I spent two months in Japan back in 1987. But since my marriage and the creation of a comfortable home and family life, every trip away from home requires an effort. I usually travel only when it is necessary. I visit the capital Skopje maybe only two or three times in a year (although friends and acquaintances there are always inviting me). So I go there when it's necessary for my work, to attend a wedding in the family, and the like. My books and writings on history frequently earn me invitations from Macedonian communities around the world to come visit. Organizers have sent me offers of tickets and hotel stays, and even visa documents, for visits to Canada and the USA. I also received an invitation for an all-expense paid participation in a history symposium in Slovenia. I've received other invitations to visit Australia, Croatia, and Germany. I try to be as gracious as I can when I refuse them. I consider one of these trips to be a burden, and they represent time away from my pleasant pursuits at home. I understand and appreciate the intentions of those who invite me, but I much prefer to be at home. I know that many people will not understand this, but that is the way it is…

So it was now. I was quite willing to give this caller as much time as he might like on the phone, even to invite him to my home, but I wasn't prepared to drop everything and come to Skopje at his insistence. I told him as much and asked exactly what he wanted from me. I felt like my patience was beginning to wear thin.

After a brief pause, he continued uncertainly:

"Fine, but, I want you to know. I want to have a conversation about an important matter…"

"I understand and I thank you for your confidence in me. I certainly hope that we can meet some day…"

The second line saved the day once again and ended our conversation:

" I hear my second line again… Leave me your number and I'll get a hold of you later. Excuse me, but I have to go now…. "

I told him out of politeness, knowing that my phone had already registered his number.

"No need… I'll call you."

" But what is your number?"

"Good bye. We'll be in touch."

I wondered why he wouldn't give me his number, but the ringing of the second line demanded my attention.:

"Hello?"

"Aleksandar, Traiche here. I'm on my way to Sotir's in Skopje. Give me some books to carry."

"Hi, Traiche." - I recognized the voice of an acquaintance who frequently travelled to Skopje to my friend Sotir Pastenarov's and took my books to him, and he would bring back books by other authors. Sotir, who was a great lover of Macedonian history and a skilled craftsman in the creation of neon signs, often gave me books.

"Sotir told me yesterday that you would be going to Skopje. I've got ten books to send."

"I'm going now. I'll be at your place in two minutes. Bring the books down to the building entrance for me."

"Fine. Thanks Traiche…"

The books were already packed and ready to go, so I just grabbed my coat and the books and headed down to the street.

A few minutes later Traiche came by, I gave him the books, I thanked him and returned home satisfied that the job was done. My thoughts suddenly returned to the fellow in Skopje. I looked at the number on the phone monitor record and dial it, ready to apologize again. I was sure that he would answer at the first or second ring. But there was no answer. The phone just rang and rang. I thought maybe I had dial wrong. I tried it again… and again no answer.

" Could he have left his house so quickly?" - I asked my wife, but she just shrugged her shoulders - I couldn't just drop everything and go to Skopje, and I didn't know him, I wouldn't even recognize him. How could I do this just so he can tell me some important business?

"I don't know what to tell you. It doesn't seem right that you have put the man off twice now. Go see what he wants." - she said.

" I know, but I don't have the time. You know all of the work I have to do, and then some… Besides that, I've called him back, and he's not there…"

"Okay then."

(...)

"Hello Alexander. I'm the one who called you a while back." - said the familiar voice on the phone exactly four days later. This time he called just before noon, as I was preparing to clean the aquarium.

"Oh, it's you… Sorry, but I still don't know your name…"

"Call me Stoyan."

"Yes… Fine… Pleased to meet you… I tried calling you back right after you called and we had to cut it

short the other day. I had your number on my caller ID. But you didn't answer…"

"Hmmm… I had to go out… That's actually not my number. There was no need to call me back. I'll contact you."

"Fine. Tell me what you want." - I said, a bit mystified.

"I'd like to order some of your books. Which titles do you have in stock?"

"*Praise the Lord, finally something practical from him*…" - I thought, perhaps a little too sanguine, and then said aloud:

"I have 'The Role of the Macedonians in World Civilization', one about the ancient Macedonian inheritance in today's Macedonian nation, 'Jesus Christ and the Macedonians'. I also have…"

"I know your books… I'd like to order all of the titles. Actually I have them all, but I'd like to order them for a friend." - Stoyan cut me off.

"Not a problem. Give me your address and I'll send them with a bill. I'll cover the cost of mailing. Tell me which ones you want."

"I want five of each title… No, make that ten copies…"

" Oho… Fine. Thank you very much. I'll send you a list…"

"No need to prepare a price list. I'll pay whatever you say they're worth."

"Thank you… Now tell me your address, and I'll get them all in the mail no later than tomorrow. The postal carrier will deliver them, and if you're not at home…" - I

began my standard explanation of the delivery of orders, but he interrupted me:

"Wait a moment, Alexander… Could you deliver the books to me in Skopje? I'll pay you immediately, and we can have our talk."

" Hmmm… Well, I really am busy right now… Could I send them by taxi? I would send them directly from home. I have a taxi driver friend… His name is Kole…"

"You don't understand Aleksandar. I want you to bring them." - Stoyan insisted.

"Me? I'll see what I can do, although the taxi driver would deliver them…"

"You're afraid to deliver them yourself? I am a serious man and I ask you to take me seriously. Let me have your address, and I'll send you the money by telegraph express. You'll have the money this afternoon, and you can bring them by tomorrow. We'll have our talk and then you can go home… If you don't like that arrangement, it's no problem. Let the books stay with you."

"I didn't say I didn't like it… You don't need to send the money right away… Let me have a little time to rearrange things, then I'll give you a call."

"Fine. You shouldn't call the number on your phone record. That's not my phone number. I'll call you back in two hours."

When I got off the phone, I consulted with my best advisor, my wife Zagorka, who couldn't resist joking about it:

"Didn't you tell him that you don't go to Skopje?"

"Oh, don't joke with me about this. One reason to go is the important conversation he wants to have, but there is also business. For work people travel to the North

Pole or Africa. The man wants to buy 50 books, there's no point in my not accommodating him. I'll visit with him for a while and come back… But, I have to say that the man intrigues me… Where is he calling from? Why won't he give me his address? On the other hand, he is offering to send me money right away. If I had insisted, I'm sure that he would have sent the money. It means that he is serious about having my books. I'm going tomorrow."

Two hours later the man (who called himself Stoyan) called back. When I heard his voice I gave him my report:

"Fine. I'll come tomorrow. I'll leave about 8 am and that means I'll be in Skopje by 9:30 am. But, you know, I don't drive, so I'll be coming by taxi. Where do I find you?"

" I'll look for you at the trade centre Mavrovka. I'll be there at 9:30, and we'll have some coffee."

"Good. And how will I know you?"

" I know you from the pictures in your books."

" Fine, and excuse me if I've offended you at all."

" No problem. Good bye for now."

I wanted to tell him that I might be late because I wasn't sure that I could find a taxi in time, but he had already hung up on me.

The next day around eight o'clock with two big cartons of books, in quite chilly weather, my wife dropped me off at the place where informal taxis waited for customers in town. I had good luck and found one right away to take me to Skopje for 200 denars.

During the trip I was typically silent and my thoughts kept returning to the secretive man I would soon meet. How old was he? What did he do? I couldn't guess his age from his voice. My fellow passengers were a

middle-aged woman and a cute little boy. No one spoke a word, except the taxi driver who urged us, if the police should stop us, to say we were friends rather than customers. But we didn't get stopped, and by the usual route, we soon arrived in Skopje, and then at the Mavrovka, where the taxi driver let me out on the sidewalk out front. I said good bye, grabbed my heavy boxes and stood in front of the window of an adjoining hardware store. I looked around and quickly spotted a small amn, as he approached while staring at me. My first impression was that we were of the same generation. After he introduced himself as Stoyan, we exchanged friendly smiles and handshakes, and then he offered to put the cartons of books in his car that was parked near the Mavrovka Café. Since I don't know much about automobiles (and I've never had much interest in them, never even bothering to learn to drive) I don't know what kind of car he drove. It was a red car, probably from the 90's. We stored away the books, nand he immediately paid me the whole amount for them with cash from his wallet. I thanked him, and he invited me to join him for coffee.

"*You're the boss*." - I thought to myself in the English I'd heard in films.

"Now we'll go over to my house so that I can show you something quite interesting."

"Fine. But I don't want to take up too much of your time, sir. And I don't have a lot of time myself…"

"At least for an hour, and then I'll take you wherever you'd like to go… And don't refer to me with such formality, please."

"If you like, I'll try…" - I said, smiling courteously.

We got in the car and drove off. Where exactly we went, I'm not sure. I don't know Skopje that well. Back in 1978 I lived and studied here and got to know the city a bit. But I'd forgotten much of it, and neighborhoods had changed since then, so I didn't really know where we were. I just know that we drove through the downtown for a few minutes and eventually arrived at a smaller building where he parked. No one seemed to be around. We took the books in and carried them up to the first floor. Stoyan unlocked the door and we went in to the dimly lit entrance room which led to a bedroom and a bathroom door and a living room kitchen door. So it appeared to be a modest one bedroom apartment.

He invited me in and I sat down in an arm chair. While he went off to get us some juice, I quickly looked around me. There were a couple of wooden arm chairs, a small table (created from various woods), a thermal heating unit, a rather worn rug, an old ottoman and a cabinet with a tv from the early 90's. The room looked more like a modest student apartment rather than the home of a man who blithely spends 15,000 denars on books. It suddenly occurred to me that this was not his home, but I decided not to say anything. It wasn't really any of my business. We would visit, he would tell me what he wanted to say, and I would be on to other things… Was he some sort of madman? But he was rather small. I could defend myself if need be, and after that I could rush out and call for help… I didn't know whether to be fearful or to laugh at such paranoia. Thoughts of this dilemma were interrupted by Stoyan's return with two glasses and an unopened bottle of pepsi. He opened the bottle, poured it carefully to avoid a foaming overflow, and when I saw him

take a first sip, I did so as well, rebuking myself for my paranoia.

"Well, sir, here I am in Skopje. Tell me what business you have in mind now."

" Please, don't address me so formally… Alexander, I need a bit of help from you. I, in fact, have some work for you. If you can accomplish it, I'll pay…"

"Tell me now, what do you have in mind, that is in my area of expertise."

"I know that you have written about the language of the ancient Macedonians… I assume that you have considerable knowledge of ancient languages and symbols…"

"I can't claim too much… I've collected words of ancient Macedonian from the writings of the scribe Hesychius of Alexandria… These words had not yet been made known to the general public, and even now they remain not translated. But I was able to obtain a copy of his writings through a friend of my father's in Holland, who got them for me from a library archive there. I have a photocopy that I'm still studying, the ancient words are explained in ancient Greek and Latin… I get obsessed with such challenges, and I can't put them down, I just want to hurry back to continue working on it. Concerning ancient symbols, that is a whole other complex subject in itself…"

"It means that you can probably help me."

"It depends on what you need."

"It's this. I'm going to give you a set of words and symbols, to study and make what sense you can of them, then let me know what you've learned about their meaning. But you must not tell anyone about this."

"That’s what you have in mind?", I answered, relieved since it seemed that I now knew the deep secret of this mysterious man. "I’ll look at them, but I can’t promise anything."

"Fine." said Stoyan, and then he got up and went into the next room again. He quickly returned with a black plastic folder and handed it to me. I impatiently opened it and looked at the two pages of small standard size paper on which someone had written in grand style with a fountain pen a substantial number of words, one after another. There some symbols and simple signs, some of which just looked like stray marks. All of the black ink shapes suddenly flickered before my eyes. After taking a quick look, I heaved a sigh:

"This will take some work. Each word will need to be studied and analyzed. Even after all of that I can’t guarantee that we’ll make much sense of it all."

"I know, that is why I’m prepared to give you 300 euros as an advance now, and 300 more if you can provide a translation of some sort. If you can’t make any sense of it, that will be that. Keep the advance."

"Thank you, but I can’t accept your money." - I said, refusing to accept the offered bills. "I don’t want to be paid anything if I can’t produce results."

He continued to insist, but I cut in:

"Come, let’s do this. I’ll see what I can make of the words. If I think that I can produce some meaningful translation, I’ll accept the advance, and if I don’t think I can produce any results, I’ll return the set of words."

"Good. If that’s what you want, that’s what we’ll do." agreed Stoyan.

"And how will I get back to you? And how will I send you any results?"

"Don't worry about that. I'll be in touch."

"Fine.. But where are these symbols from? Who wrote them? Obviously they were copied from somewhere or something… It could help me in understanding them if I knew more."

These words caused Stoyan a certain visible distress. "You see… That's not important now… Right now I need to know if they have any meaning". - he tried to answer me as calmly as he could. When he saw that his answer hadn't satisfied me he tried to be a bit more forthcoming. "Actually you're working on a text found on an old stone monument. The father of a friend dug it up in his vineyard near Gevgeliya… So now he wants to know what it might say…"

"Why not take it to a museum?"

"To a museum? That could present some problems… That's why I didn't want you to mention this to anyone else."

"It appears that he highly values this stone, to be willing to spend so much money on its translation."

"Well, okay… No matter about the translation. You know how illegal archaeology finds are treated here… The government punishes the discoverer, even though such people have found more archaeological treasures than we have in our museums."

"Yes, but I've heard that they sell such treasures abroad. They act against our country." I said in a patriotic spirit, realizing that this was a case of treasure hunting, in which the owner wanted to have a translation in order to better know the value of what he had for sale. He probably

even had a buyer already (and it looked like it would be an expensive sale), so the final price would depend on the text.

"It's not what you think, Alexander. Don't believe everything you've heard. The treasure hunters also can serve to our country, but who is to blame if we won't use their services?"

"How would we use them? They seem like they're only out for themselves…", I reacted.

"First of all, who isn't interested in their own welfare? Are government officials so selfless? Or do you consider that you are better? I made friendly enough invitations for you to join me for a conversation, but it wasn't until I ordered books. And then you were willing to come and visit me right away…"

Instead of taking offense, I smiled at this observation. Although I don't consider myself excessively materialistic, I can't deny that money makes the world go round (even when I don't always agree with that). I was immediately reminded of my uncle Jordan (rest his soul) who was a painter with real talent. He often said: "Whoever tells you that he doesn't want money is either a liar or a fool!" Of course, he always said this half in jest, since I know that there are some things that can't be bought for all the money in the world, but still, Stoyan had a point. When he saw that I wasn't offended, he went on:

"All they need to do here is pass a law that makes it legal to dig for artefacts. The way they do elsewhere. That way independent archaeological excavations under state permits could join in the search for objects and share what they find with state institutions. Amateur archaeologists under state sponsorship could be of great

use to the state, and no one should underestimate their patriotism. Most of them would serve their country if they could, but the present situation turns than into criminals."

"I don't know… I hadn't considered that aspect of it… But here there are people who would never agree to having part of the archaeological riches in our land legally go in to private hands…"

"Such narrow-minded people will be the biggest losers, and not the treasure hunters." Stoyan declared.

"Why?"

"I know what they do elsewhere. If some independent diggers or treasure hunters discover some highly significant artefact, the state rewards them for their find. In practical terms they benefited the state. They increased the state museum's treasures… Perhaps their find will draw thousands of new paying visitors to the museum. They will spend money locally as tourists… They ought to be regarded as heroes, and not criminals as he is here…"

"Hmmm. You may have a point."

"Let's say that someone finds 200 coins of Alexander the Great, why not let him sell 50 of them to foreign collectors legally, who will then display them in their museums or private collections and promote the name Macedonia in the process? Tens of millions of euros in treasures lay buried in our land, and we don't know how to benefit from that fact."

"I see the logic of your arguments, and I again admit that I'd never considered the issue from that aspect." I began to alter my opinion.

Then we had a conversation about history, in general, and a bit about political issues, and after that Stoyan took me in his car to where I could catch an

independent taxi home. The drivers there at the old bus station would shout out destinations and you could choose the one you wanted. I found a ride to Shtip, and I was home by early afternoon, satisfied with my trip.

By that evening, I didn't have the energy to look at the pages he'd given me. By the time I'd finished all of the work that had piled up, I was ready for bed. The next day, by early evening I finally had a chance to sit down at the computer and open the folder. At first I could barely make any sense of the text. But slowly I began to sort some of it out. The words were written in a precise row, one after the other, which I assumed was the work of Stoyan or someone else, who had transcribed the text off of the stone, but obviously not as it had originally appeared. There were words in Latin and old Cyrilic. There were strange symbols and marks, which for the most part had no meaning to me.

In the days that followed, every afternoon I would delve a bit more into the possible meanings of the words. Some were readily recognizable, while others, though carefully transcribed, were not at all clear. Of those words that were clearly legible, only some of them were understandable. However, I failed to find any logical connections among words. Apparently I wasn't looking at a single text, but a compilation of Latin and Cyrillic words, with signs and symbols. Some of the words that I could read were:

CLITARCHUS
THRACIA
COLLINUS
CITAT

REX
ANHIAIOS
AHENUS
VERO
SUMARIUS
BISAILTAE
CHARTA
EXITUS
AHENIS
SEMITA
KAMENE
CONTRA
TETALIS
KAPULUS
ABRUPTUS
BASILICA
EXLIBRIS
DITARCHUS
PEN
CRINA
FODIAURUM
VERO

There were also several words in an old Cyrillic:

ПРЕМУДРОСТ
НОУЗДА
БОЛИАРЕ
ПАТА

There were other words, and the remaining pages were filled with various signs with broken lines and crosses

around them. There were also simple drawings of a sun, a path, a leaf, an eye, a goat's head, among others.

That is all that I managed to observe, and everything that I could make any sense of I wrote down in a note book.

On the 7th of February 2005, a Monday, my notes from that day show that I got a call from Stoyan. This time it was in the evening. He told me that he would be passing through Shtip the next day, and if possible he would like to see me. Of course, I agreed and about 11 am the next day we met at the coffee shop, "The Short Rest." Stoyan had come alone in his automobile, and we didn't have any other guests that day. This time he appeared more relaxed to me, and there was none of the previous tension between us. We were becoming friends. After the usual obligatory "*how are you*?" and "*how are things*?" and beverages (me, coke with whiskey, him, pure juice), we moved on to business.

To the question, where was I in the analysis of the words, I took out my notebook, that was in a case along with the folder with the list of words, and began:

"Look, Stoyan, I have to tell you right off that on the whole these words don't make any particular sense to me, at least to my modest knowledge. Of those that are clearly readable, I've managed to understand a few, and of those that are difficult to make out, God only knows what they mean. We obviously don't have a unified text here, but some compilation. Of course, there are technical issues that would appear to add to the confusion. For example, why is a set of words written in Latin and another set in Cyrillic? Although at first glance this would seem strange, this could possibly be explained by the text having been

written in different time periods… In other words, people of different periods added to the stone monument what they had to add."

Stoyan's attention was totally fixed on me. He was carefully following my every word. Knowing that I had his full attention I continued:

"I remember when I did my diploma work on Saint George's Church. That's a church not far from Shtip, at the site of the ancient city of Bargala. There are very old inscriptions that accompany the frescoes, but there are also medieval and more recent inscriptions as well. So some of the language is archaic and other parts more modern… Maybe your stone monument contains similar additions over time… I don't know… And are we certain that the words are arranged on the stone just as you've given them to me?"

At this Stoyan appeared somewhat taken aback, but after some thought, he said:

"But why would the arrangement of the words matter?"

"As I said, if they are across one another, then that could mean that people from different periods added their words at different times. They might have added their names and where they came from, much as they did in Saint George's Church."

Again, after a bit of thought, Stoyan replied:

"I didn't copy the words exactly in the order that they appeared, but in the original they appear quite carefully written, one after another, and not like you described. I don't think that it is a text like the one you studied in the church."

"If that is the case, I don't know what to say. I found some names and places among the words. For example, 'Clitarchus' was a common name among ancient Macedonians as well as some other Balkan peoples. Here is the place-name 'Thracia', that is certainly the region Thrace. Most likely someone named Clitarchus, who came from Thrace signed this 'Clitarchus from Thrace'. Even today many people sign that way on various monuments, walls, toilets, trees, and the like. The word 'Collinus', at least to my knowledge, has no known meaning in the Macedonian or Latin language, so it is probably someone's name. I'm not sure of the meaning of the word 'citat'. In Latin there is the word 'citata' with two different meanings, one being 'rapid' and the other 'quotation'. We still use the word 'citation' today. But I have no idea whether this word has any connection to any other words here, and I would even begin to speculate. And the word 'rex' means 'king'. But again I can't see how this word connects to any of the others. The word 'anhiaios' doesn't mean anything to me. Maybe that is also a proper name. And I don't know any meaning for the word 'anhenus'. I also don't have a meaning for the word 'vero'. In Latin the word 'veris' means 'springtime'. And I'm not certain of the word 'sumerius'. I might know the meaning of the word 'Bisaltae'. There was an ancient district of Macedonia with that name. Again the word 'fodiarum' doesn't mean anything to me. The word 'charta' meant a letter or a piece of paper, which is also papyrus. 'Exitus' means to exit or end something. 'Semita' is a path. 'Kamene' could be the Macedonian word for stone, 'kamen'. 'Contra' is a familiar word meaning 'to oppose'. The word 'tetaiis' again doesn't mean anything to me. 'Aenigma' means 'an enigma'. 'Kapulus' I don't know of

a meaning. I haven’t found a similar word in the dictionary. 'Exlibris' doesn’t mean anything, but separating in into 'ex libris' means 'from the book'. 'Ditarchuis' might be another proper name, although I’ve never seen it before. 'Basilica' is a type of structure. 'Abruptus' probably is related to the verb 'abruptio', which means 'to abandon'… I also see several words written in Cyrillic…”

"Which words?"

"For example, 'premudrost' ('ingenuity') and after that the word 'nuzhda' ('need'). They are written in archaic Cyrillic letters. 'Premudrost' is a common word in religious texts And generally at that time…

"At what time?"

"In the Middle Ages… It is apparent that we have a text with different periods of time represented. The Cyrillic words were from a later time. They aren’t from ancient times. As I mentioned, these words usually appear in religious texts from the Middle Ages…"

"But why are most of the words in the Latin alphabet? And why would there be references to things from ancient times, as you said?"

"That I don’t know."

"At least give me your theory", insisted Stoyan.

"It is difficult for me to formulate theories with so little evidence… But if I can speak frankly…"

"Please."

"I am inclined to believe that you think that there is some great secret that this text will reveal. I suspect that you have imagined more than there is there. It is a typical text of mixed names and places and other words, and there may be a religious message as well."

"Why do you think that?", Stoyan continued to challenge me.

I momentarily considered my answer:

"I don't know… I'm a sceptic by nature. I only trust in indisputable facts and arguments, and I avoid naïve theories and imaginings… Once on television I heard one professor of science of law, George Maryanovich is his name, reply to a reporter who wanted him to speculate on some situation. I don't remember the issue, but I'll never forget his answer. He said: '*I'm a law expert, which means that I am a literalist and approach my work in literal terms. I only accept that which I can see for myself, and that which I can interpret for myself when written*.' I like the way he says that so much that I often remind myself of his message and take it to heart. In this case I can only believe what I literally am able to read in this text, and what I read is merely a set of unconnected names and words in Latin script and a few more in Cyrillic script. If I had been able to read some meaning beyond that in them, I would certainly say so. I would have said, '*it says this or that here and here, as a message*'. But I can't find evidence of connections among words, and I don't have a talent for imaginative, inventive interpretation, to create some tale about some secret that is revealed in this text… I'm sorry. Maybe you need to consult someone else…"

Stoyan considered this, and then he calmly replied: "Fine. Since that is your thinking, then that's that. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing. That was a free consultation."

"I promised you that I would pay three hundred euros, even if you didn't manage an interpretation.", said Stoyan, and he reached for his wallet.

"It doesn't matter. I didn't really help you, at least, I didn't provide any of what you had hoped I might.", I objected strenuously, and after it became clear that there was no way I was going to accept his money, he put his wallet away. We had a bit more to drink and after that, without any show of emotion or disappointment, Stoyan got up and said that he had to be going. I offered him the list of words, but he refused it.

"Why don't you keep it, Maybe, you'll eventually discover something in it."

"It won't be easy… And if I do find something, how do I contact you?"

"I'll call you again sometime, if you don't mind that."

"Fine.", I said, and we said good bye to each other and he left for Skopje.

*

March of 2005 arrived. The weather began to improve, though it was still quite chilly at times. I continued to struggle with a host of demands on my time, books, letters, notes, the aquarium… But my get-togethers with Stoyan continued. He came by three times that month, when he was passing through Shtip on his way to Kochani on business (although he apparently had some business with treasure hunters in Shtip as well). We had conversations over coffee at local cafes, and we were slowly becoming friends. But his private life remained a taboo subject. He only told me that he was married, but they didn't have children, and that he was involved in trade and that was about it… The last time we saw each other was on the 16th of April, 2005. We drank in the Irish Pub

under the Hotel "Oasis" and had a good conversation, and he departed.

For a period after that I didn't hear anything from him.

Then came the 18th of May of 2005. At that time my favourite entertainment was watching movies with our DLP video projector. That evening around 9 pm we were busy watching one of the favourite films of my childhood "The Fearless Vampire Hunters" by Roman Polanski, that I had somehow managed to find at "divx". In the darkened room, once again the phone rang. My wife called me over in her usual gracious manner and passed the phone to me.

"*Who, the hell, is calling during the film*?" - I protested as I always do at such interruptions to a viewing. It had taken me years to find this particular film. Trying to be more gracious than I felt, I managed a slightly sharp

"Hello?"

There was no answer at the other end for several seconds.

"Hello!", I shouted.

I received a sigh in place of an answer.

"Who is it?", I asked, slowly beginning to lose my patience. The picture projected onto the entire wall in front of me caught my attention as Roman Polanski, the director and the main character in "The Fearless Vampire Hunters", began to fight with the vampire in the castle. For an instant I was drawn in to the drama…

"Good evening…", murmured an unfamiliar voice that heaved another sigh as he spoke.

"Good evening.", I replied still absorbed in the confrontation on the screen.

"Mr. Donski, I am…" - said the voice, then faltered once again.

"Yes, please."

"This is the father of one of your acquaintances…", the voice continued in a slightly shaky manner. It was clearly some elderly gentleman.

"Please go on.", I said, thinking that he was probably the father of one of my many friends in the Macedonian diaspora that I corresponded with through the internet. It was probably one of those parents who were still in Macedonia. Occasionally one of these family members would have a package or just a greeting from my friends. With a hope that this conversation would be a short one, I said:

"Which of my acquaintances?"

The elderly voice continued:

"I am the father of Dimitar." (Readers must understand that this name is not his real name. The reason for this will become clear later. I am obliged to use a pseudonym, in this case, Dimitar, for this narative.)

I considered this and then continued uncertainly:

"Yes."

"As I said, I am Dimitar's father.", the trembling elderly voice continued.

I couldn't honestly remember a Dimitar, and I was searching my brain for any such possible person. I hoped that eventually the elderly man would supply me with enough information to learn who his son was. I couldn't come up with a single possibility on my own. So I tried to draw this information from him:

"To which Dimitar are you referring? I know several…", I lied in hopes that he would tell me.

"Dimitar B...".., the elderly voice offered me his surname (which I also cannot publish, so I've chosen the initial "B" to represent it).

I paused briefly, at a loss:

"Excuse me, but I can't recall… So where does your son live?"

Another pause and a heavy sigh. I don't know why, but something didn't make sense.

"Where does he... live…", the old man murmured.

"Honestly, I can't remember your son. Excuse me. I'm over-tired. I've been very busy lately, and I'm having trouble concentrating…"

The struggle with the vampire in the movie came to an end, and a calmer scene followed, one that wasn't quite so distracting to my conversation.

The man continued uncertainly:

"He knows you quite well… I'm certain that you know each other…"

"I don't doubt that, but at the moment I can't remember him… I'm searching my brain for any possible connection…", I tried to justify myself.

"You should remember the text from the book."

"Which book?", I asked, beginning to wonder if this was a serious caller. Maybe he was playing with me. Or provoking me deliberately… He had given me an unknown name and last initial and now he was bringing me some book… He seemed to have the right party on the line, since he'd asked for me personally, but maybe he had me confused with someone else. All of these thoughts rushed through my mind.

"You certainly know which book.", he continued.

"You should understand, sir, you've got to explain yourself better. I don't seem to know your son at all, nor do I know the book to which you are referring. Is it one of my books? Explain this better to me…"

"How could you not know the book?... And the translation?"

"Which translation?", I asked abruptly.

"The one you made for my son."

So the possibilities were narrowing. I had apparently translated something for this man named Dimitar. But other than translations from Bulgarian, Serbian and Croatian that I had done for the magazine for art "SUM", I hadn't done any translations. I couldn't think of any translations I had done for someone by the name he had given me…

"Honestly, I can't think of anything… What was the language of the translation?", I asked.

"Ah!", the old man sighed again. "You translated words from Latin for him…"

I suddenly thought of Stoyan:

"I've never translated anything from Latin, because it isn't a language that I know very well. To be honest. I only tried to translate a few words from Latin for a man from Skopje… But his name was Stoyan. I don't know your Dimitar."

"Stoyan?"

"Yes, he gave me some words from a stone monument… Or so he said."

"A stone monument?"

"It means that you're probably mistaken. You've confused me with someone else. It happens…"

"It's not a mistake… He's met with you… And you translated some words for him… You met in Shtip and here…"

For an instant I didn't know what to say, although I was beginning to catch on. I suddenly came upon a way to clear things up.

"It appears to be Stoyan. But, I don't know why you call him Dimitar. He told me his name was Stoyan…. If that's the case…"

Again he was silent, then he sighed:

"Eh, Stoyan..."

"If that's the case…", I continued still trying to find a way to make sense of this.

"Yes, that's him. But he's called Dimitar, not Stoyan. His real name is Dimitar."

Now I was silent. I knew that Stoyan had not been forthcoming with me, but I had no idea that he'd given me a false name. For an instant I felt angry and deceived. But I tried to contain that. I let the anger pass. He lied to me, so what? Why was that so important? It's his business how he chooses to introduce himself. I should have known that he was not telling me the truth, when he called himself Stoyan. After all, that's our most common name, and the one we typically use to cover up our identity. Americans and Englishmen use the name John Smith in the same way. I remember how a friend, when we were younger would introduce himself as Stoyan to all the girls, when his real name was Pero… So it sounds like that was the case here… However, he didn't do me any harm. In fact, he bought a considerable number of books from me. All of this occurred to me in a few moments. So I tried to be gracious as I uttered:

"I didn’t know… That’s why I couldn’t remember him right away… I don’t know why he told me that was his name."

" I don’t know what to tell you…"

"I’m inclined to think that we are talking about the same man, don’t you think? A short man of forty something…"

"Yes, that is my son Dimitar."

"But he never gave me words from a book, he said they were from a stone monument."

"No, not from a stone monument."

"It means that he wasn’t truthful about that either…", I just barely managed not to say "he lied to me".

"Yes… apparently…", the old man murmured through one more of so many sighs. That reminded me of him.

My feelings were quite mixed, anger and acceptance struggled within me. But I managed to remain gracious through it all:

"Fine.. That is his right… Since he chose to present himself that way, I won’t hold it against him… He probably had his reasons, so I’ll respect his decision… But where is he now, Stoyan, your Dimitar? What is he doing? Where does he live? No matter what he called himself, he left a good impression on me… We haven’t seen each other in a long time."

There was silence on the other end.

"Hello?"

Still he was silent.

"Hello, are you still there?... It appears that the connection’s been broken.", I turned and said to my wife, who was following the conversation closely.

Sniffling on the other end of the line let me know that the line was still active. There was one more deep sigh, and then a shock:

"My son has passed away…"

" What?... He's passed away!?", I answered, and a shiver passed through my spine, as it always did when I heard the news of someone's death, particularly the death of someone I knew.

Instead of an answer, I heard constrained weeping.

" God rest his soul… Accept my condolences… I didn't know… But from what? How?", I couldn't seem to from whole sentences in my upset.

After a short pause, once the man had collected himself, he continued:

"He passed away last month…"

"But from what? He was a young man…"

"That's why I've contacted you…"

"Why?"

"Because of his death…"

"Why on account of his death?"

"He had a good deal of respect for you…"

"And I for him. We talked by telephone and in person… I really am sorry."

"Mr. Donski… I would like to see you… To talk…"

"That won't be a problem…", I said, still in shock from the news, but also aware that someone in such emotional pain didn't need to hear any of my possible objections… "I really am sorry…", I continued, repeating myself, with the only words that came to me under the circumstances.

"Are you planning any trips to Skopje?"

"Not at the moment, but if you come our way, please stop by. But how did Dimitar pass away?"

"I'll explain when we see each other…"

"Was it from illness? Or an accident?"

"From a heart attack…"

"May his soul find rest."

"Thank you."

I felt that it would be insensitive to question him in detail about the circumstances of his son's death at this time, The old man's voice continued:

"I wanted to talk to you about the book…"

"Which book?"

"The one you translated some words from."

"He told me that it was a stone monument… But what kind of book is it?"

"Copper… Made of copper… It's a very old book…"

"So that's what it is. I've heard of the existence of several such books in Macedonia. Some newspapers have even published a few photographs of one of them. But I've never seen one in a museum or collection."

"I have."

"So that was it. It was your book, but Stoyan, I mean Dimitar, wanted to find out what was written in it. Now it is clear to me."

"Not quite everything…"

Again I was startled:

"Whose book is it? He said it belonged to a friend…"

"I have the book in my possession, but it isn't mine. Before I return to the owner I would like… I would like to say something about its history."

"Hm.", I answered and already I was beginning to develop a professional interest. "It just happens that I have some business in Skopje next week. Could I see you then?"

"Fine. Give me a call before you come."

"Okay, I have your telephone number. Is that your home phone?"

"Yes, give me a call. I'm usually at home."

" We'll be in touch…", I said, and I wanted to express my condolences once more for his son, but he had already hung up.

The movie "The Fairless Vampire Hunters" had already ended, and I asked my wife to rewind it.

"To what scene?", she asked.

"The one where he fights the vampire.", I answered.

*

The following week on the 26th of May I really did make the trip to Skopje. I again took a taxi that delivered me to the address that the elderly gentleman (whose name will be "Boris" for this narrative) gave me. It was a tall apartment building with an elevator that didn't work, but, fortunately, the man lived on the third floor, so I easily managed the climb on foot. I recognized the door by the death announcement and the cloth draped over it. Besides "Stoyan's" name, Dimitar, and his family name, it gave his age, 45 years. It said that he had passed away suddenly, leaving those closest to him to mourn his passing. I read that he was a husband but not a father. Once again I felt sadness at his death. After I had read the entire

announcement I rang the door bell and right away, at the first sound, Boris, my host, invited me in.

This apartment was quite different than the one where I had met with Stoyan. It was a spacious apartment, larger than most from what I could see. The rooms that I caught a glimpse of through open doors were nicely furnished, with the best furniture from the 1980's, which, at the time, must have been expensive. Works of art adorned the walls and all of this left the impression of a comfortable and cultured family. Every item in the room we entered was in its proper place, which made me think that the owner was a man who favoured order.

Boris was of average height with thinning white hair. He was probably around eighty years old. He was dressed in black, but he didn't have the beard that most men in mourning let grow. His look was rather spare. Once I had sat down on the luxurious French style armchair, he offered me a drink, and I chose mineral water. We were the only ones in the apartment, and I suspected that he lived alone. There was a picture of Dimitar with black framing displayed prominently in a glass case in front of us.

During the usual questions about how my trip had gone, and the like, Boris sat opposite me and initiated the conversation. He spoke in measured tones, trying to make every word be as precise as possible. Under the circumstances, due to his recent loss, it was not surprising that his face remained serious.

- You see, Mr. Donski…

"Please, you don't need to be so formal with me, and no need to address me as mister."

"Thank you, so let me continue… Alexander, I've experienced a great loss! You can't imagine how terrible it is to lose a son…"

"No one can quite understand, who hasn't experienced it… May he rest in peace…", I said in a vain attempt to console him.

"No one…", repeated Boris.

"It is some small source of solace that some day we all will depart this earth, then, there on high, we may meet again our dear deceased ones.", I said.

"Do you think so?"

"I not only think that… You may know that I researched some of what is known of clinical death. I had conversations with some of our citizen who experienced a death state, before coming back to life. I even wrote a book about it… All of them spoke about a life after death…", I began, but quickly realized that a person in his circumstances wouldn't appreciate a discussion of one of my books. I wished that I hadn't mentioned it, and I chose to say no more.

"Who knows? It is hard for those of us who remain here, but no one escapes death in the end…"

I was at a loss as to what to say, so I waited for him to continue.

"I called you about a different matter…"

"Before you continue, can I ask you something?"

"Please.", Boris responded with the same measured tone.

"I met with Dimitar in Skopje, but not here in this apartment… Similarly, he never gave me his phone number, he would always call me from various numbers, I

think they were public phones… Why was he so secretive?"

Without showing any visible emotion, except a certain gravity, Boris replied:

"Be patient and I'll explain everything… Where was the apartment you visited?"

"I don't really know… I don't know Skopje that well… But it was a modest, out of the way apartment."

Boris apparently knew exactly what I was referring to. "That isn't his apartment. But be patient, and I'll explain."

"Fine, I'm listening.", I replied, settling myself more comfortably in the armchair, ready to listen to a long story.

"First of all, I should introduce myself better. I am a retired officer of the former Yugoslav Army. I've been a widow for seven years now, and with the recent loss of my son, I am quite alone now…"

"Did Dimitar live with you?"

" No… He was married. He lived in another apartment, but he and his wife weren't always on good terms, so he often came and stayed here with me…"

"Was that the apartment he took me to?"

"No, the apartment he took you to wasn't his. It was a rented apartment… He would meet women there… and the like…"

"You said that you were an officer in the Yugoslav Army… What was your rank and duties?"

After a brief silence, Boris replied:

"I was in the intelligence service. I finished my career as a colonel."

"Really? My God..."

"What is so strange in that?"

"No, nothing… I was just reacting to the fact that you were doing such sensitive work."

"I know. That is controversial work everywhere, but particularly here during that time."

An uncomfortable silence followed. I was unsure how to excuse my reaction to his distasteful army service, at least to my mind, as well as many others I knew…

"Excuse me, I didn't mean anything bad… It just came out…"

I had to say this in order to get us back to the conversation. But he apparently was somewhat used to reactions like mine, and he continued calmly enough:

"I worked all over Yugoslavia. I participated in various things, both public and secret…"

"*So, here we are*", I thought. This means that I'm in the presence of a former member of the dreaded Yugoslav communist Secret Service or something similar… And I should be careful what I do… That was my first thought, but I relaxed immediately as I realized that the man was close to the end of his life, and it occurred to me that there may be some things weighing on him that he would like to share with me. As cruel as his service may have been, it was a long time ago, there was no such thing today, and he seemed to be a decent person, who had invited me to be his guest and had treated me well enough.

"There is no doubt that you had some dramatic experiences… Part of our history now, that I would be interested to hear about.", I said, but almost immediately regretted my presumptuousness, and once again chose to say no more.

" I would like to tell you a story, but on two conditions."

"What are they?"

"Everything I say, I would like you to note down carefully and publish it."

"How should I publish it"

"You know how. You'll find a way. I am going to tell you almost unlikely but true story, the likes of which you've never heard."

" Fine, but… What is the second condition?"

" My name and that of my son must not be mentioned. Promise me that! You must not reveal our identities."

"Why?, I blurted and immediately wished that I'd waited again before reacting.

But Boris again took this calmly:

"No one in my extended family knows anything about my occupation…"

"Fine… If that is what you want, that is how it will be, but I have a few questions. First of all, did you have in mind a published book, or some other sort of text?"

"A book. I want a book. That will make it a lasting story. Newspaper and magazine articles are more fleeting in character. But a book endures. Even today we read books that are thousands of years old."

"If it really is a story of genuine interest to readers, I can try to tell it, but a book costs money."

"You'll receive what you need."

"From whom?"

"From me."

"Hmm… Fine. But we'll have to discuss the details of that… I have one other question."

"Please."

"You've told me not to mention your names, but only the facts connected to you and Dimitar, but how can I do that and it be a credible historical work?"

"Who said it should be a historical work?"

"But you know that I am a historian, and I have in recent years written only well-documented history books…"

"Find a way. Write this book in the form of a novel or tale."

"A novel? I've never written a novel, nor a tale. I'm not sure I'm suited for such writing. I may not succeed…", I began to object.

"Just write down what I am about to tell you, and then see if it can be refined later. Don't worry about the literary merits of it at all."

"But if I conceal your and your son's identities, who is going to believe me, or your story?"

" People don't have to be convinced… It doesn't matter if they believe it or not…The important thing is that it be written down… for the future…"

"Well, alright, if that's how you want it. I'll do my best, but I can't guarantee anything…. At least I have a dictaphone for such work…"

"No need for that. Here's a notebook, go ahead and write in it.", said Boris, and he handed me a fine pen and notebook that he'd bought for this purpose.

I had serious doubts about all of this. Yet, it was a project I might do. I would write the book, he would pay for the printing, and maybe I would manage to sell some copies… I silently took up the pen and notebook. I knew how to take notes. From 1984 to 1986 I had done some studies in folklore in and around Shtip, during a year I worked as a village teacher. I was accustomed to taking

notes from oral interviews, and then working from my notes later at home.

"You are free to ask whatever you like for your text. Put it any way you like, narratives, descriptions of situations, anything you like. But it is important that you stay with what really happened."

"If that's the case, then I don't see any real problem. It won't be a problem for me to write down what you tell me, and since you are willing to bear the cost of publication, I'll try to do my part. I'm listening…", I said with the pen and paper at the ready in my hands.

He began as I commenced to take notes:

"As I said, I was an officer in the Yugoslav Army, I'm now retired. My career began with the People's War of Liberation [World War Two]. I joined up at the end of 1944 when I was seventeen years old. I participated in the battles on the Sremski Front, and after the war I devoted myself completely to a military career. At first I was on active duty, but later I applied to the military academy in Belgrade and I was among the best cadets in the sixth class… I was a, so to speak, devoted member of the secret service, the KOS. I fulfilled every task I was given with energy and enthusiasm, particularly the efforts to root out those who were hostile to the new Yugoslavia. Maybe that is why I was assigned an important task. One day I was personally called to appear at central command in Belgrade."

"What year was that?"

"1947, the first half."

"Fine. Continue…"

"I entered the main office of KOS and General Yefto Shashic met me personally there… Do you know who he was?", Boris suddenly asked.

"I know.", I answered readily and continued. "He is the man who gave the order in January of 1945 for the execution of 50 citizens of Veles. Many of them were innocent… He was still alive until recently…"

"Yes, he is. Then, he was head of the KOS for all of Yugoslavia. A hard and dangerous man… He inspired great fear… There was also an unfamiliar officer with him."

After a brief pause, Boris continued:

"General Shashic informed me that I would be working on one special case of particular importance. Then he told me:

'Comrade, I am giving you your orders in person. We've chosen you because we consider you the most capable man to carry out this assignment. Here it is. There is an officer, a captain, in our army, who has a particularly valuable asset in his possession. We must obtain this item. Our agents have already discussed the matter with this man, but he refuses to surrender it. We've offered him money and other privileges, but he has refused them. We don't know where he has hidden the item we want. Your job is to find it for us.'

I was quite surprised by what I heard, but before I could react, General Shashic continued:

'You will befriend him and see if you can find out where he has hidden this valuable object. It is, of course, understood that no one is to know of this! This is a very important matter.'

'I understand, comrade General. It will be an honour to do all that I can. But I've never met this captain and I don't know what item he is hiding.'

'The colonel here will provide you with all of the necessary details. Good luck comrade,' said General Shashic.

The colonel (whose name I never learned) looked me straight in the eye and said:

'This captain is from your army district. He has in his possession a very old copper book. It is of great antiquity… It is a treasure of national importance, part of our heritage…'

The colonel was silent for a moment, and I took advantage of that to say:

'If I may ask…'

'Ask whatever you will,' said the colonel.

'Where is the book from? Where did he find it?'

'Apparently he inherited it from his forbears, but who knows for sure… He tried to sell it recently, but it appears he had second thoughts. We have reason to believe that he was in contact with some foreign service that was trying to get him to smuggle it out of the country. Our man saw evidence that he possessed pounds and dollars, even though he comes from a poor family.'

'But', I managed to interject amidst the colonel's words.

'What?', he demanded.

'I want to know…'

'What?'

'What makes you think that this book is so valuable?'

'Be patient, you'll learn that soon enough… Parts of that book, even during the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, were studied by experts on antiquities. Professor Miloye Vasic, an archaeologist and curator of the People's Museum in Belgade, examined it personally. He is the archaeologist who excavated the famous Vincha site in 1929 and again in 1934. As an expert on ancient symbols, he determined that the work was valuable. We have a copy of his written report on the book, and we have no doubt as to its value. We now have orders from the highest authorities to do all we can to obtain possession of the book. But we don't know where the captain has hidden it. We've offered to buy it, but he won't hear of it. He stubbornly claims to know nothing about it.'

'Why won't he sell it?'

'We don't know… Our people down there have observed that he visited some clairvoyant. An old Turk from Bitola… Sinan Hodja Desovets… We think that he asked the man if he could tell him anything about the book, and after that the captain decided not to sell it. Of course, I consider that business to be nonsense, but he must have believed him. Who knows what Desovets told him…'

The whole time the colonel spoke I stood at ease in front of his desk.

'Your job is to find out where he's hidden the book or to convince him to give it up. Is that clear?', said the colonel.

'Yes, comrade colonel. But if he won't give it up, what should I do?'

'Then, we'll have to step in… take other measures!'

'Yes, comrade colonel, but how will I get acquainted with the captain? Who is he? What is his name?', I asked.

'We will arrange for you to work together. He's serving in a supply unit at the Strumitsa garrison at the moment. We'll assign you to command the same unit. See that you befriend him… And then… don't let him take a step without you knowing. Is that clear?', said the colonel.

'Very clear, comrade colonel.'

'You'll get all of the information we have on him from his dossier in Skopje. And now, if you have no further questions, you are dismissed!'

Before leaving I turned to General Shashic, who had been following our conversation closely:

'Comrade General, if that is all, please, I'll leave for my assignment.'

'You're dismissed.', he replied without further comment."

Boris sighed and stared absently at the table in front of him. Then he continued:

"That was a time when whatever they told us was for the good of the fatherland Yugoslavia, we went ahead and did it. So I understood things, and I was prepared to do whatever I had to do to fulfil this mission. Since the order had come from the highest ranks, I didn't question it. I would follow orders. I had been assured that this book was valuable to our state and people, so no individual, whether he was a captain or not, should stand in the way of us… And so I found myself stationed in Strumitsa and I got to know the captain…

"Captain who?", I interrupted.

Boris looked at me and answered in a grave voice:

"I can't tell you that. His identity needs to remain a secret for now."

"Huh…Okay… That's your right… But now you have to understand that no one is going to believe me when I write down and we publish what you tell me. You and your son have an identity that I can not present, and now the owner of the copper book can't be presented too… Readers will think that I made all of this up… I'll be discredited…", I said, a bit discouraged.

"It doesn't have to be that way…", replied Boris.

"Why so?"

"First of all, you can publish what I've told you as a novel, then no one can be sure if it is made up or not. In a novel nobody cares if it's true or not."

"Hm."

"Second of all, I've given you a good reason why I don't want to have my name or my son's name to appear…"

"Fine, and I've accepted that…"

"And third, the captain's identity… Our victim… Maybe you'll learn it some day."

"When? How?", I almost shouted.

"I can't tell you, but some day someone else may… It's for them to say…"

"I don't understand."

"It doesn't matter. Let's just get on with this work."

"Honestly, I don't know what you're saying… Who might tell me the identity of the captain?"

"I've told you that it doesn't matter… Let's go on."

"Fine.", I shrugged.

Boris was a bit unsure of how to proceed. I seized the moment to add:

"Before we go on…"

"Yes?"

"I want to say… You've mentioned the seer Sinan Hodja Desovets. I've heard of him. But he died a long time ago. Way back in 1952, I believe. My uncle visited him. I wrote about this unusual man in one of my books… It's a shame that he lived at the wrong time. From what I heard about him, he would have likely been world famous if he'd lived in some different time and place, where he'd have been freer to practice his art… Excuse me for digressing… Go on…"

Boris didn't comment, he just continued his story:

"Before I left for Strumitsa I studied the captain's dossier carefully. He had an interesting biography…"

"Will you share some of it?", I asked with genuine curiosity.

"I'll tell you some things, but others I won't…", said Boris, and he took out a case that held his eyeglasses and put them on in order to read something, as he continued:

"The captain was several years older than me. He came from a poor family from one of the Veles region villages. Apparently the copper book had been in his family for many years… It had been passed from generation to generation, and so it had come down to him. During the Second World War he had twice been interned in Bulgaria. The first time was in July of 1941. Several months later he had returned to his village only to be arrested a second time. He was jailed again in 1943. It was clear that this jail time had something to do with the book, although he never realized that. The Bulgarians had arrested him on various pretexts. The second time they claimed that he had participated in some armed attack on their soldiers. But it wasn't true. Once he told me himself that he never took part in that action, but when I asked why they had arrested

him then, he didn't answer… Apparently the Bulgarians were determined to get their hands on the copper book, but they didn't. He told them, just like he'd told us that he didn't have any such book and didn't know what they were talking about. In 1944 he joined the partisans. He fought on the Sremski Front. He rose to the rank of captain. He showed a lot of courage, and he was wounded in one battle. When he was in the hospital in Slavonska Pozhega he met a nurse named Milena Popovic. She was his nurse and later they corresponded. However, our secret service discovered that the nurse had been living under a false name. Her real name was Elizabeth Heinz. She was a German who had worked for the English during the occupation. Once she was discovered, she had been jailed. But she escaped and took on the assumed name of Milena Popovic. Her job was to befriend our captain. She offered him a lot of money for the book. She likely gave him quite a bit of money just as a gift. In 1947 Lieutenant Nikola Manasijevic noticed that the captain had a significant sum of dollars and pounds. I read all of this in his dossier… The captain continued to communicate with Elizabeth Heinz, right up to the time he came to the camp at Strumitsa. Then our people arrested and imprisoned her. The captain claimed that he had no idea what she was up to, so he was never called to task…"

"I see that you know enough details about him… I can't resist asking a few questions."

"Yes, I know a lot from his dossier. I think that what you write will be more believable if I provide you with a lot of details.", Boris answered readily.

"But through these details somebody is liable to discover the captain's identity.", I continued.

" Well, what of it? I told you that you might learn that one day. It is important to me that I don't reveal his identity when I describe events… Simply in order to avoid any unforeseen consequences… But later, if you find out, I leave it up to you whether to publish it or not…"

"Hm, okay, go on."

Glancing over his notes, Boris continued:

"Our people tried to get the captain's copper book right after he came back from the Sremski Front. Because he wouldn't cooperate, he was followed, and he lost ground, so to speak."

"What do you mean, lost ground?", I asked.

"In the service… He was a captain who fought in the war. As a respected soldier he had even achieved the post of political commissar of a battalion. But when he failed to cooperate with us over the copper book, he was reduced to supply duty at the Strumitsa camp… I suspect you've been in the army…"

"Yes, and I know what supply duty is. That's a rear unit that sees to supplying the army with food and supplies. And it is a real step down for an officer who took part in battles and was a political commissar, to all of the sudden end up in a rear supply operation…"

"It was hard on him. He went from carrying weapons to carrying a pen and a notebook, and instead of joining his comrades on armed patrol, he was stuck back in camp counting potatoes, sacks of flour, grain and eggs in the army stores. But without good options, he had to accept it. Right from the start he was not very good at the work, it was some silent rebellion against his superiors. He would get the figures wrong on supplies that were his responsibility. And all of this was prominently noted in his

dossier. Later, when we got to know each other, he would go off on his own on visits to nearby towns, where he was observed being highly critical of conditions around him… Actually, I was a party to this. I won his confidence by posing as someone who was also being demoted to supply duty at the Strumitsa camp. And it was hoped that that would help me to find out where he hid the book. As soon as I found out, I was to offer him a lot of money in the name of some foreign state and a chance to escape across the border."

"And did you succeed?", I again interrupted Boris.

I thought that he would give me a simple yes or no answer, but the question seemed to startle him. He didn't offer an answer right away. He just sighed and then said:

"Did I succeed?..."

"Yes, did you get the book?"

"Yes, he gave it to us… But much later…", Boris answered with difficulty, and then more to himself, murmured. "Why didn't he give it to us immediately? Why did he have to suffer so much?"

I waited, wondering what he would say next. Boris continued a bit uncertainly:

"This is something I've never told anyone until now. It has bothered me all my life… Maybe I'll find some peace now toward the end of my time…"

"Did you do something to harm him? Is that it?", I decided to try and provoke him in to further disclosure.

Boris ignored my remark. He seemed to be gathering his strength to continue:

"Six years… We sentenced him to six years in prison… A man who had done no crime, nor was ever

proven to have done a crime… Five years he served for no good reason at all…"

I realized that he wasn't likely to be forthcoming. I couldn't resist pushing a bit:

"He spent five years in prison?"

"Yes."

"Where was he?"

"At Goli Otok."

"At Goli Otok.", I repeated in astonishment.

"That's where they put the political prisoners in those days."

"He spent five years in prison because he refused to give you something that belonged to him?"

"I know what you must be thinking of me now… But that was that. I won't try to justify what we did, but the thing he possessed was, in fact, very valuable. It could have been worse. You'll hear as I go on… Except maybe you'd like a break?"

"Yes, this is pretty upsetting to hear. I know that some terrible things happened back then, during the communism, but I've never heard anything about what happened to any particular individual. But I want to hear it all, and set it down in a professional manner. I want to ask you something else. I'd like to know how you actually managed to have him put in jail. Tell me exactly how that was done?"

Boris considered what to say, then he went on:

"As ordered, I befriended him, but he was wary of me. He avoided talking to me about serious things, and once, when I brought up the copper book in a conversation and suggested that I had a buyer for him, he just about ran from me whenever he saw me coming. Once it was clear

that he would never discuss the book with me, I let my superiors know. I was called to Belgrade, where I gave a detailed report to General Shashic. He appeared nervous, since he'd been ordered to resolve this matter by the highest authorities. So he told me it was time for the next phase of the operation. We had to frighten him with prison, and to make him spend some time there, if necessary. Meanwhile, the captain had gone on to additional training in ordinance and supply in Trebinje. I was ordered to go to work with the KOS at Trebinje to move things along. Once it was clear that he was going to stubbornly resist, we got several officers from the camp to testify that they had heard him making anti-state comments…"

"Do you remember any of their names?", I asked in search of details.

"Of course, I'll give you their names. They died long ago. The main one was Lieutenant Slavko Kolarevic and Franyo Maynaric. They had earlier made false accusations against the prominent communist leader Edvard Kardelj. They claimed that the captain had expressed sympathy for the Russians. They made up or distorted other things as well. The two of them were directly under my control. We later got others to add their statements against him. These included the Lieutenant David Durakovic and someone named Hero Jafer. There was also someone named Shukovic. And someone else named Bosic Novak… All of them made up things against the captain, but mainly it was Kolarevic and Maynaric. Their trumped up claims were the most damning of all… I've kept the transcript of the hearing… It was so terrible…"

"What year was that?", I asked.

"I can tell you the exact date of his arrest. Here it is… January 17, 1951."

"That was still during the days of the Informbiro."

"Yes, thousands of people were jailed just for things they had said. That was the atmosphere at the time of our struggle with the captain. And during his arrest we pressured him to give us the book. But he didn't give in… He never gave in even after the Military Court in Sarajevo sentenced him to six years of hard labour prison. He didn't even give in during his time in prison. Not even when we threatened to punish his family… Five years in prison and he never gave in, and then we let him go…"

"Then how did you get a hold of the book?", I asked, still feeling revulsion, not only toward my informant, but the whole system that had played with people's lives.

"In the meantime I had finished the military academy in Belgrade and I again served in Macedonia. I was ordered to continue to follow the former captain's every move. This time I worked with the local civil authorities. We understood that he had had serious problems after his release from prison. He was a physical and a mental wreck, and we saw to it that nobody gave him any help. We told all of his old friends to avoid all contact with him. In fact, one of them defied us. A journalist from Skopje. He was the only one who accepted him at his house after his release from prison. But he paid dearly for that. The journalist soon lost his job. Then the former captain joined his wife, whom he'd married back in 1949. Although he was barely 30 years old he looked like an old man. His hair had turned grey in prison… He'd only been there a few months when he suffered one more tragic blow. His two year old son died. Broken and defeated after his release,

he fell in to a deep despair. And that's when we approached him again! We waited for him to be at his weakest, and then we pounced…", At this point Boris stopped to think.

I was already beginning to curse my informant to myself. I thought about the captain, who had rotted in prison just when he should have been happiest in life with his new bride. What had he had to endure there? And to what purpose?... At least to be a political prisoner of conscience… But he had suffered for nothing! What a monstrous system! And here I was with a guy who didn't exactly smell like a rose. He was the sort who had made that monstrous system work… But why get so upset? Better to keep quiet. Let him tell his story for future generations to know…

"And what did you do this time?", I asked in a cynical tone.

"Nothing. We just threatened him with more prison time if he didn't give us the book! Another six year term! We told him that he would serve the whole sentence next time… Then he gave up. He knew that we were serious. He called me one day on the phone we'd given him for this purpose, all distraught, and said that he wanted to meet me. We met in the town where he and his wife were staying. We met in the city park. There was another officer with me. The captain carried a sack, and we had our pistols. We were ready for anything. When he reached in the sack, we instinctively reached for our pistols. He pulled out something wrapped in a white cloth and told us:

'You've defeated me, you shits… Here is your book. Son of bitch…'

The other officer and I relaxed. First we opened the cloth and when we saw what he had in it, we smiled and began to console him…

'Bravo. Good for you, thank you for this patriotic gesture. Our fatherland will be in your debt. You'll get money, as promised…'

But he wouldn't hear of it. He glared at us and muttered:

'This book never brought me anything but misery. I wish you the same bad luck…'

'Don't be that way, comrade… Come, let's go have a drink, and tomorrow we can bring you some money…', said the officer who accompanied me.

'Money? From you? I don't want any of your dirty money…'

After trying to convince him for a while, it became clear that he wouldn't take our money, he just cursed us under his breath and then left.

We were satisfied that we'd carried out our assignment successfully. We never even looked at the book, because that wasn't in our orders. We just delivered it right away to the station. The next day we took it in to Skopje, to the regional command, where they were visibly pleased and praised us for our successful work, and then they let us go."

Boris was silent again, and I could barely contain my dislike for him, covering it up with a mask of indifference.

"And?"

"And what?"

"What happened next? Where did the book end up? How valuable did it prove to be? And di you ever see the unfortunate captain again? What happened to him?"

I never saw the captain again, but I discreetly learned of his fate. I heard that he slowly regained his life. That he had two more children. He died twenty years ago of a heart attack…

"A consequence of his prison time…"

"Maybe…"

"And the book?"

"It is because of the book that I've contacted you."

"Are the words and signs and symbols your son showed me from the book?"

"Yes."

"How did you obtain it? Hadn't it become the property of the KOS?"

Boris heaved another sigh and continued:

"The copper book appeared to be some kind of secret set of instructions to some hidden treasure, but..."

"But no one knows the code…", I completed his words.

"Yes…"

"Go on."

"The book was taken to Belgrade right away. President Tito took a personal interest in it. And not just him. It created a real stir. A number of professors examined it and concluded that it was an extremely rare and valuable find. And that it held some great secret… It was said that some foreigners also took a special interest in it…"

"Who?"

"I don't know if it's true, but one colleague told me that he heard about some secret conversation between Tito and Churchill… The British premier had sought to obtain the book… Tito didn't give it to him…"

"How did Churchill hear about it?"

"How? … Think about it?"

"Yes… It's obvious… You already told me about the German woman who worked for the English… The book apparently really means something… But what? What is it exactly that makes it so valuable?"

"We'll talk about that."

"And you say Churchill tried to get it from president Tito?"

"That's what they said in our circles… Churchill offered a lot of money… Even more than that…"

"What else?"

"I don't know… I can't prove it… I only heard that…"

"What?"

"Churchill was rumoured to have also offered some political concessions for the book. But don't ask me what kind… I can't say, and I don't have any proof…"

"Britain didn't have any open controversies with Yugoslavia at that time… Except the Macedonian question in Greece…", I ventured.

"I don't know, and I can't say."

All of this seems so fantastic, almost beyond belief. On the other hand, your sources were certainly well informed… Who knows…", I said and mused over it a bit, but then quickly returned to the present:

"I think that's enough for today. I should go. Let's see each other again next week."

" If that's what you want. I still have a lot to tell you.", replied Boris.

"It really is interesting and almost unbelievable… Who would have thought that such things went on in Tito's

Yugoslavia? But, okay, I wasn't even born back then…", I said, more to myself.

*

I spent the days until our next meeting transferring my notes to the computer. I spent a good deal of time thinking about all of this. My head was filled with images and ideas. I felt a revulsion for my informant, for his cruel behavior of the past, but I also felt a certain sympathy for his recent loss of his son. I kept thinking about the unlucky captain. I felt so sorry for him. I kept wondering who he was. Where did he live? Obviously he must have some family somewhere in Macedonia, since Boris didn't want to reveal his name… Should I try to find out on my own? But how? It would be impossible. Boris told me the names of several officers from the ordinance and supply school in Trebinje, but that was a long time ago, they had probably all died by now. Even if I find some of their sons and daughters, they probably wouldn't know where and when their parents worked and with whom. I considered what he had said about a possible interest by Churchill. How could I ever document that? I took another look at the words, signs and symbols on the sheet that the deceased Dimitar had given me. Now it seemed possible to me that they really did have some great meaning…

The next Wednesday (June 1, 2005) I again made the trip to Skopje. Everything went pretty much as it had the last time: the taxi ride, the high rise with the broke down elevator, the death notice at the door, ringing the bell, being greeted by the staid, serious Boris dressed in black, and the comfortable old Parisian-style armchair… The only thing that was new was a slim book with a blue

cover on the small table. After the usual greetings and pleasantries, Boris began:

"Any thoughts?"

"Yes, I'm thinking that it could be an interesting book. I've put everything you told me into the computer, and later I'll go ahead and refine the text with further descriptions of events.

"Fine. Once you have something more along, let me read it."

"No problem… And now I think we ought to get started… Not lose any time."

Boris took a deep breath and went on:

"We obtained the copper book, but then new problems arose. Our experts couldn't make sense of the message it contained. They only managed to translate some of the words while many of the signs remained a mystery. The translated words suggested something important… For security reasons we didn't want to bring foreign experts here to examine it. We sent some photocopies of parts of it abroad, but we never got any helpful responses from there either. Some people suggested that we needed to rearrange the pages in order to shed some new light on the meaning of the whole text. We tried various things, but nothing helped. So we were at a dead end. We had this obviously valuable book in our hands, but we couldn't make anything of it. In the meantime I had moved on in my career, but I was still involved in this case. Twenty five years passed… Times changed… And then… A new opportunity arose to make sense of the book… "

Boris stopped for a moment.

"What kind of moment?", I asked impatiently.

Boris went on as if he hadn't heard me:

"That was at the end of 1978. One day I was called in to the headquarters of the Third Army district. I had been personally summoned by General Dane Chuic."

"Who is he?"

"He was chief of the Military Secret Service, KOS, for all of Yugoslavia at the time."

"It means that it was a summons from the highest authorities again.", I commented.

Then Boris continued:

"Generals Karangeleski and Chuic were both waiting for me in an office of the headquarters of the Third Army district. General Chuic informed me that I had a new assignment, that again involved the copper book… He told me that I would get the details of this assignment from the KOS colonel who had accompanied him. Then the colonel filled me in on the job… I was to arrange to have a part of the contents of the book prepared to deliver in to the hands of…", Boris hesitated again.

"To some foreign experts on ancient languages and symbols?", I asked impatiently.

"No, the book wasn't to be delivered to an expert, but to a… psychic!"

I couldn't resist a laugh at this:

"What? To a psychic? How could that be? I didn't think that you people believed in that sort of thing."

"I remember that I was resistant to the idea when I received the assignment. I'd been schooled in the materialist theory of Marxism, and I was convinced that religion was just a tool used to manipulate and divide the people…"

Boris again grew silent, and I took advantage of the pause to react:

"I understand… But excuse me for saying so, you weren't right in this…"

" I know… I've come to think differently these days… The closer I come to the end of my life, the more I become convinced that there is something… That religion isn't what we were taught that it was in our courses on Marxism and at communist party meetings we had at the military academy… I still don't attend church, but I know there is something… But back in the 70's when Marxism was our one and only ideology, I really did think that it was foolish and even subversive…"

"Yes, that was how it was. Go on… Who was the psychic?"

"Vangia from Petrich. 'Granny Vangia'".

" Really?", I asked with growing interest.

"Her popularity was at its height, but I simply dismissed such business as nonsense."

" Yes, in my opinion, she was certainly among the best seers of all time in the world. There are many well-documented cases of her psychic powers… Some of the stories are astonishing… I don't know if you know that she was born in our town Strumitsa. When she married in Petrich, she decided to live on that side of the border… Eh, if she had stayed to live here, what could she have done for us? ", I said in an excited voice and continued . "And? What did she tell you?"

"Actually, this was no easy assignment. You probably know how bad things were between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Tense and almost openly hostile. We knew that Vangia was carefully watched by the Bulgarian secret

police, so we either would have to risk getting caught trying to visit her or somehow negotiate a visit with the authorities. Which would, of course, require a mediator…"

"With the help of the Soviet KGB?",I asked.

Boris looked at me, a bit surprised:

"How did you know?"

"I didn't. It just seemed logical."

"Yes, we negotiated with the Bulgarians with the assistance of the KGB to get permission… The KGB at the time, personally looked at the case… We sent a man to discuss this at the KGB headquarters at the First Chief Directorate responsible for foreign affairs. Our idea was to take the book to Vangia and come back the same day. The Soviets quickly agreed to help, but then our people had second thoughts… We asked ourselves why they were so quick to agree. It made us uneasy… In the end it was decided to send Vangia a copy of a portion of the symbols in the book, by way of a third party. If she discovered something significant, then we would take further steps…"

"And?", I asked impatiently.

"And nothing came of it…", Boris replied.

"What do you mean, nothing? Did you give her a copy? What did she say?"

"The whole thing failed."

"How?"

"When we decided to send only a copy of a small portion of the contents of the book, and not the book itself in the original, the Bulgarians refused to cooperate. So we had to find our own way. One of our people found a Bulgarian citizen who was willing to take a copy to Vangia. We convinced him that we were trying to decipher a map to a hidden treasure…"

"Did he take the copy to Vangia?", I asked with growing impatience.

"No… Actually, yes…" was Boris's vague reply.

"I don't understand.", I said, rather disturbed by what I was hearing.

"Because he approached Vangia as an ordinary visitor, her sister, as they normally did, screened him first. And she informed him that Vangia didn't assist people whose purpose was to discover treasure. Her sister sent the man to her own daughter Krasimira, who was an expert on ancient scripts. The man gave the sheet to Krasimira, and she took it to a professor in Sofia. Everybody seemed to agree that these signs and symbols were impossible to make any sense of. I suspect that they were at as much of a loss as our own experts. So the copy never got to Vangia. At least that was the official version of the report of the man who tried for us…"

"And unofficially?"

"Unofficially our people in Bulgaria learned that not long after that, there was some very interesting digging that went on in the mountains. Ludmila Zhivkova who was Bulgarian Minister of Culture and a daughter of the communist dictator Todor Zhivkov, oversaw this work."

"Oh, my… How does this square with their avowed communism?"

"Well, Ludmila was an unusual person. She was familiar with Eastern cultures. She had broad interests, and they were reflected in her activities. For example, she was very interested in ancient Thracian connections to the present-day Bulgarian people. She wanted to promote Bulgarian culture beyond the Eastern Bloc countries, and she had a well-known interest in parapsychology. As a

result, she wasn't very popular with the more conservative Bulgarian communists, and the authorities in the Soviet Union. Some even think that she was quietly eliminated… She died in 1981 at the age of 39… They claimed she had a brain tumor, but who really knows?"

" I've heard something about that… But did you learn anything about the copy of things from the book?"

"No, except as I said, that there was some new digging around that time that never yielded any results. But we never had proof that the copy of the material from the copper book was related to that…"

Boris's last words disappointed me. Maybe I had hoped to hear something spectacular. I had to react:

"Well, that's fine, Boris… If you never managed to get a response to the material from the copper book from Granny Vangia, why did you bother to tell me this story? I can't see anything that interesting in it."

"The interesting part came later"

"How?"

Then Boris handed me the copy of the book with the blue cover. The title was "Vangia". The author was Krasimira Stoyanova, Granny Vangia's sister child, who had received the material from the copper book. This was a Macedonian edition of the book, published by the Skopje publishing house Gold Bak. The book was published in 1997, while the Bulgarian original dated back to 1989 in Sofia.

"Wait a minute, I have this book." I said, surprised. "I have it in the Bulgarian original. An astonishing book! I didn't know that it had been translated into Macedonian… Nobody could read it and not be stirred…"

"I agree.", said Boris.

"Is there something I ought to read in it? Why do you want me to have it?"

"Turn to page 126."

I picked up the book and quickly found the page.

"Ten years… It took me ten years to find out…", continued Boris.

"To find out what?", I asked with growing curiosity.

"Give me the book."

When I handed it to him, Boris put on his reading glasses and looked at me as if he were about to reveal a great secret.

"Krasimira, the author of this book, unwittingly described this incident… What happened with our man who went to Vangia…"

"She described it? In this book? I've read it, But I don't remember…"

"She wrote about the most amazing of her aunt's experiences in the book, to which she herself was a witness. Not knowing who the man was who brought her the sheet we sent with the material from the copper book, she wrote about what happened…"

"But you said that Granny Vangia never saw the sheet."

"So we were told, and so it seemed until Krasimira's book came out."

"Interesting. I can barely wait to hear how she described all of this…"

Boris was already thumbing through the pages of the book, and before beginning to read out loud, he repeated the most important information:

"Write that his case is described on eight pages of the book about Vangia. As I said, the author is her sister's

daughter Krasimira. She lived with her mother, Vangia's sister, who, at a place called Rupi, would screen people who wanted to see Vangia. Krasimira unwittingly described our case…"

"I've written that down… Go on.", I said impatiently.

What Boris read to me from the book about Granny Vangia can't be quoted directly due to Krasimira Stoyanova's authorial rights and the Macedonian publisher's rights, so I recommend that readers find the book and read the passages in the original. Without getting into details, I'll only paraphrase some of it in abbreviated form. What Krasimira essentially writes is that one day a man came to Vangia's sister with a request for an audience with the famous psychic. Her sister asked the purpose of the visit, and he took out a folded sheet of paper with mysterious signs and symbols on it, that resembled hieroglyphics and tiny geometric figures. He told her that it was some sort of secret trasure map. Vangia's sister said that she didn't help treasure seekers. Due to his stubborn insistence, she agreed to have her daughter Krasimira, an Egyptologist, who understood ancient symbols, take a look at it. Krasimira overheard all of this, and in order not to disappoint her mother, she agreed to take a look at the sheet, and eventually she took it to her professors in Sofia. However, neither she nor her professors succeeded in discovering anything of interest in the symbols. They didn't correspond to any known ancient system of writing. The professors in Sofia thought it was all nonsense, that there no meaning to it. After a time the man came back, Krasimira met him in the yard and reported to him that her professors in Sofia hadn't made any sense of it. After that,

the man went away, discouraged. Bit it turns out that Vangia overheard their conversation from the house. She called Krasimira to her, and then told her that these signs and symbols were not meaningless, that they represented a great and terrible secret that neither Krasimira, nor her professors, nor the man himself, nor anyone else of their time, was capable of deciphering and understanding. Vangia, as if in a trance, began to talk about a map that provided information about a stone sarcophagus in which there were secret writings. These signs and symbols were recopied over the course of many generations and over time they became incomprehensible. The sarcophagus was hidden in their land many centuries ago. Vangia said that even if people should find the sarcophagus, present-day people would not be able to decipher the secret letters. They contained history of the world from over two thousand years in the past, and they told of things that would happen two thousand years in the future. Then Vangia said that the sarcophagus was brought secretly from Egypt with the help of an army, military leaders and slaves and camels. It was secretly hidden away underground, then everyone who took part in the work was killed at the site in order to cover all traces of the secret location, until it would be revealed in some distant future when all would be made known. Vangia said that it was an ancient message of priceless value to humanity.

When Krasimira asked Vangia about the location of the sarcophagus, she only replied that it was “somewhere in our land.”

After that Krasimira writes that, although until then she had believed in everything that Vangia told her (as her niece, she had personally witnessed the fulfillment of

countless predictions), all of this seemed highly unlikely. However, she had travelled to Sofia the capitol of Bulgaria a number of times to talk to her colleagues about the signs and symbols on the sheet, but they had continued to insist that they were meaningless and that it was all nonsense. Then Krasimira, discouraged, simply tore up the sheet of paper with the copied material that the man had given her. She never saw the man again.

Some time later Krasimira met with her aunt Vangia again, who asked her what the professors in Sofia had thought of the sheet of material. When Krasimira told her that they continued to believe that it was all nonsense, Vangia again told her that these were secret writings, which concealed a great mystery, but the time had not yet come for its revelation. Then Krasimira told several of her friends what Vangia had said, and they suggested that she ask Vangia for directions to the site of the mystery.

So she did that. Krasimira, accompanied by her friends, met with Vangia. During this meeting Vangia went in to some sort of trance and imparted directions to them. She gave them a detailed description of a place in the mountains, where they would need to go. She told them that they would need to visit precisely on the 5th of May. They would need to stand by the edge of some great smooth stone and await the first rays of the sun. (The name of the mountain is not mentioned in Krasimira's book.) Then Vangia said she would speak of this no more.

On the 4th of May Krasimira, in the company of four friends, made the trip into the mountains where Vangia had directed them. After a day of searching, and nearly deciding to give up and return home, around dinner time they found the place they were looking for. It was just as

Vangia had described it. They saw the great stone that rested on the northern edge of the meadow. However, there was nothing unusual to be seen. That afternoon the sky clouded up and the rain poured down. Although they had a tent, the rain was so strong that it soaked the interior of their tent. They built a fire to dry it out. The weather remained overcast and there was the threat of more rain. Then Krasimira grew discouraged and suggested that they give up and go home, because the weather was so bad., and there were no stars visible. But her friends suggested that they stay on until morning. The night passed. They rose before the first rays of the morning sun, and they hurried to the smooth edge of the great stone to await the first light. There were more clouds in the sky. They noticed three round solar signs carved into the stone, probably in ancient times. Two were set together and the third was set below them, so they formed a triangle of sorts with its top pointed down toward the earth. At first nothing happened, but with the appearance of the first rays of the sun, suddenly there was an interesting play of sunlight. The sun's rays began to illuminate the etched sun symbols and to move along their outlines in such a way as to create a glowing triangle. Those who were present were quite amazed by the sight and the fact that Vangia had guided them here at this precise moment. After a few minutes the sunlight quit playing over the petroglyphs and poured over the entire stone.

All day the group discussed the possible meaning of this phenomenon, and they decided to stay til evening to see if there would be further light play on the stone when the moon rose. However, the rain returned that afternoon. Not long after that it grew dark, and they stayed at the

stone waiting, although nothing could be seen in the cloudy conditions. Around 9 pm the sky began to clear and stars appeared. Suddenly the first moon beams appeared. One beam of light illuminated the top of the stone, and then it made its way to the triangle formed by the etched circles. Again the light played for several minutes along the lines, as the sun beams had. The group stared in amazement, not knowing if what they were seeing was intentional or mere chance.

Then the moon disappeared and they were plunged into darkness. The five of them stood there in total silence. And then they experienced something that they will never forget. What happened next was a complete shock and like nothing they had ever seen before. The smooth, polished surface of the rock suddenly became entirely lit up. It was as if it were illuminated from within, resembling the screen of a television. At the same time two figures appeared who were outlined in white. They were so big that they took up almost the entire surface of the rock, which was about fifteen feet high and six feet wide. The figures were so realistically portrayed that it appeared as if they might walk out of the rock any moment. Those present were frozen in a state of utter astonishment and fear. They stared at the unbelievable images with gaping mouths and wide eyes.

What did the figures look like? Krasimira gave a detailed description of them in her book. The one figure stood. It was an old man with long hair. He was dressed in a long, flowing ancient tunic. In one hand he held some kind of mysterious object. It was in the shape of a sphere. Next to him was a second figure, who resembled an ancient Egyptian pharaoh and sat on a throne. He was a

young man. He wore a tall hat which had two peaks. The two figures remained fixed on the stone for about 20 minutes, a sufficiently long time for them to be completely studied and memorized. Then suddenly they disappeared, and the stone grew dark again. The surrounding area also grew dark. The group silently returned to the tent and packed their things and hurried back to the nearest settlement.

They were silent as they walked, and once they were settled back in a town, they tried to analyze what they had witnessed. They first established that everyone had seen the same thing, so it was clear that it was not an isolated individual experience. They also agreed that there was no obvious source of light in that isolated wilderness place to create such a phenomenon. That was in May of 1979.

When she returned Krasimira talked about all of this with Vangia, who listened to her with great interest. But she offered no comment. In the years that followed she returned to the site with others, but nothing ever happened. Krasimira, to this day, can't explain their strange experience, which she described in detail in her book about Vangia.

When Boris stopped reading, I sat there stunned.

"How strange!", I said.

"Yes, quite interesting…", commented Boris.

Suddenly it occurred to me to ask:

"But what makes you so sure that this experience of Krasimira's is connected to your copper book?"

"The year corresponds… And other details… There's not much doubt."

"But you said it was 1978."

"Yes, that's when we began to prepare our plan. But our man didn't visit Vangia until 1979. Just as she writes here.", Boris answered readily.

"And is there anything further about the nature of the secret contained in the book?"

"We'll talk about that… I suggest that we save that for next time… Here is the book about Vangia for you, reread the pages I read to you, bring it back when you come again."

"Understood.", I said, still a bit overwhelmed by what I'd heard. I took the book "Vangia", said goodbye, and left.

* * *

Immediately upon returning home, after the briefest of rests, I went to work. I typed all of my notes into the computer. Then I began to write. The excerpt from the book about Vangia was of particular interest to me. What to make of it? I reread the most intriguing parts several times. I kept turning it over in my mind… Over the course of the next several nights all sorts of thoughts floated through my mind… like rushing cars on a freeway. I woke in the middle of the night and I couldn't get back to sleep. I was beginning to grasp the seriousness of this business. At first I thought that the book that I was going to write would create a real sensation in Macedonia and wider. There could be a film in it. Maybe it could be translated into English and enjoy wide distribution. The whole world might be interested in what went on in Macedonia… This imagined glory in my half-dream state soon turned into quite a different imagined scenario. What if the copper book really did contain secret information about a great

treasure or some hitherto unknown secret? And if I publish all of this, would the state security police come after me? Try and force me to reveal all I knew about the copper book? And what about the state security police of neighbouring countries? Even criminals might show up. I might return home some evening to find that my family had been mistreated or one of my children kidnapped in order to get my cooperation. It meant that I would suffer on account of a copper book I had never even seen… I had to get a grip on myself and think this through calmly. I would tell old Boris that I couldn't make it next Wednesday, and after several postponed trips he would realize that I don't want to work with him anymore… I would stick to writing about history, and let him find someone else to write about his adventures… But I quickly dismissed these thoughts. They weren't as convincing or plausible upon reflection… The copper book was no secret. The state knew all about it. Boris certainly planned to make the whole story public with this book. If it really did hold some great secret and all that was known of it was revealed, then it would all be for the best, for the state and for people like me. But even if it didn't amount to anything, either way, it didn't pose any danger to me… There wasn't any secret police like in past times anymore! And what sort of criminals or mafia could make anything of it? I would be telling them all the truth if I said that I'd never seen the copper book, and I couldn't say where it might actually be… If I had to I could just claim to have made the whole thing up… These warring points of view kept me up for a number of nights….

The mornings were more pleasant. At night I would always imagine the worst, only to find, upon

reconsidering in the morning light, that things weren't so bad.

However, I felt uneasy because I had made up my mind to confront Boris at our next meeting, which took place on the 8th of June, 2005.

"Before getting in to the final portion of your story, with all due respect, I need to bring something up.", I said immediately upon my arrival for our third meeting, at the same time and place as the previous ones.

Boris appeared a bit puzzled at this, but he said:

"Please, say what you wish."

"It's like this. You want me to write the tale of the copper book that you possess…", I paused, a bit unsure of how to put this.

"Yes, as we've agreed… I'll be covering the expenses…"

"That's not the issue. We've agreed on that."

"Well, what is the problem?"

"The problem is the book!", I took the bull by the horns.

"With the book? I don't understand…"

"Not my book, but the copper one…", I paused again, because I felt my usual discomfort when I had to confront someone directly.

"What about the copper book?", asked Boris, obviously clueless as to my concerns.

"It's this… You've got me writing about it, and it… That is, I… I've never seen it… I don't really know what's in it… What's the great mystery about it…"

Boris didn't say anything. But I, as if gathering my strength, pushed on:

"How can I write about something that I've never seen? I can't say for sure that it really exists… I only have what you've told me to go on, a section of a book about Granny Vangia and a set of words that your son gave me, may he rest in peace."

Boris still didn't say anything, and that just made me more aggressive:

"It's the same as if some businessman were to want you to write him a tourist brochure describing the attractions of his new hotel, but without letting you actually see the building. How can you write about something like a hotel without seeing it? Can you imagine that?... I understand that the book is precious to you and probably of great value, but tell me how I can write about it if I've never seen it?... I'm not saying that you have to produce the original if you don't want to, but you should at least let me see pictures of it… You must have some…"

I didn't say any more. I'd said my piece. Once Boris was sure that I'd said all I had to say, he calmly replied:

"But who said you won't see the book?"

This caught me by surprise. I didn't know what to say. I finally said:

"I'm not sure what I was thinking… Really, I just thought…"

"Be patient, Alexander. You'll see the photographs of the book when the time comes… We'll look at them together."

"If that's the case, then, excuse me, I take back what I said just now… I am a person of my word, and you can be sure that I won't tell anyone about all of this…", I continued nervously.

"Let's take this a step at a time."

"Of course… Where are we in the story? I'm listening.", I said, with my pen and paper ready.

But instead of continuing right away, Boris seemed to be torn. I had a feeling that he might not continue the story.

"Can I say something?"

"Please."

"I think that we've come to the crucial moment in your story."

Boris looked at me.

"Yes…"

"I would suggest the following…"

"What's that?"

"You need to tell me how the copper book fell into your hands.", I said decisively.

Boris sighed, which I took as a sign that I'd hit the mark.

"Eh, how did it come to me… I would have left that part for a while… But listen carefully and write this down.", He fixed me in a serious, direct gaze.

" I'm listening.", I answered readily.

" I, the copper book… So to speak… I stole it… If the word stole can apply here… Since they, that is, we of the secret service took it by force from the captain… Seen from that point of view, I stole the item…", Boris again paused.

"How did it happen? When? Where?"

"1981 in Serbia…"

"Go on."

"After we didn't get any results from Vangia, that year I was ordered to take it to another psychic… In a

village in the vicinity of Nish. Two officers accompanied me. We were dressed in civilian clothes and drove an ordinary car. Toward evening in a parking rest area we were attacked…"

"How?"

"We'd gotten out to stretch our legs. Two strangers in a car stopped, they pulled out pistols and immediately started to shoot at us. My two companions fell, and I was wounded in the hand. But I managed to pull out my pistol and return fire. I wounded one of the attackers, and the other, seeing that I'd taken cover, probably figured that they'd lost the element of surprise, so he quickly jumped in his car and fled. While I was lying there wounded and bleeding, an idea occurred to me. The other officers were dead. Both had been hit in the head, and there was little hope for them… There was no one around… It was early evening. The few cars that had been in the rest area parking lot had raced off when the shooting began… First, I stopped the bleeding, then, I slowly got up. I took the wooden box that contained the book and I hid it in a secure place a bit down a path, under a large stone, surrounded by brush… I returned to the car and lay down, pretending to be unconscious… As luck would have it, it wasn't long before another car came along. When the people in the car saw me lying there unconscious, they rushed me to the hospital in Nish. There was an investigation that never turned anything up. I told the investigators that we'd been surprised, and that when I was hit I lost consciousness and only revived later when the people showed up. The copper book was gone. It seemed clear that the second gunman thought that we were all three dead, and he had stolen it and fled. The identity of

the dead gunman was never established. He probably worked for or was in the hire of some foreign agents… Their car was later found out near Vrshats. It was determined that it had been stolen in Germany a month earlier. They never did catch the second gunman… They reported to the families of the murdered officers that they had died in an accident while involved in some military training exercises. They questioned me fairly thoroughly over a period of time, but since I stuck to my story, they eventually gave it up. I know that there was an internal investigation of all the officers who knew anything about the copper book. But it was never determined who might have tipped off the attackers. The book's movements that day were known to men in Belgrade and in Nish… After I'd recuperated from my wound, I returned to work, but I no longer received important assignments. Not long after that I retired."

"And the book?"

"I'm a professional and I knew that they would watch me discreetly, whether they publicly praised me for killing one of the attackers or not. I waited a whole five years before picking it up. It wasn't until 1986 that I went back with my son. We made sure that we weren't being followed by switching cars twice before pulling in to the rest area. The box containing the copper book was right where I'd left it. I took it home at first, and then gave it to a friend to keep where it would be safer."

"Who was that?"

"He's known by the name Dionys. He lives in the village of Stoyakovo near the town Gevgelia. A truly good and honest man. We've known each other for a long time, although he never knew what I did for a living. As far as he

knew, I was just an ordinary military officer… When I gave him the book I told him that I was often away for work and needed a safer place for it. I told him that I'd purchased it in a village in Serbia, but that it wasn't quite proper for me to do such business as a military man… Then came Macedonian independence. Our beautiful Yugoslavia fell apart. Outsiders managed to tear us apart. The Yugoslav Army disintegrated, and I had no idea what the new Macedonian authorities might know about the copper book. So, in 1992 I asked Dionys to send photographs of the book's contents to President of Macedonia Kiro Gligorov with an offer to sell the book to the state. I was interested to see how they would react. Dionys even asked for a meeting with President Gligorov. But instead of that he was directed to state security, which caused us to break off contact. Dionys was interviewed by someone from the state and he told them that he didn't have the book, and they left him in peace. After that we sent photographs of portions of the book to some people who were knowledgeable about ancient history and culture. Some newspapers published photographs of its contents, and some foreign experts looked at them.

"I knew about these public pronouncements, but I didn't know that they were about your copper book… Is the book still with Dionys?"

Boris didn't answer me.

"And what was your son Dimitar's role?"

Boris murmured in a gravelly voice:

"He urged me to sell it… He was up to his neck in debt… But when I absolutely refused, he set out to have the book deciphered… But too soon… Nothing came of it… He's gone…."

Boris's eyes filled with tears.

I waited for him to regain his composure, and then I suggested:

"It's time we were going… Instead of next Wednesday, could I come by tomorrow?"

"Of course, I think that we're nearing the end of the story.", Boris replied, struggling to contain the sorrow that had gripped him.

*

I couldn't stop thinking about our conversation once I was back at home, which kept me company as I transferred the material to my computer. From our conversations I concluded that Boris was a hard and cruel man in ways, but he was also quite intelligent and cultured. However, even the toughest of men couldn't steel himself against the blows of cruel fate. The deaths of his wife and now his son had broken him. From a hard man, he had become, toward the end of his life, a sad and penitent man… If there was holy retribution, here was evidence… I wondered what he would decide to do with the copper book. I was also very eager to finally get a look at parts of it. What secrets might it yet reveal?...

Two days after our last meeting, on the 10th of June, 2005, I again made my way to an interview with Boris. Even before we had exchanged the usual greetings my eyes went to the large manila envelope that rested on the small living room table.

Boris didn't waste any time on preliminaries. He got right to the point, inviting me with a gesture of his hand to look at the contents of the envelope:

"Go ahead, have a look. This is the book."

I admit that I was a bit taken by surprise. I hadn't quite imagined the moment when I would actually see the famous book, even if only in photographs…I picked up the envelope impatiently and opened it. There were four large color photographs inside in A4 format. Each one was a photo of a page of the copper book. I studied one after another of them. My first impression was of a chaotic jumble of words, signs and symbols. I commented:

"Thank you for your show of confidence. But I don't know if I can be of any further help now… This is all far too complicated…"

"Go ahead and take your time… Study it carefully…", Boris said to me, and then settled into his armchair, prepared to sit there all afternoon while I examined the photographs, if necessary.

I took advantage of this opportunity to study the first page… At first I simply enjoyed the chance to look at an artefact from our past. To admire its beauty. Then a series of questions began to form in my mind. Who could have written this? What could it possibly mean? How did people live at the time of its creation? Did they have similar conversations to our own? What did they eat? How did they entertain themselves?... This book had seen it all… What did they use to create the marks on the metal? All sorts of odd and contradictory thoughts floated through my mind. Could I uncover some meaning in the book? Some part of me entertained serious doubts about that, given the fact that so many experts had failed to find any meaning in it. But still, I couldn't resist a brief flight into a fantasy that maybe I would be the one to discover something that others had missed… Examining the pages, it became clear to me that Dimitar had only provided me with a very limited

number of words and symbols contained in the book. He'd probably given me the ones that he wasn't able to make any sense of. However, my earlier impression, that I had suggested to him, that there might be some compilation of messages here over a period of time, was reinforced by my present study of the four pages in the photographs. There were too many unconnected words, and a lack of textual unity. A particularly intriguing part of the contents were the mysterious symbols from which I could not derive any meaning.

On the upper middle section of the first page there was a big empty space, perhaps a gap or hole in the text. It appeared that there had been something there at one time, but it was removed. I had to conclude that other than a sense of its antiquity, nothing made any sense to me. At least not here and now. I glanced over at Boris, who seemed content to let me go ahead and study it as long as I wanted to.

"And what do you think?", Boris suddenly interrupted me, probably aware of the fact that if he left me free to study it, I would spend all day staring at it.

"Quite fantastic. The book really is amazing…"

"Yes…"

"But what is it's message?", I asked, mostly to myself.

Boris was apparently prepared to share all his knowledge of it with me:

"I'll tell you everything that is known up to now… But it's not very satisfactory…I only know that there is some suggestion here of a great treasure hidden in its message… Maybe it is the treasure of secret writings that Vangia spoke of…"

"Why do you think that? Whose treasure? I didn't get any such impression from the words that Dimitar gave me… Who knows…", I said, waiting to hear what he had to say.

"Whose treasure was it? That is written in the book…"

"How so?"

"Hold on…", said Boris. He picked up the photograph of the second page, held it up for me to see and pointed to one place on it.

I could make out the word FODIAURUM.

"I saw that word. Dimitar gave it to me to find a definition. But there is no such word in the Latin dictionary."

"Exactly.", said Boris and continued. "The word FODIAURUM doesn't exist, at least not as a single word. But if you divide it in to FODI and AURUM, then what you have is…"

"Well, I'll be!", I broke in.

"It means you know."

"Yes, it never occurred to me to separate the word into parts. But Dimitar gave me a written copy with it as a single word… The literal translation of FODI and AURUM would be "shipping gold" or maybe better "gold shipment". Unbelievable!", I exclaimed.

Boris waited for me to regain my composure. Then he continued, pointing out something else on the same page:

"And what is written here? Written in archaic Cyrillic… Go ahead and read it."

"Silver (SREBRO)!", I nearly shouted.

"It means that we have information about gold shipments and silver."

"Dimitar hadn’t mentioned this word, but then, he could already read it.", I commented, still a bit unsettled by the words.

Boris also pointed out the word AHENUS on the same page.

"I’ve seen the word. It was also on the sheet he gave me, but I never found the word in my Latin dictionary."

To this Boris readily replied:

"I looked it up also. In one comprehensive dictionary I found that AHENUS is the same word as AENUS, which means 'copper' or 'bronze'".

"It means one more word hinting at riches…", I couldn’t resist saying.

Boris picked up the photograph of the third page and pointed to a word just left of the centre of the page. There was the word AMETHYSTIS. Obviously the Latin form of the violet-hued semi-precious stone, amethyst.

My excitement was beginning to grow… But a lot of questions remained. Beginning with the fundamental question, was all of this for real or was it just some strange fantasy? Then there was the question, if it was real, then where were the riches? Could they be on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia? And finally, whose treasure was it?

"Whose treasure was this?", I asked the last question out loud.

Boris gave me a significant look:

"You haven’t spotted that in the book yet?"

"No, where is that written?"

Boris just continued to stare at me with a look that gave me the shivers. I thought that all of his life and its

experiences went into that gaze. He meant something most serious by that look. Boris slowly cast his gaze back onto the photographs on the table. He picked up the photograph of the first page again and turned it in my direction and pointed to the lower part of the page, and in a commanding tone he said:

"Look down here!"

I looked at the place he was pointing and I began to read: “ANTIKU ALEKSANDRO BASILEO BENEDIKTU (It was written in mixed letters): ANTIKOY ALEHANDRO BASILEO BENEDIKTU...”

I was struck dumb. Boris didn’t give me any time to collect my wits, he just pushed on:

"Good. And now look more closely at the bottom of the page, right under the word BENEDIKTU".

I squinted to make out the familiar letters he’d pointed out, as they floated before my eyes. I simply couldn’t believe it. At the bottom of the page, in archaic Cyrillic letters, appeared the word BOGATÃSTVO [riches].

My eyes grew wide and I stared at Boris in wonder. He was calm and unsmiling as he asked me:

"And do you know what all of this means? Can you translate it for me?"

"I can’t believe it…", I murmured, stunned by what I’d read.

"Tell me then.", insisted Boris.

"I’m surprised that I didn’t see it myself.", I continued in my astonishment.

"It means that you know what it says.", Boris said with satisfaction in his voice.

"ANTIKU ALEKSANDRO BASILEO BENEDIKTU BOGATÃSTVO, literally means: 'The riches of Alexander, ancient emperor blessed by God'. This is amazing!"

Boris calmly continued:

"It means that this speaks of the riches of the ancient emperor Alexander. That could be no other than Alexander the Great of Macedon! That's what caused such a stir in a number of countries… "

Still reeling from the news, I didn't know what to say. I'd never before in my life been privy to such a discovery, and, therefore, I reacted this way. Then, I slowly began to collect my thoughts and finally managed to say:

"But so many questions remain unanswered…"

"For example?", Boris asked.

"I've got all sorts… Where is this treasure, if it exists? Why is the copper book written in Latin and Cyrillic letters? Are you sure that Granny Vangia's response really refers to this book? And what on earth could all of these strange signs mean?..."

"If I knew the answers to all of these questions, I wouldn't be sitting here with you right now.", Boris answered evenly. "I'm inclined to think that the book is a copy of some very ancient writings. And that's what Vangia thought… That's why there are Cyrillic letters while the content is from the ancient times. There are also signs from some secret writing system, something like what we find etched into our stones in Macedonia from many thousands of years ago."

"Hm. Maybe that's so… But can you find any message in some of the other words in the book? I'm thinking of some of the words that we can translate. I could

come up with definitions for them, but without the context I couldn't translate anything."

Boris again took up the photographs of the copper book and pointed to a portion of one.

"Look at one of the words that appears on the very first page… I don't know if you noticed it, since it was divided up into three separate syllables on three different lines…"

"No, I didn't notice that…"

"Read here… What it says… Each part on a different row…"

"AE…NIG…MA. AENIGMA. Enigma."

"Yes, enigma!", Boris exclaimed triumphantly, and then continued. "The Latin word 'enigma' means a mystery, doesn't it?"

"Yes, that's true…"

"It means that the book begins with an admission that there is a mystery here. And now look at how it ends… Look at the end of the fourth page…"

NUZHDA PREMUDROST (written as *NOUZDA PREMODROST*), which means "IT REQUIRES WISDOM" is what I saw.

"It's interesting that the book begins with the announcement of a mystery, and ends with the advice that 'it requires wisdom' to understand its contents.", Boris asserted with a certain confidence in his voice.

"Ha.", I laughed. "There is a certain logic to that, but the ending piece is written in Cyrillic, which means that it was placed there by the eventual copier from the Middle Ages. There is no connection…"

"Well, what if it was written in the Middle Ages? The medieval copier of the book from ancient times made

a comment that whoever would read this book will need wisdom in order to make sense of it…"

"Maybe… That is all possible… I don't know… - I answered, not knowing what to think."

"Look at the remaining words… Some of them obviously could fit this theory…"

"Which?"

"For example, look at CAVO from the fourth page. In Latin it means 'to dig up'. Then there is the word BUTSUM, which means a 'grave'. So it seems like there could be something here about the digging up of a grave. Or some business connected to somebody's grave. But whose?..."

"Yes… But above them are the words THRACIA and BISALTAE.", I interjected.

"Well, what? Thrace is a neighbouring province to Macedonia, and Bisaltia is an ancient region of Macedonia. Maybe it refers to something that happened in Thrace or to someone from Bisaltia, or is somehow connected to it?"

"I don't know…", I commented.

"I don't know either, but let's take a look at some other words. Here's another one by itself. Could they have written it any clearer? COLLINUS FRONTE? Which means…"

"The facing side of the hill or ridge.", I finished his thought.

"Exactly. Here above it is a drawing of a hill or ridge… Among the recognizable words on the page is the word MOGILA (a tomb) written in Cyrillic and the word REX or king. Here's the word CHARTA, that I suspect means 'map', and here is a trail along with a sun. Don't you think

there’s plenty of evidence here to suggest that there is something hidden that needs to be found?"

"Maybe…", I continued to answer in a nervous tone.

"Or let’s get back to the first page. Here’s the word ANTRUM, which means a cave or hole in the ground. There are some signs under it. Below that, separated into two syllables, one below the other, is written the word VERTE. Do you see it?"

"Yes, but I don’t know what it means."

"If you add the letter X at the end you can get VERTEX, which can mean 'a crown'. Do you see how this was printed at the edge of the sheet, so there was no room for the X?

"Could be…"

"This same page has the words that we’ve already established to mean 'the riches of ancient and blessed by God emperor Alexander'".

"I don’t know what to say…"

"And what do you make of these twelve enclosed spaces? - asked Boris, pointing to a place in the middle of the page, where there were a set of encircled spaces, twelve drawings of encircled spaces. In each one of these was a word and a set of signs.

"I don’t know what these are either… Could they be associated with some kind of astrological system?", I suggested.

"I don’t believe so.", answered Boris.

"Well, then, what?"

"Maybe spaces?"

"Spaces?"

"Yes, spaces in a cave…Have you ever been in a cave?"

"No."

"Then, maybe you've seen one on TV. Some caves have such spaces or chambers, and you enter one after another of them…"

"Hm… I don't know…", I said, noncommittally.

"Apparently this shows what was left in each of them."

"Maybe…"

We were silent for a time. Boris picked up the photograph of the second page and continued:

"Well, fine. The second page is particularly revealing… There is some message that includes the words EXITUS TETALIS."

"EXITUS I know has the meaning 'to exit' or 'go out', or it could mean 'to finish'. But the word TETALIS. I couldn't find it in the Latin dictionary.", I said.

"You can't imagine what I went through to find the meaning of the word TETALIS. It's not a Latin word.", Boris continued in his usual serious tone.

"Well, if it isn't Latin, what is it?"

"Believe it or not, it's a word from Urdu."

"Urdu?"

"Yes, it's one of the languages of the Indian sub-continent. It's the official language of a region of western India called Gurat."

"Interesting. And what does it mean?"

"It's a number. Forty three…"

"EXITUS TETALIS. To exit or finish at 43. What could that mean?"

"I don’t know. It could just be a measure of the distance. The distance from a trail? But what kind? Steps? Or maybe it’s the Roman 'pasus' that measures about four and a half feet. Or maybe the Roman 'pertiki', which were about nine feet. Or something longer? It’s hard to say."

"How would an Indian word end up among these Latin and Macedonian words?", I wondered out loud.

"I don’t know, but we know that the first major contact between India and Macedonia occurred in Alexander’s time… This word may represent part of the mystery that confronts us. Maybe the author deliberately tossed in difficult words to understand form a variety of strange languages, so that not just anyone could come along and read the book. You’ve no doubt noticed that there are other numbers in the book…"

"Yes, there are some written in Roman numerals. Here on the second page is the number CIV (104). Who knows what it means?", I replied.

Boris shrugged his shoulders:

"I don’t know. It also could refer to some measure."

"Let’s look at the words on this page.", I suggested.

"Read this word written in Cyrillic. It’s familiar… Right here…"

"BOGATÎ (rich)… Oh my…"

"Here’s the head of a goat. Nicely drawn…", continued Boris.

"What could it mean?"

He ignored my question and went on:

"Here's another number, probably combined with this word IX KAMENE. Nine stones or the ninth stone… Look at this drawing… What do you think it looks like?"

"That certainly looks like waves…", I said confidently, as Boris pointed out several other places where waves appeared.

"But why waves? I told you that there's some sort of message here… Maybe it simply refers to the fact that part of the journey passed over water. Or maybe the waves are some kind of symbol. And now take a look at the word SEMIPLENUS."

"Yes, I see it. But it has two very different meanings.", I said.

"One of which is 'half a contingent'".

"Hm… Could be."

"It means some troop or crew. Some people who possibly came here by water… Could it be the men who came here from Egypt?", Boris commented and then added. "Read here!"

"SEMITA SUM ARIUS.", I read.

"This might be loosely translated 'traveled by a dry land path'.

"I don't know… I tried to find the word ARIUS, without any luck.", I said.

"Apparently that is the word ARIDUS, missing the D. It means 'dry land'. SEMITA is a path. It means we can read here that 'half the contingent traveled by a dry land path', which suggests that they went by water before that. If they went overland from Egypt by way of Israel, they might have then travelled by ship across the water to Thrace. Some came across by water then, and half

continued on the dryland route from Asia to Europe. At least that's what it suggests to me…

This time I didn't have anything to say. I was silent. The logic of Boris's arguments was beginning to wear me down. But I was still wary that maybe all of this would still prove nothing more than unsubstantiated claims in the end. Yet, his arguments had me thinking.

Boris hadn't really expected me to react to each individual element that he proposed, so he simply on to the next: "Here again we see the word ANTIKU, followed by a set of waves again".

"And there are signs and symbols.", I added.

"But take a look at page three. Read this here…"

"KAPULUS.", I read.

"And what does that mean?"

"Nothing that I could find in my Latin dictionary.", I answered.

"After some hard searching I did finally find out that it is Latin."

"Then why wasn't it in my dictionary?", I asked.

"It was, but you would have needed to look under CAPULUS."

"I didn't see that… But how do you know that that's a variant of the word? You need to have some proof of that. Otherwise the difference in one letter can make a big difference in the meaning. I think that you may be stretching things here."

"No, not at all. I've managed to find a sentence in Latin literature with the word spelled with a K. My son found it in an internet search. Here's the sentence 'Kapulus in quo mortut efferuntur'. It means that KAPULUS and

CAPULUS are the same word. Some authors spelled it with K, others with C."

"And what does it mean?", I asked.

"A burial casket or sarcophagus.", Boris answered.

"Hm…"

"It all fits what Vangia said… Something is hidden in a sarcophagus…", asserted Boris and continued. "Look at this drawing… Doesn't it look like an anchor? And here is again the word BOGATÎSTVO (rich) written in Cyrillic under it…"

"Yes, I see…"

"Here is a drawing of some structure and an arrow pointing to it. Read what he writes."

"BASILICA ABRUPTUS.", I read the letters which were barely legible.

"And what does that mean?"

"I know. I managed to translate it…At least I think so…"

"Good. Then what does it mean?"

'An abandoned church'", or maybe a remote or isolated church… But wait, how could there be churches in Alexander's time. He lived before Christ…"

"It's true, there weren't any churches in Alexander's time, but the word BASILICA doesn't just mean a church. In Roman times it referred to a type of public building. You can check in your Latin dictionary.", Boris informed me. Then he continued. "It means that this refers to some abandoned structure."

"Maybe…"

"Here are some interesting words as well… Please read this."

"'EX LIBRIS DITARCHUS'". I know that one, too.", I said, expecting to hear Boris's explanation.

"And what do you think that it means?"

"EX LIBRIS means 'from the book of', DITARCHUS is probably someone's name… Only…", I was silent for a moment.

"Only what?"

" I've never encountered such a name. I've never seen it among names of Macedonians, Greeks or Romans."

Boris sighed, then said:

"It's no surprise… It's not a name."

"How so, not a name?"

"It's not. There really isn't any such name."

"Well, what is it then?"

"You need to think about the way we managed to figure out the meaning of FODIAURUM. Once we divided it into FODI and AURUM we saw the two words that translated into 'gold shipment'".

"Exactly. But how would you divide the word?"

"Into DIT and ARCHUS. That's two words, but when the writer didn't have space at the edge of the page he crowded them together."

"And what would you say those words mean?"

"Wealthy ruler".

"EX LIBRIS DIT ARCHUS: 'From the book of the wealthy ruler'", I concluded.

"Or 'from the writings of the wealthy ruler'", Boris suggested.

"But who was the wealthy ruler? Could it refer to Alexander the Great?"

"So it would seem… He's the one Vangia talks about. This could refer to secret writings of Alexander…"

"I don't know…- I repeated for the umpteenth time."

"Take a look at this word. - Boris continued."

"'ROMANA' or…"

"ROXANA.", Boris added.

"Maybe… It's not clear whether the middle letter is an M or an X…"

"It makes some sense that there would be some reference to Roxana, the last wife of the Macedonian emperor."

"Maybe…"

Boris continued:

"Here are the words BUNARÎ and MÎSTO."

"I see… I'm aware that, at least the word BUNARÎ (a well), with MÎSTO (a place) seems like it is referring to a location…", I said, studying the photograph of the third page of the copper book.

"That could be…", said Boris.

"And what now?", I asked.

Boris looked perplexed, as if he wasn't sure what I meant. So I explained:

"Do you have some theory? What does all of this taken together mean? Are you convinced of Granny Vangia's description of the contents of the book? She talked about its containing some secret message…"

Boris eagerly plunged on:

"The mysterious signs seem to hold the key to all of this. The words just provide some supplement to them… The signs are the most important, but so far no one can make much sense of them… They are undoubtedly part of

the secret writing that Vangia tells us is in the sarcophagus. There are also the drawings… I have my theory that I've laid out, but it may not prove true… There are a lot of things that are consistent with what Vangia said…"

Then Boris again opened the book with the blue cover about the famous psychic. Once he found the text he wanted, he continued, reading and adding his own comments:

"Here she says that this text was copied and recopied over the centuries. Doesn't this ring true? The copper book has the words EX LIBRIS. We said that that literally means 'from the book', but it could be more loosely translated as 'an extract', that is, a writing from a book, or a writing from some older piece of writing. Could the writings come down to us from the time of Alexander? So it would seem…"

"You've already said all of this. I agree with you.". I said.

Boris continued to read from the book about Vangia:

"Vangia goes on to talk about letters that have been unknown to us up until now, which were inside the sarcophagus, which was hidden in the earth long ago."

"But this doesn't altogether fit with what's written in the copper book. Vangia speaks about letters here.", I commented.

"It doesn't have to mean that. The sheet that we delivered to Vangia had just a portion of the signs in the copper book. We didn't send the Latin words, which are the ones that refer to the existence of material riches, gold, silver, copper, amethyst… But what Vangia said seems

more important. The secret that the sarcophagus contains… I've shown you where the copper book refers to a sarcophagus. That's the KAPULUS that I mentioned. Vangia said in the book that the sarcophagus was secretly brought from Egypt with the help of the army, military leaders, slaves and camels. It was secretly hid underground, and then everyone who participated in that was put to death at the site in order to keep the site secret for the future, when the right time and people could discover it. Then it would be a great gift for all of humanity."

Boris paused in order to take a breath, and then continued:

"I've already told you that the copper book clearly states: SEMITA SUM ARIUS, which means 'traveled by a dry land route'… Vangia said that they traveled with camels and came from Egypt, which would mean they traveled by a dry land route!"

"Perhaps all of this is about… No, it doesn't seem possible…", I said abruptly.

"The sarcophagus with the body of Alexander the Great! Secretly brought from Egypt to the Balkans. That was in Roman times. They had slaves with camels bring it and then bury it somewhere over here, and then they were slain. There are secret letters hidden in the sarcophagus that not only speak about the history and future of the world, but they also provide a description of the hidden wealth of Alexander… I think that is what we find so hard to believe!", concluded Boris in a trembling voice.

I responded immediately:

"It's just too much to swallow. It's so improbable… I'm afraid that we're just getting carried away here… I've read some about Alexander's grave…"

"What have you read?", Boris interrupted me.

"That it was in Alexandria… In the district of Soma, though no one can find that district nowadays.", I said.

"Yes, but it was removed from there… No one knows where.", Boris broke in.

Then he picked up a sheet of paper with something written on it and continued:

"I have information from various ancient sources about his grave… I've gathered everything I could on this topic. Dimitar took it off the internet… Do you want to hear?"

" Of course.", I said with growing interest.

" So here it is the ancient geographer Strabo, who lived from 67 to 23 years before the Christian era. He wrote that Macedonian general Ptolemy conveyed Alexander's body to Alexandria, Egypt, where it rested in a tomb in that city right up to Strabo's time. Another historian, Diodorus of Sicily, who lived in the first century AD reported the same thing, and Plutarch also wrote that Alexander's body rested in Alexandria. The Jewish historian Josephus Flavius also confirmed that information in the same period. There was one interesting story conveyed by the historian Pausanius, who lived in the second century A.D. He said that Alexander needed to be buried in Macedonia, but the general Ptolemy the First had it brought to Memphis in Egypt, and his son Ptolemy the Second conveyed it to Alexandria. Later there were other ancient authors who wrote about Alexander's tomb. They included Dio Cassius, Lucian, Antiochus Gripus and others…"

" But do any of them report the removal of Alexander's body from Alexandria?", I asked.

"Well, maybe…", Boris replied.

"How so?"

"Dio Cassuis's writings are really the most interesting to us about this. He was a Roman historian and, among other things, he described events in Egypt during the period of the Roman conquest of Macedonian-ruled Egypt. He mentioned the sarcophagus of Alexander, and certain secret books. All of this was hidden away by order of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus., who was in control of Alexandria at the time."

"When was that?"

"Septimius Severus lived from 146 AD to 211 AD. And the Roman historian Dio Cassius, who wrote about this, lived during the same period. Since he was alive at the time, it means that he was a witness to events.", concluded Boris.

"Do you have any credible documentation of what Dio Cassius wrote? Has that been published anywhere?", I asked with growing impatience.

"In his work 'History of Rome', Book 76, Chapter 13, this is what he writes about Emperor Septimius Severus in Alexandria: 'He hid all of the books that contained secret knowledge and closed the tomb of Alexander so that no one should view his body in the future, or have access to the writings.'"

Once he had read this I couldn't conceal my surprise as I said:

"How could I have missed that? Are you sure of this?"

"You're welcome to read it yourself. The works of Dio Cassius can be accessed on the internet."

"Fine.", I replied. It all seemed so improbable, but that was all I could find to say.

"After that, no one can say what happened to the body and the sarcophagus of Alexander or the secret writings. It's quite possible that it was all transported to Macedonia with the help of Egyptian slaves, who traveled with camels… You know."

"But why?"

"How do we know? People had different ways of thinking back then… It would have been enough if the emperor Septimius Severus had had some premonition or prophecy or dream that suggested that he take such a course of action… Who knows, and it doesn't matter… What matters is that he hid the sarcophagus and the secret writings…"

"Let's suppose that's true… Where is the sarcophagus now? If we're to believe Granny Vangia, then it is somewhere over in Bulgaria. You said that it's already been searched for over there. In that case, there's nothing for us to do.", I said, still of mixed mind about all of this.

"That's not necessarily so… They didn't find anything in Bulgaria, except for the illuminated figures that Krasimira and her friends saw…"

"That is a particularly strange incident… Who can explain it? Could you read that passage about the spectral figures again?"

Boris opened the book about Vangia and looked for the pages, and after a brief search he began to read Krasimira's description of how the figures had appeared as if on a television screen. Two very large white figures covering a large portion of the stone, 15 feet by 4 feet. They were so realistic that it seemed like they could get up and walk out of the stone at any time. Those present were

absolutely transfixed, frozen in fear and wonderment. They gaped at the unlikely figures.

Then Boris again read the detailed account of the two figures that Krasimira had written. One figure stood, an old man with long white hair, dressed in the long flowing tunic worn in ancient times. In one hand he held a mysterious sphere. Next to him was a second figure who resembled an ancient Egyptian pharaoh and sat on a throne. He was a young man. On his head he wore a hat with two peaks. The two figures remained visible for about twenty minutes and never moved. It was enough time for the witnesses to study them carefully. Then they suddenly disappeared, and the stone grew dark again.

"How incredible!", I whispered, the story sounding as improbable as ever.

Boris looked as if he hadn't heard me. Once he'd finished reading, he commented:

"The elderly man could have been Aristotle, Alexander's teacher, and the pharaoh could have been Alexander himself. We know that he had been proclaimed Pharaoh of Egypt and son of the god Amon Ra. The part that has me particularly intrigued is the hat with two peaks… That doesn't mean anything to me…"

"I can't believe it.", I almost shouted.

Boris stared at me:

"What's so unbelievable?"

"Just the hat… The description fits the hat of the ancient Phrygians… Worn by Macedonians…", I began to explain.

"Hm. I hadn't thought about that… But the double peaks on it? That seems strange. I don't know why Alexander would wear such a hat…", Boris commented.

Still excited by what I had just learned from his reading, I went on to explain:

"That's just the thing that makes it Alexander's hat…"

"How?", Boris wondered.

"Do you have any of my books here?"

"Yes, I have them all. Dimitar bought them from you…"

"I'd like you to bring me the book 'The Contribution of Macedonians to World Civilization'. Please…"

Boris caught my sense of urgency and hurried off to find the book. When he returned with it I turned to page 49 and still in a state of disbelief myself, I said:

"Listen carefully."

Then I began to read:

- "*When we talk about the connection between Macedonians and the origins of Islam, scholars point out one Macedonian who is mentioned in the Moslem holy book, the Koran, Alexander the Great. But he is cited under a different name. He is actually mentioned under a descriptive name, Zu'l-Karnian. This can be translated in various ways. Literally it means 'the one with two horns'. The German historian Ulrich Wilken writes that such a designation for Alexander comes from ancient Egyptian sources which declare that he is the son of Amon, and the son of Amon is portrayed as having two small horns on his head. On account of that, Wilken has concluded that the descriptive name of Alexander as the one with two horns, originates from that source. (Ulrich Wilken, 'Alexander of Macedon', Skopje, 1988, p. 353.)*"

This time it is Boris who is dumbfounded.

"Why didn't I see that?"

"It struck me immediately… I've seen a number of historical artist's renderings of Alexander in which he has the two small horns on his head. This is connected with the Egyptian declaration of his god status and the Moslems apparently picked up on that, and to this day they refer to him as the prophet of Allah with two horns on his head.", I responded.

"It means that there is little doubt that one of the figures was Alexander the Great…", Boris declared with confidence.

Then the two of us grew silent. I was the first to speak again:

"But how does all of this connect to the copper book?"

"Anything is possible…", replied Boris. "It could be that Septimius Severus couldn't translate the writings in the sarcophagus and decided to have them buried… It could be that one or more of his people decided to write a secret record of all of this. It could explain the presence of so many Latin words in the copper book… It could be that the author recopied some of the signs from the sarcophagus. It could also be that it means that there is a map in the sarcophagus to the hidden riches of Alexander. The copper book itself, could be the map, who knows?"

"Too many 'could be's…' There are so many important questions that remain unanswered. Where was the sarcophagus taken? Could it really have been transported from Egypt to Thrace? Or the Pirin region of Macedonia in Bulgaria?"

"Or is it on our part of Macedonia?", added Boris.

"Now let's be realistic. That's unlikely…"

Boris objected:

"I am being realistic… I've done some further investigating…"

"What?", I asked.

"Once I'd read the book of Krasimira I sent a cousin to visit Vangia in 1991. I was interested in knowing more about where Krasimira was when she saw the spectral figures… And if possible, to learn more about the book."

"Is that right. And?"

"And once again it led nowhere. When he got a chance to see Vangia, she only told him: 'I know why you've come, but you are wasting your time. Go home. There is nothing more to tell you… I said, in our land…' He appeared disturbed and turned to go, but Vangia added: 'In the cut-up mountain…' She recalled and related tome."

"Wait a second.", I said, my adrenaline flowing again. "Maybe she really did mean 'her land', which, in fact, is 'our land'. You know, Vangia was born in our country, in a village near town Strumitsa… Her brother even fought and died as a Macedonian partisan in our war of liberation… Later she moved on the other side of the border... Could she have meant our part of Macedonia?"

"Could be… But who's ever heard of the 'cut-up mountain'? If my informant heard it right."

"No, I've never heard of one by that name. Or could she mean some barren or cut over mountain? Or maybe a meadow… We need to look at a map…", I began to improvise a plan as ideas came into my head.

"I don't know. I've managed to come this far and that's about it for me.", said Boris and continued. "Even if we figured out which mountain she meant, who could

search a whole mountain for the site? This is the end of my story… At least for me…"

"End of the story?"

"Yes, so much for me…"

I didn't quite understand at the time what Boris was telling me, but I didn't insist on his explaining himself further. Our conversation had filled an entire afternoon, and I realized that it was time for me to be returning home. We agreed to stay in touch by phone, and, if necessary, we would meet again some time.

*

My first night back home was terrible. I spent the night in my room in order not to disturb my wife. The thoughts whirled around in my head. All sorts of strange things entered my head. I shut down my computer, hoping to get some sleep, but I couldn't. My brain just wouldn't shut down. My thoughts kept jumping around, from one extreme to another. I couldn't seem to get any sense of proportion. It was all a confused mess. It all just kept going round and round in my head. I would think I was about to make some sense of it, and then I would lose the thread. I would be back to scanning and analyzing the facts once again. Did all of this really involve the sarcophagus and remains of the Great emperor Alexander? It was just too much to believe… But then again, there was all of the evidence… My thoughts turned to another frightening direction. I was thinking of my informant. Although he was an old man, he should be considered somewhat dangerous, given his past. Was he using me in some game? Why had he chosen me? Would he get rid of me afterward? He certainly knew how to do that if he wanted to. But should I report all of this to the police? To make

sure that he didn't do anything to me? But wait… What was there to report? He was just a sorry old man now, near the end of his life. And he'd suffered for his sins, I didn't need to add to that. If I reported this to the police, they would want to question him, and they might mistreat him in the process. He certainly wouldn't talk to them, and then I would be the one that he would blame. It wouldn't lead to anything good. What would be the point? All this over a copper book, or to be more precide, some pictures of a copper book, and some stories about it… And then my thoughts were off and running again. Why think the worst of the man? He had been decent enough to me. He had chosen to share his secret with me. We had, in fact, become friends of a sort. I'd spent a lot of time with him. He certainly knew that I meant him no harm..

Despite all of these thoughts I finally fell asleep late that night. It was 10 in the morning before I awoke. I'd had a terrible dream that lingered in my memory. This was one of those vivid dreams that stay with you long after. In this particular dream I was right here in my study, lying on the sofa, with the lights still burning brightly. Suddenly I felt some frightening presence in the room. I blinked my eyes several times and then saw several strange people with me in the room. There was a handsome young man, an older woman, and another person that I don't quite remember. The young man was dressed in an ancient tunic. He gazed at me calmly. I couldn't quite make out the meaning. The old woman was blind, but I felt that she also focused her attention on me. I felt rooted to the spot. I couldn't move an inch. I felt trapped by them, but I didn't know whether to be afraid or not… Then I woke up, not knowing whether it was a dream or not. Then I realized that it had been a dream.

“I dreamed about Alexander the Great… He visited me in my room… And granny Vangia was with him… And one other person, but he wasn’t so important…”, I mumbled to my wife over our breakfast coffee.

“Who did you dream about?", She asked, her curiosity aroused.

“Nothing really... Forget it…”

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I spent the next few days on a sober, fundamental review of all the facts, theories and possible conclusions about all of this. I didn’t contact Boris, and he didn’t call me. I began work on the book that you have in your hands. I decided to wait until I had a section of the work ready for Boris to read before I called him. We would also need to discuss the concrete details of the printing as well. At the same time I realized that there was no way for me alone to pursue the further unlocking of the secrets of the book, if there really was a hidden treasure to discover, and it really was here in our mountains somewhere. I kept studying the words and the images that the deceased Dimitar had given me. Yes, they certainly were the words that I had seen in the photographs of the book… Here was the word FODIARUM, here was AENIGMA, here was AHENUS, here was the drawing of snakes… Eh! What is this drawing? Four snakes draped around a square… But wait a minute… Could it be? … Yes! What the devil? It bothered me that the drawing with the snakes hadn’t been on any of the photographed pages that Boris had shown me. I was a hundred percent sure of that. What now? What kind of a joke was this? Boris had told me that he’d given me photos

of the entire book to look at, but his son had given me a drawing from the book that wasn't in the photos. I could only conclude that Boris hadn't shown me the entire book. There was at least one more page to the book, pages which Boris had told me were imprinted only on one side. What to do?… It was pointless to contact Boris He had deliberately withheld the page. But he didn't know that his son had provided me with part of its contents, the drawing with the snakes. It meant that Boris didn't know that I knew there was more to the book than he had shown me. It could be that that page contained some essential information for the eventual unlocking of the book's secrets. From my past experience with Boris and Dimitar I knew that they were always withholding information from me in order to protect the book's secrets. That could mean that they knew still more that they hadn't shown me… But why should that surprise me? Other than the fact that the two had deceived me, there was no harm done to me. And after all, the copper book was theirs to do as they liked… If I were to confront Boris with my discovery that there was more to the book, what would that accomplish? But, on the other hand, my stubbornness and curiosity would not let me be… Why had he concealed this from me, when he'd shown a willingness to share so much with me? In the end, there was no guarantee that if I told him what I knew that he would show me the page… I decided that I would ask him anyway.

That was the evening of Sunday, June 12, 2005. I telephoned him at about 8 pm, to his home phone. No one answered. I called again the next day, but again no answer. The same thing happened on the days that followed. I was beginning to wonder what had happened.

He'd always been at home when I'd called him in the past. Where could he be now? Could he have gone on some trip? Or maybe he didn't want to talk to me. He might have realized that I knew about the other page in the book, and he wanted to avoid me. But how could he know? I'd never shown him the words that his son had given me. Maybe he'd had second thoughts about the writing of a book about his secret. But then why had he had me visit him so many times and shared so much? All of these questions kept tumbling around in my mind… The uncertainty plagued me. It's worse than almost any conclusion. If you experience some defeat or loss, at least you can try to learn from it and avoid making the same mistake in the future. But when you don't know what happened, that can be hell. That's how it felt now. The longer I was unable to communicate with Boris, the greater my sense of confusion. My mind kept jumping to all sorts of conclusions. Could he have died? Maybe he was alive, but ill. He may have prepared something for me. He might still contact me. Maybe this… maybe that…

On the 16th of June of 2005 I was in Skopje, but for quite a different reason. I was there for a concert of Kraftwerk. I took my daughter with me. We arrived in Skopje just as the concert was beginning. It was a wonderful time! We visited with a few old friends after the concert and then returned home. We didn't get home until 2:30 in the morning. My godfather and old friend Angel Arsov drove us.

By the 17th of June I could barely stop myself from contacting the police about Boris. That day I went downtown in Shtip after work. As usual, I returned home by taxi. Somewhere near the central business district, we got

caught in a traffic jam. While we were sitting there waiting, I was casually observing the cars that passed by in the opposite direction. While doing this, I just happened to notice a yellow taxi with Skopje plates as it passed by. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a familiar figure sitting in the back seat… He was wearing dark glasses. For an instant he seemed to glance my way, then as quickly he disappeared as the yellow taxi moved on.

"Boris?", I almost shouted, and just as I turned to follow the yellow taxi with my eyes, we began to move.

"Somebody you know?", the taxi driver asked as I unsuccessfully tried to get another look into the retreating window of the other taxi.

"I'm not sure… He looked like somebody I know…", I said, the worm of doubt already gnawing at me.

That experience just added to my sense of uncertainty. Could it have been Boris? Why would he be in Shtip? Could he be spying on me? Maybe he had decided to liquidate me?... What a dumb thought… He could just as easily be visiting a friend here. And then again, maybe it wasn't even him… I've been so preoccupied with him that I'm beginning to see him on the streets…

The uncertainty concerning Boris continued for several more days. And who was it who finally restored my peace of mind? It was the postal carrier. Our friendly old local postman, who pleasantly surprised me every other day or so with something: letters from far away, occasional checks or money orders. So it was that day. Since he usually rang the bell some time around 11 am, I knew who it was. As usual, as soon as I'd opened the door, he had his pen and ledger book ready for my signature. This time he gave me a yellow slip to sign. I had no doubt that he

had some money for me and an explanatory note. I went ahead and signed for it, even before I'd seen who it was from. Then he handed me a letter and told me that he had 100,000 denars (about $2.200) for me, and he began counting out the bills.

"Wait a minute, this must be some mistake. Who would send me so much money?", I suddenly said.

The postman paused in his counting in order to verify that there was no mistake.

"No mistake. Here's your name."

"Let me see that…"

"Take a look.", and he handed me the paperwork.

Then I realized that the money was from Boris, because his name was on the paper work, as the one who had sent it. I didn't want the postman to think that there was something out of order here, or that I hadn't known anything about this delivery, so I corrected myself right away.

"Oh yes, that's money from my uncle in Skopje. I'd forgotten all about it for a moment… Excuse me…"

The postman looked at me, a bit puzzled, and then went on with his counting. Then he handed me the money and left.

Once I'd closed the door behind him, still in the entrance hall, I saw that the letter was from Boris. I went into the living room, put the money on the table and opened the letter. No one else was home. I put on my reading glasses and sat down in an armchair, studying the contents. He'd typed the letter and it was written in a formal style, with great care. I offer the entire letter here:

"Dear Alexander,

I know that you've tried to call me a number of times. Forgive me for not answering. I didn't have anything more to say to you. Our work together is finished, and, as we agreed earlier, I'm sending you 100,000 denars for the printing of the book. You must not mention me or my son, because that would force me to take certain unpopular measures in order to defend my self-dignity. Forgive me for having to say this.

About the copper book. It is no longer with me. It never brought me any good. It killed my son. He became obsessed with its contents, he wasted a good deal of money trying to learn its secrets. He lost his wife and eventually suffered a heart attack. And my own wife died prematurely. You know that I am seriously ill. I have cirrhosis of the liver, and won't live much longer. Alcohol has destroyed me, even though I gave up drink years ago. I have no heirs and no one to pass the book on to. The book itself is not evil, but the misdeeds of those who have tried to control it has led to their downfall. Evil begets evil. I know that better than most people. The riches that we talked about and sought, no longer interest me. I have neither the time nor the strength for that. It will take considerable time and energy and no one can guarantee the results. I still have a little time left in which to still do some good. That is why I've returned the book. It has a certain value. It could be sold as an archaeological artifact of considerable worth, at the very least. I've told you all I know of its contents, but I also told him about you, and about how we've worked out some of the meanings of the words together. He might decide to contact you.

Don't look for me again. By the time you read this I will have already emigrated from Macedonia. I'm going to

Bosnia, where I have some family through my wife, and where I have an apartment. I won't tell you where. Try to think well of me, although I have done bad things in my lifetime.

Yours, B.

I didn't know whether to be sad at the contents of the letter or rejoice at the end of my uncertainty. I stood and paced the room at first, not knowing what to think. My thoughts began to wander once again, but this time within boundaries. Finally there was some sort of closure. I no longer feared Boris. I praised him for his honorable act. Now it was time for me to write his story and my part in it, while honoring his wish for privacy, not revealing his or his son's identity. It meant that the project was coming to fruition. As to the new owner of the copper book, I couldn't imagine why he would contact me. But if he did, he would be welcome. Now I had work to do…

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On the 19th of July we experienced one more unforgettable concert in Skopje. This one was by Deep Purple. My friend Ane Volchev and I went with our daughters and one other friend. We went by taxi, two generations brought together by a mutual delight in the legendary rock band's music.

That was followed by our summer vacation in the resort town of Struga near famous Ohrids' Lake. We had a great time, swimming, lounging on the beaches, strolling the streets and eating in the restaurants. I was busy working on my book about the genealogical connections

between Macedonian royal dynasties and some of the U.S. presidents.

The summer passed. Fall came. We prepared our usual pepper preserves that filled the house with the delicious aroma of roasting peppers. The months continued to pass. October, then November and December and Happy New Year! January came and went and then winter break, when my schoolteacher wife and our children and I enjoyed a stretch of movie viewing at home with the video projector.

Finally the winter passed and spring came and went. During that whole period I never heard another word from or about Boris or the copper book. To be honest, I was reluctant to try and search him out, sensing that I would be treading on ground where I might not be all that welcome. I confined myself to the work as he'd laid it out for me. And so, I arrived at the point in the creation of the text that you see before you. As I slowly revised and refined the text, I approached the day when the text would be ready for publication.

Then, one day the telephone rang. According to my notes it was Saturday afternoon, June 10, 2006, that I received a fateful call.

"Hello. This is Slavo from the Oasis Hotel. I'm looking for Alexander.", I heard on the phone in my office, upon responding to the ringing with my usual, "Yes?" and seeing that it was an unfamiliar mobile phone number.

"Slavo? Ah, Slavo, is that you? I'll be…", I said, pleasantly surprised.

"Is there any chance that we could get together? I'd like to talk something over with you.", Slavo got right to the point.

"Not a problem. Anytime. You can come here, or I'll come by if you like.", I answered without hesitation, because I had a bit of unscheduled time at the moment, and it might prove a pleasant diversion.

"Well, is there a chance that you could come by right away?"

"Give me a half hour. Where you want to meet?"

"I'll meet you at the hotel reception desk. If I'm not there, have the receptionist page me. Or you could come right up to my office, if you want."

"I don't know where it is. So I'll stop by the reception desk on my way."

"Great. See you soon.", said Slavo and hung up.

Before I relate what happened next, let me tell a little about Slavo, owner of the Hotel Oasis. Nowadays he is one of the leading businessmen of our town of Shtip and beyond. He and a partner own the Hotel Oasis, as well as a number of shops and other places of business. They've been very successful in their commercial ventures in recent years, after a lot of hard work. But Slavo and I go way back, to when we were in high school together, in the late 70's. We'd spent a lot of time together as pals. Our little circle of friends had shared some of the most memorable times of our youth. We'd shared the daily recesses and breaks from school, roamed the streets together, gone to dances and parties, had our first drinks and our first ventures into the world of dating, cruising in cars and on motorbikes, and shared all kinds of little adventures. But time, as it will, had eventually separated us all as we pursued various individual paths in life. The years had passed, and Slavo and I had gone our own ways, managing only an occasional greeting in passing.

He later told me that he had shared some of my interest in history of late. On a recent trip to Canada to visit the sister of his wife Sonia, they had occasion to meet with Liliana Ristova, an owner of the newspaper "Macedonian News" in Toronto. They had shared several days of conversations with the journalist. Liliana had stirred Slavo's interest in Macedonian history. Upon his return to Shtip, Slavo began to take some concrete steps in this regard. As a result, he and his partner decided to finance the impressive bronze monument to Alexander the Great that stands in the main square of downtown Shtip today, and they also paid for the placement of the great metal cross that stands on a prominent slope on the outskirts of town, as a protective symbol. Those acts had earned Slavo a special place in the hearts of his fellow townspeople. Although he had his detractors as well, certain people who seemed to always be jealous of those who were more successful in life.

But, as chance would have it, our paths were about to cross once again. Two years before, Slavo had also called me out of the blue and ordered copies of all of my books. We'd gotten together briefly at the time, but then we'd both gotten busy with our projects and years had passed again. I would hear about an occasional get together of some of the old high school crowd on a holiday, and I, even though I never seemed to find time to join them, would share some pleasant conversations whenever our paths should cross.

What's up with Slavo? I wondered as I prepared to go out. Could he be interested in some more books or maybe he wants to talk about history? If so, I wouldn't mind. I knew that we would have a pleasant time together.

A few minutes later I left the house and hailed a taxi and a half hour later I arrived at the fancy downtown Hotel Oasis. Slavo was waiting for me in one of the plush chairs in the reception area, and as soon as he saw me approach he got up, greeted me, and then led me to the elevator that took us up to his luxurious office.

Once we were settled, there was a momentary pause in our conversation. Slavo seemed like his old self. He was a bit taller than me, with brown hair and blue eyes. He was looking good for his age. He pulled out some old pictures of us from our school days and we began to reminisce about things that we'd done some thirty years back.

"You've come a long way since then. We're all proud of you.", I said, moving the conversation along.

"What will you drink?", Slavo asked in response.

"Just some juice."

"Bring us two glasses of juice and some coffee.", he said to someone on the phone. And as we waited a few minutes for the drinks, we had a typical exchange, of the sort: "How are things? It's been a while", and the like. Phrases that reminded me of our old connection, and put me in mind of old times together back in the 70's.

After an office helper brought in the juice and the coffee and left the room, Slavo got right to the point. And what he had to tell me took me right back to my time with Boris, with all of its strange events and startling revelations.

"Look, Alexander, we've known each other for a long time, and what I have to share with you now is one mighty important business. Maybe you've already guessed it."

I just shrugged my shoulders. Slavo then continued:

"Okay. What I'm going to tell you has to remain between you and me. At least for now."

"Fine. So what is it?"

"It's about a certain book. A copper book."

Slavo's words hit me like a bolt out of the blue. I would have never guessed that his invitation had to do with this. I was totally taken by surprise. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't be sure of where this was going, so I mechanically responded: "What copper book would that be?"

Slavo laughed:

"Which would it be? How about the one you're writing your book about?"

That's when I realized that he certainly knew all about it, but I still didn't know what Slavo's connection to the copper book was.

"Has it been offered to you for sale?", I asked to get to his story.

"No.", Slavo answered, a bit surprised that I still hadn't quite caught on.

I kept trying to imagine how he'd gotten wind of this business. Of course, there had always been people who'd known about the book. He could have learned of it from one of them. But how had he learned about my connection to the book? I was still trying to work through all of this, as I said, without a second thought:

"So where did you learn about it?"

Slavo gave me a significant look, at this, and I knew that he was about to give me the real story. He then announced:

"The copper book is back where it belongs."

Although it still seemed hard to believe, I was catching on, without his filling me in on the details. I could barely contain my excitement:

"What? You mean, it's you… It was your dad?"

Slavo calmly continued:

"The old ex-army officer that you got to know… Boris… He gave it back to us. But for now you've got to keep all of this to yourself! You understand?"

"Wait a second, Slavo. Are you telling me that the copper book was yours? That the captain who was forced to give it up was your dad?"

"Yes."

"Your dad's name was Angel."

"That was him, Captain Angel Ivanovski.", Slavo confirmed.

My mouth felt dry. I was so astonished. I took a big gulp of the juice.

"I'll be!"

"So you couldn't guess. But that's it."

"How could I? It's unbelievable! I remember your dad. But I had no idea that he'd been an officer. Let alone a former prison detainee. I can remember when he died, though I'm not certain what year it was."

"1983. He had a heart attack."

"And now you have the book…"

"I've got it safely stowed away.", Slavo broke in.

"Of course, well, let me tell you, I'm really glad you've got it back. When did he return it?"

"Last year. I think it was in June. An old man called me from Skopje, wanted to meet, which we did, and

he gave it to me. He told me the whole story before he did that."

"Ah, now I remember. You know, I just happened to catch a glimpse of him in Shtip. But he either didn't see me or he pretended not to. But did you know anything about the book?"

"I knew of it. My dad told me some things not long before his death. He'd had previous trouble with his heart. It was sometime around then that he told me that we'd owned some kind of copper book, but that they'd confiscated it. He didn't tell me that he'd ended up in prison because of it, probably so as not to upset me. He never said anything about its value either.", Slavo began to explain to me.

"When your dad died, we weren't friends. I didn't even know that he had been an officer. I remember him slightly from a few visits to your house back then. He was a kind person. But how did the book find its way into your family in the first place?"

"My dad is from the village of Voinitsa, in the Veles region."

"Yes, I do remember that much.", I said.

"That village, according to local legend, was a warrior village. It had an old martial tradition. The story has been passed down to us that an ancestor, also named Angel, was a military commander at the time of Tsar Samuel. That Angel returned from the battle at Belasitsa at the head of the army that had been blinded by the enemy. He was one of the men who was only blinded in one eye. He had been the owner of some sort of secret writings on parchment that had been recopied over many generations."

"It was a guide to some sort of treasure.", Slavo continued. "When he saw that Tsar Samuel's empire was in trouble, he gave the writings to the Tsar, who had them recopied in the copper book in order to preserve them. But about the time the king was organizing an expedition to try and find the treasure and save his empire, the disastrous battle at Belasitsa occurred. Just before he died the Tsar gave the book to Angel. He had returned the writings, but in a new and more enduring form. He told him to guard the book as something of great value, that might one day reward the owner."

"Interesting.", I commented. "But do you have any proof of this?"

"No, it's just a story passed down in my family, from father to son, over the generations."

"I don't know what to say. There is some logic to this story, although people do typically make things up as well. That's how it is with most legends and tales. They could be based on real events that happened. But over the course of time in their transmission orally from one person to the next they get embellished or exaggerated, so that today we can't be sure what is true or not."

"What do you think might be true in this story?", Slavo asked me.

"Who can say for sure."

"Okay, but you said that there was a certain logic to the story."

"That's my guess, but without any careful analysis. What strikes me though, is that it would make a certain sense for the copper book to be made in Tsar Samuel's time, a thousand years ago. That is a time when it would be possible to have something written in Cyrillic, that also

contained Latin words, and maybe a more ancient language with signs and symbols we can't recognize today. I don't know. I'm just trying to make some sense of it all. The Cyrillic words do seem to function as explanatory words for the accompanying text. If you know a little of the contents, do you remember the words NOUZHDA PREMUDROST, which clearly translate to 'wisdom is needed', which I take to be referring to how one can understand the contents. This was clearly added later."

"Hm. That could be. Do you have any other arguments to make?", Slavo wanted to know.

"Maybe."

"What?"

"I don't know, Slavo. I'm only speculating, my opinion could change. I can't quite believe what I'm seeing. Let me think about it some more."

"That's fine. We're just having a conversation, so feel free to tell me what strikes you as logical."

"I think Tsar Samuel really didn't have much confidence in his possible successors. As the first in his line, he couldn't be quite certain who might succeed him, and he didn't seem to trust his son Gavrilo Radomir. His son Gavrilo had caused him enough headaches in the past. He even provoked the Hungarian king to declare war on Tsar Samuel's empire. At the same time, Samuel didn't have much confidence in his other possible heir, his brother's son, Jovan Vladislav. This could account for his sending the copper book to a family he considered to be more reliable."

"Why would he think that?"

"There's a history that is well-known. Samuel and his brother Aaron competed for the throne. Samuel won

out and Aaron was killed. Aaron's son Jovan Vladislav was seen to also be a threat to the king, and there were plans to kill him as well. Samuel's son Gavrilo apparently intervened to save his cousin. But Samuel never trusted his nephew, nor his son after that. So I think that he wouldn't necessarily want to trust them with the valuable book. This is my take on events, but it's just speculation, based on the possibility that the story your family tells is true."

"I'm inclined to believe it!", Slavo declared.

"Fine. But, of course, that's to be expected, that you would believe what your family tells you.", I said with a smile.

We were both silent for a time. I was the first to break the silence:

"Voinitsa is an interesting name. There is, of course, the word 'voinik' that the ancient Macedonians also happened to use in reference to the military. It is same as our word 'voinik' (a soldier)"

-"The connection seems likely.", Slavo agreed.

"When was your dad born?"

"1922."

"It means that he died relatively young. I've been writing all about what they did to him."

"I know some of it.", Slavo added and continued. "My mother told me some things. I thought that he was imprisoned for participating in a subversive group agains communism. In the year 2000 I requested a copy of his police file. I was surprised to find that there was no record of involvement in any such organization. All they had were some spurious accounts of informants that he had

expressed politically incorrect opinions on the Korean War and some Yugoslav politicians and other nonsense."

"That would be evidence that the reason for his imprisonment was other than reported. If he had been a member of a counter-revolutionary group it would be in his file.", I concluded, confirming what Slavo had said.

"So he was brought down… He ended up in the hell-hole of Goli Otok. The prisoners there suffered terrible abuse. Subject to beatings and brutal hard labor in a stone quarry. Living conditions were terrible. They were forced to go about barefoot and in rags. They suffered endless beatings from officers and guards and even fellow prisoners. He had one friend in there who helped him survive, an Albanian. But he died in the prison. When they let my dad out, his old friends wouldn't have anything to do with him. Only one journalist from Skopje befriended him."

"I know. The old man told me about him, and about how it cost the man his job.", I added.

Slavo continued.

"I tried a while back to find the journalist, but he had passed away by then. His wife and son were all I could find, and I expressed my great gratitude to them for what he had done for my dad."

"Really? That was a wonderful thing to do. Too many people just grow coarse from man's inhumanity to man. They forget to honor the good in others or undervalue it."

"If the Albanian prisoner had survived, Suad, I believe was his name, I would have tried to find him as well. But he died in the prison... And he never had a chance to have a family."

"I don't know what to say. I feel so sorry for the suffering they had to endure. I didn't know that you had a brother who had died too."

"Yes, he was called Borche. Born in 1949 and he died in 1951 while my dad was in Goli Otok. My sister and I were born later."

"A terrible tragedy."

We were both silent for a time, then I said:

"And what do you know about the copper book? What would you like from me?"

"The old man who gave it to me said enough about it. And he told me that you know something about it. I've tried to make more sense of it these past few months, but I haven't had much luck. That's why I decided to see if we might do better if we worked on it together. We've known each other a long time and that counts for a lot to me."

"You can count on me. I'll do whatever I can to help you. But I'm not so sure that we can make any further sense of the book.", I said.

"The one thing you need to know is that I can't show you the original. That's hidden away in a secure location and it wouldn't be easy to make it available. But I've made good copies of the words and symbols, for us to see if we can learn more of its secrets."

"Slavo, I don't need for you to show me the book. It's enough that we are old friends for me to help you all I can. But as I've told you, this is a project that may be beyond our ability to achieve results."

"I can pay you for your time. Just let me know what you want.", said Slavo.

"You don't need to pay me.", I argued.

"Fine. What are you working on at the moment?"

"What are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking of other works besides the novel about the copper book."

"My book about the language of the ancient Macedonians is almost ready for publication."

"Okay. Then let me participate as one of the sponsors."

I laughed. I really would be a fool to refuse his offer, I thought, when I almost exclusively publish my books through sponsorship.

"Okay. That's a possibility.", I said. "My friend, the well-known businessman, Pero Shimov from Doiran, is providing most of the money for the printing of the book. And then there are others from the diaspora, but if there are more sponsors, then we can get more books printed and more books can also go to the sponsors."

"I'll put in 1.000 euros. Let me know when the book comes out."

"Okay. Thanks for the help."

"So now let's see what we can make of the copper book.", Slavo changed the subject.

"I could tell you everything I know about the book until now. But it would be better if I just give you a copy of the manuscript of the book to read. It's all in there. Of course, your dad's name isn't mentioned.", I started to explain.

"Fine. When will you give me a copy?"

"Whenever you want. I can transfer it to a CD."

"Could you get me one by this evening?"

"Not a problem."

"I'll tell one of my workers to go ahead and print it out for me."

"Okay.", I said.

After we'd talked about various things and reminisced a bit more about old times, I left for home. Before dinner I transferred the manuscript on to a CD, took it over to one of the offices of the "Oasis", where they printed out a copy. Then I put it in an envelope and dropped it off at the reception desk for Slavo.

*

The next several days passed without further excitement, but I couldn't get over the turn of events concerning the copper book. I kept pondering its contents. On the 16th of June, 2006 I again met with Slavo in his office.

"Have you thought any more about what this could mean, this divided mountain that Vangia talked about?", I asked straight away.

"Well, what do you think?", He answered with his own question.

"I don't know. I'm not at all sure. I've pored over the map of Macedonia, the geographical one, and on the internet, the detailed satellite photo maps."

"And, what did you find?", Slavo asked with a hint of mocking in his voice.

"Well, I can't say that I discovered America, but I decided that there wasn't a single mountain that could be said to be divided or cut up in its shape. They are all covered with a varied mix of vegetation with bare places. That's how they appear on the satellite pictures on the internet. Except one…"

"Wait, here's a map of Macedonia.", Slavo broke in, arranging a topographical map of the Republic of

Macedonia on the table.", then adding. "Which mountains look divided to you?"

"As I've said, in the topographical sense, none of them appear divided, but …"

"Let's take a closer look. I think that there is a divided mountain and that it is one of these.", Slavo interrupted me again, tracing the borders of the Republic of Macedonia on the map with his finger.

"Well, that's what I wanted to say. There are divided mountains in Macedonia. The mountains that are along the borders. They're all divided by the state borders."

"It means that our mountain is one of several divided mountains in Macedonia.", Slavo declared with satisfaction.

"Well, is it possible that Krasimira came here with her companions? That she saw the ghostly figures here on our side of the border?"

"No."

"How do you know that?", I asked, a bit surprised.

"She told me.", calmly answered Slavo.

"Who told you that? Krasimira?"

"Yes, this past November I paid her a visit in Sofia. It just bothered me too much, so I had to go and ask her which mountain she and her friends had visited."

"And?"

"They were on Stranja. That's where they saw the phantom images.", Slavo told me.

"Stranja? Where is that?", I asked.

"It's on the border between Bulgaria and Turkey. In the far eastern part of Thrace. That's where they were.", said Slavo.

"Hm. But why? How can that be?"

"How should I know? That's just what Krasimira told me. A very charming and intelligent woman. But they didn't find anything there. Which means that Granny Vangia just sent them there to see the phantom images. That's not the place where the sarcophagus is located. By the way, Krasimira told me that one of her friends was Ludmila Zhivkova. And that she sponsored a search, but they didn't find anything."

"But does Krasimira know that this might involve the discovery of a sarcophagus of Alexander the Great?"

"No, she didn't know, but I told her about that possibility."

"And how did she react?"

"She was very surprised. She'd never considered that. She's an Egyptologist.", Slavo explained.

"I know.", I said.

" In any case, they never found anything on Stranja, except the phantom images that most likely represent Alexander and Aristotle. Now let's turn to our divided mountain."

"It's still a stretch for me to believe this. And which mountain would you choose?"

"Don't you have any ideas?", Slavo pushed me to say what I thought first.

His response made me think that maybe he had an opinion on the subject.

"If you want to know...", I said, studying the map, and then continuing. "...I'd say the most likely place would be somewhere along the southern border, toward the Aegean part of Macedonia. That's where the centre of the ancient Macedonian state was located. Let's see. That

would mean Galichitsa, Baba, Kozuf, Nije, and Belasitsa. But which one to choose?", I asked, hunched over the map.

"Which would you favor?", asked Slavo.

"I don't know. Maybe Kozuf or Belasitsa."

Slavo smiled:

"I've thought about those mountains too, And I've come to favor Belasitsa."

"Why?"

"First of all, it's the closest to where Granny Vangia was born, since she came from the Strumitsa region. That would mean it is in 'her' or 'our' homeland that she talked about. And there have been some very unusual activities in those mountains in recent times."

"Like what?"

"Is it just coincidence that NATO helicopters frequently fly over this mountain?"

"I don't know. I hadn't heard that. It could just be coincidence."

"And rumoured reports of a UFO?"

"I've heard about that. But I'm not inclined to believe in it."

"And the flood of treasure hunters who have flocked to Belasitsa in recent years?"

"And the presence of army units, although there are no military sites located there. Is that all coincidence?", Slavo demanded to know.

"Okay. I admit that there are way too many coincidental activities associated with that mountain. On the other hand, it's the only mountain that you can say is literally 'cut' into thirds by the border. But I'm not going to accept it without

some real proof, which we don't have.", I said, unmoved by his arguments.

"We'll see.", said Slavo.

" I don't know how we can prove for certain that it is the place. How can we be so sure that it is Belasitsa? And how would we ever search the whole mountain? Especially the parts on the other side of the border? "

"I agree. It is very difficult to make a search based on what we can read in the book. I won't dispute that, and so I'm inclined to not have very high expectations, but we should at least try.", concluded Slavo.

"Fine, Slavo. Since you've brought up the copper book, I've got a question for you."

"Say it."

"How many pages does it have?"

Slavo laughed. He hesitated. Finally he answered me: "Five."

"That's what I thought. Boris only showed me pictures of four pages, but I discovered some information that suggested there was another page.", I said, satisfied with his admission.

"I'm not surprised that he withheld the fifth page from you. He told me that it was the most important one. It has some snake drawing and key…"

I was uncomfortable having him discuss the page with me, because I didn't want to force him to share more than he wanted with me. That was his business. So I said:

"I don't know. All this seems so far-fetched. But no matter how I try to convince myself that it's just a fantasy, I can't shake my obsession with it, and there seem to be new arguments every day in support of the authenticity of the book."

"How so?", Slavo was interested to know.

"For example, there are people who may think that there is no historical proof that Alexander the Great left any writings, prophecy or testament...", I began, but Slavo broke in:

"What do you mean? You must know about the book with his prophecies. I have a copy."

"You took the words right out of my mouth. I was about to mention that very book. Professor Vera Stojcevska Antic published it, and she sent me a copy. That was from a very old manuscript, apparently found in Babylon. A priest monk named Atanas translated this manuscript into modern Macedonian. Professor Antic found the translation and published it."

As I was speaking Slavo was busy finding his copy of the booklet.

"Here it is.", he said. "The title is 'The Prophecy of Alexander the Great'. It was published by Zumpress, Skopje in 1996. Take a look at page 33. Look at what he wrote"., Slavo continued and he motioned for me to take a look at the page indicated.

"*At an excavation at Babylon, inside one golden box was found a very old written document of considerable value. This manuscript was translated into all languages because all of the prophesies of Alexander the Great foretold all of the great things until now without fail, and tell of what is yet to come*."

"Yes, that's it. It means that there are other sources of evidence of Alexander's prophecies. A portion of them came into monk Atanas's possession, and he translated them into the common Macedonian language some time during the first half of the 19th century. He

published this small, translated book in Venice. Professor Antic found the book in Italy and published it here."

"But it could be only a small portion of what is hidden away in the sarcophagus.", suggested Slavo.

"So it seems. But Atanas's booklet is important for the fact that it confirms the existence of such writings.", I said.

We were both silent for a time, then I suddenly asked: "What do you think of the book I'm writing?"

"It's good. I don't have any objections to its publication. That's your business.", said Slavo.

"Okay."

The conversation returned to our mutual memories. We went from the office over to my house for coffee. Then we parted ways.

A number of interesting events occurred in the period that followed. I've recorded most of it in my daily notes. On the 29th of June of 2006 Slavo and I, along with a mutual friend, Zoran Georgievski, a talented wood carver and a former director of the museum in Shtip, attended a promotion at the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences dedicated to the text of the Egyptian Rosetta Stone. We enjoyed seeing a number of friends there. I later asked the researchers if they had encountered any symbols like those we had found in the book. I hoped that there might be some correspondence between markings on the Rosetta Stone and those in the copper book, but they told me that they weren't familiar with the signs we found.

On the 6th of July of 2006 I had another interesting experience. Slavo invited me to join him on a

visit to Dionys in the village Stoiakovo, the man who had kept the copper book for many years. Slavo had formed a friendship with him. When we arrived in the village we were warmly greeted by Dionys and his wife and sons. He was a good natured man of middle age. We discussed the copper book, and Dionys reminded us that it was no ordinary book. He stressed that the book would only reveal its secrets if one approached it in a special manner.

"This required deep concentration. What at first appeared to make little or no sense would slowly be transformed into a meaningful message.", Dionys explained.

He was convinced that the signs in it represented some ancient secret Macedonian writing. He pointed out that there was an image of a precious stone in the center of the first page and that maybe it was one key to reading the book. He mentioned that the word "amethyst" appears in the book, a type of semi-precious gem. He told us that it was no accident that the particular stone was mentioned, because it had special occult significance in ancient times. Finally, he told us that some portions of the contents of the book can only be understood if the pages are separated and then placed in a very specific order. He had made many attempts to determine what this order should be, but he never succeeded. I didn’t know what to make of all of this.

Both Slavo and Dionys claimed that every time that they held the book, they felt a burning in their hands that would last for some time even afterward.

On our way back to Shtip we stopped for lunch at a restaurant near the museum in Gevgelija. We parked his BMW-6 in an adjoining lot. When we departed from there,

Slavo soon had us traveling at well over 90 mph. As we entered the tunnel in the environs of Demir Kapiya, a vehicle warning light and alarm signaled car trouble. Slavo immediately realized that there was a serious problem with the car's tires. He somehow managed to maintain control as he slowed the car to a stop. We got out and saw that a rear tire was damaged.

"Don't worry.", Slavo said. "The tires on this car have a double chamber. It's likely that only the first layer was damaged. We should be able to get home with just the one."

However, closer inspection revealed that the tire was completely ruined. Fortunately, we were not far from a tire shop named "Start". We made our way there and they immediately set to work. They hoisted the car up on a lift and removed the damaged tire. They found a piece of metal about six inches long curled up into an "r" shape. The chunk of metal was so embedded that they needed a pair of pliers to pry it out. They ended up having to replace the entire tire with a new one. How such a piece of metal got embedded in the tire remains a mystery. The workmen at the tire shop couldn't explain it, although they had seen all sorts of damage to automobile tires over the years. Could someone have deliberately tried to cause a wreck? Could they have done it while we were parked in Gevgeliya? I mentioned my suspicions to Slavo, but he didn't respond at all. He seemed determined to not let it upset him. In any case, the warning signal in his BMW had warned us in time to avoid the danger.

On the 9th of July Slavo and his wife Sonia came to our place for dinner. We watched the soccer match between France and Italy in the World Cup Finals, and I

recorded everybody with my camcorder. That same night my phone rang around midnight, waking me up, but when I checked the caller ID, there was no number recorded. I learned the next day that Slavo had received a similar call that night.

Dionys also experienced some unpleasantness. Two strange men visited him and said that they represented someone from abroad who was prepared to pay four million euros for the copper book. Dionys was wary of them, and he insisted that their foreign employer come speak to him personally. They made some excuses for why he couldn't do that, and Dionys sent them packing.

Could all of this simply have been chance? Who could be behind such provocative incidents? In any case, we continued our research, but with a certain sense of caution.

In further meetings with Slavo and Dionys we agreed to seek scientific verification of the antiquity of the copper book. Slavo was prepared to send a sample to a well-known scientific laboratory for testing, but we knew that it might not be possible for them to determine the age of a metal object. So we contacted one of the most reputable of such facilities for advice. I sent the following email letter on the 7th of July of 2006 to the British Museum in London:

Dear Sir,

I am sorry for disturbing you, but I shall be grateful if you will answer me to this message.

It is a matter about one old object from a private collection. We don't know its' (at least near) age, i.e. how old it is.

So, please, if you can answer me the following questions:

- I found on the Internet that there is a laboratory in the British Museum for dating the age of objects through C14 method (which, of course, is normal for such a big museum :-) . I wonder if you do favours for "outside"people, i.e. if you date the age of the objects that do not belong to the BM?

- If you do such favours, how much will it cost?

- How large shall the piece of that object be for this operation? (We can not bring the whole object, but perhaps a small piece of it - so please answer me how large should it be)?

- The object is made of metal (probably copper, perhaps with some mixture). Can the method C14 be useful for this material? If not, is there some other method for dating the age of metal (copper) objects?

- How long until the procedure for the age dating will be completed after receiving the piece from the object?

Yours sincerely,
Alexander Donski
"Kole Nedelkovski" 23
2000 Stip
Republic of Macedonia

On the 9th of August I received the following reply from the British Museum:

Dear Mr Donski

Thank you for your e-mail.

I am afraid that radiocarbon cannot solve the problem of how old your metal object is. It only works with things which have once been alive, where it can be used to calculate how long ago they died. Dating metal objects is much more difficult - there is no simple scientific test which

can be applied. Normally the only way to get any estimate of age is to look at the sorts of metals used, and the way in which the object was made.

We have now closed our radiocarbon laboratory, but if you do ever want to use the method, you will find lists of labs, sample sizes and costs on www.radiocarbon.org

With best wishes
Janet Ambers
Dept of Conservation, Documentation and Science
The British Museum
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This meant that all we had left to try and determine the age of the book was the contents. So we took a course of actions that yielded some interesting results. Because there appeared to be certain connections to ancient Egypt in the copper book, we thought that perhaps some of the signs and symbols in it could be found in ancient Egyptian letters and symbols. I sent an email letter to the National Museum in Cairo, in which I included a number of signs.

Several weeks passed without an answer, but then one day I was surprised to discover a message on my computer screen. The message said that similar signs do appear on some objects in their possession. However, they informed me that it would not be possible to send photographs of these objects. I would need to see them for myself.

This was at a time when my wife and children and I were discussing where to go for our summer vacation that

year. We were weighing our options for a possible trip to Turkey, Albania or Montenegro.

"Let's go to Egypt!", I said after giving it some thought, not long after receiving the message from the National Museum in Cairo. It didn't take long for the others to warm to the idea. We would see an exotic land whose wonders drew millions of tourists from around the world.

We paid for a package tour through the Shtip travel agency "Porta", which was affiliated with "Aurora" in Skopje, and on the 27th of July we caught a charter flight to Hurghada, a popular tourist destination on the Red Sea. After a three and a half hour flight we arrived and then caught a bus that delivered us to the Hotel "Empire" an hour later. In the days that followed we went on excursions to the pyramids at Giza and visited the capital Cairo. I had made prior arrangements for a visit with Dr. Salahadin at the National Museum. He was my email contact there.

We visited Cairo on the 4th of August. We arrived in the city about 09:00 am, after a six hour minibus ride along the Red Sea on the edge of the Sahara Desert. We had travelled in a tourist caravan of buses, accompanied by armed policemen to prevent terrorist attacks. Our first stop was at the National Museum of Egypt in Cairo. Our guide was a young woman named Karima from Sarayevo, a graduate student in Egyptian studies, and a young Egyptian named Joseph, who was an expert on ancient Egypt. We were told to stow all cameras and camcorders in the minivan, because photographs were strictly forbidden in the museum. And so, after a thorough search, we were allowed to enter this grand building.

The exhibits of ancient Egyptian culture were truly fascinating, but I won't go into that here, since my

interest at the moment is the copper book. All of the tourists from Macedonia traveled together in a group. But early on in the tour I let our guides know that I had a special purpose to my visit. Once it was clear where we would need to meet later, my family and I separated from the group. Then, almost immediately, I left to pay a visit to the museum administrative offices, after agreeing on a time and place for us to meet up later.

A friendly guard directed me to Dr. Salahadin's office, where my contact on the staff was waiting for me. He was a bit younger than me. He had a moustache and eyeglasses. He was of medium height and dressed all in white. After a period of courteous greeting and an invitation to drink some hot tea (a curious practice, given the scorching hundred degree summer heat in Egypt), Dr. Salahadin began:

"I wanted you to come in person to see what we have. Please follow me."

We went into the museum storage area where there were easily as many objects as were on display. They were stacked up, but in a readily accessible order. We quickly found ourselves in front of a stone monument on which several dozen symbols appeared. Dr. Salahadin pointed to one of them:

"The European bird called the hoopoe. In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics it was the symbol for inspiration and gratitude. It resembles the drawing of the bird that you sent me."

"Indeed.", I said, astonished by what I was seeing.

"Look at this symbol."

"The head of a goat.", I said.

"Yes, it is almost identical to the symbol that you sent to me."

"But from what I have heard, today the goat head is a very negative symbol. It is a symbol associated with Satan. That's why I wanted to hear your thoughts.", I said.

Dr. Salahadin smiled at me and replied:

"It's true that satanic sects use the goat's head as a major symbol. But it really is an ancient Egyptian symbol. It comes from the Egyptian city of Mendes."

"I didn't know that.", I said with growing interest.

"It was the symbol of the soul.", Dr. Salahadin continued.

"Hm."

"Here are some of the other symbols you sent me. One is an eye, another is a figure that I particularly like, the scarab. Both of them are symbols of the Egyptian god Ra. The four snakes are quite interesting."

"What do they mean?"

"The cult of the four snakes in ancient Egypt is closely tied to the myth of Ogdoad. In this myth the old god Tot created the first eight creatures on earth. Those were the four snakes and four frogs. The four snakes consisted of two pairs: Nun and Nunet and Ket and Keket. They were symbols of water and darkness."

"And what do you think explains the fact that we've found all of these symbols together in one place?"

" I think that you are dealing with some very important object. Something royal or sacred. Two of these symbols indicate that. One of these is the symbol for the soul. It means that you are dealing with some previous king or emperor connected to the chief Egyptian god Ra. The four snakes again are symbols of water and darkness. The

water symbolized eternal life, and the darkness had a number of meanings, which include chaos, but also the bringer of light. You may be dealing with some emperor who was of special importance to humanity, who had great influence, an inspiration to later rulers, which made him, in a manner of speaking, eternal. But possibly, in a symbolic sense, he could be a beacon of light for some future time. I can't be certain. The symbols suggest that, but only God knows for sure."

"Do you think that it could be Alexander the Great?"

Dr. Salahadin smiled again:

"Yes. I thought this might be connected to him. He was declared a son of Amon Ra. He left a deep mark on world civilization. We Muslims have great respect for him and consider him one of our ancestors. It could be that this is all about him."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Salahadin. You've been a great help.", I said, my head filled with thoughts associated with what I had heard.

Then we separated, and I went and found my family. We toured the rest of the museum together and then spent the rest of the day at the pyramids, the sphinx and in the Sahara Desert.

*

After we returned to Shtip, I got together again with Slavo at his office, and Dionys joined us. That was on the 12th of August, 2006. This meeting yielded some very interesting information to add to the story. I began with a detailed account of all that I had learned in Cairo. It was clear that all of that served to confirm what we had already suspected about the contents of the copper book.

Then Slavo spoke up:

"You've concentrated on study of the contents of the book, but I haven't been sitting here with folded hands. I won't hide anything from you. You both have been a great help to me, and I really appreciate that."

" Have you learned something interesting?", I asked.

"I did, but you were in Egypt at the time, so I wasn't able to tell you. I ended up taking a number of measures on my own."

"What kind?", I asked.

"I had a conversation with an old police official. Someone from the time of the Yugoslav state administration. He's retired now. I asked him directly whether there was ever a time in his career when he dealt with something concerning Alexander the Great."

"And?", I asked impatiently. Dionys also seemed to be waiting with growing impatience.

Slavo paused briefly, then he said:

"The man without hesitation told me that he knew about some matters. And can you guess which mountain he mentioned?"

Dionys and I didn't venture a guess.

"Belasitsa!", Slavo announced.

"You've got to be kidding.", I said.

"No, I'm not.", Slavo declared.

"So what did he have to say? What was the man's name?"

"You don't know him. His name is Atanas. He's not from here. He told me that he learned about some things from documents in the archives of State Security. He said that they were public records of the present Macedonian

police. He wasn't the only one who had read these records."

"So what did he read? Come on, tell us.", Dionys urged him.

"There were documents that reported that Hitler had sent an expedition to Belasitsa during the German occupation during World War Two to try and find the burial site of Alexander the Great. The expedition didn't find anything. In 1989 the Vatican showed special interest in the subject. They sent a representative to Yugoslavia, who had some secret meeting with the top party officials. Not long after that the Yugoslav Army blocked off several areas on Belasitsa. They also searched the terrain, but they didn't come up with anything."

"Wait a minute, Slavo. Does that mean that they thought the sarcophagus was located on our part of the mountain? Is that why the Yugoslav Army was involved?", I asked.

"Yes, that's what Atanas told me. He said that there were records of this in the state security archives. He suspected that the Vatican found some old writings in their library that they showed to the Yugoslav leadership. That led to activation of the Yugoslav Army."

"Unbelievable!", I shouted.

"But that's not all.", responded Slavo, then paused again momentarily before he continued. "That same year, 1989, the state security recorded one other interesting occurrence."

"What was that?", I asked.

"The Greeks organized their own secret expedition, which involved the digging of a tunnel under Belasitsa which would have allowed some of their people access to our side of the border. This would have given them an

opportunity to be the discoverers of the sarcophagus. Their project ended in disaster. Eight Greeks perished in the tunnel and that put an end to it."

"Is there proof of this?", I asked.

"There is. That's what Atanas tells me. He saw this report with his own eyes. The report remains to this day in the archives of the former state security."

"How did the Greeks die?", asked Dionys.

"Atanas didn't want to talk about it, or he simply didn't know."

"I was beginning to believe that there really was something there. The Yugoslav state security was a serious agency. They had tremendous power and influence, even extending to the West. Nowadays some of these people are speaking more openly on television. However, I'm not at all sure that this definitely involves the sarcophagus and treasure of Alexander the Great. That's still too much for me.", I said.

"Now there are some more recent developments.", Slavo continued, as if he hadn't heard my comment.

"What are they?", asked Dionys.

"Do you recall the famous battle on Belasistsa that led to the blinding of Samuel's soldiers? Do you think that it was just chance that the battle took place there?", Slavo responded.

"What are you getting at?", I asked, curious to know how he would answer.

"What if Tsar Samuel knew that there was something hidden on Belasitsa? That may explain why he sent an army to meet the Byzantines in that particular place. To deny them the mountain, so that he could search for the treasure hidden there."

Dionys and I were silent, waiting for Slavo to explain his idea. He continued.

"I've already told you about how our family passed down a story of Tsar Samuel's preparations of an expedition to discover the secret written in the copper book, and how the battle of Belasitsa interrupted that plan. And how the Tsar chose to give our ancestor, Angel, the book, which had prepared from a parchment manuscript originally provided to him by Angel. He did this when he realized that his state was nearing its end."

"Do you think that the Byzantines passed through Belasitsa because of the possibility of finding the treasure?", I asked.

"No, I don't think that they knew about the secret, but they stood in the way of Tsar Samuel's plans to search for the treasure on the mountain, riches that might have saved his state. I think that after my ancestor gave Tsar Samuel the parchment with the secret information and it was transferred to the copper book along with some explanatory words and signs, Tsar Samuel's learned advisors studied the book. They probably made the connection to Belasitsa, but the military incursion by the Byzantines scuttled any search efforts.", said Slavo, nearly convinced of what he was saying.

"I don't know... There's no real proof of any of this. It's all just hearsay.", I said.

"I know that you don't believe any of this. You're just a born skeptic. But you have to admit that everything points to my story being true. There are too many coincidences that all have to do with Belasitsa, back in Tsar Samuel's time and in our own.", argued Slavo.

"I don’t want to argue with you. The fact is that some pretty amazing things have come to light. But we’ve got to be rational about all of this and approach it realistically. All we’ve got is circumstantial evidence.", I tried to make clear.

Slavo didn’t respond.

"Hold on there, Aleksandar, Slavo may be justified.", Dionys suddenly joined in. He usually just listened to us in silence during our meetings. He generally wasn’t all that eloquent a speaker, but he sometimes could emphasize a point with some dramatic gesture. So I was a bit surprised by his readiness to take Slavo’s side in this. Slavo and I both studied him carefully as he continued:

"You aren’t the only one who has been out looking for confirmation of all of this, and I think that I’ve uncovered something interesting. I’m surprised that it didn’t occur to me sooner. And all the time it was right there in front of my nose."

"What’s that?", asked Slavo.

"The signs. The signs in the copper book. They hold the key."

"Okay. We’ll buy that. But have you discovered the key?", I asked impatiently.

"Yes and no."

"How so?", asked Slavo.

Dionys picked up one of the photographs of the copper book.

"Look at this word."

Slavo and I bumped heads slightly as we both leaned over at the same time to take a look at the photo.

"REBUS, well, what of it? That’s a word we know.", I commented.

"And what does it mean?", asked Dionys.

"Well, if you want to me to say, I will. It's a Latin word that means a kind of mystery or puzzle.", I began to explain, not seeing anything special to make of it, nothing we hadn't already discussed.

"Doesn't it make you think?", said Dionys, ignoring what I had said.

"Well, why don't you tell us what you see in it. Quit playing it up.", Slavo demanded, growing impatient.

"This word isn't Latin.", declared Dionys.

"What do you mean, not Latin? It's in the Latin dictionary. But if you're talking about its origins, who knows where it came from.", I said, ready to debate the issue.

"I'm not talking about the origin of the word 'rebus', I'm just thinking about the word written down right here. It doesn't mean what rebus' means. It should be read as 'rebush'. It holds the key to the secret signs.

"Rebush? What the hell is that?", asked Slavo.

Dionys looked at me, but I just shrugged.

"That's the name used for a secret Macedonian system of signs. The last to use it in Macedonia were shepherds, who carved it on their staffs. I've seen some of those sticks, and I can tell you that there are similarities between rebush letters and those in the copper book."

"Wait a minute! I do remember something about this.", I almost shouted as some of what I'd learned came back to me. "Several years ago a Macedonian daily newspaper wrote about this. Apparently shepherds right up to the Second World War were still using a secret system of writing with signs, but I don't remember what they called it."

"Rebush.", Dionys broke in.

"Maybe, I just don't remember that."

"And what were those letters like?", Slavo asked with growing interest.

"A system of signs.", replied Dionys and then continued. "Each sign had its own meaning based on its form and placement."

"So we need to find somebody who knows this system of signs and show him the signs we have.", said Slavo.

"I don't think there is anyone left in Macedonia who can read them.", declared Dionys.

"Why is that?", asked Slavo.

"Because after the war the communists ordered the removal of livestock from the mountain pastures. They pursued a policy to force people out of the villages and into the towns. So herders became rare. The tradition that included the reading and writing of rebush died out with the death of the old generation of shepherds. The newspaper published a photograph of one of the last shepherd's staffs in Macedonia with rebush signs on it. A journalist found it in a western Macedonian village, but there wasn't anyone who could still read what was written on it. I've heard that there might still be a few elder clergymen in Armenia who can read rebush. Apparently the rebush used in Armenia was the same as that in Macedonia, because there are very old connections between the two peoples, but who knows for sure. I really do think that the signs in the copper book are in this kind of writing, and the name rebush is written right in the book. That's why I said that Slavo was on the right track. If there is any truth to the stories passed down in Slavo's family, then it is very possible that the scribes or scholars in Tsar Samuel's court were able to read the rebush signs and had determined the location of

the treasure on Belasitsa Mountain, but they learned this too late."

"I must admit that this sounds quite interesting.", I said.

"But from what era does rebush originate?", asked Slavo.

"No one knows. Some say it dates back to ancient times. But then there are others who say that it pre-dates our civilization, and that it represents an effort by an earlier civilization on earth to try and leave us some knowledge of them. It's no accident that you can find very old rebush signs carved on stones, carvings that could be many thousands of years old."

While I was no fan of such unsubstantiated theories, I didn't say anything. After all, I had read about rebush writings myself, whether they dated back to a prehistoric civilization was another matter.

We decided that we needed to find someone who might still be able to read this system of writing. Dionys remembered an old shepherd from his childhood who had known these signs, but he had died long ago. He again said that he doubted very much that there was anyone left who could read rebush.

We all sat silently for a time, mulling this over. After a time, I asked Slavo:

"What are your plans now?"

"Now? I intend to visit Belasitsa again."

'What?", I asked in surprise, and Dionys shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Yes, I'm planning to make another trip there. With some of my own people. If you'd like, you're welcome to join us.", said Slavo.

"I don't know. I haven't heard of any discoveries there up til now. And I still have serious doubts that you'll find anything.", I said.

"There's no a mountain in Macedonia without its buried secrets.", Dionys admonished me.

"Maybe so, but the story of Alexander the Great's treasure is just too fantastic for me to accept.", I continued to argue.

"I wouldn't be so sure.", said Slavo and added. "I've talked with enough people who know our mountains, and they have stories that woulod make your hair stand on end."

"But who hasn't hears such stories? It's just that I haven't seen any of this with my own eyes yet.", I argued.

"Yes, but one of these stories concerns a cave on Belasitsa that I take very seriously now."

"Have you been there?", I asked.

"Yes, but let me tell you what motivated me. I just don't want to reveal the man's name who told me about it. He's an acquaintance. A Vlach from Strumitsa who goes up in to the mountains to cut wood."

"Did he find something?", I asked.

"He was in one cave up there.", Slavo answered.

" How did he find it?"

"Some old man showed it to him. And he told me a fantastic tale."

"What sort of tale?", I asked.

" The old man often crossed paths with the woodcutter up on the mountain. The old man had a sheep fold up there and the woodcutter, as I said, would go up there after wood. One day the old man asked him: 'Would you like to see a cave I know about?' The woodcutter said

that he would, and they set off. When they arrived at the entrance the old man said that his brother had died there. It was at the time of the Second World War. His brother had ventured inside the cave, where he found a belt buckle with the image of Alexander the Great on it. Unfortunately, on his way home he slipped and fell off a rock and was killed. The family held on to the belt buckle, but the Bulgarian authorities got wind of the buckle and put pressure on the family to give it up. The old man, who was a boy at the time, was thrown into jail, and he was only released after his mother gave the authorities the belt buckle. However, he never revealed the location of the cave, and he never visited it again, until he shared knowledge of it with the woodcutter, and the two of them visited it not long ago. The old man warned the woodcutter to be careful not to fall at the same place that his brother had lost his life. They went deep into the cave where they found a skeleton in a wooden casket. The woodcutter noticed a ring on the skeleton's finger, which he took. That was three years ago.

"It's all very interesting.", I commented. "But it isn't necessarily related to the copper book."

"Why not?", Slavo asked.

"What makes you so sure that the belt buckle they found had the image of Alexander the Great on it?", I argued.

"That's what they thought.", replied Slavo.

"But they aren't experts on ancient artifacts. And even if it was Alexander's image, so what, there are…"

But Slavo interrupted me:

"The fact is that way out in the middle of nowhere on Mount Belasitsa someone found a grave that belonged to some important person. If it isn't Alexander, it is still proof

that important people in the past were buried there. Who knows why? What is important is that there is a cave on Belasitsa that contains secret graves."

I didn't have anything to say to that. But after a time Dionys asked:

"What did the woodcutter do with the ring?"

"I don't know. He probably sold it.", Slavo casually surmised.

"I wonder if that's against the law?", I asked.

"Who knows.", Slavo remarked in the same casual tone and then added - No one even knows for sure, what's legal or not here.

"Yes, I had a conversation about this concerning the copper book with Boris's son, who died last year. The rights of someone who finds some valuable archaeological artefact are not very well defined. We still treat such people as criminals, instead of treating them as heroes for their contribution to archaeological knowledge. Since the state won't recognize their right to the things they might find, we'll never know how many valuable artefacts have been lost to science.", I said, thinking back on my conversation with Dimitar.

"How would you ever legalize treasure hunting?", asked Dionys.

"I don't know. Maybe through organizing of amateur archaeological societies that could receive certain legal permissions to dig. The state could oversee their work, and what they found could be divided between state and private collectors, or at least offer them a fair compensation for things they might find. Their rights should include the right to sell items at public auction. That's the way they do it in the West. For example, in England, anyone who finds

something on his property automatically becomes the legal owner of it."

"But don't you think that people will find ways to play games with the law?", argued Dionys.

"Maybe, but what can we do, it has to be better than what we have today with illegal treasure hunters. The state isn't all that strong, and there's no way they can watch all of the known and unknown archaeological sites. It would take thousands of policemen. It's totally impractical. What I'm proposing would automatically eliminate the problem of illegal treasure hunting. They would be made legal, and those who still won't follow the law would have trouble with those who were once their fellows, but now obey the new law. We wouldn't have the anarchy we have today. Even if we had problems at first, over time they would be worked out.", I said, all the more convinced of the idea.

Then Slavo joined in.

"I think you might be right. Did you hear about the incident involving a Turkish woman in Bulgaria?"

"No.", I said.

"How could you have missed it? It was all over the media a while back."

"Well, I really didn't hear about it. What happened?", I asked with growing interest.

"It was January of this year. An ancestor of this woman was the chief pay clerk of the Ottoman Imperial Army. Just prior to the collapse of the empire the soldiers failed to receive their last pay. The pay clerk had hid the gold liras somewhere in Constantinople, and he went to live with his family in Bulgaria. Later on he told his family where he had hidden the money, but on account of the conditions in Bulgaria during communist rule he wasn't

able to retrieve it. But not long after the end of that rule his granddaughter went to Turkey, visited officials in the Turkish government and told them: "I know the location of a hidden treasure in Constantinople. I'll tell you where it is, but you'll have to give me 40% of the value". The Turkish officials were delighted at this news. They treated her royally. Wrote up a contract, and she showed them where to dig for the gold her grandfather had hidden. After they had retrieved the gold, worth millions, they gave her the agreed upon sum, and she left for home. They reported all of this on television in Bulgaria. A friend tells me. And what was the harm in all of that?

"And the wolf got fed and all of the sheep made it home safely.", I recited and then added. "If the Turks thought the way our officials do here, they would have acted against their own self-interest, and instead of a share for everybody, there would have been nothing for anyone. That mentality has not served us well. The Turks acted in such a way that they benefited and the woman who deserved something for herself."

"I admit that I'd never looked at it that way before.", said Dionys.

"The same woman came for a visit here a while back. She wasn't received well by our own authorities. Instead of asking her for her cooperation, they just followed her around like she was some kind of thief. She got scared and left. Why should she or any other treasure hunter reveal what they know, and many of them know a good deal about hidden treasures here, if the authorities would just take it all? So they keep quiet, out of fear, and all sorts of valuable treasure remains wasted underground.", Slavo concluded his story.

Then all three of us grew silent once again as if by some signal. I was the first to break this silence:

"You haven't told us about the cave. Have you visited the cave that your Vlach friend told you about?"

"Yes.", confirmed Slavo.

"And?" I asked impatiently.

"And nothing. We didn't have the gear we needed, so we couldn't go very deeply into the cave. Next time we will be better prepared."

"I can lend you my camcorder. It will even film in the dark with infrared light.", I said.

"You can join us if you like.", said Slavo.

" I'll think about it. When do you plan to go again?"

" On Saturday the 19th."

(...)

The day arrived. There were four of us, Slavo, myself and two of his friends that I had never met before, but who apparently were seasoned climbers and cavers. They brought along the necessary gear for such places. We were on our way to the fabled cave where a man had died decades ago, and where a belt buckle with the possible image of Alexander the Great had been found, and where there was a skeleton in a coffin. I went along out of pure curiosity. I still had my doubts that we would find anything. The two members of our party (They have asked that their names be withheld.) with experience in cave exploration carried ropes, lights, special foot wear, and other items used in caving. We brought along my camcorder that would allow us to film in the total darkness. Even where Slavo and I would have trouble going, hopefully, our companions would be able to film.

We made our way from Shtip by car. No one talked during the drive. About an hour and a half later we parked by the roadside and continued on foot. I wasn't at all familiar with the area. I simply followed the group. After some time of hiking, we arrived at the foot of a steep ridge.

" The entrance is up above.", said one of my companions, and he pointed to a clump of brush some thirty yards from where we stood.

We made our way slowly, one after the other, without conversation. The climber who led the way suddenly stopped about ten yards from where the cave entrance was supposed to be.

" I'll be damned! What's this? What's happened?"

As Slavo and the second climber approached him, they also stopped, staring in astonishment towards the entrance to the cave. I approached them, not knowing what I would find.

" My God!", shouted Slavo.

All three of them hiked up to the supposed entrance, and I followed. There was no entrance, just a pile of earth and stone.

"Where is the entrance?", I asked.

" It's gone!", said one of the climbers.

" Someone buried it.", said the other.

" How could they have buried it?", I asked as I studied the pile of earth and stones.

" They didn't do this by hand.", Slavo commented. "They used explosives. See what a mess it made."

The two climbers studied the rubble for a while. They removed some of the stones and examined them.

"There was an explosion, and how! The stones that were blown up from below are still damp.", said the one.

" But who? Why?", I asked, astonished.

No one answered me. All three poked around in the rubble, trying to make some sense of the site of the explosion.

Finally they stopped trying. And that's when I asked:

" And now what?", hoping one of them was ready to answer my questions.

" Nothing to be done. It would take us a week or more to remove the pile of debris.", one of them said.

" We may as well pack it up and go home.", he said. We all agreed. There didn't seem to be a good alternative. We were all a bit upset, but I, at least, also felt a certain amount of fear. What if we were being watched at the moment? Fortunately, my suspicions didn't amount to anything, and we arrived back at the car, while continuing to discuss what we'd seen.

We returned to Shtip. We were all unsettled by our experience. There was no doubt that someone knew about our activities and took what we were doing very seriously. Our thoughts drifted in circles. Who could have been following us? Could it have been agents of the state security? Or some agents working independently? Or maybe a criminal gang? Could old Boris be involved? What if he hadn't left for Bosnia, but had discreetly followed our activities to see where it might lead? Maybe his son wasn't dead, if he really was his son.

Slavo, Dionys and I ran through all of these possible scenarios, as well as others, without making any progress. But one thing was clear. We should not underestimate whoever it was. They may have already tried to injure or kill us, if the tire damage was intentional, and if they were willing to use explosives, who knew what they might be

capable of? We had no idea how to protect ourselves, given the fact that we had no idea who we were dealing with.

" Slavo, there is always the possibility that they might visit us at night at our homes, or mistreat members of our families in order to get the copper book.", said Dionys and neither Slavo nor I had anything to say that would deny that terrible possibility.

Not long after that there was one more strange incident. On the 25th of August of 2006 Slavo received a phone call from one of his acquaintances, who told him:

"Slavo, I was over at the 'Saint Petka' monastery in the Mountain Plachkovitsa, just outside the ancient city of Bargala, the other day. There is an old woman who lives there by the name of Polizena. Immediately upon meeting me, she asked, 'Do you know Slavo, the owner of the Astibo Hotel in Shtip?' I was surprised that she should ask me that, and I told her that we were friends. Then she told me to tell you to come visit her."

Slavo didn't know what to make of this, but he discussed it with his wife Sonia, and they decided to go to the monastery the very next day. When they arrived at the monastery, Polizena's son, Georgi, greeted them. Polizena was quite old, over eighty, and she was napping when they arrived. Her son woke her up for them. When she saw Slavo she told him that it was a dream she'd had that caused her to call him. Then she told him what she had dreamed, one day in mid-August. Saint Mary appeared in her dream. She had two sand-filled platters in front of her in which candles burned for the living. Saint Mary snuffed these candles out. Suddenly a bright light surrounded Polizena, and she felt a special grace descend upon her.

Saint Mary told her not to fear because the light she saw was for Macedonia. Then Saint Mary began to recite names of various countries, but Polizena couldn't remember any of them. When she came to Macedonia, Saint Mary uttered the name "Slavo of Astibo". As she spoke his name, her face took on a worried look. That was her dream. Polizena had no idea what it meant, but she had decided to ask who this Slavo is and to contact him. Slavo told her about himself, that he was owner of the Oasis Hotel, formerly known as the Astibo, that together with a partner he had donated the great cross above the city of Shtip, and he was the sponsor of the bronze statue of Alexander the Great in the city center. He promised that he would also see to the repair of the roof of the "Saint Petka" Church at the monastery.

Polizena, who lived at the monastery "Saint Petka", is well-known to the people of her home region. In a conversation with her son during their visit, Slavo and Sonia were told that she frequently falls into a trance-like state during naps and utters amazing things, In recent times she had repeated on a number of occasions that the body of Alexander the Great rested in our land.

I think that it was this strange meeting with Polizena that was "the last straw" for him. After that he made up his mind about what he must do.

Not long after that, Slavo dropped his "bombshell" during a meeting with Dionys and me.

"I've made up my mind. I know what I'll do. I'll publish it!"

Dionys and I stared at him in disbelief.

"What will you publish?"

Slavo continued:

" The copper book. I've had enough of all this secrecy. And intrigue. I'll display the book in the Shtip Museum or some state institution. If they want, I'll sell it to them. It's time that we cut the crap and settle things between me and the state."

" But why?", asked Dionys. I could barely wait to hear more myself.

" Because I don't see any point in risking anything more on account of the copper book. My meeting with the old woman was the final warning."

" Hm. Maybe you're right.", I said after considering all of this.

" It's the only thing that makes any sense. You and I are in danger, from who knows what source, so long as we hide the book. But if we make everything public, we eliminate the threat. Anyone who wants to see the book will be able to visit the museum and study it.", said Slavo.

"You know, there's some real sense to that.", I said, still mulling it over. "But what will the authorities have to say? Could the police decide to confiscate the book?"

"Who would dare to confiscate it?", responded Slavo. "It's a private possession. Part of my inheritance from my father. They can buy it, if they like, if I choose to sell it."

"Yes, that's how it ought to be. And how do you propose to carry out your plans?", I asked.

" I've already started talking to certain people in the state administration. They agree with my decision to put it on public view, and then place it with a museum. According to the law, it is possible for the state museum to display objects from private collections. And I'd like to say something else as well."

" Say it."

" In the novel that you're writing, feel free to write about my dad. Let everyone know. In fact, make sure you tell the whole story about what we've experienced, just as it happened.

"Are you sure you want me to do that?"

"Yes.", Slavo said. "Since I've decided to make the copper book public, there's nothing else to hide. Let the whole world know what happened."

"You seem to have really thought this through, and I think that you've made the right decision.", I said.

I completed the novel shortly after that. In addition to the description of everything as it actually happened, I've included my own imagined vision of how things might have happened in the course of the creation of the copper book, basing the story as much as possible on the stories passed down in Slavo's family. I wanted to make my story as vivid and powerful as possible, to stir the interest of readers. Meanwhile, Slavo proceeded with his plan. Over the course of the next several months he was busy with negotiations and preparations.

At this very moment as you read this account, the copper book is being made public, first of all for the benefit of scientific institutions, and eventually it will be made available for public viewing, once the necessary security measures and official red tape have been resolved. Then, you yourself may be the judge, as one more witness to this mystery. A mystery that is still far from being solved.

(TO BE CONTINUED...)

Notes on some of the historical events (listed in the order in which they appear in the book)

Alexander the Great's tomb. Despite scientific progress in research and continuous excavations, the mystery of Alexander the Great's tomb still has not unraveled.

According to the ancient texts from such sources as Strabo, Diodorus and Plutarch, Alexander the Great left Egypt in 331 BC traveling to Babylon (modern Iraq). There, he became ill, perhaps from malaria, though some sources tell of his poisoning, and on his way back to Macedonia, he died suddenly. On his deathbed he asked for his generals after which Alexander supposedly gave his ring to one named Perdikkas. Hence, the general was appointed regent of his huge empire until Alexander's queen, Roxane, gave birth to their child. This child was Alexander IV, who inherited his father's Empire, though apparently only briefly.

Philip Arrhidaeus was the general who had been chosen by the Macedonian army to be in charge of Alexander's funeral arrangement. Two years were required to prepare for Alexander's funeral convey, though its original destination seems to be a matter of speculation. Many scholars believe that indeed, his body was to be sent home to his ancestral burial grounds in Macedonia.

However, the years between 323 to 301 BC were troublesome, with endless conflicts among Alexander the

Great’s successors. Initially, Alexander IV and his mother were assassinated by Cassander who usurped the throne my marrying Thessaloniki, Alexander the Great's sister. In the ensuing conflict between Alexander's generals for succession, the body of the conqueror played a symbolic role which influenced the power struggles of these men.

Perdikkas, is thought to have at first sent the mummified remains of Alexander the Great on their way to Aigai, the old Macedonian capital, for burial. He had a magnificent funerary cart constructed for this purpose. The body was placed in a gold anthropoid sarcophagus which was then encased in a second gold casket and covered with a purple robe. Alexander's coffin was placed, together with his armor, in a gold carriage which had a vaulted roof supported by an Ionic peristyle. The decoration of the carriage was very rich and is described in great detail by Diodoros. An interesting reconstruction of the funerary cart has been developed by the modern archaeologist Stella Miller, who makes no claims as to its accuracy, so that scholars may visualize what Diodoros described.

However, Ptolemy Lagos, one of Alexander’s generals, wished to secure the wealthy territory of Egypt for himself, and it had been prophesized by Aristander, Alexander's favorite soothsayer, “*that the country in which the the body of Alexander the Great was buried would be the most prosperous in the world* “. Hence, he wanted the body of the conqueror to be buried in Egypt.

Already in control of Egypt as the founder of Egypt's Macedonian Period, Ptolemy attacked the funerary procession carrying Alexander's body (other variations of this account differ, though with the same results). Afterwards this procession was redirected to Memphis in

Egypt, where Alexander was initially buried. These events are described by all ancient historians. In fact, Diodorus describes the tomb of Alexander in Memphis with great detail.

Strabo and other ancient authors mention that Alexander's body was interred by Ptolemy II, the son of the first Ptolemy, in Alexandria after having been removed from its Memphis tomb. There, after an elaborate ceremony, the body was laid to rest in a Mausoleum called Soma or Sema. Soma was a part of Alexandria's Royal quarter. Achilles Tatius, an Alexandria historian who was born and lived in Alexandria in the 3rd century AD places its location in the center of the ancient city in a district name for the Soma monument. A number of ancient authors mention a district of Sema in Alexandria, including Achilles Tatius, Zenobius, Strabo, Lucian and others. There, the remains of Alexander the Great were laid in a golden sarcophagus within a grandiose building. The soma was enclosed by high walls and many believe that later it would also hold the Ptolemy Royal family tombs as well.

The tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria, where his body probably lay in public display, was visited by important personalities, scholars, as well as common tourists. We hear that Alexander's body was originally laid to rest in a golden sarcophagus, but Strabo, who visited Alexander's tomb himself in the first century AD, tells us in his reports that king Ptolemy IX (116-107, 87-81 BC), one of the most infamous successors of Ptolemy I, replaced Alexander's sarcophagus with one made of glass. Supposedly, Ptolemy IX melted down the original gold sarcophagus in order to strike emergency gold coinage.

Dion Cassius, a historian who lived between 155-235 AD and who was also consul of Africa in the reign of the Roman emperor Septimus Severus, reported Augustus's earlier request to see the body of Alexander. As he bent over the body to kiss the great conqueror, Augustus accidentally broke Alexander's nose. When Augustus was asked if he wanted to visit the tombs of the Ptolemies, he refused, saying that, "*I came to see a king and not dead people* ".

Several other Roman emperors reportedly visited the tomb of Alexander in Alexandria. Even prior to Augustus, the tomb was visited by Julius Ceasar in 45 BC. Later, the Roman Emperor Caligula went to Alexandria to visit the Sema and left with Alexander's cuirass (armor breastplate).

Septimus Severus (early third century AD) eventually closed the tomb to the public out of concern for its safety because of the hoards of tourists who visited the site. He is even said to have placed in the Mausoleum many secret books, reportedly "*so none could read the books nor see the body*".

The last reported imperial visit that we know from ancient accounts, according to Herodian, was made by Caracalla (3rd century AD), who believed that he was Alexander's reincarnation. This emperor dedicated a treasure of offerings to the body of Alexander, including his tunic, ring, belt and other jewelry.

In the 4th century AD, St. John Chrysostom, the Bishop of Constantinople (347-407), asked his people, "*Tell me where is the Sema of Alexander*?". His real purpose was to emphasize the futility of the world where even the greatest of men became lost in history, but in

asking, it became clear that the tomb of Alexander had completely vanished. No one can claim to have seen this tomb after the end of the 4th century.

Bisaltia. A region in Macedonia on the west from the river Strymon (Struma).

Roman stadium. A Roman distance measurement (about 185 metres).

The words *darvlo* (*a tree* or *drvo* in present day Macedonian) and *vadi* (*water* or *vodi* in present day Macedonian) are words from the language of the ancient Macedonians. The words *balaio* (*great* or *bolshoi*) *knuman* (*a tomb* or *humka* in present day Macedonian) and *bago* (*riches* or *blago* in present day Macedonian) are words from the ancient Brygian or Phrygian language, which was one of the precursors of the ancient Macedonian. The Brygians were one of the ethnic groups that later led to the ancient Macedonian ethnicity. For details and further information on this, consult the book "Jazikot na antichkite Makedontsi" by A. Donski, with a review by Dr Vera Stojchevska Antic, published by MNLD "Grigor Prlichev", Shtip/Sidney. 2006. ISBN 0 9757332 5 7).

Czar Samuel's empire and the battle on Belasitsa. Samuel came to power in Macedonia and also ruled other Balkans lands after he and his father Nikola led the uprising against the rule of the Turco-Mongol Bulgarians. The uprising was supported by Nikola's three other sons, the brothers of Samuel, namely David, Aaron, and Moses. At the time of the uprising, Byzantium occupied what is present-day Bulgaria, and Samuel together with his brothers succeeded in creating a new state better known in history as the "Empire of Samuel".

David, Samuel's brother, was the de facto ruler of the state, but he subsequently relinquished power and became a monk. After David and Moses died, a struggle for the throne ensued between Samuel and Aaron, in which Samuel prevailed. Aaron was killed together with his family, except for his son Ivan Vladislav, who was saved by Samuel's son, Gavrilo Radomir. Samuel thus became the ruler of the state whose center was in Macedonia. At the same time, Basil II the Macedonian was ruling Byzantium.

Within a short period of time, Samuel expanded the territory of his state. In the first serious battle between the Kingdom of Samuel and the Byzantine Empire, which took place at Trajan's Gate in 986 AC, Samuel's army achieved a significant victory. It destroyed virtually the entire Byzantine cavalry, and Emperor Basil II barely escaped certain death.

Following the battle at Trajan's Gate, Samuel's army entered Dalmatia, where Samuel annexed Diocleia, a region bordering Dalmatia, that stretches over most of the territory of present-day Montenegro, which was ruled by the young King Vladimir. Samuel defeated the king's army, dethroned him, and exiled him to Prespa (in Macedonia). Then he burned the cities of Kotor (in Montenegro) and Dubrovnik (in Croatia). The Kingdom of Samuel at its zenith encompassed the entire territory of Macedonia (with the exception of the city of Salonica), present-day Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Thessaly, Epirus, Diocleia and other coastal regions, present-day Albania and the greater part of present-day Bulgaria.

In an interesting development, Samuel's daughter Kosara fell in love with the exiled King Vladimir and eventually married him. Samuel then proclaimed Vladimir

as a king and returned to him the land of his ancestors, adding the town of Durazzo (in present-day Albania). As a result, Vladimir became Samuel's loyal vassal.

In the meantime, Basil II the Macedonian had succeeded in quelling the internal turmoil in Byzantium, and thus was able to turn his attention to attacking Samuel's state. Samuel was decisively defeated at the battle of Spercheos, when his army was set upon as they slept. Samuel himself was wounded. The two states and leaders concluded a peace again, and Samuel pledged servitude to Basil II in a written agreement.

Then, however, Samuel proclaimed himself a "Czar" probably with the aid of the Pope, who wanted to see Byzantium weakened. Upon hearing of Samuel's action, Basil II sent his army against him.

Samuel's second daughter, Miroslava, also married a war prisoner, one Ashot, the son of a Byzantine administrator of the city of Salonica. Samuel approved this marriage, as well and, having first agreed with his son-in-law Vladimir, gave the city of Durazzo to Ashot, to administer. However, Ashot betrayed Samuel and escaped to Byzantium. Miroslava followed Ashot and became a lady of the Byzantine court.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the war between Samuel and Basil II intensified. The Byzantines succeeded in acquiring significant parts of Samuel's territory. In 1001 AD, Basil II conquered the ancient Macedonian city of Veria (Ber). The city was supposed to have been defended by its administrator Dobromir, but, faced with an overwhelming force, Dobromir surrendered without a fight. Basil II then conquered the entire territory of Thessaly, bordering Macedonia, as well as the city of

Edessa (Voden) in Macedonia. In 1004, Basil II conquered Skopje (the capital city of the present-day Republic of Macedonia).

Because Basil II attacked Samuel through the pass in the Rhodope Mountains (in today's Bulgaria), Samuel ordered that mountain road be closed. However, the Byzantine strategist Theophilactos Botaniates with a large number of soldiers succeeded in encircling Mount Belasitsa (in the present-day Republic of Macedonia) and attacking Samuel's army from behind. On July 29, 1014, during the ferocious battle at Belasitsa, Samuel's army suffered a catastrophic defeat with many dead, wounded, and captured soldiers. Samuel himself barely evaded death and escaped to the city of Prilep (in the Republic of Macedonia).

Upon hearing that Samuel escaped, Basil II ordered the eyes of Samuel's captured soldiers (about 15,000) be gouged out — save for every 100th soldier, who was left with only one eye, so that the soldiers could return to Samuel. When Samuel saw his mutilated army, he suffered a heart attack and died on October 6, 1014.

Gavrilo Radomir succeeded Samuel on the throne, but Basil II continued to conquer new territories of the kingdom, including the towns of Shtip and Prilep (in today's Republic of Macedonia). Gavrilo Radomir consolidated his army and succeeded in defeating the Byzantine army on several occasions. Basil II recruited Ivan Vladislav, Aaron's son, to kill Gavrilo Radomir, even though the latter once had saved the former's life. Ivan Vladislav carried out the deed during a hunting trip in the autumn of 1015 and thus succeeded to Samuel's throne.

In 1016, Ivan Vladislav also killed Vladimir, Samuel's son-in-law, who was later canonised as a saint. Ivan Vladislav at first pledged to be Basil II's loyal vassal, but he then turned against him, as well. After several battles between the two, with alternating victories, Ivan Vladislav was killed. Samuel's kingdom effectively remained without a ruler as the Byzantine army began to advance. The court's leaders, without a king and exhausted by the constant warfare, began to surrender their kingdom's towns and fortresses to Basil II. In return, Basil II respected the courtiers' right to own the land they administered and gave them noble titles.

Ivan Vladislav's oldest son, Fruzin, continued to resist Basil II's advances, but he too surrendered in the end and in turn obtained a noble title. Several other feudal lords also resisted Basil II, but were either defeated or surrendered. By August 1018, Basil II had conquered the kingdom of Samuel and it ceased to exist as a state.

Goli otok (literal translation: "barren island") is an island off the northern Adriatic coast. The island is barren and uninhabited. Its northern shore is almost completely bare, while the southern one has small amounts of vegetation as well as a number of coves. Humans first took notice of the island during modern times. Throughout World War I, Austria-Hungary sent Russian prisoners to Goli Otok.

In 1949, the entire island was officially made into a high-security, top secret prison and labor camp run by the authorities of communist Yugoslavia. Until 1956 it was used to incarcerate political prisoners or even regular citizens accused of exhibiting any sort of sympathy or leanings towards the Soviet Union. Non-political prisoners

were also sent to the island. Some were sent to serve out simple criminal sentences.

The prison inmates were forced to do heavy labor in a stone quarry, regardless of the weather conditions. Inmates were also regularly beaten and humiliated.

After Yugoslavia normalized its relations with the Soviet Union, Goli Otok prison passed to the provincial jurisdiction of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (as opposed to the Yugoslav federal authorities).

The prison was shut down in 1988, and completely abandoned in 1989. Since then it has been left to ruin. Today it is frequented by the occasional tourist on a boat trip and populated by shepherds from Rab.

Baba Vanga. Granny Vanga (Vangelia Pandeva Dimitrova) is one of the best clairvoyants in the world. She was of a Macedonian origin (born in Strumitsa, today in Republic of Macedonia).

In her childhood, Vanga was an ordinary girl. A turning point in the biography of Vanga is a story about a storm which lifted Vanga up and threw her in the. She was found after a long search. She was very frightened, and her eyes were covered with sand and dust, so she couldn't open them because of the pain. No healing gave results. In 1925 Vanga was brought to a Blind House in Zemun, Serbia, where she spent three years, and was taught to read Braille, play the piano, as well as do knitting, cooking, and cleaning. After the death of her stepmother she had to go back home, in order to take care of her little siblings. Her family was very poor, and she had to work all day.

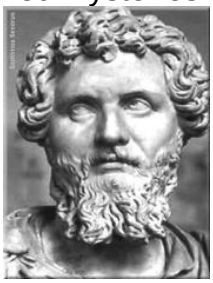
During World War II Vanga attracted more believers - a number of people visiting her, hoping to get a hint about whether their relatives are alive, or seeking for

the place where they died. On 8 April 1942 the Bulgarian king Boris III visited her and she told him the exact date of his death.

In May 1942 Vanga married Dimitar Gushterov with whom she moved to Petrich (in Pirin macedonia under Bulgaria), where she soon became well-known. Dimitar died in 1962. Vanga continued with her activity although under the communist regime. She died on 11 August 1996.

The informations about Captain Angel Ivanovski in this book appears with the approval and permission of his son Slavo Ivanovski.

Alexander the Great of Macedonia left many unsolved mysteries



The Roman emperor, Septimius Severus, was the last one to know the secret of the mysterious writings and of the burial remains of Alexander the Great.

“Return of the Blinded Soldiers of Tsar Samuel’s Army” (1969) A work by Lubomir Donski (1926-2006). This large composition (2 by 1.7 meters) was painted on the occasion of the one thousand year anniversary of Tsar Samuel’s empire. It is today located in the archbishop’s residence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Skopje.

Captain Angel Ivanovski,
photographed a short time before his arrest

IVANOVSKI Slavko ANGEL, biv. kapetan - slušaoc intendantske oficirske škole.

Rodjen 1922 godine u selu Pojatica, srez Titov Veles, Makedonsko, po zanimanju kožarski radnik, svršio 3 raz. gimn. u JNA, oženjen, otac jednog deteta, u JNA od 7 avgusta 1944 godine, član SKJ bio sa prekidom od 1942 do decembra 1944 godine, i ponovo primljen i bio do hapšenja.

Lišen slobode 17 januara 1951 godine.

Pravosnažnom presudom Vojnog suda u Sarajevu, sud br. 227/51 od 4 jula 1951 godine, osudjen na kaznu strogog zatvora u trajanju od 6 godina.

Osudjen je:

- što je, pred svedokom Kolarević Slavkom u više navrata od juna 1950 godine, u vezi pomoći koju primaju od Amerikanaca i ostalih zapadnih zemalja govorio, da to znači za naš narod predaja pod američki uticaj i da smo time postali zavisni od Amerikanaca, "da smo naturalisani i pasivizirani", da je SSSR nekada također bio u zaduženju, ali da nije ništa slično kao pomoć, na je

Copy of the original charges brought against Captain Angel Ivanovski. (Taken from his dossier)

Original inscriptions from the first page of the Copper book, where the following words appear: ANTIKOU ALEXANDRU BASILEU BENEDIKTU BOGATSTVO (translated, it reads: *The treasure of the ancient blessed Emperor Alexander*)

Slavo Ivanovski, of Hotel Oasis (left), and Alexander Donski, photographed during a high school outing. (Kraguevac, Srbija, May, 1977)

REVIEWS

BRIEF HISTORY OF A MISTERY
ALEKSANDAR DONSKI's history fiction:
"THE SECRET OF THE COPPER BOOK"

The writer and historian Aleksandar Donski this time is offering to the Macedonian and world literature and to the disciplines of history and anthropology a book that supersedes time and space boundaries of civilisation continuity. This book contains a unique magic power to supersede even the boundaries of the human sacral imagination, while performing a paralel masterful vivisection of its secular and documentary content.

The author Donski has applied the simplified wisdom of the biblical writer Solomon in a unique unison with the journalistic lapidary style of the American Nobel prize laureate Ernest Hemingway. The result is a work in the Macedonian *magic realism* that secures Donski's place in the 21st century world literature. Producing an synergy of fiction and documentary genre, the author transports his literary-historic research to a point from which he observes the ancient world with a novel equipment of his creative genius.

Donski acquires the role of both a folk sage and a science-fiction captain of a Star Trek ship. His novel of sense but not of sensationalism, connects civilisations, traditions and languages within a supernaturally intrigued dilemma of the spirit, within an enigma that remains to be resolved in the future

tasks in discovering earth realities. In his *book about a book* Donski presents an authorship of synthesis between the real and the surreal. To accomplish this he assembles a literary organism that, like an anthropological android in his highly organised function, coordinates between the extinction of a finite individual on the planet (Alexander the Great) and between the continuity of the sacral secrets on earth (the mystery about his burial ground).

Donski confirms the notorious paradox that reality could be more fantastic than the fact-proven objectivity. The researching time-machine, operated by the writer Donski, runs on inter-active energy between the past, the present and the "potential" futurism, in its literary goal to integrate the interdependence of the worlds and the words in different communication codes and modes. On the course of his panoramic view offered from his trans-temporal and trans-spatial "creative cabin", Donski transforms the understanding of cognition and recognition. He serves not only as a narrator but as a conduit of multi-media, multi-cultural coexistence - to remind the world that the cosmic power does not discriminate but does demonstrate that even the best leaders of mankind are subdued to becoming lost toys in the caverns and mountains of the unknown.

That is how the destination course: discovery of the secret burial grounds of the Macedonian king Alexander the Great, transports the novel action through quantum leaps. Donski leads the reader through Rome and its mysteriously tormented emperor Septimius Severus, as the cosmic force urges that he is "liberated" of his sacred

duty that torments him, the duty being to keep Alexander the Great's secret.

After the historic introduction Donski develops the plot into another continent. The action arrives to another time-space destination: Macedonia and its tragically terrorized king Samuel who wisely pledges to protect from the unworthy hands the secret about the copper book and the sarcophagus with Alexander the Great's legendary wealth. This incredibly convincing history fiction crosses history and world history events to reach the 20th century Macedonia.

In his mystery novel Donski accomplished a fusion of two thousand years within a radius filled with prominent figures, formidable facts and well known events that took place in the Balkans and around the world. Among them we are in the company of Winston Churchil, Ljudmila Zhivkova, the famous Macedonian clairvoyant Vangia, the Turkish hodja from Bitola, Macedonia, the treasurer of the Ottoman empire. We also encounter a linguistic phenomenon: the intermittent application of languages in official discourse of the time the characters interplayed their roles: Latin, Romeic (an Indo-European innovative version of Esperanto that became Donski's intellectual novel product), as well as another exclusive linguistic phenomenon of including the ancient-Macedonian language. Another rare cultural, anthropological and linguistic value presents the re-introduction of the Macedonian *rebush*, which is secret Macedonian symbolic script.

Through this extensive inter-related network of facts and figures, the author penetrates beyond the

boundaries of cultural divisiveness and incredibly intelligently flows into the contemporary currents of today. There we witness the ongoing legal procedures being introduced to benefit the archaeological excavations, protection and legal regulation from illegal activities and rampant ID thefts taking place in Macedonia by anti-Macedonian trends. The author takes us further, to the infamous “Goli Otok”, the equivalent of “The Gulag Archipelago” in Tito’s Yugoslavia. This is the last destination on the time-line of mystical events, places and people that are secretly impacted by the magic power of possessing the copper book. An unprecedented intellectual explosion reflected on both the academic and the common mind accompanies these revelations.

Resuming the role of a presumable space traveller, the reader is repetitively and then conclusively witnessing absurd tortures that finally replicate in the crude dialectic and diabolic materialism that equals the anti-humanism of the Yugoslav communist purge. At this stage of his narration Donski introduces the children of this purge victims, one of them having transformed into an influential builder of the Macedonian prosperity in the post-communist development of the town of Stip, who is the actual owner of the secret Copper Book. He is Slavo Ivanovski, also known as “Oaza” (the owner of hotel Oaza in the historic town of Stip).

Two aspects in the final analysis of this novel are extrapolated. One of them is the executors of the Orvelian maltreatment induced by the mysticism and the supernatural power of the “secret book”. The other one is the paradox that the executors ironically enact their own

anti-thesis by imposing a cynical dogma against the noble spiritual dimension of being. These executors come from the dark materialistic and Machiavelistic world that severely opposes the spiritual one as if dreadfully facing the Angel of Light.

Being a visionary who interrelates the realistic and sceptical with the sensible and intuitive realm, Donski explores and expands on probable off-course shifts of the plot and unexpected resolutions of surprising historic and psychological phenomena By this he reveals the spiritual reaction to the merciless mundane actions on the scenes of earthly destiny.

Donski proceeds the human necessity to search for the lost, to figure out the inexplicable and at the same time to preserve the inherited secret as a cursed mystery according to which the spiritual power belongs to those individuals and nations that know how to preserve and prepare for the wisest revival of the rule of spiritual values.

The global communications and their inevitability to equip with translations from the “minor” languages, will soon obtain the capacity to recognize the grandeur of the writer’s genius of Donski, the author and historian from the South Balkan. When that takes place, neither Garcia Markes nor Paolo Coelho in their cosmopolitism located in South America will no longer appear superior with their peculiar projection of cultures cultivated in the southern hemispheres. Even the “founder” of the modern short story horror, Edgar Allan Poe, will envy the intellectual genius of the writer Donski. The reason? Donski presents history as a story of inter-cultural swift, as a splendid touch of ethnicity and eternity, of horror of extinction and honour of

preservation, of fear of failure to lose the heritage, of ironical twists of the faith and of perpetual triumphs of fidelity, exemplified by the historically “undying”, recurring, redefining and refining character though the metaphorical, metaphysical and physical figure of Angel.

Donski introduces his masterful narration from the first page of his thriller with impregnated images compressed with emotional and cognitive mass. He renders the story in short and dense sentences, witty mental games and gameful gammas of metaphors. This *specialist in microsurgery* of history, and of the conscience about history, transports the reader through the portal of unique visions of people and places. The author performs this communication between the worlds from a virtual, highly organized cabin of his mind, equipped with moral and patriotic messages (ex. The earthling saves Angel’s life) with life wisdom that operates through tantalizing psychological dilemmas, complex situations and extraordinary fatal figures.

The protagonists in his novel discover a common denominator in the captain, axiomatically named Angel, as he serves the Macedonian “time machine”, that also undergoes the Romanization (likening the anglicanization of the computer programs of today), transporting and translating the impact of the history of culture as old as two millennia. The continuous reappearance of certain characters and interactions is designed to increase the irony in the convincing power that even mistakes in history repeat themselves, as if mankind does not learn from its own past. Seemingly, each time phase reflects parallel worlds of an inevitable copy of a lesson non-learned, and

of an exam not-passed. The search after the meaning of the secrecy (of the book) continues, despite the change of oppressors and oppressed, despite the evolving flow of differences that occur on linguistic stages.

As the author Donski uses multiple languages, he also applies variants of psychological sketches and profiles to depict the complexity of the human soul. He does that with his micro-analytical power, with an expert'ssease and relevancy. Donski does it for the purpose of fusing the idea about a given world in a given time, at the same time acquiring the general idea about the mystery of the human race. His intention in doing this is to transfer message and warning that one should delete the genealogy of betrayal when it comes to the sacred duty of being great, of being grand and worthy of admiration and adoration as a member of the humankind. That understands to be an individual who, in the likes of Goce Delchev, could understand the world as a field for cultural competition among people and nations.

Alexander the Great of Macedonia remains to be mysteriously unknown in equal regards to his material and spiritual heritage, as well as to the prophecies and messages about him.

Aleksandar Donski, his countryman, has relentlessly employed all his arsenal to make a world contribution to the planetary search for the most famous fortune yet unfound, a fortune that will bless the nation where it is being discovered. The historian and science fiction writer, Donski, performs his discovery mission in-possible by engaging both styles of a history screenplay and of eclectic literary genres, integrating methods and means of

philosophical and physical notions that build his prominent literary heights.

The most well-known king of all times, Alexander the Great, together with his most un-known gift for mankind: his spiritual and material riches that are as much blessed as they are a cursed mystery, remain to be buried together with the physical remains comprised of the king's human flesh and of his supernatural fame.

Yet, the author Donski turns the enigmatic saga about the hidden sarcophagus and the secret codes to find it, more valuable and valid for an international multi-disciplinary research and for further academic, and political analysis. Above all, Donski turns the secret of this book into the hands and minds of the individual self-analysis involving the price and the prize of keeping a secret, and the losses that come with the determination to protect the fatal meaning of the hidden treasure, although that same secret suggests that the lucky nation that discovers the secret code of the Copper Book and thus the hidden grave of Alexander the Great, will transform into the most prosperous and most privileged one on earth.

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August 2007

in memory of her divine daughter
Emilija Doneva KUKUBAJSKA (08.16.1979 - 9.11.2006)

REVIEW OF THE BOOK
THE MYSTERY OF THE COPPER BOOK

The author of the *The Mystery of the Copper Book*, historian Aleksandar Donski, gives us the major theme of his new book in its sub-title: "*the mysterious writings about the treasure of Alexander the Great of Macedonia*", an "*historical thriller, inspired by real events*." The question that will repeat itself in the reader's mind over and over again with the turning of each and every page of this new book: Is this story true? But if it is true, why did the author choose to "dress" the story in the form of a novel? And if it isn't true, why are so many plausible, detailed facts presented in this "story"? In the end the reader must simply call it what the author does- a mystery.

Readers will no doubt debate the issue. However, the taking of sides may only be a matter of optimists favouring the opinion that it is all authentic and true, while pessimists will favour the view that it is all an elaborate hoax. The evidence itself is simply inconclusive.

The story is fascinating, in any case. It is a masterful blend of known facts- the copper book exists! And imaginative speculation- what did the ancient guardians have in mind? The copper book is not the only text that has come to the attention of modern science that will not easily yield its message. There are others that immediately come to mind that are of great interest to scientific researchers, such as the mysterious third text of the famous Egyptian Rosetta Stone.

In each case, we have considerable evidence right in front of us. Able researchers have given us their best answers. But there is still no scientific consensus, no

conclusive evidence to support a thoroughly convincing theory exists. Thus, the mystery remains.

Here again, in the case of the copper book, the mystery remains. The author, in his usual clear and concise style, has given us as many of the pieces as possible. He has provided detailed evidence for anyone who is interested to sift through, to try to fit the pieces, literally or figuratively. You be the judge, he is saying to us.

The author also raises a serious issue for all of us to consider. Has modern state law done more to hinder than to help archaeological science by insisting that artifacts are state property? By denying the finders property rights and turning them into criminals, the actual result of such law has been to deny scientists the opportunity to learn all they might from private discoveries.

One of the most intriguing pieces of the puzzle was the response to the copper book by the Balkan's most famous modern seer, Baba Vanja. She seemed to confirm the authenticity of the book, but at the same time her cryptic words seemed to add a new layer to the mystery.

For those who insist on easy answers, for whom "life is no more than a problem to be solved," this book will perhaps inform, but not delight. For others, however, for whom "life is a mystery to be lived," the book *The Mystery of the Copper Book* by author historian Aleksandar Donski will be one more tantalizing journey into mystery. It is a journey to be enjoyed on the way, whether the journey ends in full disclosure or only in new questions only to be answered at some future time.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aleksandar DONSKI is born on November 1960 in Shtip, Republic of Macedonia. He originates from an artistic family. He graduated on the faculty of History of Art with archaeology on the University of "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje and has a Masters from the University of "Goce Delchev" in Shtip where he works as an executive of the University library and as a member of the Institute of History and Archaeology. He is an author of 25 books based on history, folklore, religion and literature, as well a few hundred articles in newspapers, magazines and on the internet. He is also an author of a large number of TV and radio documentary programs regarding history, folklore and his travels, for which he has received awards and acknowledgements.