

1985

ta'en

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ta'en · *C. P. Cavafy*

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reading Greek
folk lately
our stuff
the kind close to the heart
of wars and feats of freedom
outlaws
the sweet stuff

reading then the mournful ones
on Constantinople's fall the fall
of Saloniki
of the Voice heard
as the king
on the left chanted to Patriarch
on the right
saying hold
those papers close the gospels
Constantinople's fallen and so is Saloniki

what touched me deepest was
the song from Trebizond in its strange tongue
the sorrow of those distant Greeks
believing we'd still make it
somehow

a bird of fate though
in fro' the 'Polis
a roundwrit paper on its wing
lighting neither in yard nor vine but rather at
the cypress root
the leading priest not
able—or just unwilling—to take up
and read
the wedos son instead

Janikas picks
and reads
and starts the moan

alas is us
and wellaway
beating his heart
alas is us

Byzance is ta'en

translated from the Greek by Stavros Deligiorgis