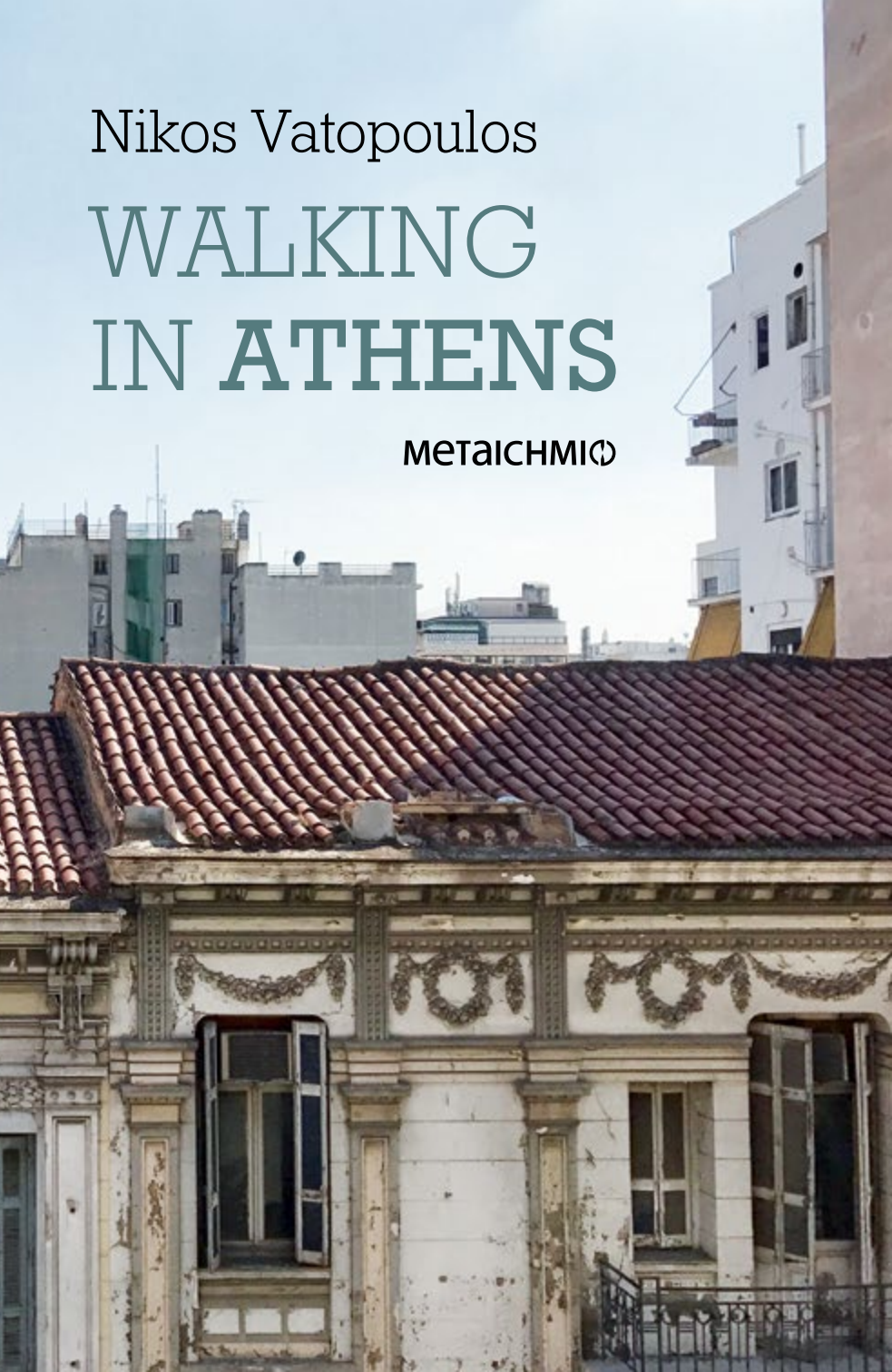


Nikos Vatopoulos

WALKING IN ATHENS

METAICHMIO



All footnotes belong to the translator of the book.

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The mythology of the landscape

The Acropolis evokes a sense of ecstasy in its beholders... but did it always? At New Year, when it represents the city, the country and the whole imagined reality of the nation, we can hardly picture the city without it. The same goes when Athens is covered in snow, or heralds a new century, or celebrates the full moon or a national anniversary.

I found myself deep in an ocean of associations as I walked along Apostolou Pavlou Street, over the hills of Thiseio, observing the change in perspective of the Acropolis. Yes, in a handful of places you can still have a 'sense of landscape' in this immense city. But even the very notion of landscape is a modern one. I had been absorbed in a superb book over several days, and under its influence I saw the city again: through its openings, clearings, ravines, skies, ascents, descents, on the city slopes themselves. From Mets, Makrygianni, Monastiraki and the Lycabettus Hill, the image of Athens remains idealised – changeless, stripped bare; a confirmation of existence. The book was *Photography and the Greek landscape. Between myth and ideology* by Hercules Papaioannou (Agra Publications). Caught in eddies of thought, association and reflection, I ventured out to meet the city anew. Hercules Papaioannou writes of the



landscape in general, not just Athens, and he dresses it up in every possible garb – whether philosophical, intercultural, aesthetic or national. Against this intricate, tightly-knotted canvas, Athens emerges as I had never before seen it, through the mists of discovery. From the travellers of the eighteenth century, the nation state, the Great Idea and the convulsions between the Wars, from the pioneering photographer Filippos Margaritis to Nelly's and contemporary photographers...



Athens, through its much-interpreted landscape, appears as a palimpsest of desires, projections and expectations –collective and personal, realist and ideal.

We as users, receivers and transmitters of the Athenian 'manner', are in turn held in a reciprocal relationship with the landscape of the city. I do not know how many times I have



looked at the Acropolis, consciously or not, and I do not know in what way a sense of confirmation of the place, recognition of the moment, and self-definition of my consciousness passes through me each time.

Beyond all this, however – beyond all the ideological baggage – the sense of landscape in the city is surrounded (not more than that) by an immaterial aura of sanctity. But even this perception is loaded with ideology. It is culturally informed. Put simply, any attempt to form a personal relation-



ship with the landscape is bound up in a long series of associations, which confound any specific vision.

Nonetheless, the myth of the Athenian landscape is one of the city's very real possibilities. It will continue after us to change and be changed.

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