

NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS' *TRAVELLING: THE MOREA* –  
BYZANTIUM AS AN IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT  
OR A UNIQUE SOURCE OF PERSONAL INSPIRATION?

by

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ABSTRACT: In September 1937, Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) set out on a tour of the Peloponnese commissioned by the newspaper *Kathimerini*. Relying on Kazantzakis' account from his *Travelling: The Morea*, I focus on his impressions of the Byzantine heritage that he had the opportunity to contemplate *in situ*, as an eye-witness. Such an approach to Kazantzakis' work (which has previously been mistreated) may shed some light on the Byzantine past not merely as an abstract idea used for ideological purposes, which is rather obvious, but as something more tangible, especially for a Greek, and thus constituting a significant component of personal inspiration for the writer. I will devote my attention both to visible traces of the cultural wealth of Byzantium, especially in Mystras, and to notable and influential Byzantine personages he mentions while sightseeing in the former capital of the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea, i.e., George Gemistos Plethon and Constantine Palaiologos. My aim is to show the uniqueness of the reception of Byzantium in Kazantzakis' travelogue which, in my opinion, significantly differs from the well-known stereotypical West European perspective.

*Να βυθιστώ στο όραμα Βυζαντίου*  
N. Kazantzakis, 8 December 1914

I. GREEK BYZANTIUM – A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Museum of Nikos Kazantzakis and the Museum of Byzantine Culture, together with the Regional Directorate of Crete, organized the exhibition *Kazantzakis and Byzantium: the Quest for the Divine* (15 March–15 September 2019) in Thessaloniki. The items on display, most of which were shown to the public for the first time, included Kazantzakis' earliest personal diaries from his visits to Mount Athos and the Peloponnese in 1914 together with his spiritual brother, the renowned poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1951)<sup>1</sup>. The organisers

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<sup>1</sup> The diary was published in 2020 by the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, see KAZANTZAKIS 2020.