

THE LIGHT OF THE CYPRIOT SUN IN THE POETRY
OF GEORGE SEFERIS

By

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George Seferis (1900–1971), the first Greek Nobel Prize winner for literature (1963), visited Cyprus several times during his diplomatic career. His subsequent sojourns in 1953, 1954 and 1955 that he made from Beirut where he had been posted, coincided with the time of the struggle for self-determination of the Greek population of the island. Later, as an ambassador to Great Britain (1957–1962) he eagerly strived towards the solution of the Cyprus dispute. His emotional attitude towards the island is visible in the collection of poems *Logbook III (Ημερολόγιο Καταστρώματος Γ')* first published in 1955 and inspired by his visits in Cyprus. Initially the collection appeared under the title *Κύπρον, οὗ μ' ἔθεσπισεν...* (“Cyprus, where it was ordained for me...”), which was a quotation from Euripides’ *Helen* (148). Its speaker is Teucer, the most famous and skilled archer in the Trojan war (Hom. *Il.* VIII 265 ff.; XII 329 ff., 364 ff.), who – according to the instructions of Apollo’s oracle – had to sail until he reached Cyprus where he was to settle (Eur. *Hel.* 148–150). The words from the ancient play placed as the title out of context may underline the personal attitude of the poet to the island¹. However, in 1962 Seferis removed this title and placed it as a motto in one of the most significant poems in the *Logbook III*, “Helen”. The whole collection is dedicated “to the people of Cyprus, in memory and love” (Στον κόσμο της Κύπρου. Μνήμη και Αγάπη) and consists of the poems written mostly during his two winter visits in 1953 and 1954, the time of crucial decisions concerning the island’s future when the autonomy under a constitution proposed by the British administration was eventually rejected².

The visit in Cyprus is for Seferis a sort of revelation of “a place where the miracle still functions” (όπου το θαύμα λειτουργεί ακόμα)³, as he writes in his

¹ ΚΡΙΚΟΣ-DAVIS 1994: 28.

² BEATON 2004: 205.

³ MARONITIS 1987: 160; VITTI 1994: 241; BEATON 2003: 293.