

History-writing is a tautology, since writing in itself is history. I am bound by language in thought, and even more so, naturally, in speech. But there, the words are still living things. There they writhe like the serpent, there they shift complexion like the lizard in its exposure to a world it is trying to emulate. But put a pen in my hand, and have me chain the words to paper by ink and they will instantly be condemned to death. Here they die, and language becomes a past; writing, a history which can be interpreted or forgotten, but never undone or revived.

Nevertheless, there is a history to be told, and as there is no one to listen, I will bury it here in a procession of petrified signs and letters. Sing to me, Muse. Or just dictate slowly, I don't mind.

As young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more, in a year before the years were numbered, a man came walking through the valley of Dodona. The man was a priest and he had come to listen to the oracle. A pair of grey-speckled kingfishers chased by him as he entered the grove and followed the bubbling spring to the foot of the great green oak of Zeus Naos. There he sat down, on a polished marble bench straddling the giant roots. For a long time he did nothing but listen. The clouds drove across the mountain ridge and warblers sang intermittently. Eventually he raised his voice in prayer:

"All-knowing Zeus, hear me now as I address thee! I have come to ask what the future holds for my people and its descendants. I shall pour libations to your honour in the hope that you will grant me a prophecy of the ages to come."

At that the priest took out a jar of fine wine from his rinsel and drew some in a silver cup to be poured onto the ground at the tree's foot. After doing so he sat back once more in silence and heard the wind rattle through the lovely green leaves.

Then the tree spoke.

Around 600BC, the first track-steered wagonway is constructed across the Isthmus of Corinth. The 8,5km long route consists of grooves carved into limestone along which wagons can be drawn without risk of derailing.

In the year 391, the oracle oak in the Dodona sanctuary is cut down by Christians and its roots excavated.

On July the 20th, 1837, the first railway station in London opens, to form the terminus of the new London-Birmingham line; one of the very first intercity trainlines in Britain, and indeed, the world. The station, designed by Thomas Hardwick, sports two platforms, a 61m long trainshed with wrought iron roof, and, as an entrance, a 22m high Doric propylaeum; the Euston arch.

In 1875 archeologist K. Karapanos leads the first excavations at Dodona, which identify the old sanctuary and several buildings.

1961, the Euston arch is torn down, to make place for a new modern station building in concrete which opens 1968. The public outcry at the demolition of the old Euston station leads to the formation of the Victorian Society and heralds the modern conservation movement.

In the late 1960s, during restoration work on the remains of the Dodona sanctuary, the archeologists plant a new oaktree in the place of Zeus' removed oracle. The new tree can not tell the future.

The Greek sun had awoken insects in their thousands. The day bustled forth in a cacophony of buzzing and chirping. The priest ran his hands over the marble. No questions had been answered. Time, as he knew it, had been reduced to numbers. Points connected by unuttered and clearly imaginary threads. The oak of Zeus had but given one clarification: History, whether extended forward or backward, is nothing but years and names. Signposts pointing always to one end.

"To what end?" he had asked.

"The present"

He took out a bronze knife from its sheath, admired it, let it rattle a couple of times across the marble surface, and then started carving letters into the side of the bench.

The text is the past, while I move into the future. But as the future disappears at a faster rate than the past, soon I, too, will dissolve. Or have already dissolved. And years later, all that remained was this sentence.