

I feel elated and touched to be here today at the opening of the Fourth International Conference of Astrophysics. It is wonderful that a conference of such high scientific standing takes place in our small village. It is a tribute to our village and a tribute to Arcadia, famous since antiquity, and lauded by great writers, poets and painters for its enchanting natural beauty.

As you all know, the renowned painter Nicolas Poussin, who lived in the 17th century, depicts an idyllic pastoral life in his work “The Shepherds of Arcadia”. Its Latin inscription, ET IN ARCADIA EGO, which is interpreted as “I too belong to Arcadia” or “I too was in Arcadia”, contributed to the embodiment of the Arcadian Ideal and inspired later poets, writers, musicians and philosophers.

So, whoever happened to be born in Arcadia can proudly say: ET IN ARCADIA EGO, “I too belong to Arcadia”. Also, any visitor can equally say with pride: ET IN ARCADIA EGO, “I too was in Arcadia”.

Of course, the Arcadian Ideal is based on the mythological pastoral country of the goat-hoofed god Pan and conveys an idealised picture of life, a picture of pastoral paradise, a utopia.

However, from ancient times and until even 50 years ago, life was vibrant in the villages of Arcadia and exuded an idyllic atmosphere. At the beginning of summer, where now one sees deserted places becoming forests, the ripe wheat was undulating, the newly-sown corn had already sprouted and, between its ruts, grew chickpeas and beans. The vegetables in gardens and orchards were a lush green, and the sheep and goats were feeling the pressure of their milk which was processed into butter, cheese and ricotta, goods that sustained families through-out the year.

For us who today live away from Arcadia, nostalgia inevitably infuses our memories of those rural activities of sowing and reaping, the gathering of the crops, picking of the grapes for days of celebrations and festivities. It is difficult for one to give an authentic picture of that past idyllic life. Naturally, there is also the tendency to embellish the past. Undoubtedly, life in those years was frugal and hard. However, the food was pure, the environment clean and there was no pollution - everything was recycled.

I will finish with a poem of the late poet Nikos Gatsos from Asea, the next village.

A few trees, a few houses and an empty sky
was all our world, was all our possessions.
The jug on the window-sill, the well in the yard
the courage of the mother, the advice of the father.
With the cold, with the snow, with the tear in the heart.
The bread frugal, the snacks few
and to earth, the first mother, big thanks.
That was our life and not any other
small and modest but also great
and if at times it distressed us – never mind.

Yota Krili, May 2017