

The Architect

This story was revealed to me in a dream, while I slept under the stars on a deserted beach on the east coast of Northern Cyprus. I woke as the sun rose over the Latakian sea, and scribbled down those fragments of my dream which I could drag back from the fog of sleep. I believe I dreamed of a time long past, perhaps 400 years before the birth of Christ.

The fifth day of the month of Agúios

Evagorus, King of Cyprus, prince among men, in the eighth year of his reign, has decreed that in his city of Salamis a temple shall be erected to the glory of Zeus and in honour of his forefather Teucer son of Telamon, of the Argonauts.

I, Diodorus of Ammochostos, am the King's architect, and it is my duty and privilege to direct the building of this monument. Many tasks lie before me: levelling the ground, establishing the foundations, setting out the positions of the colonnades according to sacred mathematical principles, overseeing the quarrying and shaping of great blocks of stone into pillars, capitals, lintels, flagstones and more. Arrangements for the accommodation and feeding of many hundred slaves, overseers and craftsmen from all over Cyprus are the care of my younger brother, Leonidas, who I have appointed as one of my deputies. I think Leo would have preferred a more prominent role, but he is not yet ready.

The fifteenth day of the month of Agúios

The work proceeds slowly. No work is done from noon until the heat of the day has abated. His Majesty has sent an envoy, Antalcidas, to demand faster progress, but the slaves are already struggling with the strenuous and difficult work. We must avoid a revolt which would delay us further.

The twelfth day of the month of Dióskouros

From the top of the newly-laid entrance steps I can see the foundations of the walls and the bases on which the pillars will soon be erected. Walking east through the centre of the temple, I can imagine worshipers gathering there to praise the great god Zeus, whose image is being sculpted from the whitest

marble in a workshop in the city. Our Zeus Salaminios will be the finest Zeus in the Eastern Sea.

Much of the floor is reserved for mosaics. My particular pride is the mosaic in the sanctuary, which I have designed myself. It is the most sacred part of the temple, where none but the priestesses and the King may go. The mosaic will be an image of Zeus enthroned on the holy mountain, and for the god's face I have given the craftsmen a papyrus image of His Majesty to work from. They prepare the work on small panels using many marble tesserae of miraculous colours. Only the most careful and trusted slaves are allowed to install the panels in their proper place on the sanctuary floor.

Antalcidas has not yet returned to the King at Ammochostos. He is most insistent that I should compel the slaves to work after midday. Leo does not think this will speed things up in the long run, and I agree with him. Nevertheless, we are the King's subjects, and must zealously execute his wishes, so I give the order for work to continue for two hours after noon.

The last day of the month of Theodósios

The searing afternoon heat and heavy workload has overwhelmed some slaves. The northern barbarians have been particularly affected, but the Anatolians and Ethiopians are more accustomed to the heat. Eighteen northerners and four Ethiopians have died of exhaustion, and we have had fifteen accidental deaths. Overall about one in nine of the remaining slaves are unfit for their usual duties. All are increasingly rebellious. Even though the afternoon work is at the King's insistence, they blame me for their suffering, so for safety I take two soldiers with me wherever I go. Antalcidas has agreed to petition the King for more slaves and more troops to guard them, although whether they will come is not certain. While we await an answer, the mosaic in the sanctuary progresses well. I enjoy working with the craftsmen on the most important panels, as a respite from the cares of my position.

This morning I saw Leo and Antalcidas talking in a distant corner of the works. Leo told me later he was expressing his concern about a possible revolt.

The twenty-second day of the month of Póntios

I have directed part of the mosaic to be destroyed and re-done. The image

was insufficiently reverential to the god, particularly the face. It will take no more than a month to re-do; the craftsmen are willing and the slaves have no choice.

The eighteenth day of the month of Rhabínthios

I am chained in the King's palace in Ammochostos, where tomorrow I am to be executed. My brother Leo has taken my place, with the connivance of Antalcidas. They have planned my downfall from the start, blaming me for the slave revolt which they engineered, and telling the King that I ordered his face to be destroyed in the sacred mosaic. I cannot express the depth of my pain and anger at my brother's betrayal, and my despair that he, not I, will be remembered as the builder of the temple of Zeus at Salamis. I must prepare myself now to cross the Styx, hopeful that Charon, the dread ferryman, will not carry me too far down the river to awful punishment. Perhaps I will be remembered at least for my mosaic, completed to perfection just before my arrest, and which shall last for five thousand years.

On the morning after my dream of ancient Cyprus, I wandered alone in the ruins of Salamis and its temple, admiring what remains of the buildings, for I too am an architect. From the dust, I picked up a single white tessera, about one centimetre square. Of the temple mosaic, there was no trace.