

The Library of Maps, #37
Text by Moira Roth
Drawings by Slobodan Dan Paich

THE MAP OF STONES
For Lydia Matthews

I

Stones

Collected from all over the world
—from oceans, streams, ponds, lakes, grottoes, rivers, and fountains—
Had been brought to the Library
Shortly after it was built.

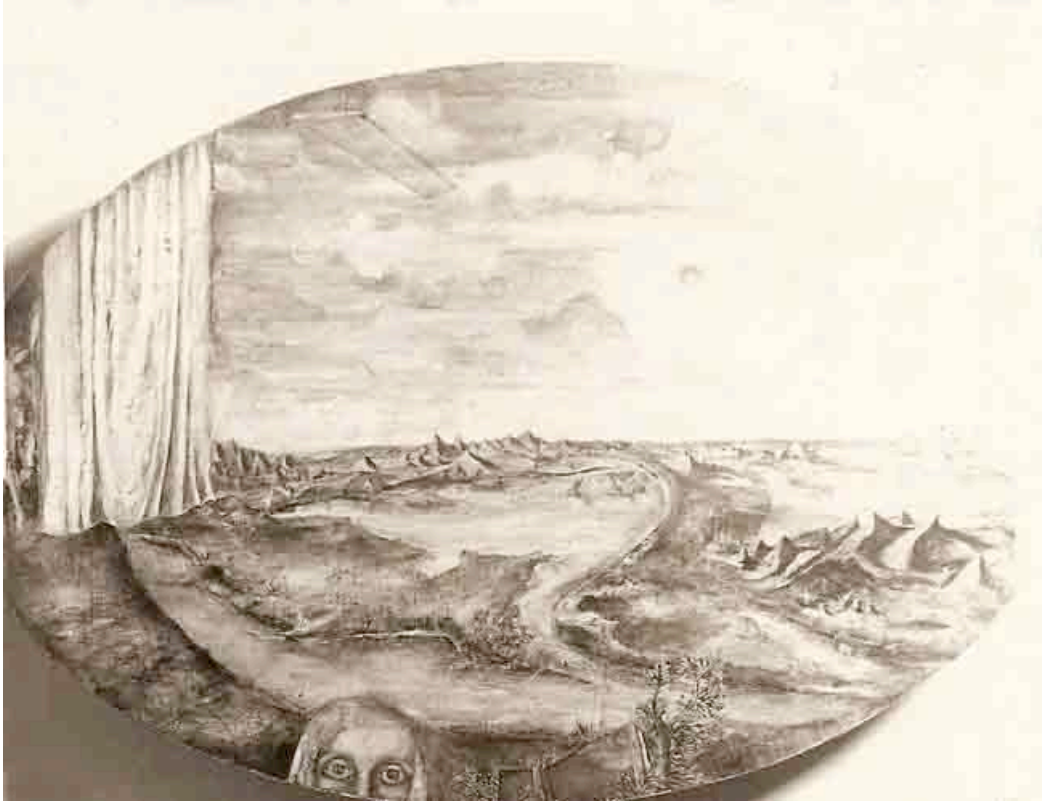
The Stone-Collectors
Had inscribed
The names of the original sites
On the stones,

But it was only
Over several hundred years
That these became visible to the eye.

Suitable Stone-Readers
Were then found
And trained
To read
The inscriptions out loud every year.

At first,
They scrutinized the Stones closely,
Reading out their names slowly and falteringly
But later,
As they memorized each name,
Their voices grew confident and louder.

Until a young Stone-Reader
Would only glance
Cursorily,
Almost carelessly,
Toward the Stones themselves,
Before beginning to recite.



II

At the beginning of one spring,
The Chief Librarian
—who came periodically to inspect the Stones—
After handling one after the other
With increasing agitation,
Cried out,
“The names have all vanished.”

At this moment,
All the Stone-Readers paused,
And when they tried to resume the Naming,
They realized
They had been struck dumb.

They sat there
Mute

In the Reading Room
With the Stones.

Outside the Library
Could be heard the sounds



Of avalanches
Of earthquakes
Of tidal waves
And of torrential rain,



While
Great shafts of lightening
Destroyed the Library's walls
And
great gusts of wind and hail

Swept away the maps and books.

Only clusters of shattered stones,
Surrounded by wild hyacinths and sun-baked skulls,
Remained.

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Time passed,
Until one winter
The Children arrived,
sailing up the Acheron River
In their Boat of Songs
To clamber up to the snow-covered ruins
Where they played
Renaming the stones as part of their game
—thus making it possible
for the Library to be rebuilt.

*Written June 6, 2003 in Siatista, Northern Greece.
Drawings by Slobodan Dan Paich added in Winter 2008-2009*