



## An Inquiry into: "The Greek Interpreter"

"The Greek Interpreter" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 6, 1893, and soon after in *Harper's Weekly* in its September 16, 1893 issue. It is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

Although not unanimous the majority of our Canon scholars agree that 1888 appears to have been the most

likely year in which the case took place. Were that to be so, then at that time Sherlock Holmes would have been 34 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 36.

### Main Characters:

Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock Holmes' elder brother and key government official. Mr. Melas, Mycroft's neighbor, a linguist and interpreter. Harold Latimer, criminal attempting to force a signature from his prisoner, Paul Kratides. Sophy Kratides, Paul's sister and Latimer's fiancé. Paul Kratides, a Greek subject and Sophy's brother. Wilson Kemp, Latimer's henchman.

### Notable Quotes:

"My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class."

"Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms."

"I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers."

"I hear of Sherlock everywhere since you became his chronicler."

"It is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes."

### The Greek Interpreter

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	A Wednesday in summer
Baring-Gould	Wednesday, September 12, 1888
Bell	The summer of 1890
Blakeney	1881-1887
Brend	The summer of 1882
Christ	Wednesday, August 29, 1888
Dakin	August 1884
Folsom	Wednesday, July 25, 1888
Hall	Late July 1890
Keefauver	Wednesday, June 20, 1888
Klinger	1888
Zeisler	Wednesday, August 15, 1888

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist's results for their research framework.

## *The “Desultory and Spasmodic Conversation”*

At the opening of the story, Watson tells us that his after-tea conversation with Holmes “had roamed in a desultory, spasmodic fashion from golf clubs to the causes of the change in the obliquity of the ecliptic, came around at last to the question of atavism and hereditary aptitudes.” It is difficult to imagine that such a conversation could merit such dismissive description. I doubt that there would be any one of us, who would not have done just about anything to be with Watson while this interlude was taking place.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

What is exceedingly amusing, however, is that someone who once shocked his friend by claiming ignorance about whether the Earth orbited the Sun or vice-versa discusses the change in the obliquity of the ecliptic. Clearly, back when Holmes claimed such complete ignorance about the solar system, he had been having fun at Watson’s expense.

## *Mycroft Holmes*

Watson mentions Mycroft Holmes in only four of the cases that he has set down: BRUC, EMPT, FINA, and GREE. Although we get to learn a bit more about the elder Holmes in each of these cases he still remains, for the most part, somewhat of a shadowy figure.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

I have always suspected that the Holmes brothers were considerably closer—in friendship, interests, and tasks—than Watson has led us to believe. I also doubt that Watson could have been so utterly ignorant about Mycroft’s existence. While the Good Doctor may not have spoken much about his own brother, the fact is they apparently did not live close to each other, and the older Watson’s bad habits probably kept from even trying to see his younger sibling. In Holmes’ case this was not so. Although not set down in the Canon, it is doubtful that Mycroft would not have consulted Holmes more than once during

the time in which allegedly Watson knew nothing of his existence. Eventually, the fact that his friend had an elder brother would have been obvious.

According to our biographer, Sherlock Holmes remarked to him once that, without any exaggeration, it could be said that there were times when his brother *was* the British Government and that he had often been responsible for the direction taken by Imperial policy. This certainly seems to be light-years away from the rather feeble description of him being someone who simply audited the books in some of the government departments. Obviously, Mycroft Holmes was far from having been

a glorified accountant or inspector. Let us recall that it was he who brought in the Great Detective into the disappearance of the Bruce-Partington plans. What business would a mere glorified clerk have had with a matter of such crucial military importance?

Mycroft's background—much like Sherlock's—is open to speculation. Going by *zeitgeist* of the time, he would have had to attend one of the leading universities of the time—the kind that young men expecting to enter civil service either as administrators or diplomats, would go to. The two obvious candidates would have been (and still are) Oxford and Cambridge.

As a student, besides studying the subjects that he would need for such a career, more importantly Mycroft would have been able to establish the important lifelong friendships with the scions of the



Courtesy of ITV Granada

right families, who would later facilitate his entry to, and welcome him into Government service. Certainly, like his younger brother's university friends, they would have known of Mycroft's astonishing abilities, making him a very desirable companion and, after graduation, colleague.

We are told that Mycroft's Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, and Whitehall circumscribed his cycle. His lodgings and club membership alone must have cost him a pretty penny. He wasn't exactly living in the East End. Pall Mall was famous for its high-quality shops during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and gentlemen's clubs in the 19<sup>th</sup>. The Reform, Athenaeum and Travellers Clubs are still there. Fur-

thermore, it is interesting to note that during the second half of the 19th century the War Office was also based on Pall Mall.

All this seems to give short shrift to the £450 (≈\$170,000) per annum auditor.

### *Some Disjointed Ends*

In this tangled skein of a story there seem to be a number of unexplained actions and loose threads left.

After going all the trouble to procure Melas, why did Latimer and Kemp interrupt the questioning of Kratides? It could not have been because of Sophy's appearance, because she could be easily controlled. It certainly was not because of what Melas might have learned during the questioning, because by that time it was too late—he was very aware that there was something crooked going on. He had been virtually kidnapped as an interpreter and taken to an unknown place to question a man who was obviously being held prisoner against his will. The questions that he was told to pose to Kratides and his answers clearly showed that they were both held by desperate criminals who would stop at nothing. Then they allow him to leave with just a warning?



Courtesy of ITV Granada

We learned from Melas that, physically, Kratides was in very bad shape. This must have also been obvious to Latimer and Kemp. Sophy's position is somewhat uncertain; however, there does not appear that there was much love lost there as far as the two kidnappers were concerned. Why not tor-

ture her in front of her brother to get him to sign? They could have easily have disposed of the three later. And when it comes down to it, why use such an uncertain method to get rid of Kratides and Melas? Asphyxiation through carbon fumes? How about a straightforward, decisive, error-free, cracked skull? They already had the cudgel, then just burn the house around the bodies.

It seems that there are many things about this case, which Watson has left unsaid. One of the most puzzling ones is how could Mycroft Holmes, with all that brain power, have blundered so catastrophically by advertising about the Kratides in the agony column of all the dailies? Did it not occur to that massive intelligence that this would let the kidnappers know that the translator had talked? It can be argued that this was a direct result of Kratides' death and the attempted murder of Melas.

And what about Sophy? Indications appear to be that she remained with the killers at least until they reached Buda-Pesht. One intuits that perhaps she may have been the instrument of their demise; although one must wonder how a woman who apparently did not raise a finger to help her brother managed to stab to death two men.

## *What else happened in 1888*

### *Empire*

Mashonaland and Matabeleland declared British sphere of influence.



Sarawak and Brunei placed under British protection.

◀ Suez Canal Convention signed: Suez Canal declared open to ships of all nations and free from blockade.

A 7.0-7.3-magnitude earthquake strikes North Canterbury, New Zealand.

Great Britain annexes Christmas Island.

Queen Victoria grants a charter to the Imperial British East Africa Company, and it is incorporated in London, England.

Canadian Pacific Railway opens Hotel Vancouver, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Hailstones kill about 250 in Moradabad district of Delhi, India.

### *Britain*



County Councils' Act establishes representative county-based authorities.

Jack the Ripper has murder spree in Whitechapel, kills his last victim.

Annie Besant leads the London match factory girls on strike.

Commission to examine charges against Parnell.

◀ General Buller founds RASC (Royal Army Service Corps).

County Councils Act: elects councils to take over administrative duties of JPs.

Miners Federation of Great Britain formed; demands minimum wage.

Foundation of Scottish Labour Party.

Final report on Commission on Elementary Education Acts in England.

English Priory of Knights Hospitalers authorized by Royal Charter.

Foundation of London General Omnibus Company.

## *World*

French Indochina formed.

Princess Isabel of Brazil signs Lei Auréa abolishing slavery.

Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany dies; Frederick III becomes Emperor from March to June, dies, and is succeeded by Wilhelm II.

Benjamin Harrison elected President of United States. Even though Cleveland received more popular votes, the electoral college gives Harrison the election.

Unemployment demonstration in Rome suppressed by the military.

Louisville, Kentucky, becomes first government in U.S. to adopt Australian ballot.

Marshal Bazaine, officer in charge of the French Foreign Legion in Mexico during Emperor Maximilian's rule, dies.

Agricultural depression causes Sweden to abandon free trade.

British Honduras adopts decimal currency.

Great Blizzard of 1888 strikes northeast U.S., 400 die.

Phil Sheridan, who fought as a Union General against the South during the American Civil War dies.

Clashes in Paris between Radicals and Monarchists. Anarchists riot in favor of weavers of Lille and glass blowers of Lion. Paris stone masons and waiters strike for higher wages and shorter work schedules.



More liberal constitution granted to Serbia by Milan.

Pennsylvania's Monongehela River rises 32 feet after 24-hour rainfall.

◀ Bandai volcano in Japan erupts for first time in 1,000 years.

Use of Danish language forbidden in schools in German N. Schleswig.

Founding of the Dutch shipping line Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM). It supports the unification

and development of the colonial economy.

Reconstructed free port of Hamburg opens.

The Washington Monument officially opens to the general public.

Italy and Spain sign military treaty.

King Leopold II of Belgium introduces the Order of the African Star.

Revolution in Haiti culminates in the destruction of public buildings and the flight of President Salomon.

Ferdinand de Lesseps attempts to issue a fresh series of 1,000,000 bonds "to finish the Panama Canal." Proposal is withdrawn, de Lesseps resigns his directorship, the project collapses.

Italians near Alite relieved by the withdrawal of the Abyssinians.

The first beauty contest is held, the Concours de Beauté, at Spa in Belgium. Winner is 18-year-old Bertha Soucaret of Guadeloupe.

First organized rodeo competition held, Prescott, Arizona.

New York State establishes electric chair for method of death penalty.

Boulangier supported by Monarchists in France; his popularity threatens Third Republic.

Main portion of Bremen incorporated into German Customs Union; parts of Wesser estuary remain free port.

### *Art*

Van Gogh in Arles, Holland, paints *Sunflowers*, *Portrait of Armand Roulin*, *La Mousme*, and *Drawbridge at Arles*. Cuts off his left earlobe and gives it to a prostitute in Arles.

Oscar Wilde publishes *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

*Casey at the Bat* is published in *The San Francisco Examiner*, and recited publicly for the first time.

John Phillip Sousa composes the military march *Semper Fidelis* for the U.S. Marine Corp.

Tchaikovsky performs *Symphony No. 5 in E Minor* at St. Petersburg.

George Moore publishes *Confessions of a Young Man*.

Cézanne paints *Peasant in a Blue Smock*.



Gilbert and Sullivan debut *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

Iannis Psichari, one of the creators of modern Greek literary language, publishes *My Journey* in demotic Greek.

◀ Morris publishes *Dream of John Bull*, on a socialist commonwealth.

Matthew Arnold, critic, essayist, and poet dies.

Fontane publishes *Irrungen, Wirrungen*.

Monet paints *Cap d'Antibes*.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch publishes *Troy Town*, a novel about Cornwall.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Trace Horse of the Bus Line, Place Clichy*.

Stevenson publishes *The Black Arrow*, a novel about the War of the Roses.

Rimsky-Korsakov composes *Scheherazade*.

Charles Doughty publishes *Travels in Arabia Deserta*.

Seurat paints *Fishing Fleet at Port-en-Bessin*.

Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Tales*.

Kipling publishes *Soldiers Three*, and *Plain Tales from the Hills*; short stories of India.

### *Science and Technology*

Dunlop's pneumatic tire developed, principle still unproven.

First wax drinking straw patented, by Marvin C Stone in Washington DC.

George Eastman registers the trademark “Kodak” and receives a patent for his box camera, which uses photographic paper roll-film.

Emile Berliner improves the gramophone.

Dr. Fitz, Boston surgeon, advocates the removal of the vermiform appendix in certain intestinal disorders, after several post-mortem operations. His advice is followed.

William Bundy patents the timecard clock.

First ballpoint pen patented.

The first known recording of classical music, Handel’s Israel in Egypt, is made on wax cylinder.

Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian explorer, crosses the Greenland icefield.

Clinton Merriam founds the National Geographical Society in Washington, D.C., for “the increase and diffusion of geographical knowledge,” and the first issue of its magazine is published.

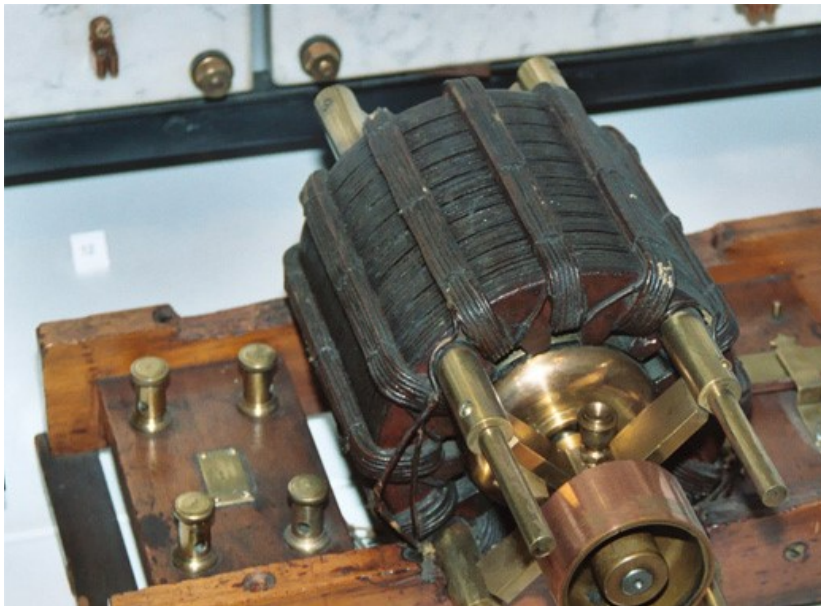
Thomas Edison files a patent for the Optical Phonograph (the first movie).

Bertha Benz, wife of inventor Karl Benz, drives from Mannheim to Pforzheim, Germany in the first long distance automobile trip.

Lick Observatory, Mount Hamilton, California, formally inaugurates the Ewing duplex-pendulum seismometer, Ewing horizontal-pendulum seismometers, and Gray-Ewing vertical seismometers.

Hudson and Sclater publish *Argentine Ornithology*.

Mercerizing process introduced into cotton manufacture; facilitates later development of the artificial silk industry.



Spanish navy launches first submarine, designed by Isaac Peral. It features accumulator batteries, three dynamos, two 30-hp engines, electric propulsion, a torpedo tube, and periscope. Displacement is 80 tonnes, length 48 feet, and 6 feet beam.

◀ Nikola Tesla makes first AC motor.

In the U.S., Leroy Buffington patents a system to build skyscrapers.

Incubators are first used for premature infants.

Pasteur Institute for the treatment

of hydrophobia founded.

Theophilus Van Kannel of Philadelphia patents revolving door.

Sir J. Dewar and Sir F. Abel invent cordite.

William Seward Burroughs patents the first successful adding machine.

Louis Le Prince films the Roundhay Garden Scene, the earliest surviving film.

Heinrich Hertz produces electromagnetic waves, proves light and heat are both forms of electromagnetic radiation. Sir Oliver Lodge makes same discovery independently. Hertz used an induction coil; Lodge Leyden jars.

*Next week's case: NAVA*

Respectfully submitted,

*Murray, the Courageous Orderly*

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly..."

**If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at [CourageousMurray@aol.com](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com).**

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