

REALITIES AND WISHFUL THINKING
ON THE WOMEN'S CELEBRATION OF 8TH JANUARY IN
CONTEMPORARY GREECE

Brit Berggreen

Introduction

"A celebration for Dionysos and The women's struggle: A curfew on men when Babo is being celebrated". This appeared as a headline in a Swedish weekly magazine (Gernandt 1985), and was my first encounter with the annual 8 January celebration of the midwife's day in contemporary Greece. This particular celebration took place in the village of Monokklisiá in Serres in the Greek province of Macedonia.

The part which mainly roused my interest was the banner reading GYNAIKOKRATIA - "women's rule" - together with information that on this particular day role reversal was taking place, the women taking over the public village arena while the men were sent home to take over the household chores. Gradually other aspects have mingled with my original preoccupation with sex role reversals (Berggreen 1990). There are the inevitable questions of origin and context, and of purpose and pretext for the celebration. What struck me more and more as being of interest is why just Monoklissiá has emerged as the signature village for a kind of celebration which goes on simultaneously and in similar ways in a number of villages. The common name of the day is *Mammi's Day* or *Bábo's Day*, both words being used interchangeably for "midwife", with even the word *máia* for midwife being heard. The clue, as will immediately be suggested, is the weight upon the aspect of women's rule which has caught the attention of mass media as opposed to the preoccupation with childbirth and fertility which lies at the bottom of the celebration.

I shall touch upon different aspects, but mainly concentrate on the information given, on the whole, to mainly foreigners, through guide books and newspaper articles, and contrast these with my personal

observations as a participant and as a reader of some scholarly contributions to the issue of women's festivals.

I took part in the festival at Monokklisiá for two consecutive years (1990 and 1991), and I have visited the village again during the summers of 1990 and 1993. During my last visit I had the opportunity to watch a long unedited video film of the 1992 festival. Thus I have a fairly good control of the proceedings for three years, in addition to Gernandt's article covering the festival of 1985. I shall also take this opportunity to thank Professor Emeritus Demetrios Loukatos, Dr. Voula Lambropolou and Maria Dedé for their kind co-operation in assisting me personally.

By contrasting popular and tourist versions with more scholarly ones, it became apparent that the former show a disregard for reality, and make one wonder at newspapers' and even tourist brochures' indifference for their readers, and journalists' sloppiness in relating what they have thought might be there rather than what was actually there. One may also wonder at their editing of the festival so as to make it live up to their need for headlines or confirmation of presuppositions. Or are they being led by wishful thinking to see what they expected? They certainly direct the participating women to face their video cameras. It is amazing what a journalist with a camera, not to mention a TV team, can accomplish in the way of making their subjects act and pose. There is a tricky moral issue involved when cameramen have village women shout "down with the men", but there is a related issue of verbal accuracy: When you read that three men were "hosed down", does that give the picture of a man being sprinkled with water from a two pints' bucket by means of a sprig of basil?

The main object of this article is to contrast popular presentations of this particular 8 January event with my experiences and information gathered in scholarly reports. The topic is fascinating, and like most Greek cultural expressions there is the ever present wishful thinking of demonstrating links with ancient customs.

Journalism and scholarly attempts

Creating a dividing line between a "them", that is those with a tourism and public press approach, and an "us" who have more scholarly pretensions should not be necessary. Both groups aim at a true-to-life presentation. In seeking for origins and contexts, however, everybody may feel tempted to guess and may even be excused for guessing, as long as the guesswork part is made clear.

The women's festival has the mixed blessings of being a potential tourist attraction, the women themselves being torn between playing for the public arena and celebrating among themselves. The festival is exotic, being immersed in myths, and offers the fascination of the

esoteric, being the domain of married women only. It is closed to males while unmarried women were given access to the festival and evening party for the first time in Monokklissiá in 1990. It may also be of significance that elderly women had just begun to attend the evening party. Contrary to the festival's potential as a tourist attraction, but adding to its myth-making potential is the geographical position of the village, far away from convenient transportation and lodgings. Nor does the time of the year present an asset, the festival taking place just after Christmas with the hazards of winter weather.

There is reason to believe that many journalists have approached the festival rather lightly, without really trying to give a reliable presentation, but preferring to find a sensational twist. The other option has obviously been to lean on former presentations, not taking seriously the fact that the festival is part of a living tradition, full of adjustments and improvisations from one year to the other. There may be many reasons, ranging from convenience, innocence and inattentiveness, to not having been actually present. It must be taken into account that male journalists have limited access to esoteric female celebrations. Scholarly guesswork also is included in these popular presentations, without the necessary reservations and discussions which would accompany them in scholarly journals. Before giving an ethnographic presentation of the Monokklissiá festival, let us see how it and others are presented to, mainly foreign, tourists and newspaper readers.

What "they" say

Probably the most prestigious and standard reference for visitors to Greece is the authoritative *Blue Guide* (1990:617). Its entry reads:

Monokklissiá is notorious for its practice of 8 January, when the women confine the men to domestic chores while they revel in street and tavern. The inhabitants brought the custom from E.Thrace in 1922; it may derive from the Dionysiac rites of ancient Thrace.

This has been unchanged from the 1981 edition. The *Penguin Guide to Greece* (1990:320) had this piece of information:

Also occurring in this area [i.e. near Serres] is another yearly Dionysian-derived ritual from eastern Thrace called the *yinekokratia*, or 'rule of the women'. In this jolly affair, held each January 8 at the village of Monokklissiá (...) women take over the village for the day while the men stay home and (theoretically) cook and clean (and watch TV).

We may notice that only Monokklisiá is mentioned whereas the festival is actually being celebrated in several villages. Probably most authoritative among publications for tourists is the *Travel Agent's Manual*, published by the Greek Tourist organization. In the 1987 edition, after a general introduction to "local festivities, cultural events & trade fairs", the women's festival is presented, and more areas are referred to, both in Macedonia and Thrace, but there is an emphasis on Monoklissiá, the only village which is mentioned:

Custom of female dominion or matriarchy is observed in villages in the prefecture of Komotini, Xanthi, Kilkis and Serres (Village of Monoklissia). On this day the women gather in the cafes and other social centers in their villages while the men stay at home to look after the household, allowed to join their wives in the celebrations only as dusk falls (p.34)

Besides these authoritative and rather permanent presentations, there are the more ephemeral press cuts to discuss. Even if I have had access to only a limited number, the tendency is clear. It is hard to believe that the journalists had attended the same festival as I.

The Greek daily newspaper *Ta Nea* had an article written by its Kavalla correspondent on January 9th 1989. Journalist Paulos Alisanoglou mentioned the custom being observed in the villages of Proskynités, Xylagani, Kessáni, Néa Petra, Chamiló, and Strími Rodópis. The four accompanying photographs, however, are all from Monokklisiá, which is not mentioned in the text or captions. Alisanoglou mentions the roots of the custom in "Eastern Roumelia", a colloquial geographic name, extending from the Bosphorus and westwards. He then states its association with fertility, and puts Mámmi to the forefront as a symbol of the perpetuation of life. She, he states:

paraded on top of the cart on the village roads, while the rest of the women busied themselves with ... backgammon or *préfas* /a card game/ at the cafés.

Men were shut up in their homes with their feet tied, busy with the dishes, the broom, cleaning and "naturally the nursing of children, uncomplainingly confined to 24 hours of graceful complaints in their roles according to custom and tradition." And as it was unavoidable with some "daring disregard of the house arrest", the law breakers would be hunted on the village roads by the women, receiving bucketfuls of water."

The report from Monokklisiá in the weekly *Greek News* of 12-18 January 1991 was of particular interest to me as I had been in the village both the day before and on the actual day of the festival. From the short article headlined "Women Rule" it must be assumed that the female reporter Katerina Grafioti based her article on a combination of oral information and deductions from earlier reports and assumptions. She dates the festival to "every January 9th [!]" and ends with: "After the women finished their card games in the *kafeneons*, the men and women joined together in the main square for dancing, singing and a banquet". This is an amazing amount of wrong information for such a brief article. The next year *Greek News* also brought a report, this time dating the festival to Epiphany, January 6th, putting the women into the café for cards and backgammon, hosing down of three men and then an "official dinner with drinking and dancing until the wee hours of the morning". The *Athens News* report from the 1992 festival seems to be a piece of fiction, written second hand. If such journalism occurred after some soccer or basket ball event I believe the journalists would be severely reprimanded.

Besides wrong dating, the most telling sign of wishful thinking is the fascination with men being showered with water, and the hard lived presentation of the women taking over the village *kafeneion*. The village women of Monokklisiá have had their own assembly house for a couple of decades after their Womens Association was established in 1963. Through the *Greek News* one gets the impression of a wild dissolution of normal order where "women and men shed all inhibitions and change sex roles for a day". Perhaps this is a fair representation of the celebrations of other villages. As for Monokklisiá there are certainly adjustments to be made. Civilization has certainly entered the celebrations.

Village ethnography I: Foreplay

As a married woman my access to the festival would meet with no formal barriers when I went to Monokklisiá for the first time in 1990. My daughter, then aged 21, came with me, and she had the good fortune that just that year the festival had been opened to unmarried women.

It was cold, several degrees below freezing point. All car windows were frosted, and the smell and smoke from wood-burning stoves covered the town of Serres as we headed for Monokklisiá on January 7th, the day of St. John the baptist. Outside the *kafeneion*, the only village cafe, the men were busy barbequeing mutton and drinking wine. They said *they* wanted a men's party when the women had their's once a year.

I negotiated with the board members of the women's association through my interpreter, and it was agreed that I should come back in the evening to take part in the preparations. The activities had started when I arrived, with women cleaning and brushing and cooking. The *Lysistrata* assembly house consists of a board room for smaller assemblies, a hall with a raised stage, and a kitchen, and an additional outdoor kitchen. In the kitchen were piles of chickens and huge dishes of chicken liver. It was immediately obvious that there would be no problems taking photographs. My main contact now was with the president and the vice president of the women's association.

Soon I let them see Eva Gernandt's article, and there were roars of laughter as they pointed at the pictures and commented. There were some inflamed inquiries as to how the "orgies" had come to be photographed as the photographer was male. I explained that according to the article, the photographer had been thrown out, and that the picture would have been taken by the female journalist.

In the assembly house everything was made ready for the next day, surfaces were cleaned and a fresh linen cloth was laid on the mantelpiece. In the fireplace there were cooking utensils and pans, and, in front, a low table was laid surrounded by cushions arranged in a semi-circle, oriental style. This is a reminder of how kitchens and cooking practice had been in their village of origin in Turkey before they were forced to leave in 1922. On a shelf was a model of an ox cart, a reminder of their originating from farmers. Behind the glass doors of a cupboard hung some brown dresses with red ornaments. Such were the dresses they had used before, and these old dresses were now used by the (male) musicians who played for them. The women themselves had their new ethnic costumes at home to be used during the festival. A police uniform was being fitted to one of the women. A small boy of 4-5 years happily tried on the cap, and was loudly admired by the women.

During a generous meal of titbits from the kitchen, the president explained how the celebration of this women's day had begun. "My grandmother's mother was among the first", she said, and continued:

After the Christmas celebrations the women had had enough. What had been one long celebration for the men had been incessant drudgery for the women: "*Gynaika* (woman), do this; *gynaika* do that", were words resounding through every home, not only inside the house but in the fields as well. The women had an enormous workload with children, the elderly, the sick and the animals to tend. The women even tended the draft animals. They were like slaves!

Now the women pounded on their tables and banished their menfolk to the kitchens and child care while they themselves invaded the *kafeneion*.

Soon it became a custom every January 8th that the women “became men” on this particular day and celebrated each other, but especially their mothers who had worked and toiled, with *bábo*, the midwife at the centre of the celebrations. On this day they smoked, danced and drank and chased the men home.

Other voices joined in: “This is a very, very old custom. *Bábo* is old in Thrace”, they said. So much for origin and dating.

The president related, supported by her vice president, and while we tasted the food, they recalled jolly memories of men who had tried to enter the women’s celebrations. There was especially one man who had tried to join the celebration dressed as a woman. They all fell upon him and began to tear off his clothes while he wiggled away from them and ran. But they were so eager that they chased him, and when he tried to climb a tree, they tore his trousers off. At another time an actor had tried to pass as a woman. They had found him out and given him a treatment he would never forget. He had said afterwards that he had played many roles both on stage and in the cinema, but had never attended anything as tumultuous as this. Such were their happy memories. It happened quite often, they said, that men tried to enter their celebration. *My* (feminist) reaction was that the men might leave the women alone on this day, but the women themselves disagreed, finding it added to the excitement and fun.

“The women look forward to this celebration all through Christmas”, said the president. “The widows who, according to custom have always been confined to a shadow existence in their homes have also begun to come to these celebrations. There everybody feels completely free.”

Village ethnography II: The day

“Don’t come before 10-10:30 a.m.”, they said as I left. “Nothing will happen before then”. This was not quite the case. On my arrival on the 8th January there was full activity in the outdoor kitchen. There was a steaming soup kettle and to the left was a kettle where the chickens had been brought to a full boil. The ground was slippery from all the grease. Before I had got my camera into position the women began to pose, and there was pushing and shoving while the pictures were taken.

I had even missed the arrival of the musicians. Now they were fully equipped in brown dresses, red aprons and head scarves, tuning their



Fig.1. Monoklissiá 8 January 1991: Video photographers seeking a fresh motive. A female photographer concentrates on women (mock) playing backgammon outside the women's assembly house, belonging to the women's association "Lysistrate". (Photo: Brit Berggreen 1991)

instruments out in the yard, and starting to play, first a little rusty, then full of vigour. The yard began to be filled with activity, voices and the clapping of hands, and the dancing started. The dance leader had substituted a loaf of bread for the usual kerchief used by the lead dancer. The loaf had been grabbed from the bread basket that had just been carried to the kitchen.

A table with a bottle of Martini and two chairs were set up out in the yard. The street outside had now been closed off, or perhaps the women's area had been closed in. From a distance some men were watching. The whole village had been closed off with a barrier, to be opened only when car drivers agreed to pay a toll. This particular cold January day in 1990 was not inviting to visitors. There were two or three participant observers besides my daughter and myself. Nor was the number of actual participants high. There were about 15 women, conspicuous in their colourful costumes.

The procession was about to begin. Headed by the musicians, but sometimes ahead of them, the women danced along the village roads



Fig.2. Monoklissiá women dancing along the village roads collecting contributions for the evening party. (The male musicians, dressed as women, are usually leading the procession, but they are at the back on this occasion. Notice the Martini bottle held by the woman in front. (Photo: Brit Berggreen 1991)

visiting every house on the way. If men were detected, they were immediately chased, and a fee, *soldi* was demanded and put straight into the money-box before the man was "showered" with water by means of a sprig dapped into a tiny bucket. The women who were at home came out with titbits of sweets or snacks which were eaten on the spot. Some had set out decorated tables with treats. One offered fried chicken, a welcome relief from all the sweets. Together with the sweet Martini, or substitute non-alcoholic beverages from Martini bottles there was a good opportunity to eat oneself sick from snacks while dancing and chewing as the procession went from house to house.

Many old women dressed in black were escorted out from the houses and warmly greeted and kissed. Outside one house there was some extra commotion. That was where the *bábo* lived, the old midwife who would later become the centre of attention. Behind the

window pane was her son, on this occasion holding up his baby son to show he was doing “women’s work”.

The “policewoman” whistled her flute incessantly and made sure that all cars were stopped and a toll demanded. The traffic was far from heavy. Apart from the regular bus from Serres the village was calm, this being a week day with men away and the children at school in the neighbouring village of Provatás. The population of Monokklisiá is ageing, with the younger generation living in Serres or Thessaloniki. Besides there is a limit to how much life may be brought into a village of ca. 500 inhabitants on a freezing cold midwinter day.

When every house had been visited, it was time to go back to the assembly house to eat. Cutlery, bread and glasses were put on the long tables along with plates of hard boiled eggs and *feta* cheese. From the kitchen bowls of chicken soup were passed around. The wine was poured, the same sweet red wine of the previous night. Very little was consumed, while water was gushed down. Afterwards the time had come to fetch *bábo*. All the women gathered, led by the president who now carried a tray in her outstretched arms. She soon got tired, and another took over for a while. *Bábo* received the procession on her porch. She was dressed in a checked dress, wearing a rose on her headscarf partly covering the long braid falling down her back. A low table and cushions were placed on the porch and the women of dignity were seated there after the reception ceremony. The midwife sat in the centre, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes before, shepherd’s stick in hand, leading the dance back to the assembly house. Now she was to be among the guests of honour at a banquet for the district dignitaries, both male and female. Speeches were delivered and words exchanged on the importance of women for home and society. This was the serious part for those specially invited. I was not there, but I was invited to see the boardroom as it had been prepared for the honoured guests.

The evening’s celebration began around 7 pm. The musicians were on the stage. Now they were back in their ordinary clothes. They were in full view of the room. The women had also taken off their ethnic costumes and had mostly put on skirts and blouses, although some were in their Sunday best dresses. Daughters and daughters’ daughters had arrived. The number of women attending the party was 150-180 by my estimate. Supper was served, consisting of chicken and bread, pickled hot green peppers and a mutton/cabbage dish with tomatoes. After the meal money was collected, more than 70.000 drachmas, I was told, which was seen as most satisfactory as they had already received tributes both in cash and kind during the day.

This was a delightful part. It was relaxed and funny, bold and daring with an atmosphere of warm friendliness and joy. There was

dancing, dancing, dancing, mostly traditional, but this was the year of the *lambada*, which was played. Gradually the curtains were drawn. The musicians, being male, must not see the “orgy” part. A roar of laughter swept through the room as a *corps de ballet* entered the room tiptoeing with much flesh and very little clothing. The onlookers made dirty remarks, and slapped bottoms, male style. There was the *lambada* again. After some other skits the phallic part, playing on the relations between good Greeks and bad Turks, marked the end of the fun. At 11 pm. the party was over. The president had lost her voice and could only whisper. The most eager and reluctant continued dancing with their coats on, as long as possible.

Bábo was 78 years old in 1990, and not feeling well. She refrained from taking part in the evening celebration. I decided to follow the festival to see what they would do when she no longer took part, having been told that child births were now taking place in hospital, not in the village. There was, however, another village midwife, a generation younger, to take over the ceremonial role. In 1991 the procedure was as the year before, but the weather being much warmer, more people had gathered to see the fun. There were more journalists and a man with a video camera, eight in all. I had no company this time, and I was of little consequence now, being warmly greeted, but familiar to them after two previous visits. With my still camera I could now record how shots were arranged by the press who demanded certain poses and activities according to myths and expectations. Still, between the women, there was spontaneous fun, as when a “baby” was “born” on *bábo*’s porch. There was a roar of laughter as more and more onlookers became aware of the happening. A little red haired plastic doll was lifted triumphantly up in the air, and later brought to the assembly house. A bus-load of women from the nearby town of Kavalla helped to fill *bábo*’s yard. What was hardly noticed by others afterwards was the doll being baptized in a mock ceremony, the orthodox ritual being observed with chanting and psalms. This addition, proving successful, was repeated in 1992, this time in front of a video recorder. Otherwise this year went on as the two consecutive ones, with minor improvisations only, and a new kind of “orgy” to round off the day.

Challenges: A search for structure, purpose and context

Eva Gernandt had visited Monokklisiá five years earlier. She begins her article:

Once a year the women in the little town of Monoklissiá have a proper celebration. They take a drink, smoke cigarettes and dance at the tavern as the men do. For the males there is a cufew when fertility and its symbol, Babo, the midwife is being celebrated. The women have fun, but this is not the sole purpose of the celebration which also strengthens the women's solidarity in their everyday struggle.

Did she really see the women dance at the tavern, or did she assume it on the basis of other reports? There is no further mention of this dancing in her article which otherwise is in close correspondence with my own notes and observations. But she has certainly missed a crucial point by not associating "Illustrate" with "*I Lisistrate*", that is the main character and name of Aristophanes' comedy, "*Lysistrata*". The name appears on the sign above the main door. After they got their assembly house they no longer needed the men's café, but somehow the fascinating thought of the women taking the village café lingers on, stronger than the notion of the celebration taking place in the women's own assembly house.

This means little for the overall pattern. Still, there are more important changes from Gernandt's experience of 1985 to mine in 1990. She reported that the women were making a round to all the houses in the village the day before to collect food: "eggs, sweets, wine, money and poultry to be prepared for the next day." Five years later there is a predominance in the use of cash to buy the victuals, and then to collect money from the participants to cover their expenses. In the 1990 celebration there was no suggestion as to what should be paid, whereas in 1991 and 1992 there was a poster at the entrance announcing a fee of 500 drachmas.

On *Bábo's* day Gernandt does not report of a morning round to every house in the village before the visit to *Bábo's* house. This seems to be absorbed in the dance through the village *after* visiting *Bábo*, and having presented her with "gifts of food and washed her hands". That village dance is described as a "wild game where men's ways towards women are exploited by women themselves to set their force free." Here is where men are seen in their aprons at home, which *I* saw at the morning round. Gernandt has experienced the same kind of evening arrangement as I did, except for "her" *Bábo* taking a much more active part:

Towards the evening mink coats are mingled with popular costumes in the assembly house where the women eat chicken soup ahead of the Dionysian ecstasy later on. The musicians have changed into electrical guitars and tango to

eardrum breaking level. There is dancing and an encouraging speech on the importance of women's power. The climax is getting closer. A group of women, strangely dressed up. Someone is waving a shining, white phallus symbol. Babo has joined in, dressed in a long kaftan and a turban. Soon they are tumbling around on the floor as if they were having sexual intercourse. This marks the end of the celebration, and the women return to their husbands.

Space prevents a further analysis and commentary on the differences from the 1985 to the 1990 (1991 & 1992) celebrations. The most important is that the midwife does no longer take part in the "wild" dancing from house to house, but is a guest of honour at a formal dinner at mid-day. Earlier photographs show the women in a horse driven cart, with the midwife as the centerpiece. After tractors took over from horses, the women no longer had access to a vehicle to carry the (old) midwife along. The model cart in the assembly house serves as support to the memory of this former practice. Also money has begun to play a part where tributes in kind were common before. I should above all stress the flexibility and adjustments which denote a living tradition, a folklore that has not (yet) become folkloristic and frozen as a fixed ritual, but is wide open to improvisations and adjustments according to convenience or need.

Whereas journalists and tourism promoters may be said to prefer the scenic and the sensational, scholars seek "truth" and authenticity from a non-interfering observation post. True enough this is an ideal, as just by being present, interference is unavoidable. Wishful thinking is involved in both groups. Scholars must not edit events, just interpret them, whereas journalists may feel free to direct events to get good stories and photo angles. To seek roots and links are the arts and ambitions of amateurs and scholars alike, and a fascinating game. The most thrilling of challenges is that of finding roots and links to *ancient* rituals. We feel no real satisfaction when having to settle on uncertainties. When we know that ancient Greece and Rome had women's festivals, there is a temptation to suggest links even when there are about 1500-2000 years which cannot be accounted for, and where no connection can be verified. It is indeed likely that revitalized parts of notions of ancient celebrations and associations with them have been introduced as demonstrations of ethnic Greek adherence. The festival itself is structured around general and vital traits in any culture: There is the society of married women who initiate novices to esoteric knowledge of childbirth and sexuality. There are the younger women of childbearing age venerating the midwife and older women who administered traditional pre-science

knowledge and served as supporters and, not infrequently, as life savers in the most critical moments of women's lives: in the pains and helplessness of giving birth.

What have we witnessed with regard to Monokklisiá? Was it really a *gynaecocracy* as we were told by the banners, or was it a *midwife's day*, or the celebration of all the (grand)mothers of the village. Let me suggest that it was all of it. No obvious rule or law was at the back of the celebration, just tradition kept up by the date, by the population and by the new village of Monokklisiá where the population settled after they had left their original homes near Kirklareli in Turkish Thrace. (The Greek name is Saránda Ekklisíes, literally "forty churches", whereas Monokklisiá means "one church"). This resettling took place during the dramatic events of the winter 1922-23.

Let me suggest that there is a connection between the stress on "women's rule" and the fact that the day is organized by the Woman's association in Monokklisiá which is a political organization.

In the neighbouring village of Ano Kamilla, which I visited briefly 8 January 1991, the local "folkloristic-cultural circle of women" which carries the name *I bábo* ("the midwife") organizes the day as "The Midwife's Day", advertised on posters for the public to come and attend. They promise *ta vrehoudia* ("making wet"), dance and merrymaking". Nevertheless, there is also a banner announcing "women's rule". There is an accumulation of ingredients, and any original focus or purpose has been blurred. It is more than an assumption that the two villages compete both for public attention and for being the village that originally began the celebrations. We cannot pretend that the village populations are ignorant of ancient Greek rituals and practices, antiquity being a building block of the contemporary Greek nation state. Nor can we exclude totally the thought that there has really been a continuity from Thracian antiquity on. In Monokklisiá there are elements present of Dionisiac orgies, Eleusinian secrecy, sex role reversal, revering the *bábo* and celebrating the *yiayía* —grandmother, and female, married, village veterans. Demetrios Loukatos (1977) suggests that the celebration may be in honour of the saint Dominique who allegedly assisted the holy virgin during the birth of Christ.

There is, however, another approach. The Finnish ethnologist Uno Harva wrote an article in 1941 on "Societies of married women" and their annual day for celebrating fertility, strengthening ties between themselves, and ceremonially including women who had entered matrimony during the year, while excluding even old unmarried women from this esoteric society. The celebration centered on sexuality and childbirth. Total secrecy was demanded. Trespassing men were treated with ceremonial violence. This custom was observed in central and eastern Europe. Harva believes in a connection



Fig.3. Poster announcing the women's 8th January festival in Ano Kamilla, neighbouring village of Monoklissiá. The poster shows the midwife while the text promises "women's rule, midwife, splashing of water, dancing, fun". (Photo: Brit Berggreen 1991)

between the Germanic and Slavic practices of the custom, their being too similar for a mere coincidence. Harva (1941:284) suggests the ancient Roman *matronalia* as a possible origin, but cannot trace the custom between ancient Rome and the 16th century.

We are to some extent dealing with the fascination of seeking "the missing link", so fashionable when evolution was prominent in cultural studies. We still feel a professional and psychological

dissatisfaction when being confronted with broken historical lines. Cultural history, however, is no Hollywood film where all bits and pieces can be gathered into a satisfactory or happy ending.

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