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Pilgrimage to a Greek Island Shrine

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Pilgrimage to a Greek Island Shrine

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In modern Greece, the festival dedicated to the ‘Dormition’ of the *Panagia* (‘the All-Holy One’), who is the Virgin Mary, is celebrated on 15 August. On Tinos, in the island group of the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea, this fertility- and healing-festival dedicated to the Dormition of the Panagia is particularly important due to several reasons. The Church of the Panagia, *Euangelistria*, owes its fame to a miraculous holy *icon* (image) of the Annunciation, which was unearthed in a field in 1823. Since then, the miracles worked by this icon have made Tinos a centre of Pan-Orthodox worship, and pilgrimages are particularly made to this greatest shrine of Greek Orthodoxy during the Dormition. The Dormition of the Panagia is also an important ideological manifestation for the ‘new Greek nation-state of 1821’, as demonstrated through several ceremonies during the festival, particularly the procession when the icon is carried from the church to the harbour. The festival is also a significant occasion to study gendered spheres, as well as the relationship between various Greek population groups.

This article is based on several periods of fieldwork, carried out from 1990 to the present, involving research into the festival dedicated to the Dormition of the Panagia on Tinos, and it explores some of the main elements of this festival, within a socio-economic and political framework.

Keywords: Greece, Tinos, pilgrimage, *Panagia* (Virgin Mary), gendered spheres

Introduction

The festival is an important means of communication, an offering or a gift, most often dedicated to a deceased guardian of society, for instance to the *Panagia* - the All-Holy One (from *Pan* meaning ‘all’ and *Agia* meaning ‘holy’), who is the Virgin Mary. In modern Greece, the festival dedicated to the *Dormition* of the Panagia, i.e. the Bearer or Mother of God (i.e., *Ē Koimēsis tēs Theotokou*), is celebrated on 15 August, marking the end of a fifteen-day fast in honour of the Panagia. I attended the festival eighteen times in the period 1990-2019, and the following draws on my fieldwork, mainly presented in former studies (Håland 2017: Ch. 4 and 6-7, see also Håland 2012), but also on material collected for a larger ongoing book project, *The Dangerous Life: Gender, Pain, Health and Healing in Modern and Ancient Greece, a Comparison*.

The feast of the Dormition began in the seventh century, and in Greek Orthodoxy it still retains the name. The festival takes place after harvest and the threshing of the grain, in a period of holiday and leisure, and announces the passage from summer to winter and the new agricultural

season. The Dormition may also be regarded as a festival where the first fruits of the grain are offered, presented as the first loaf of bread made from the harvest.

The cyclical perspective is central in connection with festivals of the agricultural year, and official ideological rituals are adapted to the agricultural calendar. Hence, the Orthodox liturgical year is established through the Panagia’s biography. It begins around autumn, and several important moments in the life of the Panagia are celebrated during this period of the year; i.e., before and around sowing and during the germination and growth of the grain crops. The Panagia’s death or Dormition is celebrated during the ‘dead period’ of the grains’ cycle (Bourdieu 1980), and the 15 August cycle ends with the memorial service nine days after her death, on 23 August.

The Sanctuary

15 August is celebrated with special reverence all over Greece, and on this day pilgrimages are made to the greatest shrine of Greek Orthodoxy, on Tinos. Here, the fertility- and healing-festival dedicated to the Dormition of the Panagia is particularly important for various reasons.

In 1823, after several mystical visions of one of the islanders, a pious nun named Pelagia, people on Tinos found the miraculous holy *icon* (image) of the Annunciation (*Euangelismos*) of the Panagia (*Megalocharē*, *megalo*: great, *charē*: grace; that is, the Blessed Virgin). According to tradition, Pelagia saw the Panagia repeatedly in her visions, and the latter instructed her to inform the elders to start excavations in order to find the Panagia's icon, buried many years earlier in an uncultivated field, and to build her 'house' (i.e. her church) on that site. On 30 January 1823, the icon was unearthed in the field where it had been for about 850 years since the church built on the ruins of a pagan temple of Dionysos was destroyed and burnt down by the Saracens in the tenth century. In 1821, two years before the icon was found, the great Greek War of Liberation broke out. The finding of the icon, the construction of the church of the Panagia, *Euangelistria*, the enormous crowds of pilgrims and all the miracles worked by the icon, occasioned the passing of a governmental decree, declaring the island to be sacred in 1971. Pelagia became sanctified on 11 September 1970.

Below the main church on Tinos are several minor chapels. In the first chapel is a holy spring, where the pilgrims obtain water, which is believed to have fertility powers and to cure sickness. According to tradition, the well was found during the excavations undertaken in search of the icon, but when discovered, the well was completely dry and useless. On the day of the laying of the cornerstone of the church, however, the formerly dry well became filled to the brim with water. The source is seen as a miracle, and according to tradition, it is one of the most important miracles of the Panagia of Tinos. The chapel of holy water is called *Zōodochos Pēgē*; i.e., the Life-Giving Spring. Since the discovery of this water source, pilgrims regard its water to be sacred. Accordingly, small or bigger bottles of this precious water are taken away by pilgrims from all over the world, and kept in their homes as a talisman.

The sanctuary is a vast complex. The Holy Foundation of the Euangelistria of Tinos is a multifaceted institution of national and international dimensions, and the most important source of income on the island. The different parts of the sanctuary, such as doors and benches, are gifts, and the names of the donors are always written on nameplates affixed to the dedications. Among the most famous gifts, tokens of gratitude, is the marble fountain donated by a Muslim official who was cured of

syphilis. Much of what is given to the church as offerings is retained, but many of the gifts are sold. Most of the jewellery is auctioned in Athens, and the livestock, olive oil, etc., are sold. As an organisation, the Church of the Annunciation is a powerful force in local politics, acting in the manner of a philanthropic institution that commands a vast amount of wealth. The health business of modern Tinos is illustrated in many ways, for example, by the church sending talismans all over the world, requested by people who do not themselves have the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to Tinos.

The miraculous icon is attributed to the apostle and evangelist Luke, who is believed to have painted it during Mary's lifetime, with Mary sitting as his live model. This icon thus directly both ties to the origins of Christianity and to the likeness of Mary herself. It shows Gabriel appearing to Mary with the announcement of Christ's birth; i.e., the icon announces fertility. Today, the icon is covered with offerings of gold and precious stones, and it is not possible to see what it portrays (Figure 1).



Figure 2: Pilgrims make their way up to the sanctuary of the Annunciation on Tinos, which lies on the top of the hill, August 1993



(Author's photograph,)

Tinos, 15 August

All year round, pilgrims arrive to Tinos, but the crowd of devotees increases dramatically during the days around the August-festival (Figure 2). They come to the shrine for their *tama* (pl. *tamata*) or ex-voto (a dedication sealing a vow). Their pledge is to offer something to the Panagia for her help, mainly concerning people's health issues. Before leaving for Tinos, a mother may say: 'Save my child, my Panagia, and I will crawl on my knees, all the way towards your icon'. Childless couples also invoke the Panagia. Mostly women will make their way up to the church either barefooted, on their bare and bleeding knees, or on their stomachs, and they bring with them various offerings, sometimes tied on their backs: candles as tall as the donor, or icons (Figure 3). They may also bring silver candlesticks, censers, bread, wine, flowers, or sheep. The most common offering is a silver- or gold-plated ex-voto (*tama*) representing the person who has

Figure 3: A male pilgrim comes crawling as a snake, and is midway up the last staircase to the church. Penitential candles and an icon of the Panagia and Child are tied onto his back, Tinos 14 August 1993



(Author's photograph)

been miraculously cured by the icon, or the cured limb itself or the person or limb wanting to be cured, or a ship. The avenue, named *leōphoros Megalocharēs* leads directly from the harbour to the church. It is a kilometre in length, lined with shops and booths, particularly at its lower end. These are multiplied during August, since many sellers travel from festival to festival, as do beggars. As soon as the pilgrims disembark from the ships, and begin to make their way up the hill, they are assailed with the cries of the shopkeepers who stand outside their stores, hawking the items necessary for a successful pilgrimage:

*Lampades! Tamata! Mpoukalakia gia agiasma!
Edō Lampades!*

Large candles! Tamata! Little bottles for holy water! Here [are] large candles!

At the top of the hill, arriving at the doorway of the church, the pilgrims offer their large candles. Afterwards, they line up on the steps at the Church of the Annunciation, waiting their turn to enter the main chapel, to *proskynēma*, to perform the set of devotions a pilgrim does upon entering the church, particularly the devotions in front of the miraculous icon, the most important thing is to kiss the icon itself. The black pilgrimage clothes (penitential robes) and shoes are often left as dedications either to the icon or to the ruins of the foundations of the Byzantine Church, in the chapel dedicated to *Agia* (i.e. Saint) Pelagia, which is situated next to the Life-Giving Spring (Figure 4). Many pilgrims stay for a service, but most pilgrims confine their attention to the main sanctuary and

Figure 4: The remains of the oldest Byzantine church on Tinos is a most holy place for the many pilgrims who dedicate their pilgrimage clothes (penitential robes) here, August 2005



(Author's photograph)

to the chapel of holy water below the church:

Where do we go for holy water (agiasma)

pilgrims ask each other, and other, more knowledgeable pilgrims, direct them downstairs, to the chapel beneath the main church where they will find the holy water font. Inside the chapel, they kiss the icons, before taking some earth from the hole where the miraculous icon was found (Figure 5). Afterwards, they queue up to obtain holy water in small bottles or they drink it directly from the tap (Figure 6). Most pilgrims descend by the street, which is named *Euangelistriasis*, but is labelled *Epistrophē* (the Return), passing all the shopkeepers and vendors.

In addition to the thousands of pilgrims coming on their own, several pilgrimages are organised by the Church, such as in Athens, particularly in connection with 15 August. Seriously physically challenged persons in wheelchairs also participate.

Figure 5: A pilgrim obtains some holy earth from the hole where the miraculous icon was found, Tinos, August 1993



(Author's photograph)

The festival culminates through the *olonychtia*, the all-night-service, between 14 and 15 August and the following procession. On the eve of the feast, the church is richly decorated. Many pilgrims stay overnight in the courtyard, while equally many others spend the night inside the church, during which the priests and cantors sing invocations. Simultaneously, many are occupied by obtaining earth and water in the chapel below. Both the earth and water are considered to be particularly holy when the Panagia is not near. Accordingly, during her *panēgyrikos* (panegyric) many children are baptised in the baptistery in holy water from the Life-Giving Spring.

The Dormition of the Panagia is also an important ideological festival for the new Greek nation-state of 1821, combining the celebration of the Dormition with the day of the armed forces. This is illustrated through several ceremonies during the festival.

Figure 6: Pilgrims fetch holy water from the ‘Life-Giving Spring’, Tinos August 1993



(Author's photograph)

Figure 7: A poster proclaiming 15 August as the ‘Day of the Armed Forces’, Tinos August 1994



(Author's photograph)

The aforementioned service is followed by a procession at 11 am when the miraculous icon is carried down the main-street, *leōphoros Megalocharēs*. Top government cabinet members and the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, followed by the clergy and notables, are present. A military escort and lesser officials accompany them. A detachment of sailors marches at the rear of the procession; the national Hellenic Navy always sends warships to Tinos on 15 August, because the Panagia oversees the intimate and perilous relationship of the Greeks with the sea. The Navy is honoured because it is ‘under the protection of the Virgin’. The national ideology is further manifested through the speeches given by the authorities, and by the posters hanging about the town, announcing the festival. One of these depicts the Panagia hovering over the national symbol, the Acropolis of Athens (Figure 7). Other posters may depict a mixing of modern and ancient symbols. The message is always the same: 15 August is proclaimed as the Day of the Armed Forces, and the symbols of the navy, the air force and the army are displayed. We meet

the double nature of the occasion, both a patriotic and a religious holiday, in agreement with the traditionally close connection between the official Orthodox Church and the nation-state, in a patriotic sense.

Mary's icon is carried in procession, and also carried over the sick and women wanting to conceive. Several hours before the service is finished, a long queue of pilgrims lines up in the main street, waiting for the icon. As the icon is carried down the street, they bow in its path so that the icon is carried over them (Figure 8). It is important to touch and kiss the icon. In addition to the crowd of followers, thousands of onlookers follow the procession, some on their knees, others holding incense burners or lighted candles. Several sick pilgrims will lie down on the street, as the custom was before, but today there is the danger of being trampled by the increased crowds. During the procession, fighter jets from the air force regularly fly over the island, accompanied by salutes fired by the warships and cannon at the memorial in the harbour which was inaugurated in 2002.

Figure 8: During the festival celebrating the Dormition of the Panagia, on 15 August, her icon is carried in procession. The Icon passes over the sick and women wanting to conceive, Tinos August 1993



(Author's photograph)

On arriving at the harbour, mass is followed by a speeches given by attending members of the Government, for example, the Foreign Affairs Minister, in 1993. The ceremony officially ends when the clergy and the officials go aboard a warship, carrying them to the point where the Greek destroyer Elli was sunk by a submerged Italian submarine as it was anchored off the Tinos harbour on 15 August 1940. Here, another mass is held, and the priest and the attending Government representative—such as the prime minister in 1995—throw wreaths on the watery tomb of the ship and its crew. Meanwhile, ships are blowing their horns, the jets are passing over and people line across the coastline.

We came to pay honour to the Panagia, who helped us to beat the fascists,

said one of the survivors of the Elli crew in 1993. The importance of the Panagia for the Greek nation is also emphasised during the service, asking Her to take care of the Greek nation as she has always done.

After the patriotic ceremony, the procession returns to the Church at 1 pm. Mothers try to defy the police lines, to

Figure 9: The festival is also an excellent occasion to study the relation between the female and male worlds: Crawling female pilgrims and marching male soldiers, , Tinos August 1993



(Author's photograph)

bring their sick children as close as possible to the icon. The aim of the procession is that the miraculous icon passes over the pilgrims, to purify them for another year, but the Greek nation is also purified. In short, 15 August is a special day for Hellenism, combining religion with patriotism, and thus, the Dormition on Tinos is a profound social event.

The Gendered Worlds in the Tinos Festival

The festival is also an excellent occasion to study the relationship between the female and male worlds; i.e., the differences between female and male values, illustrating the various *identities* and *statuses* displayed in the festival. But, it must be emphasised that, as always when trying to classify different parts or categories, the two opposing worlds and value systems, the female and male, are nevertheless both complementary and interdependent (Figure 9).

Is the Greek nation's identity identical with a male identity as opposed to a female, domestic identity? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, because, the Greek nation and its identity belongs to a male, linear history according to an analysis based on Julia Kristeva (1986) and Jill Dubisch' (1991) distinction between two kinds of time, female and male time, which I have developed into female and male values, as illustrated in my study on Greek Festivals and the values embedded in them (Håland, 2017). In general, men's time is linear time: time as project, teleology, linear and perspective unfolding;

time as departure, progression, and arrival, the time of history. Women's time, by contrast, is repetitive; that is, cyclical. It is also beyond time in its ordinary sense. It is eternal, i.e., monumental time.

On the other hand, in the Greek context, we also meet a combination of a linear, male history and cyclical and monumental female history, characterised by repetition and eternity, since the Panagia announced the resurrection of Greekness. In many ways she represents Greece, and might be seen as embodying Greece in her eternal aspect. While embedded in history, the Panagia represents the never-dying spirit of nationhood (unearthed in a field), as contrasted to a specific political entity (the current state of Greece) existing in limited and delimited historical time. The account of the finding of the icon and the building of the church also represents women's time, because of the miracles and visions (forces generally excluded from male history), embedded in men's historical time. The Panagia represents the domestic realm, but she also stands as a national and local political representation beyond the domestic realm.

Among all of the Orthodox icons, those depicting the Panagia are most venerated. This cult has been important since the early Byzantine period, when she, according to legend, revealed herself, carrying a sword, on the walls of Konstantinople and Athens, saving her cities. Since then, visions of the Panagia have accompanied the armed forces of the Greeks in the same way as the ancient Goddess Athena. The victory belongs to the Panagia as to the commander-in-chief (Figure 10).

Figure 10: The Panagia's active participation in the Greco-Italian War of 1940-1941 is illustrated in several pictures from the period



Collections of the National Historical Museum of Athens, Greece / Natassa Kastriti

According to some, the banner of Greek resistance was first raised on 25 March 1821, the day of the Annunciation. This day is now celebrated as a day of double importance, Greek Independence Day and the day of the angel's announcement to Mary that she would bear the Son of God. Therefore, two rebirths, of humankind and of the Greeks are combined. This double rebirth is implicit in much of the shrine's iconography, ritual and history, for example, the scene on the miraculous icon, and the name of the church housing it.

The finding of the icon in 1823 was considered a divine sign, indicating support of the struggle and confirming liberation of the country from the Turks. Hence, the history of the icon is intimately bound to the history of modern Greece. Accordingly, high military, administrative and political dignitaries represent the

Figure 11: Wreaths have been laid to the deceased heroes of the ‘Elli’ before the festival day, Tinos 14 August 2009



(Author's photograph)

Government at the celebration of the great feasts of the Church, thus making these days appropriate occasions for articulating the relationship between nationalism and religion, and between church and state.

Below the main sanctuary of the church is a mausoleum, commemorating the sinking of the Elli. Annually, the heroes of the Elli are presented with a wreath, and a mass is held in front of the mausoleum on 13 August (Figure 11). Different persons stress different values in connection to the festival, and according to one young local man, the central focus is the celebration of the heroes of the Elli.

The sanctuary of Tinos is both a religious pilgrimage centre and an important national symbol, paralleling the resurrection of Greece, after ‘2000 years of sleep (the ancient period) or 850 years of burial (the Byzantine period)’. This is particularly demonstrated by the importance of showing ancient and Byzantine symbols, illustrated by a lion from the neighbouring ancient sacred pilgrimage island of Delos and the remains of the Byzantine church, once housing the icon. This church rested on the foundations of an ancient Greek temple, and marbles and columns from the ancient sanctuary

of Apollo on Delos and Poseidon's temple at Kionia, Tinos—these latter two also once sites of pilgrimage and healing—were used in the construction of the church, according to the church pamphlets distributed to pilgrims. These symbols also bear witness to the two, or double set of, Greek identities, the ancient and the Byzantine, the *Hellenic* or outward-facing and the *Romeic* or inward-facing, according to Michael Herzfeld's (1986, 1992) analysis of the Greek Romeic thesis. This thesis encompasses the inward-facing identity, the Romeic image of Greece, an identity that echoes the Byzantine Empire and hence the Orthodox Christian tradition to which the overwhelming majority of Greeks still adhere vs. the Hellenic, which is outward-facing, presenting the contemporary Greeks as direct cultural descendants of the ancient Hellenes, ignoring the heritage of the Byzantine Empire and the traditions of Greek Orthodox Christianity. In his research, Herzfeld describes these idiosyncratic Greek identities with the term *disemia*, a two-way-facing system of meanings that can be part of a public discourse. Nevertheless, despite his theories, certain representations of the Church of the Annunciation seek to merge this Romeic past with classical Hellenic Greece. The church and its history assert an evolution

from pagan traditions to Christianity, standing and built on the past, transcending a past that it does not reject. The Greeks are neither Hellenes nor Byzantines, they are both.

Instead of saying that political discourse makes use of religion and religious symbolism and finds an opportunity for its expression in religious occasions, such as those celebrated on Tinos on 15 August, I would suggest that there is a combination of the two. Since religious discourse makes use of politics and political symbolism, they are both complementary and interdependent. This intermingling is particularly manifested in modern posters announcing the festival on Tinos, reflecting Byzantine manifestations as well as paintings and newspapers from the Greek-Italian war in 1940-1941 (Figure 10). Despite the maternal participation of the Panagia, all the official rituals performed by representatives of the nation-state and the church may be classified as belonging to a *male world*, representing *male values, identities and statuses*. Where does that leave the female one?

For the Greeks, the events of 15 August are an expression of faith, and particularly of women's faith and their identification with the Panagia. Generally, Greek women's identity and status belong to female values, and in this connection the Panagia plays a key role. Nevertheless, during the ritual chaos, which is particularly apparent in the procession, we see a female world counteracting a male official world, represented by the Church and the police.

The festival is dedicated to the most important mother, the Panagia. In Greece, a woman is the guardian of her family's spiritual health, which cannot be separated from physical health, given the importance of prayers and vows regarding healing and protection. Accordingly, on Tinos, we see a tension between the official priesthood and the representative of the individual family. Women are the most frequent pilgrims arriving on Tinos. It is women who most often undertake the most difficult acts of pilgrimage, such as crawling to the church on their knees to assure the well-being of the family. This is also illustrated by the female bronze figure at the top of the

Figure 12: Women writing (chartia) paraklēseis (prayer or supplication papers), on which they inscribe names of ill people, so that the priests may read a prayer for them or perform a blessing over the named persons, living or dead, during important stages of the liturgy, Tinos 14 August 2019



(Author's photograph)

hill, named The Pilgrim Mother (*Ē Mana Proskynētria*), embodying the arrival of a female pilgrim mother. Therefore, one needs to see this pilgrimage in the context of Greek gender roles, and particularly women come to a female divinity who dies yearly on 15 August, is reborn and gives birth again, in the same way as Mother Earth and the agricultural year. Women's time is non-linear and repeated, embodied in women who in the context of daily life, give birth, raise children, prepare food and tend the dead in an endless cycle, and who come to the shrine as pilgrims to offer themselves, so that this cycle may not be broken.

The divine female force we see throughout the Panagia makes, in this instance, history female, embodying cyclicity and resurrection. We are confronted with this in the activities that are usually performed by female pilgrims, such as vows, prayers and offerings, accompanied by oral sharing of stories of miracles. These are determined by, and in conformation to, the shape

of events and problems of everyday life and hence are gendered, continuous and in a constant flux. Women's tasks, roles and natures, supposedly, have varied little over time, related to an eternal Mother Goddess, the female domestic sphere and history. Women come to the Panagia with prayers related to timeless or eternal issues of health, children, death and birth, praying and making offerings to conceive, to be healed from a sickness, or making vows and depositing written request (Figure 12) on behalf of others, particularly for children, but also for those who just have died. These requests belong to repetition, being of a cyclical nature. The body of the Virgin Mother demonstrates the maternal cult, since her body does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via the Dormition, according to the Orthodox faith.

Although a male-dominated religious hierarchy controls the church, women most frequently attend church and domesticate its interior, noticeable through all their

Figure 13: A pilgrim mother with a sick child on her back in the hope of healing has crawled on her knees from the harbour to the Church of the Annunciation, and has arrived at the last staircase up to the main church, Tinos 14 August 2009



(Author's photograph)

offerings and their regular ritual practice. Many offer flowers or their woven fabrics, bread and other items produced by women as part of their domestic role, to the Panagia.

Greek women have their own values in addition to, or running contrary to the male view, depending on how the male view suits their own thinking. Women display their *poetics of womanhood*, the point of which is to show how *to be good at being a woman* (cf. Dubisch 1995: Ch. 10, elaborated in Håland 2017: Ch. 7). Several topics in the festival, such as the importance of the female body, motherhood, women's general activities in the religious sphere, are all important ways of manifesting a *poetics of womanhood*.

The female body provides a significant source for social symbolism: It plays an important role in the *poetics of womanhood*, because bodies have social meanings that may be used in public performances. The female body creates and represents the family and social relations in a variety of contexts. A woman makes a public performance crawling on her knees to the church with her sick child on her back in the hope of healing it (Figure 13), but the action takes validity through the sacrifice and suffering of the self on behalf of others. Through her maternal role, the mother's own body is repeatedly offered as a sacrifice, and this sacrifice may be dramatised in women's pilgrimage to the shrine dedicated to the Panagia. A suffering mother may give public performances of *being good at being a woman*. Her 'public' audiences are usually other women, who share her 'public' space, interests and value system, and therefore, are interested in competing with her performance of *being good at being a woman*.

The festival is dedicated to the nurturing, healing and suffering Mother Goddess, the Panagia, the All Holy One, the one who dominates all the others, the most holy. She is the first, most important and powerful saint in the Orthodox Church. She is at the head of the entire church because she was the vessel of Christ (Figure 14). Her two festivals, her Dormition and her Annunciation are the most important official festivals in Greece, and they have a double religious and political connotation. This is probably because of the important mediating position of a mother. The Panagia is also called *Mesitria*, the Mediator. She is essentially a human intercessor and a mother, since her maternal role is emphasised within the Orthodox tradition, as well as her powers within the heavenly and earthly worlds. Mother worship

Figure 14: The Panagia, as the Life-Giving Spring, at the entrance to the chapel dedicated to the 'Life-Giving Spring', Tinos, August 2007



(Author's photograph)

is important within political rituals and symbolism. Furthermore, Greek women are strong and active persons in their own right, paralleling the concepts of the Holy Panagia. By focussing on the meaning of the rituals that women carry out, we change focus from a man's world to a woman's world, considering values and cults, which are important to women. We realise that these cults also have importance for the official national ideology. In short, within the ideological entirety that constitutes the festival, rituals performed by women while worshipping their motherly model, are of focal importance.

Greek Population Groups and Foreigners: From a National to an All-Orthodox Festival

The tension between a female and male world during the Tinos festival, parallels the tension between the official society and a marginal group of people that is not small in Greek society, the gypsies. My use of the term gypsies is not meant to be pejorative, but a translation of the word used by ordinary Greeks. Although both the gypsies and other Greeks are all Greeks per definition, this is neither

the case for the local Tiniots nor the gypsies themselves. The former talk about Greeks versus gypsies, while the latter generally are concerned with pointing out that they are absolutely not *Tsingani*, calling themselves *Romani*. In the early 1990s, there were many of them, but they seem to be diminishing in numbers lately. One reason that the church does not welcome them is that other Greeks started to arrive before or after the festival, instead of coming on the actual days of the festival. Most of the people who actually attended the festival on 15 August were gypsies. Due to foot-and-mouth disease among the sheep and EU restrictions, the church has done a great deal of work on prohibiting the gypsies from bringing sheep to Tinos since 1993. Fear of sick animals no one wanted to buy and all the fuss in connection with the sheep led the church management to forbid the gypsies from bringing sheep in 1995. They were asked instead to offer a sum of money, equivalent to the sheep's value. This was probably a means of excluding them from the island, and the demand frustrated a people who calculate

value in animals and not in money. Still, I have annually observed some who have managed to come with their usual animal offerings, even since the prohibition was introduced and enforced (Figure 15) - sheep have still been offered as sacrifice up to at least 2019. The church, on the other hand, tries to keep the gypsies away from Tinos as a result of the antagonisms between them (*kakos kosmos*; that is, bad people) and other Greeks (*kalos kosmos*; that is, respectable, or literally, good people). These are descriptive formulations (from common Greeks) one may encounter all over Tinos. As a consequence of the ambivalent relationship between the gypsies and other Greeks, the latter only come to the island to baptise their children as soon as the gypsies have left. In 2007, however, the most fashionable restaurant in Tinos began to serve gypsies, based on the argument that they 'leave 40,000 Euros behind, and it is better to let them in than that they should sit cooking in the streets and in the park'. From 2011, many other Greeks did not have the possibility to attend the festival in their usual way because of the

**Figure 15: Pilgrims arrive with a sheep offering to the Panagia.
The sheep is put in a shopping trolley from the nearest supermarket, Tinos 14 August 2012**



(Author's photograph)

severe and disastrous economic crisis in Greece, or they arrived on the eve of the festival, stayed in the church during the night and left right after the procession, still evidencing the importance of the festival. The gypsies however, could afford to stay for several days, since most of them sleep in the streets or in the parks and do not need to spend money on hotels. From 2013 onward, especially because of the crisis, they have been admitted into the hotels as well, since most ordinary Greek pilgrims have problems financing longer stays on the island and most go back to Athens as soon as they have worshipped the icon, or they might spend their nights in sleeping bags in the parks as the gypsies did early in the 1990s. Moreover, the ferries changed their schedules during the summers of 2012 and 2013, so pilgrims could arrive in the morning and leave in the evening without needing to spend money on accommodation. In other words, the situation has completely changed since 1990. Then, the gypsies had money, but were not permitted to enter hotels or restaurants.

The local Tiniots acknowledge that the gypsies

are more religious than us ... but their religion is strange, since they only worship the mother.

This claim may, of course, be used against the Tiniots themselves, who obviously celebrate the Mother's festivals. Although the gypsies are marginalised in Greece as in the rest of Europe, they perform all the rituals in the same way as other pilgrims. The two different groups of pilgrims are united into one society during the rituals, particularly during the holy night between 14 and 15 August and during the procession. But, paradoxically, the gypsies are on the other hand marginalised by their daily tasks and their offerings, especially their offering of sheep and the clothing they wear. Even if several of their activities are not approved, they are recognised for showing greater enthusiasm when performing the rituals, and are often admired for this by the other Greeks.

In the early 1990s, 15 August on Tinos was more or less reserved for Greeks, coming from all over Greece and the

Figure 16: Ethiopian pilgrim women are breaking the fast after the procession with the icon, Tinos 15 August 2019



(Author's photograph)

diaspora. This has changed, since today, not only Greeks come to Tinos. After the turn of the century the festival has increasingly attracted non-Greek pilgrims, so today's pilgrims swarm to Greece from all over the Orthodox world, be it from Romania, where the health system is on the verge of collapse, from Ethiopia (Figure 16), or, especially in the last decade, from Russia, whose very wealthy pilgrims are overrunning the most expensive hotels on Tinos. Many of the pilgrims coming from south-eastern European and other Orthodox countries are women traveling with their local priest on a trip, where Tinos is just one stop among many - they also may take the opportunity to visit other places in Greece, such as Thessaloniki, Meteora and the Acropolis of Athens.

Regarding the latest national developments of the festival, I have already touched upon the recent economic crisis - the suffering extended by the Covid-19 pandemic for the average Greeks. According to an acquaintance living on Tinos, quite unexpectedly, the flow of pilgrims was not reduced during the summer of 2020, and in September they started to count the cases of Covid. Thus, the management in the sanctuary has assured that during this strange period, health issues carry the highest priority. One may add that it is rather logical in times of crisis that pilgrims deem the Panagia the best solution, as also happened during the recent severe economic crisis. When asked whether pilgrims wear masks, and if so, do they keep it on when kissing the icon, or do they remove it, I was told that some pilgrims keep the mask on and others do not kiss the icon.

Despite economic crisis and pandemic: on 15 August representatives from the army, the air force and especially the navy will be present on Tinos with war ships in the harbour and fighter jets flying over the island, and in this way show the rest of the world that Greece is still powerful. This date will always be the day the Greeks will combine religion with patriotism.

There are several meanings and values connected to the festival and its rituals, popular and official, female and male, since the pilgrimage site on Tinos presents an interrelationship of history, ritual and gender. Here, different interests—sacred and secular, local and national, personal and official—all come together in an intersection of social, economic, religious and political life. The takeaway lesson is that a political explanation can never entirely account for cultic arrangements.

Panagia's influence is still crucial, as we saw also in 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, when people were advised to stay home and refrain from traveling unless it was absolutely necessary. The reason for this is that Tinos, the holy island of the Panagia, contrary to the neighbouring island of Mykonos, attracted many tourists, particularly young ones, because it was regarded as a safe destination, thus clearly indicating the importance of sacred journeys.

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