

20-9-2023

## Religious Celebrations and Tradition: The Case of 'Panigiras' in Sifnos Island

Polyxeni Moira

University of West Attica, Department of Tourism Management, Greece, polmoira@uniwa.gr

Dimitrios Mylonopoulos

University of West Attica, Department of Tourism Management, Greece, dimilon@uniwa.gr

Eleni Synagridi

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, elena\_syn@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp>



Part of the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Moira, Polyxeni; Mylonopoulos, Dimitrios; and Synagridi, Eleni (2023) "Religious Celebrations and Tradition: The Case of 'Panigiras' in Sifnos Island," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 11: Iss. 5, Article 8.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/60M6-WP10>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol11/iss5/8>

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#).

---

# Religious Celebrations and Tradition: The Case of ‘Panigiras’ in Sifnos Island

---

## **Polyxeni Moira**

University of West Attica, Greece  
polmoira@uniwa.gr

## **Dimitrios Mylonopoulos**

University of West Attica, Greece  
dimilon@uniwa.gr

## **Eleni Synagridi**

Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece  
elena\_syn@hotmail.com

Religions presuppose a set of symbols that evoke feelings of respect or awe and are associated with various rituals (e.g. religious services) in which a community of believers is involved. Ritualistic religious acts include prayers, hymns, dances, use or abstinence from food, fasting, use of symbols, lighting a candle, offering food or flowers to a deity, etc. Religious worship rituals are performed individually by a person or collectively by groups of believers. The formal rituals are ceremonies which take place in sacred places such as churches, temples, mosques, pagodas (depending on religion). The informal rituals are festive events (e.g., fairs, festivals, processions, etc.) and take place on specific dates that symbolise an important incident for the believer (e.g., the appearance of a deity or its envoy, the performance of a miracle, dormition of a holy person, etc.). The celebration of a patron saint or the Virgin Mary is usually accompanied by a religious and social fair. These fairs are very popular throughout Greece especially during the summer. Beyond the general concept of national character, the religious fairs dedicated to Virgin Mary comprise a multitude of events that reflect the local culture of each region.

This study describes the actual process of the fair (Panigiri) dedicated to the Sifnos island patron Saint Panagia Chrissopighi (Our Lady of the Golden Spring), which is held every year on Ascension Day (40th day after the Greek Orthodox Easter Sunday). The 16th century monastery Panagia Chrissopigi stands at the south-eastern part of the island. More specifically, the tradition of ‘Panigiras’ (the organiser of the fair who is responsible for the expenses and the festivities) is examined. The data collection method is participant observation. For the celebration of the Virgin Mary of Chrissopigi, the custom of ‘panigiras’ originates from the unwritten rules of tradition, which shows the deep-seated religious sentiment of the inhabitants of Sifnos island, in the Cyclades, Greece. The custom of ‘panigiras’ has a dual nature - religious and cultural. The religious component (pilgrimage) continues to be of great importance to the local community of Sifnos, but at the same time it offers a remarkable cultural dimension for visitors to the island (religious tourists).

**Key Words:** tradition, religious fair, Panigiras, Sifnos Island, Greece

## **Introduction**

It is extremely difficult to give a single definition of religion, unanimously accepted by researchers (Geertz, 2004) as the practices and systems specified as ‘religions’ are different. As a matter of fact, Lambert (1991) refers to the ‘Tower of Babel’ when discussing definitions of religion. Saint Augustine has pointed out that most of us know exactly what religion is, until someone asks us to define it.

The difficulty of even translating the term ‘religion’ into some languages indicates the need to include in the sociological reflection about religious a historical semantic inquiry, because what we mean by religion is a social edifice with a history. The term religion is used in daily public speech and typically refers to things that are beyond the sphere of traditional religious organisations. Durkheim (1971) defined religion as a unified system of doctrines and deeds referring to sacred things, particularly things that are inaccessible and forbidden. This system

unites those who accept a single ethical community called the 'church'. Religion, thus, means common faith and common worship, which unite individuals into one group and establish a social cohesion (Durkheim, 1971). Religion is the beliefs and practices of a group of people, often codified under the term's prayer, ritual and religious law. Religion also includes ancestral and cultural traditions, written texts, history and mythology, as well as personal beliefs and mystical experiences. The term 'religion' also refers to both personal practices related to communal faith as well as to group rituals and communication that come from common belief (Bowker, 2000).

According to Olsen and Timothy (2006), religion is considered as a privatised yet multiple experience, where the 'spiritual' element and the 'religious' element are separate. According to McCutcheon the term describes beliefs, behaviours and social institutes based on perceptions of the origin, the purpose and significance of the universe, the posthumous condition, the existence and will of the powerful, non-human beings (spirits, angels, demons, gods) that shape human behaviour. (McCutcheon, 2006). Human beings seek to communicate with the divine as they are by nature religious creatures; while the essence of religion is real, at the same time it is not empirical, so one cannot study it, but only experience it.

The term *religion* is often used interchangeably with the word faith. This term generally defines having faith in the supernatural, the sacred or the divine, but also the codes of ethics, practices, values, organisations and rituals that are associated with it. In the broader sense, it is defined as the sum of answers given in order to interpret the relationship of humans to the universe. Testart defines religion as

*an organized set of rituals and beliefs that presupposes the recognition of a specific principle of effectiveness, which constructs the view of the world and at the same time gives meaning to its rituals* (Authors' translation - Testart, 1993).

We observe in this definition, a shift from faith in rituals to action.

Throughout the centuries, religion has taken different forms in different continents and different cultures. Often

the word religion is used to define what could be more properly described as 'organised religion' – that is, an organisation that supports the practice of a religion often in the form of a legal entity (McCutcheon, 2007).

According to Partridge (Πάρτριτζ, 2006:13), who uses a much more functional definition, religion is a historical construct, which is used by different social factors for different purposes (e.g., to classify or promote specific sectors of social life).

## Religion and Rituals

Religions presuppose a set of symbols - which evoke feelings of respect or awe and are ritualistically connected - or various rituals (e.g. religious liturgies<sup>1</sup>) in which a community of believers participate (Giddens, 2002). Worship is a practical manifestation of religious experience and an integral part of religion as an institution. It includes four main elements, the ritual (as a model of divine service), the symbols (representations of the holy), the sacraments (acts which manifest the effect of the holy) and the sacrifices (Wach, 1967).

According to Kelly & Kaplan (1990), a ritual is customarily linked to tradition and the sacred. Rituals associated with a religion are characterised by great diversity. According to Schultz & Lavenda, a ritual is

*a repetitive social practice, different from the routines of day-to-day life, follows some sort of ritual schema, encoded in myth* (2009:244-245).

Religious ritualistic acts include prayers, hymns, dances, use or abstinence from food, fasting, use of symbols, ritualistic acts such as lighting a candle, offering food or flowers to a deity, etc. Religious – worship rituals are performed either individually by a person or collectively by groups of believers. Formal rituals are ceremonies which take place in sacred places, e.g. churches, temples, mosques, pagodas (depending on religion). Informal rituals are festive events, e.g. festivals, fairs, processions, etc. and take place on specific dates that symbolise an important incident for the believer e.g. the appearance of a deity, the performance of a miracle, the dormition of a holy person, etc. (Μοίρα, 2019α:31).

<sup>1</sup> Liturgy is a particular set of words, music, and actions used in ceremonies in some religions, especially Christianity (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

Map 1: Cyclades and Sifnos Island



Source: P. Moira

Religion plays an important role in the lives of Greek people. Greek culture is closely linked to the Greek Orthodox Church (Håland, n.d.). This is also clear in the Greek Constitution<sup>2</sup> (Μυλωνόπουλος, 2001). Religious faith is celebrated with festivities and rituals in honour of the Virgin Mary, Saints, Holy figures and are held throughout the whole country, throughout the year. The Eastern Orthodox Church is highly liturgical, resulting in a rich use of religious rituals. These rituals performed in the Greek Orthodox Church are based not only on the sacred scriptures, but also on oral tradition, Apostolic tradition, ecclesiastical customs and the texts of the church's fathers (Benz, 1963). All of the above, according to Benz, constitute significant spiritual wealth because these elements are kept alive by the body of believers (Hann & Goltz, 2010).

The celebration of a patron saint or the Virgin Mary is usually materialised by holding a fair. The fair is essentially a collective celebration of the memory of a patron Saint or another religious anniversary, which is celebrated with the participation of the locals and

includes religious events (e.g. liturgy, litany<sup>3</sup> etc.). It is often accompanied by setting up a temporary outdoor market, dancing, music etc. (Μπαμπινιώτης, 2005:1312).

Residents of each region try to replicate what they identify as their own ‘traditional form’ and often consider themselves as the only ones who can ensure the ‘authenticity’ of the fair. The fair is an internal part of their day-to-day lives and is considered their ‘responsibility’. Simultaneously, designing the fair is a way of expressing thoughts and sentiments about the need of collectivity and togetherness. The reason moves between the description of events and the reproduction of myths. (Duquenne & Kaklamani, 2008).

Celebrations of the Virgin Mary are usually accompanied by a religious and social fair. These fairs are very popular throughout Greece especially during the summer. Beyond the general concept of national character, the religious fairs dedicated to Virgin Mary comprise a multitude of events that reflect the local culture of each region (Μοίρα, 2019α).

2 Section II of the Greek Constitution recognises Greek Orthodoxy as the ‘prevailing religion.’ This is further supported by laws which prohibit offenses against ‘religious peace,’ including blasphemy and religious insult.

3 Litany (*λιτανεία* in Greek language) is the procession of sacred icons, the Holy Cross or the relics of Saints or the Epitaph (on Good Friday), but always outside the Temple. The Litany belongs to the religious ceremonies.

**Photo 1a and 1b: Scenic Views of Sifnos Island**

1a: Bay of Kamares, Sifnos Island; 1b: Kastro Village, Sifnos Island



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sifnos#/media/File:Kastro,\\_Sifnos.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sifnos#/media/File:Kastro,_Sifnos.jpg);  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sifnos#/media/File:Church\\_of\\_Chryssopigi%C3%AD\\_monastery\\_Sifnos.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sifnos#/media/File:Church_of_Chryssopigi%C3%AD_monastery_Sifnos.jpg)

**Sifnos Island - The Study Area**

The purpose of the survey, which forms the basis of this paper is to collect empirical data referring to the organisation and fulfilment of the celebration of Panagia<sup>4</sup> Chryssopigi on the Greek island of Sifnos. The data collection methods include bibliographic sources and participant observation on the island of Sifnos. The participant, originally from the island of Sifnos, whose family still resides on the island and has hosted the Chryssopigi illustrated icon as a part of the tradition of 'panigiras' (religious fair), observed and recorded the events during the May 2018 celebrations.

Sifnos (Map 1) is one of the 24 inhabited islands of Cyclades (in total 56 islands); it belongs to the western Cyclades complex of the Aegean Sea and is located 75 nautical miles from Piraeus. It has an area of 73.9km<sup>2</sup>, is 15km in length and has 70km of coastline (Μοίρα, 2019β). In the southeast of the island there is an uninhabited islet called Kitriani which has a single building, the Byzantine church of Panagia of Cypriani, after which it is named. According to mythology, Sifnos is an extension of Sounion Cape and is one of the peaks of Aigida that was subdued in earlier geological times, while there are testimonies that in ancient times it was called 'Akis' because of its triangular shape (Προμπονάς, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Panagia is the Greek Orthodox name designated to Virgin Mary.

**Natural and Anthropogenic Environment**

Sifnos has a beautiful natural environment (Photo 1a and 1b). Many areas are protected as areas of particular natural beauty due to its environmental quality and rarity of local flora and fauna. In 2016, the Municipality of Sifnos and the Korean Jeju Olle Foundation<sup>5</sup>, announced the twinning of their trails. Visitors can hike on the island, following any of the 19 marked hiking trails (E-Sifnos, 2019b). Other activities include recreational fishing, leisure diving, water sports, visiting museums and cultural sites.

The permanent population of Sifnos, according to the 2011 census, is 2,625 inhabitants. During the summer, the population multiplies significantly due to tourism, reaching more than 10,000-15,000, especially in August. The Sifnians are generally polite, hospitable, patriotic and friendly. They are sociable and willing to participate in social and cultural events, while they enjoy teasing and giving nicknames to each other that accompany them for the rest of their lives, even their offspring (Προμπονάς, 2014). They have a well developed spirituality and the island has produced outstanding poets, writers, folklore writers, journalists, as well as politicians, religious leaders, lawyers etc. Among them is world-renowned

<sup>5</sup> Jeju Olle is one of the most famous trails in Asia. It is located on the island of Jeju in South Korea which receives about 13,000,000 visitors each year. The trail has a length of 425 km and it's visited by 2 million hikers per year.

chef Nikolaos Tselemedes, one of the most influential cookery writers of modern Greece. Every September, in his honour, a festival of Cycladic gastronomy is organised (Sifnos.gr, 2019).

Many well-known products are associated with the island, such as ceramics, whose construction reflects centuries-old history. It is also known for its cotton production and straw-weaving (Προμπονάς, 2014:82). It should be noted that the island has a rich gastronomic tradition. In recent years, wine production in Sifnos has grown significantly, resulting in distribution of locally produced white wine (retsina) and red wines throughout all the island's local food stores (E-Sifnos, 2019c).

### The Churches of Sifnos

Closely linked to Sifnos history, architecture and religious-social life are its numerous churches and monasteries. The inhabitants of the island took advantage of the privileges granted to them by the Turkish Sultans for the free manifestation of their Christian faith (Μοίρα, 2019β). The Sifnians used to bequeath their property to the churches and monasteries and undertake various obligations by performing rituals (mainly fairs). Thus, Sifnos, despite being a medium-sized island, has 235 churches, in the form of monasteries, churches and chapels. Churches are located between houses, with which they are inextricably linked and often share courtyards. The dominant types of churches are levelled basilicas and single-spaced with a dome (Τζάκου, 1979). On the lintel of the churches there is an embossed cross with the inscription 'έν τούτῳ νικά'<sup>6</sup>, because in traditional buildings (windmills, pigeon houses, churches, haystack warehouses etc.) it is customary to form the symbol of a cross with lime for safety and protection from evil (Προμπονάς, 2014).

Many of the churches and monasteries of Sifnos have been declared historical monuments and have great religious and architectural interest. All of the churches on the island were once privately owned, usually by priests who later passed on the church to their offspring, so most of them are small in size, with the exception of parish temples built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Another

reason for their small size is that most of them were built under difficult and pressing conditions, both during the Frankish occupation (13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the Turkish occupation. Many of them remain proprietary today, while some are managed by the parishes they belong to (Παπαπαύλου, 2011:12).

Sifnos used to have about 43 parishes, while today it has only eight. The largest number of churches on the island, 46 in total, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, followed by 22 dedicated to Saint George, 19 to Christ, 18 to Saint John the Baptist, 14 to Saint Nicholas and 9 to Taxiarches<sup>7</sup> (Παπαπαύλου, 2011:13).

### The Tradition of Panigiras in Sifnos

As already mentioned, all the churches of Sifnos were privately owned. This resulted in the creation of the custom of 'Panigiras' (religious fair), following the unwritten laws of tradition and revealing in depth the Sifnian religious sentiment. For Sifnos and especially for the custom of panigiras, the existing literature is quite sparse. The most important research, entitled 'Σιφνιώτικο πανηγύρι' (Sifnian Panigiri), is published in Sifnos by Α. Τρούλλος, and describes in detail the organisation of Sifnian religious fairs. Other sources are the trekking guide of Γ. Παπαπαύλου, entitled 'Τ' Άη Νηγιά τ' ανήφορο' (The uphill of Saint John), published in 2011, which tours the 235 churches of Sifnos and a book by Ν. Προμπονάς, entitled 'Σίφνος. Ξεναγός στο όμορφο, αγαπημένο νησί' (Sifnos: A guide to the beautiful and beloved island), published in 2014. Thus, when researching for this paper, information about the custom was obtained through direct monitoring and recording of the events.

Greek community, communalism and parish are all institutions and procedures that formed and evolved throughout Greek history, and all have played an economic, social, cultural and political role at the same time, reflecting a particular ethos that governs community life and reflects the set of values, rules and behaviours that compose Greek identity (Γκιάτας & Καλύβας, 2015). However, their importance and role have emerged

6 This is translated as 'in this sign thou shalt conquer' in English and in Latin 'In hoc signo vinces'.

7 The name Taxiarchis is given to the Archangels Michael and Gabriel by the Greek Orthodox Church, with the word literally meaning 'Commander' and usually translated into English as 'Archangel'.

mainly during the period of Ottoman occupation when the Greeks were enslaved and had the need to stay united and maintain their Greek consciousness and identity. In this context of community and communalism, developed the tradition of panigiras. Nowadays these fairs are essentially a medium of expressing folk culture and social coherence. The fairs are a genuine folk expression based on the morals and customs of each region in combination with Orthodox faith, worship, and tradition. Tradition can be learned but not instructed. To achieve the learning of tradition it is necessary to participate in a fair, since the tradition is experienced through the fair (Αυδίκος, 2004).

In general, the honoured Saint is the trigger for the running of each fair (panigiri<sup>8</sup>). ‘Panigiri’ (religious festival) is one of the most important Byzantine commercial institutions, which is an occasion for gathering and celebration of population in the places. The fair is a day of joy and entertainment. In modern times, especially during the summer fairs, there is the concept of reconnecting with the community, since there is participation, due to summer vacation, from migrants from various countries and they come to co-exist and refuel their relationship with the community (Βαρβούνης, 2019).

### *Panigiras in Sifnos Island.*

In the case of Sifnos, the organisation of the fairs starts many months before the celebration. Once a family takes over the care of a church, it also has the obligation to celebrate the memory of the Saint that the church is named after. The honourable portable icon is considered the protector of the family; thus, it is considered right to take the icon home to take care of it. Indeed, the obligation is more severe, when there has been a miraculous intervention, healing or redemption, by the Saint to a member of the family. Fear of theft of the icon, by pirates, corsairs or even thieves contributed to this decision (Τρούλλος, 1993). Even today more than three hundred icons ‘reside’ outside churches in the homes of the faithful, even following them to their winter residences outside the island in places such as Athens,

8 ‘Panigiri’ (religious festival) is one of the most important Byzantine commercial institutions and an opportunity for gathering and celebration. The main meaning of the word ‘panigiri’ is the mass celebration of the memory of a Saint and the eponymous church, which includes many religious and secular activities (Βοζίκας, 2006:68).

Piraeus, Thessaloniki etc. The only icon that never leaves the island and resides in the metropolis of the panigiras’ village all year round, is that of ‘Panagia Chrissopigi’ which is the protector of Sifnos (E-Sifnos, 2019a).

The title of panigiras is accompanied by certain obligations, besides the main one being the safekeeping of the icon. Initially, the holy icon is not placed in the iconostasis along with the other icons of the house, but in another place. The spot where it will be housed must be transformed into a tiny ‘house of God’. More specifically, a feather pillow is placed on a fixed table where the holy icon is placed. The pillow cover is usually embroidered by the housewife. Next to the icon is placed an oil lamp<sup>9</sup> that must burn continuously day and night until the day of the fair, and an incense burner for the morning and afternoon incense burning, two bronze or ceramic candleholders<sup>10</sup> with candlesticks wrapped with asparagus, as well as some ecclesiastical books such as *Sacred Synopsis*, *Apolitikion / Kontakion* and the Saint’s *Megalinarion*<sup>11</sup> for the purpose of reading the prayer (Τρούλλος, 1993).

Apart from the purely ritualistic part of the icon hosting, an especially important obligation of panigiras is the icons maintenance (preservation). The host is responsible for preserving the sacred object, polishing the wood with special varnish, while they are sometimes referred to specialists, who oversee any maintenance. Sometimes even due to their ‘Tama<sup>12</sup>’, panigiras undertake the responsibility of framing the icon or making it gold-plated or silver-plated. Subsequently, on Holy Sabbath it is necessary to light the candle with Holy Light; every first day of the month sanctification has to be done; on Sunday of Orthodoxy the icon has to be taken to its church to participate in the litany of the holy icons, and finally; it has to be sanctified along with the house on the day of Epiphany (των Φώτων).

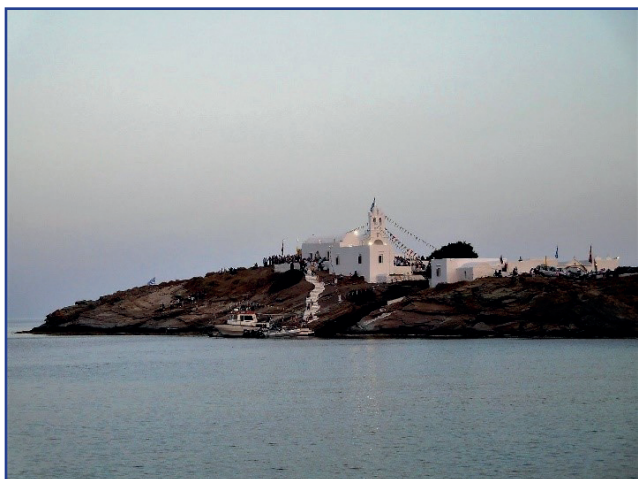
9 The oil lamp must be filled specifically with olive oil.

10 Candleholders are called cadiliera in Sifnian dialect.

11 Apolitikia, Kontakia and Megalinarion are short hymns that contain a summary about the history of that particular celebration. Specifically, Megalinarion refer to the story of a Saint or a holy person in general.

12 ‘Tama’ is a kind of promise or offering made to God or a Saint in order to fulfill a desire or healing.

Photo 2a &amp; 2b: The Church of Panagia of Chrissopigi



Source: E. Synagridi

Before the start of the fair, the panigiras is obliged to make the church presentable. This usually includes painting the walls and window frames and cleaning every brass object in the church. Also, the inside of the church and courtyard have to be decorated with flags, branches of laurel / lemon tree / myrtle and pillars of palm tree branches and flowers have to be gathered for the decoration of the icon and the cubicle that it is placed upon. Necessary materials (bread, wine, oil, candles) for the liturgies have to be gathered, the chanter and priest have to get invited separately, and the costs of the communal feasts, called ‘Trapezes Agapis<sup>13</sup>’ have to be covered for all pilgrims / panegyrist. This feast takes place on the eve of the celebration of the Saint’s memory after the Vespers (Προμπονάς, 2014).

The usual dinner provided at the ‘Trapezes Agapis’, offered free of charge to all participating pilgrims, consists of traditional local dishes like Sifnian chickpea soup, olives, fresh salad, meat cooked in tomato sauce (usually from goat or ‘rifi’ as called in Sifnian dialect) with spaghetti or potatoes<sup>14</sup> (in the period of fasting it is replaced by cod) and wine. Dinner is accompanied by music, by two organ players with violin and lute, called

‘Takimi’<sup>15</sup>. The meals will be served repeatedly until all participants have eaten. In every serving the guests drum their plates with cutlery while toasting for the good health of the panigiras, the cooks, the waiters, etc.

Nowadays, even though the cost of the major fairs, like that of Chrissopigi, are very high, they are so intertwined with tradition and are considered a psychological need. As a result there is a priority list for who will take over the role of panigiras (Προμπονάς, 2014:226). On rare occasions there are multiple panigiras, in order to reduce costs<sup>16</sup>. In this case they are called ‘Brotherhood’ (e.g. Brotherhood of Saint Simeon, Brotherhood of Saint John of the ‘Black Village’ etc.), with each ‘brother’ hosting the icon in succession for equal periods of time.

With all the above offerings and faithful keeping of obligations, panigiras has the special honour of being the sponsor of the Providence of the ‘Divine Forces’ (Τρούλλος, 1993). Even when he delivers the holy icon to the next panigiras, he feels spiritual peace and jubilation.

### *The Fair of Chrissopigi.*

The icon of Chrissopigi is considered a true treasure for the Sifnians, since its recorded miracles made it the first

13 ‘Trapeza Agapis’, is called a feast after the vespers. This makes reference to the first *Trapezes Agapis* established by the Apostles in Jerusalem.

14 All the food is cooked traditionally in ‘panostries’ (elevated fireplaces).

15 The term ‘Takimi’ means people that collaborate well together, having a close relationship (commonly known as ‘best friends’).

16 The cost for organising of the fair of Chrissopigi, with more than 1,000 participants, is estimated to be 20,000 euros.



Photo 3: The 'Lifting' of the Icon, from 'Panigiras'



Source: E. Synagridi

Cycladic pilgrimage before the fair on the island of Tinos was established (Τρούλλος, 1993). According to tradition, the icon was found one night by Sifnian fishermen from Apokofto<sup>17</sup>, during the Iconoclastic controversy, floating on the waves. They saw a pillar of light moving and when they approached, found and lifted the icon out of the water. When trying to return to Apokofto, the boat did not obey the steering wheel and headed for the sacred rock. Today, at the icon's landing point there is a marble basin, protected by a railing, where the sanctification takes place on the eve of Chrissopigi's celebration. It is also said that no matter how many times people try to move the icon to another church, it would get as heavy as lead (E-Sifnos, 2019a). The icon of Chrissopigi is a diptych, depicting Jesus' Ascension and Zoodochos Pighi (the Life-Giving Spring of the Mother of God).

The isthmus that separates the rock of Chrissopigi from the rest of the island, is attributed to a miracle of the Virgin Mary. It is said that three women had a 'Tama' to light the oil lamps of the church (Photo 2a & Photo 2b) and burn incense every Saturday evening. One night,

<sup>17</sup> Apokofto is a beach located right next to the rock of Chrissopigi.

when they arrived at about midnight, they found the shutters open and upon arriving at the front door, they realised that corsairs (pirates) were sleeping inside on the floor. Despite their fear, they entered quietly, fulfilled their tama and as soon as they reached the doorstep to leave, the corsairs woke up from the smell of the burning incense and began pursuing them. Immediately before they caught them, a severe earthquake cut off the cape from the rest of the island. At this point we have two variants of the folklore. In the first, a gap was formed between the corsairs and the women, while on the second one the earth was torn down and the corsairs drowned (Προμπονάς, 2014).

Also, with the intervention of Chrissopigi, the island has been redeemed twice by plague in 1676 and 1811. In fact, the reason Chrissopigi is celebrated on the day of the Ascension and not that of Zoodochos Pighi, as it used to be, is the miracle of 1676, where according to Parthenios Cheretis, more than 100 inhabitants lost their lives because of the plague epidemic and the island was saved after the litany of the icon, on the day of the Ascension (Βιτάλης, 1979). Furthermore, in 1927 the island suffered from a scourge of locusts for three consecutive

**Photo 4: The Icon is Transferred on the Sacred Rock**

Source: E. Synagridi

years (1925-1927) and no means of the era could destroy them. One woman saw the Virgin Mary in her dream, and after following her instructions, the clergy and the people performed liturgy, sanctification and litany of the icon throughout the island. The following day heavy rain broke out and the created torrents that drowned the locusts and led them to the sea (Βιτάλης, 1979). Thus, the sanctification was established on the eve of the Ascension in honour of the Virgin Mary.

The fair of Chrissopigi is one of the biggest on the island and lasts two days. The celebration is mobile. It is celebrated on the day of Ascension, 40 days after Easter. The panigiras who has hosted the icon in his house for a year, is responsible for all the expenses of the fair. In the case of Chrissopigi, the icon stays in the house of panigiras during the day, and every night it is transferred to the parish church of the panigiras' village and stays there until the morning, due to supplicatory prayers (according to tradition the icon does not accept to stay in a house and at night will break the windows of the house).

The fair of Chrissopigi begins on the morning of the eve with a Liturgy, followed by Grand Sanctification at the

marble basin of the rock, in the afternoon (16:30) the icon is 'lifted', in the hands of panigiras and followed by the faithful. The procession heads to the church of Saint George in Kamares (Photo 3), where a supplicatory prayer towards the Virgin Mary is carried out (17:00). Afterwards, the icon is brought towards the port and placed on the scheduled passenger ship (17:30) which is accompanied by other boats, in order to be transferred to the sacred rock of Chrissopigi. When it arrives at the pier of the rock, it is greeted by the Hellenic Coast Guard's Philharmonic Orchestra. Metropolitans and crowds of believers from Sifnos and other islands await at the site. The ceremony is followed by Grand Vespers (18:30), bread distribution and dinner with Trapeza Agapis (21:00).

As mentioned above, the cost of the dinner is paid in its entirety by the panigiras, who is responsible for everything related to the fair. The preparation is done by cooks and waiters, usually friends and acquaintances of the panigiras, food is offered to all of the people.

As mentioned earlier, the meal is comprised of traditional Sifnian chickpea soup, olives, spaghetti, and meat cooked with tomato sauce or cod. The food is always

Photo 5: The Litany of the Icon



Source: E. Synagridi

accompanied by the necessary local wine and during the meal, it is necessary for the guests to drum their plates with the cutlery accompanied by various wishes such as ‘to the health of panigiras’, ‘cheers to the cooks’, ‘cheers to the waiters’! The celebration continues until morning with dancing and songs, while the participants create improvised poems thanking the panigiras. Dancing and singing keep going until the morning hours, until the priest rings the bells for the morning liturgy, shifting the atmosphere to its religious dimension.

The icon stays in the church all night long, where the supplicatory prayers and wake take place (22:30-05:00). After the Sacred Wake, honorary transportation of the Holy Icon is done by a local boat, taking it from the sacred rock (Photo 4). The faithful following in boats, and transports it at a distance of 4 nautical miles to the port of Seralia in Kastro. From there begins the trekking litany of the Holy Icon, passing through Saint Luke and Artemonas, ending in Apollonia where the Mattins takes place at the Metropolitan church of Saint Spyridon.

The day of the Ascension is followed by the Mattins (7:30) and Divine Liturgy (8:45) at the church of Saint Spyridon of Apollonia, followed by the litany of the icon (Photo 5) with orisons (11:00) in the central square of Apollonia, all accompanied by an escort of the Hellenic Coast Guard Philharmonic.

Special bus itineraries are provided throughout the fair to facilitate pilgrims who do not have a vehicle and wish to follow the litany.

The following morning, after the Divine Liturgy, accompanied by coffee and biscuit offerings, the icon of Chrissopigi is delivered to the next panigiras. The ‘migrant icon’ continues its journey from one panigiras to the next within the blessing of its nomadic life.

### Representations and Perceptions of Panigiras

By studying the texts written about panigiras, and by observing behaviour during the events, the following points are noted:

According to panigiras, the obligations are divided into 'religious' and 'cultural':

*The Sifnian fair has two parts. The religious and the cultural one (folklore). Most people know the religious one because it is similar to other religious fairs held throughout Greece. It includes the Vespers, the liturgy with the Saint's troparia<sup>18</sup>, and the decoration of the church. Everything related to the fair is an offer of panigiras. In some cases, panigiras also takes care of the church for a whole year. That is, maintenance, whitening the walls, cleanliness, depending on the size of the buildings. The folklore part of the fair is enriched with traditions, morals, and customs that here in Sifnos are inviolable rules.*

The custom cannot exist without the participation of young people. Each generation needs to pass on the custom to the next. This panigiras' statement is characteristic:

*In recent years, more and more young people participate in fairs. Well, that is great. They like it. There has been a decline in fairs for a while, but now young people are coming back. When a young person experiences them through their friends, it is important. That is why they participate, they enjoy it. The presence of youth is important because it is a succession.*

The continuation of the custom gives pride and strength to the inhabitants of the village and is a psychological need. It is extremely honourable for someone to take on the role of panigiras.

Foreigners, believers, and non-believers are also accepted at the fair. According to a panigiras:

*What can you do? They are not Christians, they are not of the church, but they cannot be completely distanced. Whether they like it or have deep faith, everyone participates with respect. Friends come from Athens in winter to co-celebrate with others of the same age, who live here.*

The involvement of foreigners is causing changes in the events. At present it does not seem to bother the locals. Characteristic is the statement of a panigiras:

*Well, what can we do? The tourist part has become folk-like. In the past there were only four dancers on stage and if you wanted to dance you had to replace someone. Now, you cannot do that. It's not annoying though, as long as there's fun.*

It seems that the inhabitants, while talking of this custom, greatly emphasise the triptych 'past, present, future', and generally focus on the non-stop and continuous presence of the event. Interesting is the frequent use of words and phrases such as 'must', 'we owe', 'have obligation' etc., which express the existence of a psychological burden that gives the residents a sense of duty and responsibility about the continuation of the custom.

## Conclusion

The inhabitants of Sifnos seem to be connected by a common sense of duty to continue the event and the local tradition in general. This is in line with the statement of Κάβουρας (1992), that for the inhabitants of small communities, such as that one of Chrissopigi, the folk culture of their area is an essential part of their cultural identity. This festival and the tradition of panigiras is a timeless custom that has been transferred to locals by their ancestors. The locals consider the preservation of the custom as their obligation.

The event is purely religious-cultural, which is addressed primarily to the island's inhabitants and to the inhabitants of the surrounding islands, but also those who have emigrated from the island. The custom of panigiras is dual-hypostasis, as it includes the pilgrimage dimension and the cultural dimension. It is noted that the religious part-pilgrimage is still of great importance to the local community of Sifnos based on its timeless religiousness. At the same time, it has a remarkable cultural dimension for visitors of the island, creating flows of religious tourism.

<sup>18</sup> A 'troparion' is a short hymn which can be one stanza or organised in more complex forms as series of stanzas and is an important element of religious music in Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

With the rapid increase of tourist traffic, in recent years a large increase in visitors has been recorded. Many Greeks and foreigners, participate in events, either passively as spectators, or actively e.g. participating in dances, in Trapezes Agapis, in musical events etc. The number of participants is constantly increasing and given the limited infrastructure of the island and region, the results of non-rational management of the event are being reasonably questioned.

Further research is needed so that the needs and motivations of both the locals and the foreign visitors, are identified. This will allow researchers to approach these groups and to design appropriate tourist packages, with due respect for the local community. This will result in successful promotion of this cultural-religious event in the future. Also, it is worth watching and recording the evolution of this custom, under the pressure of tourism.

## Bibliography

- Benz, E. (1963) *The Eastern Orthodox Church: Its Thought and Life*. New York: Anchor Books, Garden City.
- Bowker, J. (2000) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions*, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Cambridge Dictionary (2020) Liturgy, at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/liturgy>
- Duquenne, M.N. & Kaklamani, S. (2008) Διερευνώντας τις επιπτώσεις της κινητικότητας στο πολιτισμικό πλαίσιο του υπαίθρου χώρου [Exploring the impact of mobility on the cultural context of the countryside], *Αριάδνη* 14, 251-272.
- Durkheim, E. (1971) *The elementary forms of religious life*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- E-Sifnos (2019a) *Πανηγύρια της Σίφνου* [Panigiria of Sifnos], στο <http://e-sifnos.com/what-to-do-in-sifnos/sifnos-religious-feasts.php>
- E-Sifnos (2019b) *Περπατήστε στη Σίφνο* [Walk in Signos], στο <http://e-sifnos.com/what-to-do-in-sifnos/sifnos-trails.php>
- E-Sifnos (2019c) *Τοπικά προϊόντα της Σίφνου* [Local products of Sifnos], στο <https://e-sifnos.com/what-to-do-in-sifnos/sifnos-local-products.php>
- Geertz, C. (2004) *Religion as a cultural system*, In Willaime Jean-Paul (2004) *Κοινωνιολογία των Θρησκειών*, Ψυχογιός, Θ. (επιμ.), Αθήνα: Ινστιτούτο του Βιβλίου - Α. Καρδαμίτσα.
- Giddens, A. (2002) *Κοινωνιολογία* [Sociology], (Τσαούσης, Γ. μετφρ.) Αθήνα: Gutenberg.
- Håland, E.J. (n.d.) *The Ritual Year of the Icon of the Annunciation on the Island of Tinos, Greece*, at <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol47/haland.pdf>
- Hann, C. & Goltz, H. (2010) *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kelly, J.D. & Kaplan, M. (1990) History, Structure and Ritual. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 119–150.
- Lambert, Y. (1991) La “Tour de Babel” des définitions de la religion, *Social Compass*, 38 (1): 73-85.
- McCutcheon, R.T. (2006) Τι είναι η θρησκεία; [What is religion?] Στο Πάρτριτζ, Κρ. [επιμ.] (2005) *Οι Θρησκείες του κόσμου*, Αθήνα: Ουρανός.
- McCutcheon, R.T., (2007) *Studying Religion*, στο <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/studyingreligion.html>
- Olsen, D.H. & Timothy, D.J., (2006) Tourism and religious journeys, In Dallen, T. J. and Olsen, D.H. (eds) *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, (pp. 1-21), London: Routledge.
- Schultz, E.A. & Lavenda, R.H. (2009) *Cultural Anthropology*. 7th ed. New York: Oxford Press.

- Sifnos.gr (2019) Σίφνος-πολιτισμός [Sifnos-Culture], στο [http://www.sifnos.gr/our\\_culture/sifnos\\_culture#](http://www.sifnos.gr/our_culture/sifnos_culture#)
- Testart, A. (1993) *Des dons et des dieux. Anthropologie religieuse et sociologie comparative* [Gifts and Gods. Religious anthropology and comparative sociology], Paris, Armand Colin, p. 24, Στο Willaime Jean-Paul (2004) *Κοινωνιολογία των Θρησκειών* [Sociology of Religions], Ψυχογιός, Θ. (επιμ.) Αθήνα: Ινστιτούτο του Βιβλίου - Α. Καρδαμίτσα.
- Wach, J. (1967) *Sociology of Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Αρχ. Βιτάλης, Φ. (1979) *Θαύματα της Παναγίας της Χρυσοπηγής Σίφνου* [Miracles of Panagia Chrissorigi of Sifnos].
- Αυδίκος, Ε. (2004) Πανηγύρια και χορευτικοί όμιλοι: Βίωση και αναβίωση της παράδοσης [Festivals and dance groups: Experiencing and reviving tradition]. Στο Ε. Αυδίκος, Ρ. Λουτζάκη & Χ. Παπακώστας (επιμ.) *Χορευτικά ετερόκλητα*, 203-212. Αθήνα: Λύκειο Ελληνίδων Δράμας & Ελληνικά Γράμματα.
- Βαρβούνης, Εμ. (2019) Τα πανηγύρια του καλοκαιριού μέσο έκφρασης της κοινωνικής συνοχής [Summer Panigiria as means of expressing social cohesion], εφημερίδα *Η Καθημερινή*, 27 Ιουλίου, στο <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1035773/article/epikairothta/ellada/ta-panhgyria-toy-kalokairioy-meso-ekfrashs-ths-koinwnikhs-synoxhs>
- Βοζίκας, Γ. (2006) *Το πανηγύρι της αγίας Μαρίνας στην Ηλιούπολη. Η σύγχρονη μορφή ενός πολιτισμικού φαινομένου στον ελληνικό αστικό χώρο και το κοινωνικό - οικονομικό του πλαίσιο* [The religious festival of Agia Marina in Pioupoli], διδακτορική διατριβή ΕΚΠΑ, Παιδαγωγικό Τμήμα Δημοτικής Εκπαίδευσης, Τομέας Ανθρωπιστικών Σπουδών στο <https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/24493>
- Γκιάτας, Β. & Καλύβας, Γ. (2015) Το πανηγύρι στην ελληνική παράδοση [Panigiri in Greek tradition], *Σταγόν News*, 13 Αυγούστου, στο <https://www.stagonnews.gr/to-panigiri-stin-elliniki-paradosi/>
- Κάβουρας, Π. (1992) Ο χορός στην Όλυμπο Καρπάθου: Πολιτισμική αλλαγή και πολιτικές αντιπαραθέσεις [Dance in the town of Olympus, Karpathos: Cultural change and political controversies], *Εθνογραφικά*, 8(1): 47-70.
- Μοίρα, Π. (2019β) *Τουριστική Γεωγραφία της Ελλάδας. Γεωγραφικές προσεγγίσεις στον Τουρισμό* [Tourist Geography of Greece. Geographical approaches to Tourism], Αθήνα: Φαίδιμος.
- Μοίρα, Π. (2015) ΠΕ2.1.5. [Action Plan for religious tourism in the Cyclades islands], Υποέργο 10 «Δημιουργία Μηχανισμών Επιστημονικής Παρακολούθησης Τουρισμού στην Περιφέρεια Νοτίου Αιγαίου» της πράξης «Προβολή του τουριστικού προϊόντος της περιφέρειας Νοτίου Αιγαίου». Δράση 2(Δ2): Ολοκληρωμένο σχέδιο ανάπτυξης του θεματικού τουρισμού στις Κυκλάδες. Ενέργεια Α.2.1.: Σύνταξη σχεδίων δράσης ανάπτυξης του θεματικού τουρισμού για τις Κυκλάδες. Παρατηρητήριο Τουρισμού Ν. Αιγαίου, UNWTO – Πανεπιστήμιο Αιγαίου.
- Μοίρα, Π. (2019α) *Θρησκευτικός τουρισμός και προσκύνημα. Πολιτικές – διαχείριση – αειφορία* [Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage. Politics-Management-Sustainability]. Αθήνα: Φαίδιμος.
- Μπαμπινιώτης, Γ. (2005) *Λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας* [Dictionary of Modern Greek Language], Β' έκδοση, Αθήνα.
- Μυλωνόπουλος, Δ. (2001) *Το Σύνταγμα. Νομοτεχνική προσέγγιση της Αναθεώρησης του 2001* [The constitution. Legislative approach to the 2001 Review], Αθήνα: Σταμούλης.
- Παπαπαύλου, Γ. (2011) *Τ'ΑΗ ΝΗΓΙΑ Τ'ΑΝΗΦΟΡΟ, Οδοιπορικό στις 235 εκκλησίες της Σίφνου* [Travelogue to the 35 churches of Sifnos], Αθήνα.
- Πάρτριτζ Κ. (2006) (επιμ.), *Οι θρησκείες του κόσμου* [The religions of the World] (μεταφ. Αδρακτάς, Β.), Αθήνα: Ουρανός.
- Προμπονάς, Ν. (2014) *Η Σίφνος. Ξεναγός στο ωραίο και αγαπημένο νησί* [Sifnos. A guide to the beautiful and beloved island], Αθήνα.
- Τζάκου, Α. (1979) *Κεντρικοί Οικισμοί της Σίφνου* [Central Settlements of Sifnos], Αθήνα.
- Τρούλλος, Α. (1993) *Σιφνιώτικο Πανηγύρι* [Sifnian Panigiri], Σίφνος.