

**ESSENTIAL OIL: KINSHIP AND WEALTH
AMONG OLIVE FARMERS IN MESSINÍA, GREECE**

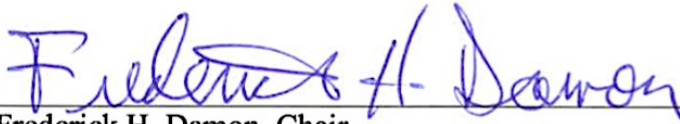
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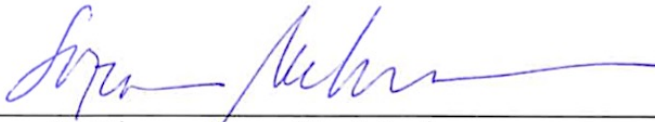
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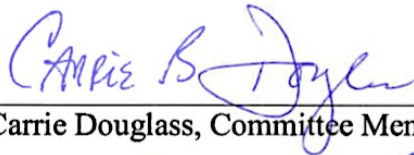
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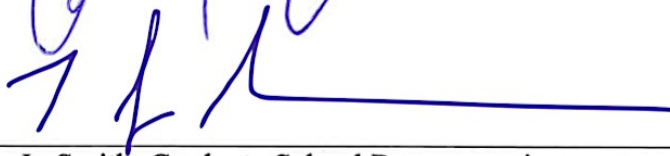
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ABSTRACT

From 2013 to 2015, amidst the economic panic, I conducted one and a half years of intensive ethnographic research in Messinía, Greece, among households that invest in the production and consumption of olive oil, often at the expense of solvency. My dissertation, *Essential Oil: Kinship and Wealth among Olive Farmers in Messinía, Greece*, documents the social life of olive oil and its local and global entanglements, detailing its role in Greek Orthodox Christianity, family relations, and global trade. In Messinía, olive oil is not only a vital daily food staple and market commodity, but it is also essential for ritual uses and for perpetuating the continuity of family households. The study of olive oil thus captures the interplay between kinship practice, spiritual worship, and economic planning. From page one, this dissertation assumes that oil is “good to think”—by the end, however, it also demonstrates that, for the Messinians of Greece, olive oil is also good “to do.”

Mapping its trajectory from the grove, through the mill, and to various sites of consumption, the social life of olive oil follows a tripartite ritual process in which exchanges of all kinds iterate—and reiterate—oil as a non-capital form of “wealth.” Stepping into the world of the olive grove, we are asked to see from the perspective of the farmer, whose toil is experienced through the body, but whose sensibilities of right and wrong are writ on the trees through the craft of cultivation. Most important is the harvest, wherein oil and money (and memories of debt) come to define the relationships that distinguish the “us” from the “them.” Harvesting is as much about yielding to social obligations as it is about yielding crops. In the oil mill, everything is in suspension—not just the green sludge magically refined into pure virginity, but also histories, knowledges, and social hierarchies. Suspended here is also oil’s status: it symbolically waits on the threshold that separates family substance from a commodity to be alienated to the global market. In the home, oil is not only a thing to be integrated into life through culinary, religious, and everyday use, but it is *itself* the thing that creates important relationships in these contexts. By effecting physical and metaphysical transformations, it helps key

actors—especially women—to reinforce dimensions of insider-ness and outsider-ness of the body and of the home. Bodily healing, boundary maintenance, and religious practice all come into play here.

In this ritual process, oil “flows” between modernist divisions of hard economics and kinship, lubricating a universe of exchanges between the two. As Greece teeters between European uncertainty and financial ruin, this thesis demonstrates how, contrary to ideological assumptions about rational capitalism, the architecture of a kinship system and of a local economy can be (and frequently are!) built from the same blueprint.

Στους γονείς μου

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In many ways, this work has been in preparation for over thirty years. Growing up in the Hellenic diaspora, and being that kid that got sent to stay with *yiayia* in the village every summer, some of the things I enjoyed and thought of as being quirkily Greek—family, church, food—returned to me as a serious matter for scholarship. I never found olive trees and olive oil particularly enthralling (and I still don't), but I would be utterly incapable of recognizing their importance as cultural symbols today were it not for families like the Spyropoulos family who, not that long ago, taught me whole-heartedly how “to do olives.” But, it would have been equally impossible were it not for my own family in Greece, whose ethnographic training began over three decades ago by getting rid of my American way of walking and making me say my Greek ABCs. It seems only right that *Essential Oil*, so reliant on analyses of bodily comportment and linguistic nuance, should have family relations at its intellectual and figurative heart.

To add brains to this heart, I found inspiration in Susan McKinnon, who, in addition to having an eye for all things beautiful, also has an eye for spotting kinship systems in all forms of human organization. I also found inspiration in Carrie Douglass, whose dogged analysis of all things symbolic is matched only by her stubborn pursuit of all things *animadas*. In Tyler Jo Smith (aka “Toula”) I found an archaeological collaborator and dynamo whose superpowers include kicking around new ideas and kicking my butt to do more. From Jon Lendon, I learned two important lessons: that anthropology and antiquity have much to say to one another, and that the study of ouzo might make for good ethnography. From this team I have learned immeasurably about the art of scholarship and what I want to be when I grow up.

For their intellectual guidance, I am grateful to Michael Herzfeld, Anne Meneley, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, Richard Handler, Jim Igoe, Roy Wagner, China Scherz, Janet Carsten, and Vanessa Ochs. And to Daniel Ingersoll and Jim Gibb, who planted the conceptual seeds of this project, whether they know it or not. For help with real life and brass tacks, I must humbly recognize Karen Hall, Millie Dean, Dan Lefkowitz, and Kath

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Lastly, much of this dissertation exists thanks to my friends J. Roy Hopkins and Mary McConnell, who sustained me with hospitality, wisdom, and wine. For helping me muddle through parts or wholes of this document, I am thankful for the colleagues I have in Cory-Alice Andre-Johnson, Roberto Armengol, Alison Broach, Dannah Dennis, David Flood, Felipe Gheno, Beth Hart, Nathalie Nahas, Nathan Hedges, Nefyn Meissner, Theodosios Paralikas, Xinyan Peng, Grace Reynolds, Julie Starr, Irene Wellman, and last—but deservedly first—Rose Wellman. Finally, I must thank my parents for believing in me and for working hard to make me who I am.



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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

The system for presenting the Greek language in this dissertation represents a compromise between the orthography and phonology of Modern Greek. In the case of digraphs and double consonants (see below), the presented spelling favors phonology. This system approximates the language encountered during fieldwork and attempts to reproduce faithfully the language in which fieldwork was conducted, including when a mix of standard and local forms was employed.

Αα	a	Νν	n
Ββ	v	Ξξ	x
Γγ	gh	Οο	o
Δδ	dh	Ππ	p
Εε	e	Ρρ	r
Ζζ	z	Σσς	s
Ηη	i	Ττ	t
Θθ	th	Υυ	y
Ιι	i	Φφ	f
Κκ	k	Χχ	ch
Λλ	l	Ψψ	ps
Μμ	m	Ωω	o
Digraphs		Consonant clusters	
αυ	af <i>or</i> av	γγ	g
αι	e	γκ	g
ευ	ef <i>or</i> ev	μπ	b
οι	oi	ντ	d (initial), <i>or</i>
ου	ou		nt (medial)

I avoid the use of Anglicized forms, except in the case of certain well-known personal and place-names (e.g., Achilles not Achilléas, Athens not Athína).

All transliterations into English employ stress accents in the modern monotonic system. Only certain literary passages are reproduced using the Greek alphabet. These are primarily ecclesiastical texts, which also preserve the polytonic system. Unless stated otherwise, English translations of scriptural and liturgical texts are *not* my own, but official translations of the Greek Orthodox Church.

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

Introduction

Athena. A man on the phone made me promise to begin my dissertation on olive oil with the myth of Athena. The myth to which the man referred was that recounting the contest between Athena and Poseidon, two Olympian gods, for patronage of one of civilization's most beautiful cities (Figure 1-1, upper left). Each deity would give a gift to the city's denizens who would then elect their patron god based on the gift's merits. Poseidon, wielding his trident, struck the ground first, from which a frothy stream gushed forth. The water proved salty but forever served the city's naval prowess, not a surprising fact since Poseidon was the god of the sea. Taking her turn, the virgin goddess dug something into the ground, which grew to become none other than the world's first olive tree. The merits of the new tree seemed revolutionary—silvery foliage for summer shade, sturdy timber for construction, essences for soap and perfume, firewood for winter warmth, fruit for the table, and fuel for the flame. For this reason, the city adopted Athena as its patron, became her namesake (Athens), and adopted her provinces—wisdom, craft, and war—as virtues of civic life.

So what does this have to do with Greek olive oil in the years 2013-15 when I conducted my study? Today, the myth survives in texts like Plutarch's *Themistocles* (Chapter 19, Sections 3-4), in reconstructed antiquities, and even in the intellectual consciousness of an unknown man I spoke to on the phone one day. While visiting an older acquaintance of mine and enjoying a cup of coffee, he received a phone call from a retired postal worker he knew in Athens. Upon hearing that I was “a professor from America,” all parties insisted (except my own) that I join the exchange. By this point in my field research my scripted response was well rehearsed as to why an “American professor” would want to live with farmers for a year, employing some artistic license to bypass the common misconception that anthropologists study bones and rocks—“I am doing folk research on the tradition of olive oil here in Messinía.” What followed was an unsolicited, preciously detailed account of Athena and the olive tree, and a request to

begin my “book” with the myth, to which I acceded not so much out of intellectual regard but as a diplomatic way to get off the phone. That the ancient past should, yet again, impose itself on Greek modernity, even imprint itself on the consciousness of this retired government worker, irritated my deconstructionist sensibilities about Greek nationalism as I sipped my coffee, which was now cold.

But it was also a contradiction to the veneration of antiquity that got me here in the first place. While gallivanting around Messinía documenting “folk” stories about archaeology—apocryphal accounts about hidden archaeological treasures, or politically telling narratives about English or German archaeologists and looters (the line is blurry for many locals) who were more interested in acquiring Greece’s fabulous resources than in debt forgiveness (by this time Merkel and the IMF had become household names in Greece)—it became clear to me that, where private citizens are concerned, the preoccupation with having olive trees surpasses any interest in having historical remains. This point was driven home when a part-time farmer/full-time mechanic confessed to me that he had bulldozed part of a known bronze-age site located in his grove (at the famed “Palace of Nestor,” no less!) in order to plant olive trees. The estimation of gnarly trees over national treasures, despite the complicated entanglement of the latter in Greek nationalism and statehood, nevertheless demonstrates a displacement (in my friend’s case, actual bulldozing!) of national historic resources for provincial, agricultural ones.¹

By dozing archaeological remains for olive trees, was this farmer-mechanic taking Greece apart? Or putting it back together? On this point, the wordsmithing of modern romantic writer and Nobel Prize winner, Odysseas Elytis (1911-1996), is telling.

If you take Greece apart,
in the end you will be left with
an olive tree, a vineyard and a boat.
Which means:
with these you can fix her again.

(*Odysseas Elytis*, “Ο Μικρός
Ναυτίλος. *Translation mine*)

Εάν αποσυνθέσεις την Ελλάδα,
στο τέλος θα δεις να σου απομένουν
μια ελιά, ένα αμπέλι κι ένα καράβι.
Που σημαίνει:
με άλλα τόσα την ξαναφτιάχνεις.

(*Οδυσσεάς Ελύτης*,
«Ο Μικρός Ναυτίλος»)

¹ Consult Herzfeld (1986) and Hamilakis (2003) for good primers on the aggressive relationship between citizens and the state concerning the private/public patrimony of Greek antiquities.

Were I to join the legions of scholars (both Western and Greek) with the trained impulse to discern in such modern writing an ancient strain enduring from the days of Aristotle or Plato (neglecting more immediate influences from Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, Balkan, Ottoman, and European traditions), then I would argue that, yes, Elytis' distillation of Hellenism can be traced to the antique mythos of Athena's olive tree and Poseidon's gushing seawater (minus the grapes). Yet the notion that the whole of contemporary Greece can be rebuilt from these essential parts has modern interpretations, too. In 2014, for instance, center-left politicians adopted the olive tree as the logo (Figure 1-1, upper right) for the Olive Tree-Democratic Alignment (Eliá-DH.PA), a coalition formed to compete in the European Union's Parliamentary elections—and to fight what it perceived as austerity measures that would utterly undo Greece and its people (ekathimerini.com 2014).²

The aspirations of Greeks were, at this time, in a shambles. The government's financial bookkeeping had long been exposed as a shameful fraud. Greece's inability to pay its mind-boggling €138 billion debt in March 2012 hurled the nation into sovereign default. When the first bailout arrived, policy was then being shaped, if not dictated, by a sudden presence calling itself the "troika," a hitherto unknown triumvirate of faceless organizations (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund). A second bailout worth an astronomical €130 billion had staved off bankruptcy but guaranteed new debts and incalculable consequences. Tax evasion became the talk of the town as everyone cited calculation upon calculation that all this could be settled by going after the Swiss accounts hidden by the wealthy and corrupt 1%. In an effort to raise a chunk of funds, the ruling New Democracy party, giving in to proposals from foreign creditors, sold state-owned assets. Disguised through humor (but not always), anxiety led many to conclude that Angela Merkel, who was imagined to have become the Chancellor of the Debtors, was fixing to landgrab Greek islands, mines, harbors, antiquities, everything—a German reoccupation—at the same time that Chinese interests were signing multi-decade leases on some of Greece's largest shipping ports. Greeks everywhere were grappling with heretofore unheard of schemes of

² Worth noting is that the coalition identified itself with a tree rather than adopt a logo that evokes high civilization (e.g., the neofascist Golden Dawn party uses the meandering Grecian Key).



Figure 1-1. Symbolic evocations

(upper left) Detail from the Parthenon's west pediment, model reconstructed according to a drawing by K. Schwerzek (1896). Athena and Poseidon stand opposed. Water gushes at his feet while Athena's olive tree bisects the whole tableau. (Source: The Acropolis Museum).

(above right) Official logo for the 2014 Olive Tree-Democratic Alignment.

(left) The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, flank Jesus' halo and are synonymous with Christ.

(below) Google Doodle commemorating Elytis' 101st birthday with the essences of Greece: an olive tree, grapes, and a boat drawn into the text (www.google.gr 11/2/2012).



Table 1: *The Olive Tree (i Eliá)* by Kostís Palamás (n.d.)*

I am the daughter of the sun
the most caressed of all others.
For years and years my father's love
keeps me in this world alive.
Until the moment I fall dead,
my eye seeks him only.
I am the honored olive tree.

Είμαι του ήλιου η θυγατέρα
η πιο απ' όλες χαϊδευτή.
Χρόνια η αγάπη του πατέρα
σ' αυτόν τον κόσμο με κρατεί.
Όσο να πέσω νεκρωμένη,
αυτόν το μάτι μου ζητεί.
Είμ' η ελιά η τιμημένη.

I'm not all blond, nor fragrant
a rose tree, nor citrus;
I blear the eye of the soul,
for all other eyes I'm an old lady.
I'm no nightingale's mistress;
a goddess fell in love with me
I am the honored olive tree.

Δεν είμ' ολόξανθη, μοσχάτη,
τριανταφυλλιά ή κιτριά.
Θαμπώνω της ψυχής το μάτι·
για τ' άλλα μάτια είμαι γριά.
Δε μ' έχει αηδόνη ερωμένη,
Μ' αγάπησε μία θεά.
Είμ' η ελιά η τιμημένη.

Wherever I chance my home,
I am never without fruits;
until my deepest elderliness
I find in work no shame;
God has forever blessed me
And I am full of prosperity;
I am the honored olive tree.

Όπου κι αν λάχω κατοικία,
δεν μ' απολείπουν οι καρποί,
ως τα βαθιά μου γηρατεία
δε βρίσκω στη δουλειά ντροπή.
Μ' έχει ο Θεός ευλογημένη
κι είμαι γεμάτη προκοπή.
Είμ' η ελιά η τιμημένη.

Horror, wilderness, waters, and darkness
Buried the earth once upon a time;
the white dove brings me, a green dawn,
first to Noah.
The whole earth's beauty and joy
I had written on my leaves.
I am the honored olive tree.

Φρίκη, ερημιά, νερά και σκότη,
Τη γη εθάψαν μια φορά·
πράσινη αυγή με φέρνει πρώτη
στον Νώε η περιστέρα.
Όλης της γης είχα γραμμένη
την εμορφιά και τη χαρά.
Είμ' η ελιά η τιμημένη.

Here under my shade
came Christ to rest,
and was heard His sweet voice
shortly before he was crucified.
His tear, a sacred dewiness,
on my root has been spilled.
I am the honored olive tree.

Εδώ στον ίσκιο μου από κάτου
ήρθ' ο Χριστός ν' αναπαυθεί,
κι ακούστηκε η γλυκιά λαλιά του
λίγο προτού να σταυρωθεί.
Το δάκρυ του, δροσιά αγιασμένη,
έχει στη ρίζα μου χυθεί.
Είμ' η ελιά η τιμημένη.

* Translation mine.

taxation that proposed a levy on private residential property, not to mention arcane language distinguishing between the ownership of one's house, the area on and around which the house sits, land for agriculture, and so-called luxury items (cars included)—all new costs for Greeks to absorb. Whatever crumbs of confidence had survived the first bailouts had, by now, eroded at all levels. Snap parliamentary elections the following January of 2015 had installed the leftist Syriza party, which promised a defiant and economically protectionist rejection (but actually retreated into renegotiations) of austerity cuts to pensions, bonuses, subsidies, and the social safety nets. European creditors reacted by freezing all payments, and the world market reacted by tanking the Athens Stock Exchange. On June 30, 2015, the Hellenic Republic became the first developed country to fail to make an IMF loan payment. Public debt totaling €323 billion amounted to about €30,000 per capita.¹ The Greek Crisis now became a general liquidity crisis that, beyond the abstract world of charts and graphs, took real shape in the middle of the night as shell-shocked card holders formed lines at ATMs, hoping to withdraw whatever drabs and dribbles they could from their bank accounts before, they suspected, domestic or foreign governments would. Shortly before midnight, June 29, as I waited fifty-three minutes alongside other Greeks in the Kamínia quarter of Piraeus, we all worried that the Alpha Bank ATM might run out of cash to dispense (and then what?!)...and considered the reality of hitting rock bottom. It seems that even before daybreak everything had escalated: living costs, strikes, hunger, and panic. Also suicides.

Back in Messinía, the southwestern province in the Peloponnese of Greece where I had been living, the situation felt equally dire. There, however, the visual reminders of darkness I witnessed on Athenian streets—trash-rummaging, heroin shooting, mattresses on the sidewalk, futile begging—were replaced by the sight of olive seedlings. At a time when Greece was facing its cruelest economic depression since the Nazi Occupation, Messinians were spending whatever money they could on expanding their olive groves. While the creditors of Greece, in attempts to save it from sovereign bankruptcy, were demanding an economic plan geared towards recouping money and, ostensibly, remolding the Greek economy into a neoliberal utopia, the Messinians I counted as friends

¹ BBC News. Greece debt crisis: Eurozone rejects bailout appeal (30 June 2015)

and acquaintances were investing in their olive groves. The dueling imperatives could not have been more incongruous and were, scarily, leaping from the pages of Thomas Friedman's book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, in which he reduces "the world" into two camps—those who adhere to what Japanese Lexus production stands for, and those who cling to what olive trees stand for in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

Half the world seemed to be emerging from the Cold War intent on building a better Lexus, dedicated to modernizing, streamlining and privatizing their economies in order to thrive in the system of globalization. And half the world—sometimes half the same country, sometimes half the same person—was still caught up in the fight over who owns which olive tree. (Friedman 1999:27)

If we revise the final phrase to read *was still caught up in the fight to plant another olive tree*, then we get a sense of how backwards ("still") and irrational ("half the same person") my Messinían counterparts might seem to modern, thriving Lexus-makers. For Friedman, globalization positions the champions of structural integration (Lexus-makers) and the indigenous, parochial resisters (olive wranglers) at diametrically opposite poles. Although this dichotomy of globalization is a false one (Alden et al. 2006; Boli 2005; Ritzer 2003), the either/or narrative nevertheless frames much of the discourse and many of the perceptions on both sides of the Crisis. Indeed, when farmers from all over Messinía converged on Kalamata and cheered as tractors blocked the gates of the taxation office of the Public Fiscal Service—all organized by the Messinían Farmers Struggle movement—one of the demands they petitioned for on their leaflets was, among other things, *No to the legal adulteration [blending] of oil* (Appendix 1). On one hand, the farmers' resistance to combining oil stocks so as to drive down bulk prices (thereby improving its competition with Spanish oil) would be attributed by Friedman's neoliberal Lexus-makers to parochialism. On the other hand, Messinían farmers perceive their rejection of such practices as a resistance to outside interference and to homogenization—literal blending!—in a new global order. Much more than this, however, Messinían farmers struggle through the Crisis in what, to them, is the most logical way: while the European troika was insisting on an integrated payment schedule, Messiníans were, it seemed, mobilizing the olive tree.

Light was thrown onto this mobilization one night at a poolside grill party where I was determined to speak to the owner of a small campground that advertises itself as a summer resort. Not only was he, in partnership with his cousin, the first entrepreneur in the area to open an RV camp for northern European tourists to pay and park, but he also built a rose nursery to supply Athenian florists and was so invested in his olive groves that he was elected president of a local oil cooperative. When I asked this man, who successfully straddles the economic chasm between international tourism and local agriculture, what olive oil means in Messinía, his response—like his straddle—bridged a chasm. “Here in Messinía,” he said, “oil is the alpha and omega.”

That olive oil could reasonably be equated to the alpha and the omega—that it is the metaphorical “beginning and end” of Messinían life—spoke volumes. Economically, Messinians produce the most olive oil nationwide.² In the culinary sphere, I knew it saturated all the dishes served to me. In geography, the whole region was one big olive grove. In the religious sphere, I knew oil closed out a person’s life with the last rite of unction and, conversely, was able to grant newborns an identity in the rite of baptism. And in the mythological realm, I knew (and was constantly reminded), that it played a role in the baptism of Athens,³ and by extension, modern Greece. However, for an owner-operator of a resort, nursery, and grove to characterize oil as “the alpha and omega” in a Greek cultural context is to inescapably invoke a reference to Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the religious connections of olive trees to Jesus are both biblically and artistically justified. Byzantine-style icons are ubiquitous in both religious and secular life, and they are rife with symbolism (Cavarnos 1993; Cutler 1975; Walter 1977). One of the reflexes I developed while living in Greece was to crane my neck back every time I entered a Greek Orthodox church to see if the Icon of the Ascension was painted on the ceiling above the main altar (Figure 1-2). In this popular icon, which depicts Jesus’ ascent to Heaven, the visual field is divided in half: the upper portion depicts angels carrying Jesus upward in a nimbus, while the lower portion shows Christ’s congregation

² *50,000 Tons This Year’s Olive Production in Messinia: Optimism for Price and PDO.* November 9, 2015. www.eleftheriaonline.gr.

³ That water and olive trees are fundamental to the naming of Athens poses an interesting parallel to Greek Orthodox baptism, which I discuss in **Ch. 5**.



Figure 1-2. Icon of the Ascension. (Left) In this freestanding icon from the church of Panaghía Palatianí, a band of olive branches separate the visual fields between Heaven and Earth (source: panagiaplatini.gr). **(right)** a fresco in the vaulted apse above the Holy Altar in Pantanassa Monastery (~1428 A.D.) shows a copse of branching olives trees (photo from the author).

(embodied in Mary and his disciples) below. Whereas medieval and Renaissance European art depicts the planar separation between Heaven and Earth with only negative space, the Byzantine style of Greek art cues a hard visual divide with a boundary of silvery foliage representing the Mount of Olives. In other words, what bounds Heaven and Earth is a hedge of olive trees.

Moreover, as a few Messinians told me, Jesus fell and rested under an olive tree's silvery foliage en route to Golgotha (Calvary), forever exalting all olive trees by association to his Passion. This connection is captured in the concluding stanza of a poem written at the turn of the 19th century by the nationalist poet, Kostís Palamás (1859-1943). The poem, which many older Greeks learned in grade school and happily recited for me, is titled "The Olive Tree" (*I Eliá*) and speaks in the first-person voice of an olive tree (see page 5). Describing the trees' blessedness as quite literally rooted with Jesus' sacrifice, it concludes: *His tear, a sacred dewiness, / on my root has been spilled. / I am the honored olive tree.* All the references in Palamás' poem—from Jesus' crucifixion and the olive

branch given to Noah, to its feminine voice—bestow on the olive tree a lineage and cast its biography as part of cosmological history.

It is in the opening stanza of this modern poem that we, perhaps, circle back to Athena. On one hand, the connection between the millennia-old myth of Athena and the oily essence at the center of this ethnography is immediately graspable (almost trite): the symbol of a virginal and wise goddess, not born in labor but springing from the split-open forehead of Zeus as an adult clad in full battle armor, lends itself readily to a substance valued for its purity and powers of illumination, ready for use once extracted from the oblong fruits of the olive tree. Equally expressive of the affinity between the virgin deity and the golden liquid is the fact that Athena is forever the favorite, honorable maiden daughter of Zeus, king of the gods, and the olive tree is, according to the opening verse of the poem, *the daughter of the sun / the more caressed of all others*. They are both, simply put, supreme in the purity of their gender and paternal fealty.

* * *

All of this merely scratches the surface. Poems, frescos, logos, protests—and the sentiments these encapsulate—make sense only if there exists a symbolic grammar of olive culture. By “olive culture” I don’t mean the agricultural growing and processing of olives, which is actually *oleiculture*. Rather, I adapt E.B. Tyler’s notion of *culture* to define olive culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired” (Tyler 1871:1) by farmers as members of an olive-centric society. Or, to put it as Mauss would, olive culture is a total social fact. Upon this status hinges everything that follows in this thesis, for it traces (but does not exhaust) what Appadurai (1986) would call the social life of olive oil, presuming that its production, exchange, and consumption reflect lived experiences as they are realized across domains that are traditionally kept separate by thinkers (like rationalist economists), including domains of wealth, kinship, food, the body, and spirituality. In this dissertation I argue that the production, exchange, and consumption of olive oil constitutes a social rite in which are executed Messinian

processes of kinship-making and the symbolic construction of the Messinían body. Olive oil is, in other words, a substance that *makes* social relationships and identities of self.

Unsurprisingly, many of the interconnections that this thesis argues as cutting across social domains (of religion, of kinship, of economics, etc.) remain, in many ways, invisible to the very Messinians from whom I learned (never mind how bizarre my claims struck every single informant that I could discern patterns regarding, say, gender or morality, by studying what is generally considered to be salad dressing). But herein lays the “totalizing” social life of olive oil: it is everywhere, and thus, its inner and outer workings fade to the background. The symbology of all things *olive*, especially of *olive oil*, permeates Greek cosmology, landscapes, and languages so deeply that it cannot but help to be both the alpha and omega of lived experiences too. To borrow from Lévi-Strauss, olive oil is, in short, “good to think.”

Theoretical Engagements

By tracing the social life of olive oil, this dissertation examines the ritual interweaving of modalities of exchange. That is, the ritual ways in which food and money convert into one another, and in which economic relations and kinship relationships overlap or diverge. In so doing, it contributes to current theories of (1) exchange and money, (2) food and kinship, (3) tree/human metaphors, and (4) how these are bundled in ritual processes.

Anthropologies of Exchange: Money and Food

Olive oil is, at its symbolic core, a substance of exchange. It flows. It flows on the plate with the same slickness as when it flows within and between domains of religion, agriculture, family, and labor. Even when it flows into the global commodity market, it does so with only a few ripples belying any essential change. Similarly, the flow of oil lubricates certain intellectual separations, analytic divisions in anthropology not usually taught or interrogated as actually conjoined (Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Ortnor 1984). At the core of this ethnography is the nature of exchange. The production, distribution, and consumption of oil in Messinía modulates between two types of exchanges: one of economic exchange, the other of food exchange. Although these two exchange regimes

share DNA from the early days of anthropology, they grew apart in later scholarship such that whole tomes are now generally devoted *either* to one *or* the other. That the two regimes should be recombined is merited now more than ever as the conditions of globalization have created a seemingly schizophrenic western narrative that, on one hand, elevates Greece and the Mediterranean as purveyors of dietary and scientifically wondrous superfoods—including oil—at the same that, on the other hand, it denigrates them as practitioners of backwards and deficient economies. Here, I discuss the particular strengths found in theories of food exchange and in theories of economic exchange as they have come to differentiate the two as separate theoretical canons, and propose that they constitute two sides of the same coin in an analytically useful way.

Anthropological understandings of economic exchange are not without disagreement (Gregory 2015:ix-li; Maurer 2006; Parry and Bloch 1989:1-23). Debates fueled in the early 20th century about the nature of economic “exchange” still echo in public narratives today—even in Messinian coffee houses. This rift concerns an ethnocentrically-informed division between those exchanges we identify as primitive and those that are monetary or commercial in nature. In this either/or narrative, money is understood as a catalyst of evolving social complexity. Money, as Georg Simmel saw it, enables a shift from personalized interactions within a community to impersonal transactions within a rational society (Simmel 1990; see also Tönnies 2001 [1887]). Karl Polanyi articulated the difference between a so-called *substantivist* model (based on provisioning of everyday necessities) and a *formal* economic model (in rational utilitarian terms), characterizing a “great transformation” in a society when it shifts, wholesale, from the former into the latter (Polanyi 1975). The aura of transformation thought to differentiate so-called “market societies” from atavistic ones was, in turn, clinched in a theoretical dichotomy between “modern” societies and “traditional” ones (Parry and Bloch 1989:7). Sylvia Yanagisako, in her critique of Marxist and Weberian models of capitalism, observes a nearly identical dichotomy between “Western capitalism” and “culture”—but also, and centrally, the separation of the domains of economy and kinship—challenging the monolithic treatment of each by interrogating how sentiments of family production perpetuate capitalist ideologies while propelling particularly Italian modes of capitalism (Yanagisako 2002), eliding the incongruity Friedman saw between

Lexus-makers and tree-protectors. Unsurprisingly, it is such dichotomous models of money and their tacit assumption of a singular “modernity” that continues to inform—indeed inflame—the fiery rhetoric exchanged between Eurozone financiers and PIGS (an unflattering acronym whose orientalism includes Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain), the latter accused of being fundamentally allergic to efficient rationalism and the former as ideologically worshipful of impersonal money.⁴ In his efforts to hem in both neoclassical economics and ethnographically substantivist paradigms, David Graeber (2001) trenchantly notes that stakeholders who stand to benefit most from a financial system are those who develop the same “predictive” (although actually *prescriptive*) economic models in the first place—i.e., economists and policy makers. In fact, both accusations are, to a degree, internalized by their targets, owing to complicated relations between European superpowers and their “hidden” hegemony over Mediterranean geopolitics (Herzfeld 1987b, 2005). As one historian astutely remarked, “Northern Europe, beyond the olive trees, is one of the permanent realities of Mediterranean history” (Braudel 1972:24).

Despite the persistence of stereotypes and narratives, however, anthropology has long shown the paradigm of money versus non-money to be a false dichotomy. Thanks to an ethnographic obsession that began at least by the time of Bronislaw Malinowski’s nuclear work on Kula (1961 [1922]) and sustained itself beyond Marshall Sahlins’ *Stone Age Economics* (Sahlins 1974), it has by now become obvious that the exchange of money and commodities is embedded in culturally specific meanings and folk understandings of production, exchange, and consumption. For instance, we know that money can be “savage,” meaning that there are multiple value systems (not just those regulated by the state), and that commodities can flow between value registers, as from a household to a market and back again, depending on need and belief (Gregory 1997). We also know that transactions can be bundled in ceremony and symbolic play, reinforcing—but also negotiating—social and spatial structures (Austin-Broos 2009). Examples

⁴ For the actual institutionalization of this money/non-money division in Indian colonial political economy (with the help of none other than Sir Henry Maine), see the Introduction to Ritu Birla’s 2009 book, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press).

include the spatial and social dynamics of hierarchical organization of Hindus and tribal peoples in a central Indian marketplace (Gell 1982), and the “cooking” of money earned by Malay men in the “amoral” marketplace by women who make it morally suitable for household and community investment (Carsten 1989).

Another thing we know is that transactions differ between long-term and short-term, with very real consequences for their form, content, and built-in expectations, as Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch discuss in their purposeful shift “from a consideration of the meanings of money to a consideration of the meanings of whole transactional systems and to the...transformative process” (Parry and Bloch 1989:23). Indeed, anthropology’s paradigm of economic exchange comes full circle here, as Parry and Bloch conclude that the variety of exchange models do not neatly change from one culture to another, but instead adhere as contrasts within many cultures. That is, gift exchange fulfills broader, long-term cycles of social reproduction while market exchanges satisfy short-term requirements for personal reproduction. “By a remarkable conceptual revolution,” they deduce about modernists that, “the values of the short-term order have become elaborated into a theory of long-term reproduction” (1989:29). Even more damning is their observation that the two cycles have, thanks to Western ideology, been rendered mutually exclusive such that we are “unable to imagine the mechanisms by which they are linked” (1989:29).

Enter Messinian olive farmers, whose decisions in the grove and mill occupy both long-term and short-term concerns, and who adjust their agricultural practices in the midst of economic uncertainty in the hopes of staying afloat. As we will see, their systems of organizing labor, reciprocity, and oil distribution constitute the very mechanisms by which short-term and long-term transactions are linked. When it comes to olive oil, short-term and long-term strategies in Messinía align themselves differentially with the concerns not just of sustaining families, but also of expanding them. Which brings us to the second type of exchange: food.

Much of what anthropologists understand about food exchange they have learned by the study of kinship long ago. Kinship experts overturned the Euro-American presumption that biology is the only referent of kinship relations (Franklin and McKinnon 2000; Schneider 1984; Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Drawing instead from

local models, theorists of the “new kinship” movement (Franklin and McKinnon 2001) urge us to focus not only on what is taken as *given* in local reckonings of kinship (like blood or DNA), but also on what must be *created* (like marriage or sponsorship) to fulfill its status (Strathern 1988). Specifically, kinship is theorized as an unfolding process of making and reinforcing conditions of “relatedness” (Carsten 1995; cf. McKinnon 2017). Examples that challenge biological bases of kinship and demonstrate instead the social processual nature of kinship include “choice,” as with LGBT families (Weston 1991) or “care” as when caring for others (Bodenhorn 2000). It also includes, to a great extent, foodways.

Foodways are behaviors and beliefs surrounding the production, consumption, and sharing of food (Counihan 1999; Douglas 1966, 1972; Goody 1982; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Weiner 1988; Weismantel 1995). Food scholars have demonstrated that foodways create and manage relatedness in two ways. The first concerns the experience of collective eating: commensality (Bloch 2005a; Mauss 1966; Smith 1956). The theory of commensality posits that exchanges of food, especially as rituals, build group solidarity and alliance (Carsten 2004:97; Counihan and Van Esterik 1997; Mintz and Du Bois 2002). The notion of commensality has its roots in the scholarship of William Robertson Smith, the 19th c. theologian who introduced it to explain how Semitic sacrifice and feasting produces a social, sentimental, and embodied sense of social relatedness (Smith 1956 [1889])—a socializing force of “togetherness” comparable to Victor and Edith Turners’ much later notion of *communitas* (Turner 2012; Turner 1969)—a sense that extends relationships of communion to spiritual entities too. That said, however, food also goes a long way in reinforcing strict hierarchies and boundaries (Appadurai 1981; Khare 1976; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Strathern 1988; Young 1971).

The second way that foodways create and manage relatedness is through the belief that ingesting similar foods can alter the constitution of one’s body to make it physically like another (Daniel 1984; Fajans 1988; Janowski 2007; Janowski and Kerlogue 2005; Meigs 1997). Some theorists, like Janet Carsten, employ the term “substance” to connote all kinds of corporeal matter and the content of relations, signified in transactions and the incorporation of food-substances or other kinds of bodily fluids (e.g., milk, rice, blood, semen, saliva). She notes that substance is “the kind of stuff that

can be detached from persons, flows between people, and creates the possibility for relationships founded on analogy” (Carsten 2011:40).

In *The Gender of the Gift*, for instance, Marilyn Strathern (1988) explains how Melanesians, rather than presuming that the body merely contains essential qualities or properties, instead conceive of it as a “microcosm of relations” that is, in other words, a composite of multiple transactions and relations created through food exchange (Wagner 1977). In a very different example, from southern India, cultural codes that stress social discrimination and boundary-maintenance (like the caste system) keep certain substantial attributes within—or apart—from a group of bodies. This is because bodies are presumed to be monistic—meaning “internally whole, with a fluid and permeable body boundary” (Busby 1997:269) and capable of receiving “inherent essences”—like contaminants—from the outside (Carsten 2004; Daniel 1984; Marriott 1976; cf. Dumont 1980).

In cases of the latter, food substances and bodily fluids are thought to be transmutations of one another (Daniel 1984; Meigs 1997; Strathern 1988). In such a “fluid reality” physical properties “can be traded around, can flow and percolate from one object or organism to another” (Meigs 1997:97). As from rice to blood (Carsten 1995) or from raw to cooked (Lévi-Strauss 1969), food-substances are “fluid signs” (Daniel 1984) or “contagions” (Meigs 1997). Their essence can be *transformed*! But they are also *transformative*. As Jane Fajans neatly summarizes, “food does not so much share attributes of different categories or domains as transfer them from one domain to another or give rise to them through its transference or consumption” (Fajans 1988:165). Thus, whether as a material *vehicle* or as a social *medium*, food—and food events like cooking, eating, feeding, or procuring—produce and reinforce statuses of relatedness within society.

Notable is the fact that, despite a growing literature on food’s ability to encapsulate memories and affect (Holtzman 2006; Mintz and Du Bois 2002)—David Sutton (2000, 2001, 2010) has blazed a trail linking foods, particularly Greek cuisine, to the sensorial and mnemonic aspects of food that tie a person emotionally to certain places, times, and persons—surprisingly little has been done to tie these embodied and mnemonic aspects of food with the anthropological paradigms of exchange. This dissertation, in part, attempts such a connection.

The case made here is for an ethnographic engagement wherein a substance like olive oil—and the contexts of its production, consumption, and exchange—blurs what might otherwise seem a hard and fast separation between transactions of food versus money. Olive oil is not just a food (Kavadias 2015b). Indeed, no food is. But within Messinian society, olive oil does double-duty: as a payment for services and as a comestible; as a substance of earthly families and of spiritual kinship. As *Essential Oil* argues, olive oil cross-cuts domains of religion, agriculture, the home, and the marketplace. It links bodies too. And because this double-duty is circumscribed within particular cultural parameters, an examination of olive oil helps the social scientist relax the tension imposed by a theory of money *versus* gift, or economy *versus* kinship, and alienability *versus* inalienability of substances. The question that remains is how.

One overarching observation that emerged forcibly during fieldwork (though, in hindsight, one that I should have anticipated) is how very ritualized the social life of olive oil is. To explain how and when the above tensions get constructed and mediated, I rely on a model of the

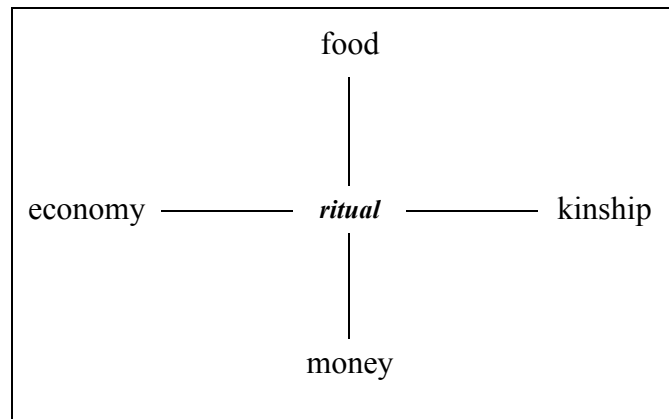


Figure 1-3: Axes of theoretical engagement

ritual process conceived by Victor and Edith Turner, who dissect social

transformation through “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (Turner 1964:94, citing van Gennep 1960). Such transformations are made possible by the dialectical reconfiguration of relations through structure and anti-structure. The Turners are emphatic that ritual processes produce shifts in a thing’s “state,” in “any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized” (1969:94). Changes of state abound in the social life of olive oil. I have already mentioned the fluidity between money and food, and economy and kinship—these are transformations in states of value and exchange type. But other culturally recognized transformations explored herein include, for instance, that of oil’s physical states (solid/liquid), and gift states (church/family). Conversely, olive oil itself effects ritual

transformation in the social state of others, as with religious induction (unbaptized/Christian) or geospatial state (village/city). Many more transformations are explored here, and they pervade every level of the olive farmer's social life, from casual rituals of healing, to the mass mobilization of the village during the harvest. Indeed, all these documented *rites de passage*, entwined with the annual productive cycle, constitute a calendrical ritual of the kind that, as Victor Turner puts it, "often embrace whole societies" (Turner 1969:168-69). Thus *Essential Oil* documents how, among certain Greeks, olive-centered rituals supply both the social form and symbolic content of exchange itself.

Trees, Rice, and Other Inspirations

In another anthropological moment of genius, when Victor Turner famously analyzed the Ndembu milk-tree (Turner 1967), he demonstrated the potential for trees to "embody" a system of cultural symbols that can map onto other aspects of social and cognitive organization. However, with the exception of Laura Rival's collected volume on the "social life of trees" (Rival 1998), anthropology's interest in a robust theory of symbolic human-tree parallelisms after Turner has been fitful at best (Bloch 2005b). Nevertheless, ethnographic accounts of human-flora metaphors reveal plants' aptitude for metaphorical usage, including the ability to: (1) supply the vocabularies for reckoning kinship (Bouquet 1993, 1996; Fox 1971); (2) connect persons through material "rootedness" in ancestral lands (Bamford 1998, 2004; Labby 1976; Strathern 1973); (3) express organizations of generation or gender through architectural incorporation (Bourdieu 1973; Knight 1998); and (4) exemplify roles of procreation and gender (Boddy 1982; Delaney 1987). In sum, ethnographic examinations of human-plant symbolisms demonstrate a cultural affinity for trees and other plants to serve as one of the many metaphors we live by (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), representing abstract concepts or relations in a living, organic medium, an idea with roots (so to speak) in *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1922) and beyond.

For this reason, my ethnography largely constitutes a study of tree/human metaphors, aimed at mapping semiotic relations within and beyond the agriculture of olives. It closely imitates the approach employed by Frederick Damon, who demonstrates how indigenous knowledge of trees (their classification and cultivation) shares a common

schematization with other domains of environmental knowledge and social life, permitting him to expand his ethnographic study of “culture” beyond humans and into non-human species (Damon 2017; see also Damon 1998). In addition to showing how the people of Muyuw are more sensitive to cognitive differences perceived across genres of flora (like palm versus yam) than within them (as among royal palm versus date palm)—registers of difference that ring true for Greek olive farmers too—Damon also analyzes differences between orders of knowledge that are classificatory (organization *within* a named system, e.g., roots, branch, foliage) versus those that are categorical (organization *across* domains, e.g., roots, feet, base):

These might respectively be entitled the nature of classification versus the social use of classified forms. I mean for the consideration of the former to turn into the latter. Together they effect a passage from trees to forests, from information to meaning. (Damon 2017:87)

Thus, Damon successfully extends specific knowledge about trees to a global semiotics that organizes knowledge in other domains (like outriggers) by looking at the whole as a “a dance of interacting parts” through structuralist axes of paradigm/syntagm and, consequently, indigenous logics of metaphor (Damon 2017:296, citing Bateson 1979). Although it was never my intention to analyze olive trees as part of a multi-species ecology—and I do not claim this to be a multi-species study—real life in Messinía necessarily pushed *Essential Oil* to be, in large part, an analysis of shared metaphors between the cultivation of olive trees and Messinians’ anatomical theories of space, time, and the body.

Essential Oil also presents olive oil as a substance that generates cosmological and social relationships. In this respect, I lean heavily on research by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) on rice in Japan. Here, rice historically represented a gift exchanged between humans and deities whereby humans gained access to pure aspects of the divine. In her monograph, aptly titled *Rice as Self*, Ohnuki-Tierney examines Japanese folktales, rituals, and myths to analyze how “rice consumption, polity, rice production, harvest ritual, and human reproduction are all equivalent in meaning” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:57). Importantly, rice, of which each grain is thought to contain a soul and life (*nigitiba*), encapsulates the Japanese concept of self as it emerged dialectically in historical encounters with the Other—that is, by who eats Japanese rice and who does not. For this

reason, Ohnuki-Tierney perceives in Japanese nationalist ideology an axis or continuum between rice, self, society, and nation where commensality in rice equates to personal, national and spiritual purity. From this coherent work I take two lessons. First, that olive oil's complicated relationship to Greek nationalism, like that of rice to Japaneseness, merits its own, separate and lengthy investigation beyond the one I offer in *Essential Oil* (Kavadias 2015a). Second, it gives us an analytic template by which to trace oil's productive trajectories—from the grove, and through the press, ending on the kitchen table (and elsewhere)—but also trajectories that amplify the symbolic meanings of oil and the olive tree across geographies (between village and city, and beyond) and up cosmological scales (from the individual and the household to God).

Finally, *Essential Oil* draws intellectual inspiration—and is geographically anchored—in a world system reconstructed by *Annales* School historian Fernand Braudel. There exists, he says in his compendia of Mediterranean history, multiple

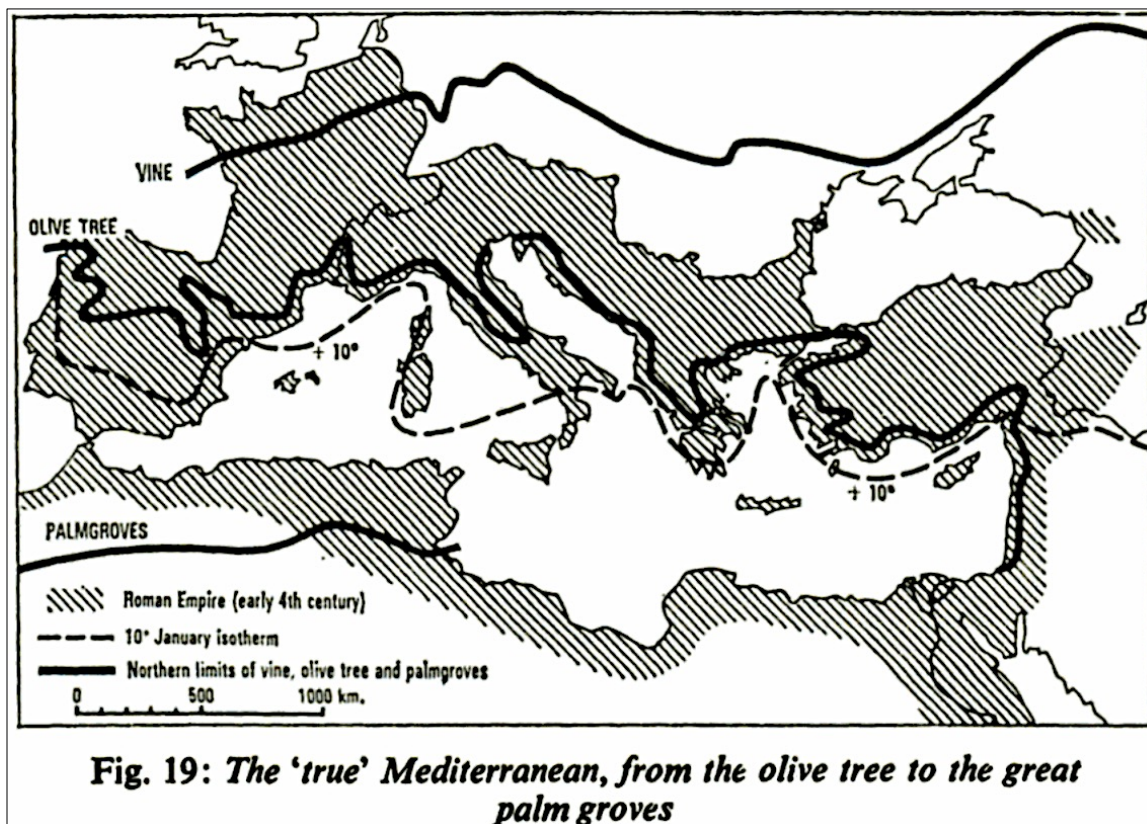


Figure 1-4. “The ‘true’ Mediterranean.” Braudel’s map of the historical-ecological complex, defined using the distribution of olive trees (inner solid black line). Extent of vineyards and palm trees (outer solid black line) designate peri-Mediterranean geographies (Braudel 1977: Fig. 19).

Mediterranean seas in a vast and culturally complex expanse; yet despite such diversity the one articulated pattern that binds these locales together across space and time is a cultural and economic triad of crop staples: grapes, wheat, and olives (Braudel 1972, 1977). About olives, Braudel defines the ecological and economic expanse of the Mediterranean—what he calls “the ‘true’ Mediterranean” (Figure 1-4)—as coterminous with the geographical distribution of olive trees (Braudel 1972:168). In effect, the entirety of his opus, *The Mediterranean*, argues for the holism of the region in historico-cultural-ecological terms over the long term, and the contingencies (and consequences) of oleiculture, viticulture, and wheat cultivation appear at every turn.

In this respect, Braudel did for regional studies what Sidney Mintz did for food studies. Mintz’s birds-eye view of the transatlantic sugar crop demonstrated how something as seemingly natural as taste preferences are anything but biological, rooted as they are in broader cultural and economic systems—in his case, a yearning for sweetness



Figure 1-5. “Olive: The Gift of the Gods.” This map, hanging in the office of an oil mill in Gargaliánoi, was issued by the E.E.C. for “promoting the consumption of olive oil” and depicts the olive-bearing coast of the Mediterranean. Text in the lower left parchment scroll reads: “OLIVE OIL: THE NUMBER ONE FOR OUR LIFE.” Compare to Braudel’s map.

as a result of an emerging capitalist world system that tied labor structures, diets, monies, and geographies into a holistic global order (Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Mintz 1985). However, while Braudel never entertains the notion of how a holistic regional system might have “naturalized” olives, grapes, and wheat into local cultural traditions, he nevertheless prepares others to raise that question (Meneley 2004). About grapes and wheat, for instance, Dimitra Iossifides observes how their historical importance manifests itself as Holy Communion, the personification of divinity in the Christian Mediterranean:

the three elements blessed by God are bread, wine and oil. Wheat, grapes and olives have been for centuries the basic agricultural products of Greece and, one could say, of the Mediterranean. They are the staples of life, the assurance of survival. Thus, the combination of wheat and wine consumed in the communion reinforces the feeling that these are the very elements of life—those elements which [*sic*] sustain and nourish. (Iossifides 1992:90)

Gender also constitutes and is constituted by symbolic understandings of engagement with grapes and wheat, where wine-making and men share symbolic ties to vitality and vigor, while bread-making and women share symbolic ties to corporeality and the home; hence, wine as blood and bread as body when combined in the Holy Eucharist (Counihan 1999; Gefou-Madianou 1992; Iossifides 1991;1992; for comparisons to whisky, see Bampilis 2013; to coffee, see Cowan 1991).

Despite its status as a “blessed” ingredient, olive oil has been discussed only in passing. Its culinary, medicinal, and ritual roles have been mentioned by a few publications, some to contextualize oil and oil presses in archaeological reports (e.g., Ahmet 2001; Brun 2003; Foxhall 2007; Riley 2002), but mostly relative to culinary or agricultural interests in the Mediterranean (e.g., Helstosky 2009; IOC 2002; Mueller 2011). An admirable exception is found in research by Anne Meneley, who not only recognizes the cultural and political significance of olive oil as a kind of master symbol of the Mediterranean world, but who also inventories the sensorial qualities that oil evoked in antiquity and continues to evoke in the contemporary politics of Palestine and Italy (Meneley 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008a). To compile an inventory of local cultural attributions of oil, Meneley employs Peirce’s analytic of “qualisigns,” elaborated by Webb Keane and Nancy Munn (Keane 1997, 2003; Munn 1986; Peirce 1955). Culturally, attributed to oil are the traits of luminosity, illumination, immiscibility, preservation, and

permeability—potential aesthetic, physical, and metaphysical qualities that can be interpreted as manifested (or elicited) in certain contexts. It is because of these qualities, Meneley concludes, that oil seems to be used historically and politically as a substance that can reinforce or mediate boundaries both tangible and symbolic. To name a few: the mundane and spiritual, the wild and domestic, the pure and impure, darkness and illumination. In the Messinían case, olive oil not so much mediates divides of, say, inner and outer or us and them, as it generates them.

The research presented in *Essential Oil* not only responds to Braudel’s plea to fill in the, till now, overlooked third niche of the Mediterranean triad, but it also expands on it, dissecting the social life of olive culture—its production, transmission, application,

consumption—to identify social events where Hellenic notions of kinship, body, and money are given shape, where logics based on metaphor get materialized, and where the stuff of relationships flow inwards and outwards.

Messinía’s Coastal Plain

Perhaps it is because a grove of olive trees constitutes in Orthodox iconography the boundary between Heaven and Earth (page 9), that Messinians (including crafty school-children) consider their countryside to be “a boundless grove” (Figure 1-6) that, as one of my friends put it, is blessed as if “Christ had passed through.”⁵ I concur, as much of the



Figure 1-6. “Messinía Prefecture / A Boundless Grove,” an elementary school student’s depiction of Messinía.

⁵ *San na pérase o Christós*

plain that descends into the Ionian Sea is lush, aromatic, and breathtaking (Figure 1-7). The effect is heightened by the fact that the whole basin is hidden behind three mountain ridges, effectively hiding it away from the rest of the Peloponnese, until one comes over the mountain pass. It is rural, remote, and has a low population density.

Even on damp and gloomy days, Navarino Bay—fortified by an uninhabited mountain island on one side and the heel of a mainland plateau on the other—feels sheltered and comforting. The area to the north, where I ate, slept, worked, and basically called home, was no less picturesque—from the town of Gargaliánoi, perched atop the plateau (elevation ~984 ft.), the townspeople enjoy sweeping panoramas of the groves below and the Ionian Sea beyond (courting couples make ample use of various lookout points). In fact, it is in this vista, where the groves meet the sea, that the small village of Marathópolis is located, buffered from the Ionian waves by a small islet that (it is generally agreed) resembles a crocodile peering from the water.

On one hand, the relationship between the small village of Marathópolis and the larger town of Gargaliánoi is what one might expect in a rural province. Marathiótes (residents of Marathópolis) flock to Gargaliánoi as the area's central hub for commerce, medical treatment, social life, school, and administration. On the other hand, the unassuming village of Marathópolis serves as an outpost for Gargalianiótes (residents of Gargaliánoi) who pass through en route to their olive groves, and who rely on it for provisions especially when spending summer in their grove cottages closer to the shore. While the village's central intersection boasts two bakeries, four taverns, two general markets, a pharmacy and a (new!) hair salon, the waterfront entices socializers from Gargaliánoi who want a change of scenery with bars, restaurants, cafes, and—in the summer—a discotheque. When a camping resort (mentioned earlier) opened outside of the village a couple decades ago, a few entrepreneurs followed suit, resulting in some small hotels and bungalows to draw Athenian and European summer vacationers. Marathópolis, however, is also an outpost for a smattering of residents who live in nearby hamlets and isolated dwellings year-round. Consequently, while the winter offers a general respite from the crowds, congested parking on Sunday mornings indicates local church attendance and, in the evenings, indicates the gravitas of the soccer match screened at the coffee house.



Figure 1-7. The Coastal Plain. (*Above*) Facing the Ionian Sea from Gargaliánoi, Marathópolis lies where the groves meet the sea. (*Below*) Navarino Bay, facing northwest. Pylos and groves can be spotted in the foreground. The crocodilic island is seen on the horizon in both images.

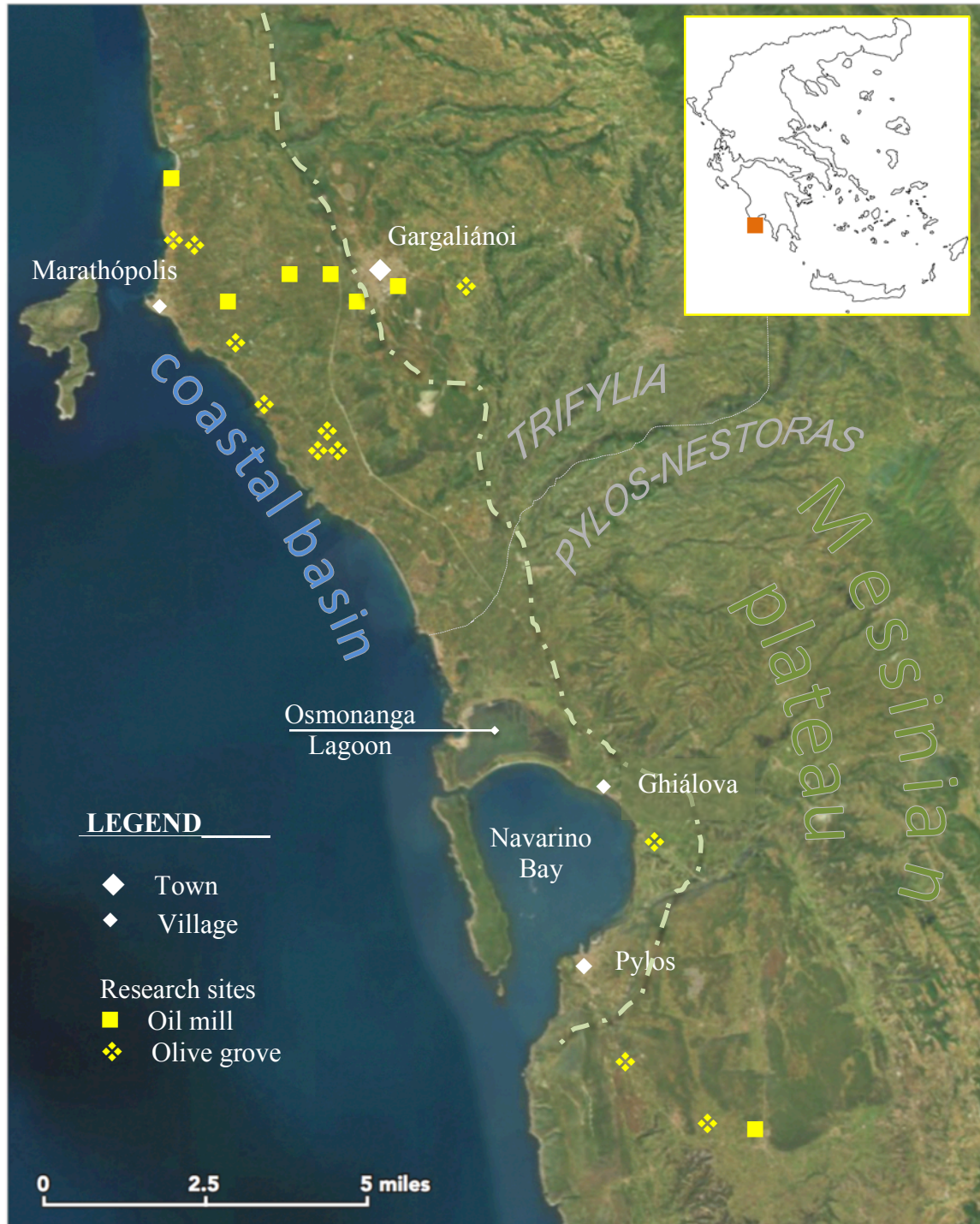


Figure 1-8. Map of Messinian coast.

Table 2: At a Glance*

<u>Place</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Area (sq. mi)</u>
• Messinía (inclusive)	159,954	1,155
○ Marathópolis proper	646	} 47.4
▪ Peripheral settlements	83	
○ Gargaliánoi proper	5,007	
▪ Peripheral settlements	562	

Administrative Organization of Settlements⁶
(Level, Seat)

- Peloponnese (Region, Tripoli)
 - Messinía (Regional Unit, Kalamata)
 - Trifylia (Municipality, Kyparissia)
 - Gargaliánoi (Municipal unit)
 - **Gargaliánoi** (Community)
 - **Flóka**
 - **Marathópolis** (Community)
 - **Ag. Nikólaos**
 - **Chochlastí**
 - **Dhialiskári**
 - **Ghefiráki**
 - **KáNALos**
 - Pylos-Nestoras (Municipality, Pylos)
 - Pylos (Municipal unit)
 - Pylos (Community)
 - **Mesochóri**
 - **Pídhasos**
 - **Romanós**

* Text in bold indicates fieldwork sites.

⁶ Prior to the 2010 national Kallikratis Programme, which centralized administrative power, Gargaliánoi served as the municipal seat with administrative functions over all the area's local affairs. The current seat for both Marathópolis and Gargaliánoi is Kyparissia, 13 miles to the northward.

The two-lane road that descends from Gargaliánoi to Marathópolis thus sees a lot of raucous tractor traffic in the winter, fun-seeking traffic in the summer, and speedy workaday commutes—speeding is the norm here—at all other times of day and all other days of the year. Another road travelling north-south along the Messinían coast connects the towns of Filiatrá and Pylos and makes a dog leg in the central intersection of Marathópolis, a junction better suited for mopeds and zippy Korean cars than for eight-wheeler cargo trucks and luxury coach buses transporting, respectively, dusty melons and gawking British tourists.

Marathópolis can be, in other words, a busy little village. In addition to luring seasonal R&R chasers and anchoring local agriculture, it is also where I concentrated my fieldwork. Of the 83 Messinians who claim permanent residency in settlements peripheral to Marathópolis (see Table 2: At a Glance), all are tied to olive production. Of these I count about a dozen as friends or acquaintances with whom I worked and interacted in some capacity. I also claim just as many informants who reside in Gargaliánoi but who have direct or indirect connections to olive production down on the plain (with an exception in Mr. Dhamaskákis, whose farm is in the hinterland). These two communities are far from segregated, however, since many Marathiótes are married into Gargalianióte families and vice versa, which means that numerous Gargalianióte families possess groves and summer residences along the coast.⁷

Moreover, while marriages between Gargalianiótes and residents to the north (from Filiatrá, Kyparrisia, and their environs) are common, rare are the marriages that occur between Gargaliánoi and its southern neighbor, Pylos, though not entirely unheard of (in fact, in this book we shall meet a couple that resulted from a Gargaliánoi-Pylos marriage). The relative bias toward northern towns—which extends also to employment—is, I gather, a function of geography. The divide between the north and south of the Messinían coast was, until very recently, compelled by mountainous terrain that was overcome only by a nauseating, curvy road that discouraged regular travel. I

⁷ As with most Greeks, Messinians practice neolocal residence—i.e., newlyweds establish themselves in a new house rather than live with parents—with some exceptions of parent-local residence for couples wherein one of the spouses is also the youngest child of an aging parent in need of attention.

suspect that romantic liaisons will expand southwards, however, given recent construction of a thruway in 2015-16 built to facilitate the southbound travel of tourists—and employees—to a major luxury resort and golf course. The resort site was constructed to straddle the topographical divide of Messinía precisely to draw visitors from the north and south, and has opened a faster route from the coast to Kalamata, the biggest city in the region.

Stepping back, I would like to invoke here general remarks made by Braudel, insisting that his synopsis speaks just as aptly to the internal relationships, both real and perceived, between Messinía and its Greek neighbors as it does regarding his thoughts on diversity in the broader Mediterranean.

The plural always outweighs the singular. There are ten, twenty or a hundred Mediterraneans, each one sub-divided in turn. To spend even a moment alongside real fishermen, yesterday or today, is to realize that everything can change from one locality to another, one seabed to another, from sandbank to rocky reef. But the same is equally true on land. Yes, we can always tell that we are somewhere near the Mediterranean: the climate of Cadiz is quite like that of Beirut, the Provençal Riviera looks not unlike the south coast of Crimea, the vegetation on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem could equally well be in Sicily. But we would find that no two areas are actually farmed alike, no two regions bind and stake the vines the same way—in fact we would not find the same vines, the same olive-trees, fig-trees or bay-trees, the same houses or the same kind of costume. (Braudel 2002:23)

Indeed, olive trees, costumes, and houses in Messinía differ greatly from those in other parts of the Hellenic world, and Messinians will gladly distinguish themselves from others with respect to: food (they are known for doing whole pork roasts and for *righanádha*, a local version of bruschetta); temperament (they believe themselves more suspicious and uncooperative than other Greeks, though much more hospitable); economy (they characterize themselves as backwards farmers too disorderly to develop their tourism sector); and politics (they consistently vote for the center-right New Democracy Party and former Prime Minister Antónis Samarás actually hails from Pylos).

By the same token, other Greeks perceive Messinía as unique in the country's overall diversity of microclimates, agricultures, traditions, and temperaments. For instance, it is valued as an area of ecological importance with many protected fauna and flora, especially in a wetlands reserve north of Navarino Bay, where silt deposits are rich

and hide the archaeological remains of Europe's first human-made harbor (Zangger et al. 1997:613-23). Geographically, Messinía is known for sheltering some of the longest and sandiest beaches of Greece, stretching almost halfway up the western coast of the Peloponnese, a fact worth noting even in the days of Homer, whose epithet describing the seat of Nestor—"sandy Pylos"—indicates just how exceptional the area's sandy beaches are in a country where rocky coasts are the rule (*Odyssey* 1.80; *Iliad* 2.76).

Messinía also occupies a special climatological niche in the Hellenic world, whose reach from the Aegean Sea to the continental Balkans results in microclimates ranging from arid scrub islands to alpine forests. Within this spectrum Messinía enjoys a subtropical climate supported by warm currents and wet breezes from the south and southwestern sirocco winds originating in Libya and Tunisia. These winds, along with the mountain peaks to the east, fend off the colder air from the northeast in the winter, and fuel hot temperatures in the summer: winters are mild and rainy (from mid-40s°F to mid-60s°F), while summers are hot and glaring (from mid-70s°F to upper-90s°F). Average annual rainfall here amounts to 45 inches and, when the sirocco winds stiffen up, showers leave behind a red deposit of fine North African grit on walkways, windshields, and forgotten laundry on the clothesline. Add to this the fact that the visible plain of trees was, long before the emergence of humans, a series of terraces that used to be under the sea and are now covered with sediments eroded from the uplands (Zangger et al. 1997), and the resulting soil—which is loose, friable, and sneaks easily into your shoes—is perfect for soaking up nutrients. However small, these climatological and geological differences distinguish the coastal plain of Messinía from the hinterland of the Peloponnese—the southern half of Greece—and even from upland areas within the rest of Messinía. Here, unlike elsewhere, thrive the first blooming fruit trees of spring and the last ripening vegetables of autumn, alongside tropical and sub-tropical plants of all colors and fragrances. The Messinían coastal plain is one of Greece's greenhouses.

Most of this greenhouse is under cultivation. Olive groves predominate. But other crops include grapes and currants, corn, cereals, fodder, figs, citruses and truck crops. Weeds also proliferate in springtime in the orchards and at the edges of row plantings, of which Messinians frequently make use (Table 5, pg. 56). The cultivation of olives, however, was not always the dominant preoccupation here. Older Messinians, who

remember when Mussolini's troops occupied the warehouses of Marathópolis in World War II also remember what those warehouses were used to store: currants. In fact, currants (*Vitis vinefera*) were a chief export of the region at the time, feeding a longstanding taste developed by British consumers (Woodhouse 1986). Today, many of the waterfront bars and restaurants in Marathópolis are converted warehouses that once prepared currants to be shipped from the area around Gargaliánoi. A moped-assisted survey of the coast between Marathópolis and Pylos reveals only one other seaport equipped with extant warehouses for currant shipping (long-abandoned in the settlement of Ghiálova on Navarino Bay), testifying to another relationship—now obsolete—between the highland town of Gargaliánoi and the seaside village of Marathópolis: inland agriculture and maritime shipping. When the British turned elsewhere for their currants and the Greek nation was reeling from civil war (1946-1949) and trying to rebuild itself with help from the Marshall Plan, much of the currant vine stock was uprooted and whole vineyards were converted to olive groves to accommodate growing demand in oil. Today, quick septuagenarians and octogenarians can point to a patch of earth and tell you when the vines were plucked out and olive trees were plopped in. While currants continue to be a major crop here, especially in the highlands, oleiculture reigns supreme.

The olive's supremacy in this region is not new, historically speaking, but part of a cycle that has ebbed and receded with human activity. According to pollen analysis undertaken by the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project (Zangger et al. 1997:576-95), olive trees have enjoyed two periods of intensified land use in the landscape surrounding Navarino Bay where sampling was conducted.⁸ Most recently, there was a spike in local olive production during the medieval period when the region experienced a back-and-forth swapping of hegemony between Franks and Venetians in the Crusades, followed by Ottoman Turks. At this time, the local seats of power were present-day Kyparissia to the north, and present-day Koroni and Methoni at the southern extremities of Messinía.

⁸ Surveyors sampled cores from the north side of Navarino Bay. Although this is not perfect for illuminating the ecological landscape closer to Marathópolis and Gargaliánoi, these settlements are relatively new anyway (~17th c. A.D.) and formed in large part within Pylos's sphere of influence to the south (and Kyparissia's influence to the north). Thus, this study serves as a good broad index for human-flora activity in the area.



Figure 1-9. Oil and the Crusades. Credit: Dana Fradon, *The New Yorker*. November 4, 2002.

Consequently, as a prized colonial possession of the Republic of Venice, Koroni came into its own as a powerhouse of olive and oil exports (1290-1420 A.D.) and its name became synonymous with the olive variety it was distributing to foreign shores: koronéiki. In fact, according to an English pilgrim, Benedict of Peterborough, who visited Messinía at the time, Koroni was the biggest

olive-production site in the world (Zangger, et al. 1997, citing Topping 1972:66). (This is likely the same time that the currant industry becomes established in Messinía, as this is roughly when the Venetian thalassocracy secured a supply of currants from its colonies in the nearby Ionian Islands (Christensen 2000)).

Prior to this, olives enjoyed another span of popularity among farmers about one millennium earlier. Olive cultivation intensified like never before beginning in about 800 B.C.—the dawn of political and cultural organization around the *polis*—and peaked at around 230 B.C. such that olive trees, at a time when Hellenic colonization of Egypt and Asia beyond Asia Minor was at its greatest reach in the wake of Alexander the Great, accounted for about one-quarter of all land coverage around Navarino Bay. They declined as a result of human upheavals brought on by foreign raids and Slavic invasions during the Roman and Byzantine eras (meaning that one of the groves I helped harvest outside of Marathópolis and next to the ruins of a Roman villa probably never operated while the villa was in use).

Pollen counts indicate that the first major cultivation of olive trees in the region occurred at the closing of the Bronze Age (Late Helladic III, 1400-1050 B.C.) but only amounted to about 10% of land use at the time. What else was being planted? According

to Linear B tablets uncovered on the plateau at the so-called Palace of Nestor (present-day Iklaina), one celebrated man (who may or may not be the king) inventoried plantings of at least a thousand vines and a thousand fig trees in his possession (Chadwick 1976:71-72). After this time, when Bronze Age civilization collapsed and human settlements withdrew from the area (the settlement of Pylos was burned to the ground), what was left behind was merely one of several local historical examples of how olive cultivation—along with other agricultures—share in the vicissitudes of not only ecological change but also those inherent in human politics and economies.

Today, this countryside is dotted with loud discotheques, industrial oil mills, modern houses, and sleepy countryside chapels, many of which are built on ancient ruins. Today, one in two Messinians wakes up to work the soil,⁹ and Messinía generally contributes to the 37% of all oil production based in the Peloponnese,¹⁰ and adds to the 10.5% of all oil in the world originating in Greece.¹¹ Its fertile soils and sandy shoreline make Messinía the rural backyard of Greece, which eats of its tomatoes and melons and savor its figs and olives. Of course, Greece enjoys olive oil from Messinía too, but so does much of the Western world beyond the Ionian Sea. Olive oil gives Messinía its backbone. It is here—from where I lived in the shadow of Gargaliánoi and an unnerving moped trip away from Pylos—in the quiet, busy village of Marathópolis that I forayed into an anthropology of *Essential Oil*, here at a crossroads of human—and olive—culture.



Figure 1-10. Logo in Linear B. A non-governmental organization for research and outreach among oil-making nations uses the Bronze Age Linear B symbol for “olive tree” in its logo. (Source: www.olivetreeroute.gr)

⁹ Baseline seasonal labor (Hellenic Statistical Authority. 2009. *Census of Agriculture and Livestock Holdings: Employment*).

¹⁰ Tótskas. [n.d.]. Nomós Messinías,

¹¹ IOC. 2002. International Olive Council. www.internationaloliveoil.org

Research Methods

This research treats olive oil as an ethnographic window through which larger cultural patterns are visible. I initially conceived this project, therefore, as constituting both an ethnography of food and an ethnography of trees. However, the more I traced the social life of olive oil, the more I realized that this project required an ethnography of ritual life, and I adapted accordingly. Beyond the data collected in social settings, I also surveyed popular culture and print media (not that these are less social!) where olive culture was the center of attention. Now to enumerate the strategies I used in these venues.

Home and Kafeneío

First, to conduct an ethnography of food, I let Maurice Bloch be my guide. When studying food, he says, one should document three types of data: “(1) the symbolic significance of different foods; (2) the symbolic significance of different ways of preparing food; and (3) the relation of ideas concerning sharing substance through food and through procreation and sex” (Bloch 2005a:46). I adapted these types of datasets to olive culture, substituting the words “olive” or “oil” where Bloch says “food.”

In order to collect information on the creation, processing, and exchange of olives and oil, I participated in everyday practices and conversations in the home and the *kafeneío* (coffeehouse). These institutions focus, to some degree, on group membership and the sharing of food, as well as the construction of gender and labor roles—data collected here helped me tie definitions of food to practices of kinship-making versus other forms of sociality (e.g., friendship). Traditionally, coffee houses used to be exclusive to men—a fact that older generations lived through and still remember—and while many of the new modern versions of the *kafeneío* are popular among both men and women, there still exist a several old-fashioned ones that draw mostly male customers. In both versions of these coffeehouses, I joined in drinks and *mezé* (small savories), and also partook of meals with friends and acquaintances in the privacy of their homes.

In both spaces, I had hoped to observe differences in how foods are prepared and served to different types of family members (e.g., in-laws, agnates, spiritual kin) or help integrate new kin (e.g., newborns, affines, distant relatives, or even strangers)—yet this

proved less informative than hearing, or overhearing, gossip with (and about) guests after meals. In short, much of my fieldwork consisted of a study in the etiquette of hospitality. In addition, I adapted methods used by Evthimios Papataxiarches (1991) and Michael Herzfeld (1985:149-62) and participated in acts of *kérasma*—treating others to food or drink—so that, as a guest, friend, or host, I could better identify contexts in which commensality enforces egalitarian or hierarchical relations: I quickly learned how much aggression (and even subterfuge!) is needed to successfully claim the host role. In scenarios where food was front and center, I often steered conversation to glean local comparisons of oil with other “essential” foods or substances thought to affect people’s bodies and experiences, especially alcohol (Papagaroufali 1992; Sutton 2001, 2010).

Moreover, as the guest of a host family (and later earning the friendships of other families) I remained ever-alert in the kitchen, what I realized to be the control center of the house, where I chatted casually with the matron of the home (the *noikokyrá* or “housekeeper”) as she prepared and distributed dishes. Although Messinians are self-stereotyped as introverted and suspicious, I discovered that, in my case, the key to unlocking secrets from older matrons was playing dumb (only *playing*?) and asking naïve questions about cooking, recipes, and techniques: every self-respecting *noikokyrá* is armed and ready to show you the “right” way. Similarly, adapting methods by Daniel Miller (1998; see also Carrington 1997), I accompanied a couple of women on their shopping trips, inquiring informally about their decision-making processes, making an already tedious chore ever more onerous.

A centerpiece of my observations in the home was the *noikokyrá*’s role in curing olives and shipping oil to children and relatives living elsewhere, as well as her use of oil for purposes of healing, hygiene, and household use. Through structured interviews, I not only consulted with these women about the household budget and costs of oleiculture (cost of cultivation, maintenance, packaging, distribution), but also compiled descriptions about familial labor roles. These painted a sizeable and vivid picture of how women’s tasks in olive culture help them consciously or unconsciously identify with procreative and feminine gender roles in Greece (e.g., women’s role in maintaining boundaries between domestic/wild or raw/edible; see Du Boulay 1986; Dubisch 1986a). With the

permission of the *noikokyrá* and fellow diners, I video/photo-documented food preparations and eating as needed for additional visual data.

The final way in which I gathered information about food exchange in oil was by studying the connections it was thought to maintain with distant relatives. With the help of my informants, I visited the homes of relatives in Athens to participate in meals (they insisted!) and conduct interviews about the importance of the oil they receive from “the village back home” (*to chorió*). This entailed a survey of the resources, networks, and means used to convey family-made oil to Athens, paying attention to its packaging and handling and to whether special efforts were made to protect strangers from handling it (short answer: yes). It also entailed ascertaining: (1) if the transmission of oil from Messinía to Athens was reciprocated with something else (e.g., cash remittances or gifts); (2) how much Athenians rely on this oil versus store-bought oil for everyday purposes; (3) if and how Athenians use oil differently for medicinal, hygienic, or ritual purposes than from their Messinían relatives; and (4) noting, as does Sutton (2000, 2001, 2010), instances where the consumption of family-made oil is described as an act of nostalgia or as recharging oneself with a substance derived from specific persons or places.

Olive Groves and Oil Presses

When it came to the ethnography of trees, I followed models that show how the symbolism of trees—their cultivation, consumption, and place in cosmology—can be elicited by looking at basic classifications of trees, categories of physical grouping (forests, orchards, lone trees, etc.), overlapping terminologies between tree parts and human parts, sexual or procreative metaphors for cultivation, and, finally, the projection of these into other domains like architecture or economics. To these ends, I worked (hard!) as a laborer apprenticed to olive farmers. As a “student” of oleiculture I collected information from farmers’ explicit instructions and copied (when they permitted) practices necessary for any olive grower to know: I learned local taxonomies of olive varieties, their seasonality and climatic preferences, standards for pruning and caring for trees, harvesting fruit, their agronomic weaknesses/strengths—in short, the Messinían recipe for proper olive cultivation. Given the “holy triad” of wine, wheat, and oil in Orthodoxy (Iossifides 1992:90) and throughout Mediterranean cultures (Braudel 1972, 1977), I noted any parallels that farmers drew between oleiculture and viticulture or

wheat farming, and investigated cases where a combination of these was practiced (hint: wheat is not grown in Messinía).

Secondly, I accompanied farmers to the oil press after the harvest as they processed and inspected their yield and decided whether or not to sell oil to press operators and oil merchants. I conducted formal interviews with all parties about market and non-market classifications of oil, and the qualities sought by local, national, and international buyers. Most importantly, I recorded formal and informal explanations of how oil is expressed from olives, carefully noting use of metaphorical references to other types of processing. Through targeted interviews and observation at the olive press, I hoped to map the chain of oleicultural production (Lemonnier 1986), beginning in the grove and ending in the bottle, in order to discern the role that family farmers play in the oil industry and, conversely, the role that oil plays in family affairs.

Churches and Secular Ritual Spaces

Finally, to tackle the ethnography of Messinían spiritual life, I draw heavily from Victor and Edith Turner, whose collective works constitute the *Gray's Anatomy of Ritual* (Turner 2012; Turner 1967, 1969; also van Gennep 1960). To investigate the spiritual meaning of olive oil, I began attending Greek Orthodox services and turned an eye toward vernacular rituals, too. In both these contexts I paid attention to behavioral and discursive information about the requirement and effectiveness of oil used in rituals—e.g., the proper type and source of oil, its appropriate storage and use, and the protocol for gifting/obtaining sacred oils. I often followed up events with formal interviews, consulting with both clerics and lay persons about the meaning and forms of vernacular and ecclesiastical rituals (for example, the “official” versus “lay” explanations of rituals like exorcism), and the use of other materials such as water, candles, basil, wine, and bread. With permission, I recorded and coded visual data with video and/or photography.

Fieldwork in church occurred during normal liturgical services but especially on feast days and other holy days in order to survey the use and depiction of olives/olive oil in the church. On rarer occasions, I leapt at the chance to attend baptisms and funerals, events usually closed to strangers, and also wandered through local cemeteries—there is one in Gargaliánoi and another in Marathópolis—to monitor informally the use of mortuary artifacts and incidence of burial (Alexiou 2002; Danforth 1982; Håland 2014;

Panourgíá 1995). Such rituals index moments of transition in a person's kinship status but also include frequent use of oil to anoint the body, especially in baptism (Chock 1974; Du Boulay 1984). Religious rituals in the home were observed with similar, unobtrusive informality. Some observation and chats focused on household use of oil in the lamps placed in home shrines and in roadside shrines maintained by a family (Forbes 2007). I also sought explanations for why, as I had observed in earlier visits, women on pilgrimage devote a bottle of oil to clerics: under what circumstances should someone contribute oil to a church? Is this tribute conceived as the sharing of a family gift with the divine house of God, that is, as an act of exchange and commensality?

Lastly, to begin outlining an indigenous model of the body and how oil interacts with it, I inquired about the use of oil in diagnosing and exorcising the evil-eye (*máti* or *mátiasma*). Following the work of Meneley (2008a) and others (Argyrou 1993; Herzfeld 1981; Stewart 1991), I sought to triangulate this vernacular rite with local understandings of the nature of oil (and water) but also of demonic possession and purification. For both ecclesiastical and vernacular rites, it was equally important to note instances where oil was entirely absent. Ritual dietary fasting was an obvious example and proved meaningful precisely because foods like oil are eschewed—the question is “why?” Data on who observes such rites, and explanations about their significance, were also collected to shed light on how symbolic substances other than oil—like wine and bread—might also determine spiritual and somatic relations.

Media, Museums, and Agronomy

To determine how Messinians, in particular (and Greeks in general), portray the production and consumption of olive oil, I surveyed three different “sources” of popular knowledge. The first source, popular media, helped me identify recurring themes as they appear in advertisements and publications. Museums, the second source, I also visited, primarily those devoted to olives and olive oil (as far as museums go, a fairly recent niche). Finally, I visited farm cooperatives and agronomic service offices that provide farmers with informational publications, training manuals, and advertising templates. I collected and transcribed these materials as appropriate to analyze their thematic content.

Data Collection

I collected data among local Messinians primarily through participant-observation and semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2006; DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). My own social status (as a researcher, as a Greek-American, and as an unmarried male adult) influenced the quality of interactions with Messinian informants, and working in this in-between status helped me test initial questions and the patterns I perceived as I collected data. For this reason, verbal exchanges between Messinians and myself was a key “site” of my contextual ethnographic learning, as the most eye-opening strategy was using my ears to listen for nuance in need of interpretation, approaching what Charles Briggs (1986) calls “metacommunicative competence” over the explanatory models Messinians use to share knowledge (about olive production/consumption), and what Michael Herzfeld (2005) calls “cultural intimacy” regarding the levels of information privy to insiders versus outsiders.

Observations and reflections were noted in writing. Or, when impractical—during an olive harvest, writing and threshing are antithetical actions—these were noted as memory-based “head notes” that I later transcribed, per DeWalt and DeWalt (2002). Formal interviews were digitally recorded, also for transcription. To catalog this qualitative and quantitative data, I adopted a mix of H. Russell Bernard’s typology (2006; Shever 2012, 2013), which distinguishes between methodological, descriptive, and analytic fieldnotes, and the increasingly popular digital use of tag words for search within Apple’s Spotlight Search function; the same was done using iPhoto for photographic data and for texts I collected from magazines, newspapers, and other popular print media. Where appropriate, the identities of participants are obfuscated in this thesis by the use of pseudonyms. Confidentiality is paramount. In compliance with approved **IRB Protocol #2013002200**, parental consent was obtained when interviewing youths. All informants were informed in Greek of their options to participate and acknowledged consent vocally or in writing.

Oleiculture and Olive Culture

The stories told in the following chapters, ranging from ordinary routines to extraordinary social events, outline a particular genre of interactions between members of

a local community and one particular substance through which they come to organize themselves and understand their world. As implied by the title, *Essential Oil: Kinship and Wealth among Olive Farmers in Messinía*, this is an ethnography of both “oleiculture” and of “olive culture.” Where the first term refers to the agricultural production of olives, I use the second term to mean the cultural use of olive-related symbols, whether overtly or invisibly structured, in events both mundane and sacred. In Messinía, olive oil creates relationships we would deem to be either economic (employer/laborer, seller/buyer, etc.) or kin-based (affine/agnate, biological/spiritual, etc.). The flow of olive oil, however, does not impose such arbitrary theoretical distinctions between these domains. Instead it only “sees” and arbitrates dimensions of insider-ness and outsider-ness. When it comes to oil, economics are kin-based, and kinship is economic.¹²

The story of *Essential Oil* is told in two halves. The first half examines the anatomical co-occurrence of Messinían life and the productive life of olive oil. As both tick along to rhythms of the four seasons, it is not a coincidence that oleiculture—the cultivation, pressing, and use of oil—unfolds as a ritual process that effects transformations in olives and Messinians alike. Thus, the first half of this dissertation maps the processual trajectory of oil from the grove, through the mill, and to sites of consumption. This method of reportage consciously and analytically makes use of the tripartite ritual process, conveying to the reader how olive culture iterates—and reiterates—the relationships most valued to Messinians

Beginning in Chapter Two, the reader is invited into the world of the olive grove and asked to see it from the perspective of the farmer, whose toil is experienced through the body, but whose sensibilities of right and wrong are writ on the trees through the craft of cultivation. Most important is the harvest, wherein oil and money—and the balancing of debts—come to define the relationships that distinguish the “us” from the “them.” Harvesting is as much about yielding to social obligations as it is about yielding crops.

¹² Elana Shever makes this point in regard to oil in Argentina, but the oil in her case is petroleum. See her book, *Resources for Reform: Oil and Neoliberalism in Argentina* (2012. Stanford University Press), and also her chapter, “I am a Petroleum Product”: Making Kinship Work on the Patagonian Frontier. In *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship*. S. McKinnon, ed. Pp. 85-108. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.

Chapter Three opens a door into the oil mill, inside of which everything is in suspension—not just the green sludge destined to become virgin oil, but also histories, knowledges, and hierarchies. Suspended here is also oil’s status, as it symbolically waits on the threshold of becoming either a household substance for the family to re-produce itself, or a commodity to be alienated in the global market. Liminality and the smell of raw oil infuse this space.

In the home, oil is not only a thing to be integrated into life through culinary, religious, and everyday use, but it is itself *the thing that integrates* key relationships in these contexts. The ways it achieves this are explored in Chapter Four. Unlike in the groves, where men dominate, women emerge here as the agents of change as oil’s inflection of gender comes to the fore. The aesthetics of olive symbolism are also explored and shown to play a counterintuitive role in how urban versus rural landscapes are imagined as being “local” or “cosmopolitan,” adding to oil’s power to create contrasts of insider-ness and outsider-ness.

The second half of this dissertation shifts from the agricultural life of oil to its life in moments of physical and metaphysical transformation. Thus, as the title indicates, this section is largely about “The Messinían Body” (in multiple senses of the word) since it explores oil’s ability to, in religious contexts, reinforce dimensions of insider-ness and outsider-ness. Beginning with Chapter Five, the reader is presented with several case studies from spiritual contexts that reveal a science of the body according to Messinians and how oil is used (or eschewed!) for the body (and soul) to achieve an ideal state. The rituals presented here—Holy Communion, fasting, and exorcism—evinced the properties attributed to oil as a substance of purity, further revealing how Messinians perceive the body as a container whose contents are subject to loss and penetration, and on which oil can act to maintain what I call an Economy of Containment.

The chapter that follows, Chapter Six, further develops the local model of the body, exploring the complementary idioms of “integrity” and “inheritance.” Where integrity (*akeraiótita*), is thought to bring somatic composition into alignment with moral righteousness (as is explored in a dramatic performance of violent bodily obliteration), the idiom of inheritance (*klironomía*) is a mode of kinship-making that is both metaphysical but also speaks to notions of wealth. Both of these idioms are important

because, in addition to demonstrating a symbolic parallel that is important to Messinians between the human body and the household. They also show how ritual uses of oil on the body are seen as practices of exchange among themselves and between themselves and the divinity. Oil is a substance that makes relationships of physical and metaphysical “belonging.” It is, in short, an essence of insider-ness and outsider-ness.

The two halves of this dissertation map two respective trajectories. The first, a trajectory of the social, organizational life of olive oil: a big picture. The second, a trajectory inwards toward a particular conceptualization of the body, rendered visible by olive oil (in conjunction with other substances): a deep picture. Olive oil is the star in the first drama, but a supporting actor in the second. Thus the two halves constitute two separate but complementary analyses, and so promise two spheres of insight.

In its closing remarks, *Essential Oil* offers the reader a summary of the chief findings of this thesis and proposes new lines of inquiry specific to Greek ethnography and to anthropological theory. It also comments on the current crisis in Greece. And while this dissertation relies unapologetically on my own emotional “take” in its brand of story-telling (after all, what is ethnography but a story told in a formulaic kind of voice?), it documents the blossoms, aromas, tastes, toils, anxieties, aches, struggles, and the few joys that presently characterize Messinian life in the post-2009 world, not to romanticize the reality that my friends and acquaintances live in, but merely to humanize it. That is all they asked of me.

SECTION I: OLIVE RITES

Introduction

“You’re going to teach them to do olives...”¹

It was neither a statement nor a question. Nor was it clear if “them” in the remark referred to my students, my professors, or, more generally, Americans. Steely in its delivery, the sentiment behind the remark was guarded skillfully by Kyra-Dóra’s dark brown eyes. Her gaze intimidated me. It was the kind of gaze that made me feel exposed. The kind of probing stare that, mid-conversation, forced my eyes to retreat anywhere besides into hers. She was a formidable and no-nonsense woman—functional in her attire, athletic in her stature, and economical in her speech. The kind of woman whose approval meant a great deal to me, personally and professionally. More than anyone else on the harvest team—even more than the rough-and-ready men to whom I must have seemed preciously delicate—Kyra-Dóra’s appraising eyes were the one that made me most nervous. Every morning I tucked myself in the corner between the dusty backseat and the heavy truck door of the Nissan Navara, partially to rest my tired body, but mostly in an attempt to evade the awareness of the woman sitting two feet from me. It was only upon arriving in the groves that I could relax somewhat, when our allotted tasks in the harvest kept us at a calculated distance.

In many ways, Kyra-Dóra’s relationship to olive trees typifies that of every Messinían. She and her husband still own some of their own trees, but they gave a majority of them to their children at the time of their marriages. In the spring, she admires the white olive blossoms, hoping that they survive the elements. In the summer she inspects the developing fruit, making sure they get watered properly. In the fall, she helps pay for the pesticides that her son will spray before any bugs can do mischief. And in the winter, she layers herself in repurposed garments, envelops her silk-white hair in a kerchief, pulls herself into the Nissan Navara, and does her part to harvest the olive

¹ *Tha tous mátheis na kánoun eliés*

groves belonging to her and her children. At the pressing, she waits by the fireplace in the oil mill as the centrifuges spin, aims her dark discriminating brown eyes on the digital scale as it weighs her olive oil and, finally, after it has been decanted into her barrels, makes sure that everyone in the family gets enough olive oil to last till next year's harvest.

Despite my uneasiness about her, Kyra-Dóra was not a mean or overbearing person.² In the groves she deferred authority to her son and daughter, as well as to her *ghambró* (son-in-law). Meanwhile, she concentrated on the task of gathering and sacking olives that I had knocked to the ground. And even though I gave her countless opportunities, she never complained about the quality of my work (or lack thereof) whacking at the trees' heavy limbs. Perhaps this courtesy was out of deference to me as the *xéno* (outsider), or as a friend of her son and daughter, or perhaps because she is not a stupid woman and knows the value of free labor. Either way, she commanded my respect and admiration, and it was for this rugged sixty-eight year old woman—whose silk-white hair contrasted the dark of her gaze—that I wanted to master the techniques of olive harvesting—“to do olives.” As will become clear by the end of this chapter, the cultivation of olives in Greece is not just a means to an oily end.

While Marathióte farmers have different personal relationships with olive cultivation, all olive farmers agree on what is expected in good cultivation. In fact, the Greek word for “cultivation”—*kalliérghēia*—derives from the root words for “good” or “beautiful” (*kálos*), and “work” (*érghos*). This “beautiful work” is something farmers take seriously, often enrolling in seminars offered by the local agricultural society, keeping an eye on trending pests and pathogens in a given season, and plugging into social media for the latest innovation in farming. A variation on the word—*kallierghía* (penultimate syllable stressed rather than middle syllable)—connotes any work that is “meticulous and useful,” as one might hear when discussing “craftsmanship” or an art project (Kriaras 1968; Triantafyllidis 1998). The concept works as an adjective too, as when a person who is cultivated in fine arts and highbrow culture is said to be, literally,

² The honorific “kyra” (f.) connotes formality but on a first-name basis (e.g., “Miss Dóra”) without resorting to the formal use of one's family name (e.g., Mrs. Psaropoulou), which is signified in Greek by the honorific “kyría.”

“well-worked”—*kallierghiménos*. So it should not surprise us, then, that the concept of “good work” also has a moral dimension: the social expectation of knowing and meeting the standards held for one’s craft. The “good work” of olives is no exception to this.

In one respect, my approach to understanding this useful, meticulous, and moral craft employs a theory of “materiality.” However, rather than a deterministic theory of materiality that totalizes and bifurcates human experience into *either* material *or* symbolic orders (e.g., Harris 1966), I borrow a theory of materiality from material-studies and commodity-studies that traces the “cultural biography of things” (Kopytoff 1986) and which analyzes each thing as “a synthesis of very complex relationships” (Damon 2008:126). In this chapter, however, I add to this material approach a dose of the “technical” by focusing on the “doing” of olives (Latour 2014; Lemonnier 1993, 2012). Where Marcel Mauss defined the French word *technique* as simply “any effective traditional act” (1968:371), Pierre Lemonnier regards it as a conflation of bodily practice, material culture, and cognition:

[Techniques] bring into play materials, sequences of action, ‘tools’ (including the human body), and a particular knowledge. This latter is at the same time know-how, manual skills, procedures, but also...a set of cultural representations of ‘reality.’ (1986:154)

This same approach has gained currency in fields like religious studies (e.g., Morgan 2010) and food studies (e.g., Sutton 2000, 2014), and analysis of the material dimension is opening up to include experiences that are embodied, sentimental, sensorial, and knowledge-based. Consequently, this attitude frees “materiality from a narrowly Western definition of what matter consists of” (Latour 2014:509), favoring an approach where *doing*—how we explain and embody it— is “good to think.”

Oleiculture—the cultivation of olives and the production of olive oil—shapes Messinían life to the point where its rhythms, both sacred and profane, keep in step with the vicissitudes of weather and the four seasons. For everyone I worked with whose ways of “doing” are explored in the following sections—Kyra-Dóra, Mr. Leonídas, Roúla, Mrs. Dhimáki, Tásos, and others—olive harvesting is not so much a way of life as it is life itself: *the alpha and omega*. Labor transactions, religious feasts, and familial rites of passage all conform to the agricultural demands and scheduling of the olive.

The journey of oil from the silvery olive grove, through the church-like oil mill, and into the rotund barrels and sleek cruets of households both near and far, maps a trajectory through time and sociality too, a trajectory constituted very much as a ritual process: (1) the first phase of this ritual, cultivation and harvest, occurs in the grove, which is conceived as an oasis in the wilderness, and its execution is shaped by obligations within and among households; (2) the second phase, oil extraction, takes place in the oil mill, a space where olives are transfigured into liquid gold, where sociality turns to *communitas*, and where modernity and science converge with history and “traditional” belief; (3) the final phase, distribution and consumption, enforces separations and connections across geographical, familial, and spiritual divides, authoritatively managed in large part by women.

What follows now is a closer examination of this agricultural ritual process, an analysis of the material, embodied, gendered structural relations that drive oleiculture, but with the nuance that makes olive culture also a total *felt* experience. It is with this sentiment that—from the grove, to the press, and to the table—I am “going to teach them to do olives...”

A Body of Work

The intensive weeks of harvest, plus the seasonal work that needs to be done throughout the year, are especially taxing for Tásos thanks to the *kakiá*—“the wicked one” (fem.). His ex-wife cannot accommodate their kids’ schedules because their son and daughter attend high school in Gargaliánoi while she works at a grocery store in Filiatrá fifteen kilometers away. Tásos is the one who shuttles them from Marathópolis most mornings and afternoons. And since they are like millions of other Greek kids in a rusty school system, they also attend supplementary tutorial lessons every evening for 5-10 hours a week, meaning that he has a separate evening commute too. The consequent stress on Tásos’s time, wallet, and nerves makes his olive groves a mixed blessing. On one hand, “it is tiresome work”¹ that adds to his weariness with his family life. On the other hand, it is only when Tásos physically exerts himself in the groves that I see his bitterness and hurt subside.

In the months leading up to the hectic harvest season, when duties are still slower-paced but no less critical, Tásos had me as a captive audience, proudly teaching me all he knew about the care and cultivation of olives. But it was with profound humility that he also taught me about life, relationships, and what it means “to be an *ánthropos*”—to be *human*.² One eye-opening lesson in particular concerned how he had once found himself in an adulterous love-triangle between himself, his then-wife (the wicked one), and a (now) former friend, an affair that wrecked him emotionally not only because it betrayed a friendship and a nuptial vow, but also one that forced him to recall the inhuman reasons for which his brother, Andréas, died thirty years ago...when Andréas’s tractor collided with a truck. Rather than pull Andréas from the overturned machinery, the couple in the truck fled the scene for fear of being caught together since they were not only inebriated

¹ *Einai kourastikí dhouleía*

² *Na eísai ánthropos.*

but also committing adultery—for their philandering, Andréas slowly asphyxiated as the overturned wreckage slowly compressed his chest. The blue Universal 445-S tractor that killed his brother is the actual one Tásos drives in the groves today, a fact he revealed while musing how wickedness is part of being human. Perhaps it is because of these cruel betrayals that, today, he stands a burly man of forty-four years but with vulnerabilities that soften his speech and sadden the brown eyes he inherited from his mother—the formidable Kyra-Dóra. According to Tásos, toiling in the grove cannot destroy one’s spirit. Only people can do that.

However, within the private world of this proud, sad man, toiling creates an intimate space for embodied work and control in an otherwise uncontrollable world. For everyone I worked with, olive harvesting is *sklirí dhouleíá*, that is, “hard work.” It is physically demanding and intensive, owing to the small window of time that farmers have to harvest and press olives before they overripen on the tree. This hard work reflects the related concept of *móchthos*, best translated as “toil” or “arduousness.” Whether in reference to backbreaking work in the fields or long hard hours on the factory floor, the



Figure 2-1. Tásos finds peace in the grove while pruning.

condition of *móchthos* connotes the state of productive but physically grueling labor. In common parlance, such labor comes at a cost, as hard workers are said to “spit blood”³ or spill “blood, tears, and sweat.”⁴ Olive harvesting in particular demands the kind of labor where you “get dissolved” (*dhialýesai*), “get clenched” (*piánesai*), “become melted” (*gínesai lióma*), where “your waist gets cut” (*kóvetai i mési sou*), and you “get undone” or “debased” (*xepatónesai*, lit. “to remove the bottom from”). Such metaphors of bodily destruction aptly described how my own body felt by the end of my days on the job as a harvester. Sore shoulders, cramped neck muscles, a stiff lower back, and permanently clenched hands were the nightly results of an honest day’s work.

Although I kept assuring myself that my novice body, soft and unconditioned, would adapt to such hard labor, my body felt just as undone on the last day of the harvest as on the very first, having worked a total of 330 hours and over 1400 trees over two harvest seasons (Appendix 3). But to my surprise, the feelings of physical destruction this newbie suffered were echoed just as much by well-seasoned farmers—older men, harder men, women who have survived wars, mothers who have birthed children—farmers who complained every morning on the way to the grove about how much precious sleep was deprived by spasming muscles and tingling wrists. I was cautioned to avoid hot showers after such hard physical labor since they cause muscles to get “locked” or “clenched” (*piánesai*), advice that I initially dismissed as quaint but which crossed my mind again a month later as I lay facedown on the table of a physical therapist. This was around the time that angry blisters, those that had not already burst open into raw nerve and flesh, had mellowed into yellow-tinted knots on my palms. Long after the harvest—past the festivities of Christmas and New Years and well into February—nearly everyone’s palms are knotted with yellow leather.

The Messinian view that olive production naturally entails bodily destruction is telling. As I argue in the second half of this dissertation, the Messinian body is conceptualized as the outward physical expression of the inner moral self. That somatic integrity (*akeraiótita*) is entwined with a person’s moral character is a reasoning used to argue, for example, that a twisted soul should result, through evil actions, in a mangled

³ *Fínei aíma*

⁴ *Aíma, dákrya k'idhrótas*

body, and vice versa. So why is physical pain and destruction a virtue in the olive harvest? For starters, one might respond that olives (and other important crops) require farmers to “give” of themselves in a kind of sacrifice. Indeed, popular expressions with a sacrificial tenor (to “spit blood” or spill “blood, tears, and sweat”) bring to mind ethnographic instances where bodily essences are converted through gift-exchange into agricultural substances, and vice versa (e.g., Strathern 1988). However, I suggest that the other half of this answer lies in the Greek Orthodox virtue of struggle and redemption. This ethos entails a cosmological view wherein struggles in the here-and-now, including physical pain, spiritual warfare, and emotional suffering, will be redeemed in salvation. Indeed, the substance of olive oil, the result of back-breaking *móchthos*, is itself considered a redemptive essence so far as it has attributed to it the powers to heal, soothe, and protect in ways both physical and spiritual (see **Ch. 4-6** for more). In so many words, olive cultivation constitutes a phase of struggle in an annual cycle of undoing and then remaking bodies. It is the Orthodox message of Salvation writ small, but also Mauss’s message of *The Gift* writ in the body. Oleiculture symbolizes the virtuous work that trades on the human body in order to wrench fruit and fat from the gnarliest of trees.

Four Seasons

Now, let us turn our attention to the calendrical cycle of this undoing and remaking. Olive cultivation is a year-round endeavor. In Messinía, the cycle is conceived as culminating in the harvest (Table 3: Annual Messinían Calendar). First, however, the year’s activities begin in March-April, a season that belongs less to olive trees, and more to yellow, white, and mauve flora that carpet the groves. This is not to say that olive trees are inactive. On the contrary, early spring is when small buds begin blooming in clusters that will, in a few months, develop into fruit. These soon-to-be florets, however, pale in comparison to the knee-high sea of wildflowers beneath the tree canopy, which blend into smears of pastel color like an impressionist painting when driving past the groves at high speeds. For farmers these wildflowers signal the time for plowing (*fréza*). Plowing and harrowing bury weeds and wildflowers under the soil in order for the trees “to clean up” (*na katharísoune*; intrans.). Cleaning up is especially good prior to Easter, a feast that, because of the Revised Julian calendar, has a shifting observance sometime

Table 3: Annual Messinían Calendar

Colloquial Season†	Month	Celestial	Oleiculture	Holidays*
Spring	March	Spring Equinox (~3/21)	Plowing	Clean Monday † Annunciation of Virgin Mary 3/25 Nat'l Independence Day* 3/25
	April			Holy Easter † Feast of St. George 4/23
	May		Pruning	May Day / Feast of Flowers 5/1 Feast of Holy Pentecost* †
Summer	June	Summer Solstice (~6/21)		Feast of St. John Pródromos 6/24
	July		Pesticide Fertilization Irrigation	Feast of St. Elías 7/20
	August			Holy Transfiguration 8/6 Feast of Theotókos 8/15
Autumn	September	Fall Equinox (~9/21)		Feast of the Cross 9/14
	October		Plowing Harvesting	Feast of St. Demetrios 10/26 Óchi Day* 10/28
	November		Harvest Burning	
Winter	December	Winter Solstice (~12/21)		Feast of St. Nicholas 12/6 Christmas 12/25
	January		Burning	New Year's/Feast of St. Basil 1/1 Theophány/Blessing of Waters 1/6
	February			†

* All holidays are religious; political holidays are marked (*)

† Greeks identify the 1st of March, June, Sept., and Dec. as the first days of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, respectively.

‡ Moveable holy day, based on Julian and lunar calendars. Dates are approximate.



Figure 2-2. Olive growth. Pale green kernels in late spring (*left*) will grow into deep purple olive drupes by winter (*right*).

between early April and early May. A holiday to be spent grilling and feasting in the countryside, Easter offers families a chance to visit their country cottage (*exohikó*) and to admire and assess the scenery. In fact, this process may begin seven weeks prior when, on the first day of Lent—also known as Clean Monday (*Kathará Dheftéra*)—families descend to the groves for a meal of Lenten fare (see **Ch. 5**), and for children to fly kites while adults enjoy the refreshing experience of going *stin exochí* (“to the countryside”) to be “in nature” (*sti fýsi*). As I elaborate in **Ch. 6**, Easter is a feast that marks new beginnings, a feast that requires the cleaning of homes, businesses, and bodies: the grove, too, should undergo cleaning...hence the plowing!

Should a tractor and its driver disturb any branches early in the season when olive flowers have bloomed, the fate of dusty pollen will befall them both; if done later, then flaky white petals will fall, revealing the small green kernel of a soon-to-be olive. Occasional rain showers help suppress pollen and dust, though too many will also delay attempts to “clean” the grove. Untidy groves can play on a farmer’s conscience or self-opinion, since they are subject to neighborly surveillance: a tidy, “neat” (*peripoiméno*) grove speaks volumes about the family owning it, much as lawns do in American suburbia (Robbins 2007). Subject to scrutiny and moral judgment, the unkempt grove of an absent farmer may be not go unremarked at the coffeehouse...

This is especially true when it comes time to prune. Some reckon this time to be after April 23, the feast day of St. Gheórgchos (St. George), whose name actually means *farmer* or *cultivator* (*ghéo-* “earth” + *érghon* “worker”). In May-June, when the weather

has grown mild enough—usually in the high 60s to low 70s °F—farmers start pruning their trees to promote growth in a thinning process called *monóvergho*, detailed below. Rain clouds grow scarce, northerly breezes suggest long-sleeved shirts, but increasing sunshine encourages otherwise. Castoffs from the pruning process will be piled up and burned in the grove on the last day of pruning. But there is no hurry. This is an idyllic time of year! Scissor-tailed swallows, so adored by Greeks for millennia (Braudel 1972:18; Danforth 1982:112), dominate the airspace above the groves as they swoop and prey on airborne insects; pink cyclamen flowers quietly govern the floor beneath; and green olive kernels, now double in size, have begun their reign over the tree canopy. These kernels will continue to grow even when the temperatures leap overnight from the low 70s into the mid 80s °F, a remarkable trait of Messinía’ climate. Seasonal change here is abrupt and unwavering.

The summer months of July, August, and September in the olive grove can be characterized by one single, constant, incessant sound: the drone of cicadas. I was told that the earlier in the morning cicadas begin droning, the hotter it will be during the day (in August, droning started in the morning long before I did). Their tan exoskeletons, abandoned in the molting process, cling low on every tree-trunk as though crisped while trying to escape fire. At the summer Solstice, the sun sets at nearly ten minutes to nine o’clock, and endless sunshine joins forces with dry temperatures in the 90s °F to make the grove a radiating, glaring, dusty place. Messinían farmers agree that trees should be completely pruned “before the heats begin” (*prin archísoun oi zéstes*), so that the trees and they, themselves, can avoid undo stress—Messinians are particularly cautious about heat in the summer and warn against too much mid-day activity. Some farmers opt to help crops regulate water retention and fungal resistance in extreme temperatures with a foliar application of potassium (*kálío*), adding a brilliant blue dusty color to the trees. Where it has not been harrowed, the rusty-red soil bakes in the sun and crunches underfoot. Water becomes a concern. Folks from town (especially Gargaliánoi) head to the grove and move into their country cottages—a vacationing practice called

paratherismós (rooted in another agriculture practice¹)—in order to escape the hotness of cement and asphalt, and to go at least once a day to the sea for a bath (*bánio*), sometimes twice, as it is considered a therapeutic antidote to heat and a hygienic practice that invigorate the body and treats many ailments.

Meanwhile, black tubes suspended between olive trees water the ground beneath each canopy with a long spray or drip. Rivulets in the soil draw out vipers and scorpions at night, and closed-shoes and flashlights become the rule for strolling down the country lane (not a summer will go by without at least one close encounter, and storytellers on the veranda love recounting previous summer battles with these skulkers). The demands on both municipal water (humans) and well water (trees) peaks around August 15, when Athenians and other city dwellers flee urban heat waves and join family members in the grove house to celebrate the Dormition of the Theotókos (*Koímisis tis Theotókou*), the day commemorating the mother of Jesus Christ and the second-most holy feast in



Figure 2-3. Spraying for fruit fly.

Orthodoxy after Easter. This is the one day that Messinians (in fact, most Greeks) reckon as the last hurrah of summer. Morning services draw thousands of vacationers from their *exohiká* houses to worship in small country chapels, after which—unless they can squeeze a refreshing sea bath beforehand!—the grilling and the feasting begins. When dance music can be heard faintly between family settlements, then you know that the plates have been emptied and the glasses are being refilled. It is at this time that one realizes the extent to which an olive grove is not just a site for growing olives, but also the headquarters of summer.

¹ According to Triantafyllidis, to stay in a country or seaside place for the duration of summer for rest or vacation, “to summer.” Literally, *pará-* “around” + *-therismós* “wheat harvest.”

In the vernacular calendar, the first day of September marks the beginning of autumn. Yet, even after Athenians have slogged back to the city for school and work, the bright heat and the interminable drone of cicadas continue to occupy the grove, as do nearby villagers with the ability to wash off the sweat of work and school with daily sea baths. Olive trees take a bath, too, but in an insecticide that combats the dreaded *dhákos*, the olive fruit fly (*Bactrocera oleae*). As temperatures soften to the high 80s and low 90s °F, bright green olives reach 2/3 their final size and become the preferred incubators for the fly's larvae, especially in moister areas by the sea (like Marathópolis). The telltale sign of infestation—a small pin-sized hole burrowed by the fly and a bruise caused by subsurface larval growth—foretells a decrease in both oil quantity (larva consume the pulp) and quality (higher acidity). The sound of tractors is commonplace this time of year and one can easily spy a burst of liquid pesticide over the tree canopies (Figure 2-3).² Thus September is a month of vigilance and the time for *réndoh* (spraying).

Everything changes with the first autumn rain. Just as quickly as the groves grew hot and bright in June, they just as quickly mellow with the scent of damp, cool soil after the September equinox, pushing up a new regime of undergrowth. Farmers visit the grove to disconnect their irrigation systems; some coordinate with friends and relatives to let sheep or poultry wander free-range in the grove, supplying organic fertilization. Thrushes from the north and turtledoves aiming south make the grove an intersection where migrating birds meet hunters eager for delicacies of all kinds (see Table 4, below). Women also hunt in the grove now, but for wild greens to add to their pies, salads, and casseroles, or to sell in bunches at the market (Table 5). Demand for these “wild greens”



Figure 2-4. A herd of sheep provides organic fertilization.

² Popular insecticides include *dimethoét* (dimethoate) and *fěnthēio* (fenthion).

Table 4: Popular game hunted in the olive grove*

<u>Messinían</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Scientific</u>
Bird		
<i>tsíchla</i>	song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
<i>kótsifas</i>	blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
<i>bekátsa</i>	Eurasian woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticana</i>
<i>pérdhika</i>	partridge	<i>Portulaca oleracia</i>
<i>ortýki</i>	quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
<i>tryghóni</i>	turtledove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Mammal		
<i>kounéli</i>	common rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
<i>laghós</i>	hare	<i>Lepus sp.</i>
<i>aghrioghoúrouno</i>	wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>

* All birds are non-resident (except the turtle dove); all hunting coincides with overwintering in Messinía and/or migration to Africa (October-February). Mammals are resident but require licensing to hunt (September-February/March).

Table 5: Popular wild greens (*chórta*) harvested from the olive grove

<u>Messinían</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Scientific</u>	<u>Season(s)</u>
<i>róka</i>	arugula	<i>Eruca sativa</i>	year round
<i>séskoulo</i>	chard	<i>Beta vulgaris</i>	spring-summer-autumn
<i>andrákla</i>	purslane	<i>Portulaca oleracia</i>	summer-autumn
<i>vlíto</i>	amaranth	<i>Amaranthus viridis</i>	summer-autumn
<i>radhíkia</i>	chicory	<i>Cichorium intybus</i>	autumn-winter-spring
<i>kafkalíthra</i>	hartwort	<i>Tordylium apulum</i>	winter-spring
<i>máraithos</i>	fennel	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	winter-spring

(*chórta*) increases during periods of religious fasting, as these are considered permissible foods (**Ch. 5**)—harvesting of wild greens begins in autumn and lasts well into spring. It is especially the habit of older women to harvest wild greens, though the custom has gained new popularity with younger homemakers (*noikokyrés*) eager for natural, affordable foods. When my host-grandmother, Eléni, was asked by her youngest daughter to teach her to identify and collect these *chórta*, the 80-year old chuckled, “I was taught by the [German] *Occupation!*”¹ Renewed interest in wild foods, if marginal, suggests a new type of oppression. With a kitchen knife in one hand and a plastic bag in the other, these women stoop over colonies of chicory or hartwort, reaping 2-3 bags of greens in no time by venturing into neighboring groves, too. When it comes to wildy grown greens or wildy migrating game, private property boundaries are not observed; so understood is this unbounded harvesting that a courtesy observed by all grove owners is to hang a conspicuous plastic bottle from a tree along the lane, warning that the trees—and therefore the wild greens under them—have been sprayed with potentially dangerous pesticides.

The shift to cool, wet days in October and November keeps pace with the growth of dark, ripening olives. As the days get shorter and daytime temperatures descend to 50-60 °F, the confusion of purple and green on young olives turns decidedly brown. Masses of plump, dark olives now dominate the grove, and branches bow down under their weight. Workers will bow down, too, under the weight of nets and sacks as soon as it is decided that the olives are ready for harvest. Common table varieties will be ready in mid or late October, a fitting time to celebrate the feast of St. Demetrios (October 26), who is the patron saint of...crops! Other olives, predominately for pressing into oil, will peak in December. (For a complete list, see Appendix 4: Olive Varietals in Messinía). For these 2-3 months, it is full steam ahead! Only rain stops the crews in their tracks, since bagging wet olives, and whacking wet branches does more damage than good. On these days, farmers are more likely to curse under their breath, anxious to finish the harvest, though they put a silver lining on it: “no matter, at least we can rest.”² Rainy days also make for muddy groves, though blankets of wild greenery—some lush and ferny, others stiff and

¹ *Eména mou tá'mathe i katochí!*

² *Dhen peirázei, touláchiston na xekourastoúme.*

prickly—help prevent erosion under the trees and cushion the undersides of harvest cloths when the harvest resumes.

Throughout the winter months, the countryside rings out with the buzzing sound of harvest equipment, and regular cars contend with tractors of every size and color as their heavy loads and monstrous wheels slow traffic. Driving by any of the oil mills at this time is like walking into a small room of wet varnish, as the heavy but earthy smell of raw olive oil thickens the air from a distance, and nearby neighbors can hear the hum of machinery well into the morning hours. In cafes, banks, and supermarkets, regular personnel swap hours and coordinate schedules so that each worker has a chance to contribute to the harvest of their family grove: appointments need rescheduling and paperwork waits...even for the authorities.³ And if, in this frenzy, we throw in Christmas, New Year's Day, and a slew of holy feasts, plus the scent of fireplaces, whiskey, and fresh rain, you have the makings of winter in Messinía.

The groves don't rest until January when the final phase of olive culture is carried out: the burning of harvest debris. On a dry day after the harvest has finished, Messinians return once more to the grove with a fork on the end of their tractors or a pitchfork in their hands. Having already sawed and hauled off fatter olive branches for firewood (these burn hot and clean from the fat thought to infuse olive wood, a precious fuel for heating homes given recent fuel costs), farmers set light to unusable heaps of twigs and leaves that have already begun drying out. Gazing out over the Messinian plain from any balcony or veranda, numerous towers of white smoke climb out of faraway groves. Subsequent rains will help the thin deposit of ash from the burning pile to spread out and seep into the red soil.

Now clean, the cycle begins anew when the grove belongs less to olive trees and more to the yellow, white, and mauve flora bursting forth from the grove floor.

Comments

When asked, most Messinians begin and end the tale of the olive cycle as presented above—from springtime to winter. The burning of remnants is a routine

³ After trying several times in December to submit certain paperwork to the police department, I was told that the best time to find the attending officer at his desk was on a rainy day.

epilogue in a story whose real climax is the harvest. And when this part of the story is thrown against the motion picture of daily life in winter, a subplot that emerges is the combatting of darkness with lightness. The Orthodox calendar, too, helps with the timing of these scene changes.

Shortly before the burning of harvest remnants, the drama reaches full intensity at the harvest itself, a time when families and villagers get together not only in the groves, but also for the Christmas and New Year holidays. At the same time that the *skoteiniá* (darkness) of Solstice becomes a conversation opener, pastries flood the marketplace, boats and trees with Christmas lights adorn home windows, hearth fires are lit to provide “companionship” (*syntrofía*), and special dishes are prepared: Messinían custom dictates a Christmas dinner of pork and celery in a creamy, tangy *avgholémono* sauce, and a New Year’s feast of rooster and pasta in tomato sauce (one of the only times rooster is preferred over hen, given its identification as the harbinger of diurnal beginnings). The drama ends on the Theopháneia (January 6), a day celebrating when the divine nature of Jesus was made visible in his baptism (Theopháneia literally means “Appearance of God”). On this day, churchgoers replenish their stock of holy water and then flock to the harbor “for the cross” (*ghia to stavró*), a ceremony in which young men dive into cold waters to retrieve a golden cross flung in by a priest. These rituals, theologically commemorating the baptism of Jesus by St. John the Baptist, signify purification and lightness, elements of special importance when the year commences. This applies to the groves too, as Messiníans like Eléni and Voúla take their new bottles of holy water to the grove after church and, aiming at the trees closest to them, spritz small jets of the sanctified water onto their foliage and trunk. This dutiful spritzing (*psekazmó*) reveals a ritual that is done, as they say, “for the good” (*ghia to kaló*), and I have observed it done also to houses, cars, and other family possessions. Thus the beginning of the calendar year and the beginning of the olive cycle align in inaugural purification and blessing.

Another aspect of the calendar concerns the feast days of St. Demetrios and St. George, mentioned earlier. Although both saints are identified as important military saints, Messiníans use their respective feast days—April 23 (St. George) and October 26 (St. Demetrios)—to reckon the timeframe of intense, hands-on farming. The span between these dates is characterized by dry, temperate weather perfect for pruning,

irrigation, fertilization, and pest control. The use of these feast days is so conventional that, when I asked one informant when would be the best time to find him in his grove, his mouth said “after St. George’s [feast]”⁴ but his tone and hand gesture—a circling of the hand with palm upwards, a common gesture in Messinía and throughout Greece—communicated the obviousness of this statement as though he were informing me that Athens is the best place for visiting the Parthenon.



Figure 2-5. Sts. George and Demetrios. While the former sits on a white horse, the latter sits atop a brown one. In this version, what looks like an olive tree can be seen between the hind legs of the white horse. (*Saint George and Saint Demetrios (horseback)*; Source: <http://kakavia-en.blogspot.com/p/icon-painting.html>).

As it happens, St. George is associated popularly with farming by his name (which, as I already mentioned, means *cultivator*); yet, St. Demetrios is, ecclesiastically, the patron saint of crops and harvesting, a patronage he likely inherited as the namesake of Demeter, the ancient goddess of agriculture (Fermor 1958; Lawson 1965). Moreover, the compelling importance of these two feast days is rendered vivid in Greek Orthodox iconography, where the saints themselves are typically depicted side by side (**Figure 2-5**). When Messinians reckon the farming season with the twin feasts of Saints George and Demetrios, we see how formalized religious observance and agricultural theories of practice come to mutually construct one another.

Anthropologically, we know the role that calendars play in ordering work and social functions, a theory illustrated in Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis (1977) of the Kabyle agricultural calendar. Like other indigenous calendars (e.g., Hoskins 1993), the Messinian calendar arbitrarily organizes the “real, practical time” (1977:164) of everyday

⁴ *Metá tou Aï Ghiórgi*

experience with the same level of efficacy as any other classification system. The classificatory (and arbitrary) nature of Messinían calendric time is best illustrated in how Messinians organize what I call “vernacular” seasons (Table 3, pg. 51) where, rather than coordinate the changing of the seasons with the celestial dates defined in scientific (read *Western*) calendars, they neatly designate the first days of March, June, September, and December as the seasonal turning points of, respectively, spring, summer, fall, winter.⁵ Consequently, when it comes to the “practical time” of olive culture and social functions that unfold throughout the year (work, school, vacation, sea-bathing, foraging, hunting, feasting, fasting, etc.) the timelines we might think as distinctly ecclesiastical, agricultural, or secular, parallel each other so closely as to be conflated altogether in popular reckonings of time. Even the shifting feast of Easter provides a guidepost for plowing much like Labor Day (also a shifting holiday, though much more constrained) marks the cultural end of summer in the U.S. That otherwise distinct calendars for worship, farming, vacationing, etc. in Messinía should lend a realness to practical life is not a new concept, for it perfectly illustrates a doxic reality where “the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (Bourdieu 1977:164). However, it is one that shows, yet again, the degree of interconnectedness between olive culture in Messinía and all other orders of lived experience, especially cyclical time and the Christian calendar.

What about olive culture with respect to space? On one hand, the grove constitutes an ecology of interdependent relations that function at different orders (i.e., irrigator/tree, tree/harvester, hunter/fowl, forager/greens, irrigator/snake, etc.). At the same time, though, the structural position of the grove in the cultural world of Messinians is as a space of renewal and regeneration. For instance, when we examine the ecological engagement of Messinians through their “real, practical” calendar, we see how they construct common-sense associations of the grove with wholesome foods that are seasonal when they, for example, plan trips for hunting, foraging, cultivating, and harvesting there. Moreover, at a broader semiotic level, the grove is clearly imagined as antithetical to Athens (or any other urban center for that matter): in summer, the grove is

⁵ An example of how these dates mark the “socially practical” start of the seasons is found in how folks, on September 1st, for instance, greet each other by wishing *kaló mina kai kaló fthinóporo* (“good month and happy autumn”).

the preferred setting for a respite from urban artifice and heat, especially during the feast of the Virgin Mary; in spring, the first meal of Lent (Clean Monday) is held here, as is Easter, when family members converge from as near as Marathópolis and as far as Athens.⁶ Thus, the grove is the ordained setting not only for the opening day of the Orthodox calendar (Easter), but also for the meal inaugurating the longest period of fasting, a form of purification that is dietary. Add to this the fact that, for Athenian Messinians, it is the place for a “getaway,” and we see how the grove is imagined as a space of physical and spiritual refreshment. As I outline in Table 6, this power derives from its position on a relational axis where Messinians place their homes (provincial towns) between one pole—the “natural,” raw countryside (*exochi*)—and another—the modern, developed city (*politeía*). Therefore, while the agricultural calendar of the grove

Table 6: Messinian Classification of Landscapes

<u>Spatial category</u>			<u>Values</u>	
Athens	<i>politeía</i>	(city, center)	core	social
Gargaliánoi	<i>eparchía</i>	(province)		
grove	<i>exochi</i>	(countryside)	periphery	natural

seamlessly bundles secular and religious timeframes, the spatial milieu of the grove helps differentiate polarities of “culture” and “nature.” To adapt Bourdieu’s terms, the grove is a doxic landscape that is, according to Messinians, self-evidently natural, thereby reinforcing “self-evident” relations between *developed* urban centers and countrysides with *raw* resources. For the Messinian farmer, the view from the grove is that it alone provides a suitable stage for replaying key moments of spiritual and physical regeneration throughout the year, not least of which is that of food regeneration. And as we shall see by the end of this dissertation, this spatial polarity informs the notion of local authenticity

⁶ About 50% of the total Greek population resides in Athens; consequently, every Messinian has a close family connection or friendship there, a connection that frequently reiterates rural versus urban differences.

when it comes to the commodification and consumption of olive oil, both among Greeks and with foreigners.

Before that, however, we must trace the theme of regeneration in annual rhythms of cultivation. Let us now take a closer look at the key steps in the olive growing cycle, tracing how each is oriented to the future, a temporal orientation at the heart of oil production.

Pruning (*Monóvergho*)

The work of pruning is an impressive art. Over and over again, I was told that “it needs *téchni*,”⁷ a word that simultaneously connotes skill, craft, and artfulness (Triantafyllidis 1998; see also Meneley 2007 on the English renderings of “techne”). When asked what makes for good pruning, most farmers intuited their answers the same way that 87-year old Mr. Leonídas did as we were admiring a pruned tree in his grove, spreading his shaky hands in front of him and tracing the tree’s spherical contours in the air: “it has to have a beautiful shape.”⁸

When the shape of a tree runs afoul of aesthetics, however, the implications are disastrous. One day, while returning home from the harvest, Róula made a detour so that her mother, Kyra-Dóra, and I could see a neighbor’s grove that had been pruned badly and had been the butt of jokes throughout the day for Mítsos and Tásos, who had already seen it. Upon seeing the trees, whose crowns were completely stripped and whose lower limbs were nude except for a pompom of foliage on the ends, Mítsos chortled and hooted while Tásos cursed out loud—“the wanker!” The raucousness was interrupted when Kyra-Dóra exclaimed loudly and indignantly: “Catastrophe! [pause] He *hacked* them! There goes the yield!”⁹ To my untrained eye the trees looked...different. But to the experienced eyes of my friends in the Nissan Navara, the trees looked simultaneously unproductive (“there goes the yield”), artless (“hacked”), and the work of an ineffectual man (“wanker”)—(the wanker in question was a hired hand retained by the grove owners who reside permanently in Athens and vacation in the grove for summer).

⁷ *Thélei téchni*

⁸ *Prépei na'chei oraío schíma.*

⁹ *Katastrofi! Ta tsekoúrose!;* Literally, “he *axed* them.”

Negative and positive appraisals of a tree's form demonstrate how agricultural experience and aesthetic sensibilities come to index one another (Bonsdorff 2005; Carlson 2000). The exercise of shaping a tree—the annual systematic subtraction of limbs and shoots—is a recursive one that bridges farmers' knowledge of what will promote growth (best conditions) with a sensibility of what is aesthetically good (correct shape). The craft of pruning imprints itself, so to speak, as an arboreal disposition or habitus (Bourdieu 1977). Put simply, a Marathiote's appraisal of a tree's beauty does not distinguish between its aesthetic looks and one's agricultural know-how: they are one and the same. But what are the principles of good pruning, according to Marathiotes? I suggest that the true art of olive tree pruning rests in the pruner's ability to predict the future and, quite literally, to shape it—an agricultural version of futuricity.

Farmers prune olive trees for two reasons (the pruning that occurs during harvest merits a separate discussion, below). Before a tree is ready to develop fruit, a farmer must first prune a tree in order to frame its basic shape. This applies especially to newly establishing trees. While Anglophone handbooks call this “formative pruning,” Greeks call it “transformational pruning” (*kládhema diamórfosis*), owing to the fact that farmers buy nursery saplings



Figure 2-6. The “open cup” form
(Source: Gucci and Cantini 2000)

already aged 1-2 years old and make them into their own. These consist of a central stem (about 1m tall) with several lateral branches. Transformation of these saplings is accomplished systematically within the first few years of planting and, according to farmers, should consider the requirements of tree spacing and fruit harvesting. Unlike their neighbors in the Laconian region and elsewhere (where local olive varieties might demand the use of a ladder for handpicking at the canopy level), Messinians harvest their olive trees from the ground, aided by tall handheld tools. Thus, the lower the positioning of the fruit, the better.

In order to keep the trees productive, farmers keep them short by removing the central shoot (*vlastó*) that would extend the trunk upwards, preferring instead 3-5 side

limbs that will eventually scaffold fruit-bearing twigs that will be reachable by a handheld saw. The end result is a tree with a trunk that is slightly shorter than a person's height and around which radiate large, lush branches called "arms" (*vrachíones*). These arms stretch upwards no more than about 3.5m (~11.5ft), ensuring that all olives are within striking distance of a harvesting pole. The aim is to achieve what Marathiótes refer to as a "free" or "open" cup shape (*eléfthero kýpello*), while published authorities describe it as the shape of a vase, wine glass, martini glass or as a geometrical "polyconic" form (for example, see Ferguson et al. 1994; Gucci and Cantini 2000). As depicted in Figure 2-6, the openness in the center of the canopy permits sunlight to shine through to the fruit-bearing branches. This formative pruning style predominates as the standard for the majority of existing trees, although an older multi-trunk shape (in which 3-5 main leaders originate close to the ground) exists in the living memory of older informants; like encountering an endangered species, sightings of this shape in the groves are rare and remarkable. Nowhere did I see (nor did anyone mention) olive trees pruned in the bush or "Christmas tree" shapes cultivated in other parts of the Mediterranean (Roussos 2007) Once the established tree has fructified (in Marathópolis the common Koronéiki variety is the quickest and takes only three years where others may take ten) the real tough art of pruning begins: that art of maximizing yield.

Pruning to maximize yield, the second type of pruning, happens in the early weeks of summer after little white buds have blossomed on the tree. Experts refer to this type of pruning as "pruning for fruit-bearing" (*kládhema karpoforías*), focusing on the singling out of productive shoots. For this reason, the local term in Marathópolis (and broader Messinía) is simply "*monóvergho*," from the roots "single" (*móno-*) and "rod" (*-vérgha*). As I discovered by shadowing Tásos, *monóvergho* requires a short-term and long-term plan. Like a surgeon's assistant in the operating room, I attentively handed Tásos the necessary tools for the *monóvergho* procedure, alternating between a new serrated saw blade—mounted on a telescopic aluminum pole extendable to 3.5m—and an old but sturdy wooden handsaw that had clearly seen much action. "The proper ones are

the same as a finger's width,”¹⁰ Tásos explained, pointing to a shoot as fat as a finger and which arched upwards and outwards from the tree's arm. He then indicated a smaller shoot behind the first: “and this one'll be next year's.”¹¹ As we moved from one tree to the next, Tásos was peering into the future, deciding which shoots would bear olives in the next two years. His blade simultaneously divined and defined the next few growing seasons as I watched and wondered. Did he cut the middle of three shoots to let the outer ones breathe? Or because it seemed the weakest? Why did he eliminate a limb that bore baby olives? When he was too tired or fed up with my questions to explain his reasoning out loud, I silently predicted which of the shoots would be subtracted from the future,



Figure 2-7. Pruning (*monóvergho*) in early spring boosts the olive yield (*left*); in mid-summer, Tásos sprays insecticide to protect the crop from fruit fly (*right*).

slowly improving my record over the course of several days. With each stroke of the blade, I watched Tásos's vision of the future take shape.

The principal theory is simple: new olives grow on limbs that developed in the previous year. Therefore, for each major “arm” of the tree, a pruner should: (1) reserve one or two twigs that will develop into fruit-bearing limbs in the future; (2) identify the limbs that bear abundant olives and should be harvested; and (3) subtract the leftover growth as dead weight. In practice, however, deciding which shoots stay and which ones

¹⁰ *Ta sostá einai ísa me to dáchtilo.*

¹¹ *Kai aftó tha'nai tou chrónou.*

meet the blade is anything but simple and requires judgment, planning, and recall of decisions made during last year's pruning season. Pruning requires, as with all questions of style, discernment. Like Tásos, most pruners prefer to begin with the easy step of removing tree growths considered to be "fruitless" (*ákarpa*) and dead, so-called "dried limbs" (*xeraména klariá*). These twigs and branches are thought to detract from general appearance and may promote infestation or infection (*arróstia*). Another easy task is the removal of the suckers (*chamókladha*; lit. "down-branches") that clutter the tree's base, and the "gluttons" (*laímargha*), so-called because these leggy vertical shoots (known in English as water sprouts), if left unchecked, dart upwards from nodes in the brachial branches and so are thought to sap energy, block light, and intrude into the canopy. In addition to these castoffs, one should eliminate any limb that proves to be withering or, at best, shows no signs of thriving and deprives stronger limbs of sunshine, sap, or water (a straggly branch opposite an established arm is one example). Such a limb is considered "attenuated" (*kachektikó*), a word used also to characterize an economy as "stagnate" and a child as "malnourished."

So much for the easy part. The next step of *monóvergho* requires trickier judgment and foresight. For each tree arm, the pruner must select two sets of shoots that will be productive: one set intended for harvesting at the end of the current year, and a second set (sometimes more) to be harvested at the end of the following year. The set intended for this year's harvest is left alone to bow under the weight of its own abundance at a rakish angle to the sun, an angle considered aesthetically attractive and efficient for harvesting. In fact, bountiful limbs are said to have "turned upside-down" (*gýrisan t'anápodha*) compared to their normal growing angles (Figure 2-8). The second set, retained for cultivation in the next year, consists of younger twigs that are selected because of their: (1) spacing (originating at least three to four inches from shoots already bearing fruit); (2) preferred habit (growing outwards and upwards but never downwards); (3) unobstructive direction (will not overlap with other limbs); and, (3) overall vigor (relatively abundant foliage and may already bear some fruit).¹² Consequently, an ideal

¹² As I observed later in the harvest, younger twigs destined for future cropping may still produce up to half the yield of their older counterparts (although 30-60cm seems to be the minimum required length).

limb shoots up and eventually arches over under the weight of olives, maximizing growth and making it easier to cut off the limb come harvest time—stem and all! Over time, a tree that has undergone several years of *monóvergho* will be characterized by its strong (Ferguson et al. 1994; Gucci and Cantini 2000) its very tips, each turn in the armature having been sculpted by the pruner's annual vision of future crops.

A key principle factored into the pruner's calculation is the common knowledge that olive trees produce relatively higher and lower yields in alternate years or, as the saying goes in Messinía, “one yes, one no” (*mía nai, mía óchi*). In agronomy, the phenomenon known as alternate bearing stems from the fact that the olive crop in any given year is (1) borne on the vegetative growth of the prior year, and (2) actually inhibits bud growth for the following year (Dag et al. 2010; Sibbett 2000). Consequently, on the heels of a bumper year (in which the majority of branches were fruitful), a pruner like Tásos would anticipate a lean year and curtail his pruning to allow the tree to recoup the loss of productive limbs. Alternatively, if he undertakes *monóvergho* following a lean year, then he would prune liberally in order to concentrate growth on new vigorous branches. Thus, thanks to a pruner's skill and vision, no tree ever maintains the same shape from year to year, and if best practices are observed, he has effectively removed and regenerated 100% of a tree's fructifying limbs within a two-year cycle.

Thankfully, even when pruning goes overboard—the pompom monstrosity showed to us by Roúla!—olive trees are very resilient. Although pruning may have long-term effects on the productivity of younger trees still in their formative stages, older ones can be leveled to the ground and still harbor life: they will generate new growth almost immediately so long as some of the stump and root system is preserved underground. This lucky fact, in addition to giving reckless pruners a chance at redemption, also adds to perceptions about the olive tree's mythic powers of survival. In fact, when forest fires charred much of western and southern Peloponnesus to wasteland in 2007, thousands of groves reduced to ashes by the conflagration did, in time, bounce back. As one farmer mused over coffee in his Athens apartment one winter, so long as the roots are still in the ground, not even the conflagration could wipe out those trees and new shoots would emerge almost immediately, “that's why they say the olive [tree] is blessed. It's

durable.”¹³ Likewise, a hack pruning job won’t do anything to a tree that time can’t fix...although the same can’t be said about the reputation of a bad pruner.

Good pruning for *monóvergho* accomplishes two things at once: the conscientious pruner maximizes the current crop of fruit for harvest, and readies a second set of limbs to be harvested the following year. Thus, the imperative of *monóvergho* perpetuates a cultivation strategy in which olive yields (and therefore oil reserves) are *both* imminently available *and* foreseeable for the future. The agricultural reasoning of this is morally coded as well. The artless “hacked” grove of pompom trees that amused Tásos and offended Kyra-Dóra suffered from the fact that, although it left plenty of shoots for this year’s harvest (albeit in a ridiculous shape), bad pruning completely eliminated the potential stock for next year’s olive crop: no secondary limbs means no next-year oil. The parameters of alternate bearing peculiar to *Olea europaea*, plus the slow onset of fructification in their development, means that a good pruner is one who balances



Figure 2-8. Two rows of olive trees. Limbs in the right-hand row have “turned upside-down” from good, thoughtful *monóvergho*. Trees in the left row have been harvested.

¹³ *Gia 'ftó léne óti i eliá einai evloghiméni. Einai anthektikía.*

productive yields and reproductive growth. In this respect, *monóvergho* is the annual ritual in which the two powers of the olive grove—the powers of production and reproduction—are kept in equilibrium. This preparatory rite, of course, achieves its dramatic height when olive trees come to fruition and, at last, it is time for harvest.

The Olive Harvest (*Rávdhos*)

Leafing through the Super Almanac found on Tásos's coffee table, the entry under “arboriculture” (*dhendrokomía*) advises that, in October, “the collection of early olive fruits begins by hand or by careful threshing.”¹⁴ Although it is true that a particular variety of olives ripens in October—the kalamón variety (see Appendix 4: Olive Varietals in Messinía)—Messinía's olive groves don't really come to life until November. The right time to start picking the nearly ubiquitous koronéiki variety is gauged by farmers like Tásos with hands-on inspection. One day, after plucking a brilliant green olive with deep purple mottling, he rolled it between his thumb and forefingers and looked blankly into the distance. Plucking two more, he handed one to me and instructed me to do the same—“this one is ready,” he muttered.¹⁵ I applied pressure, feeling how much it would take for the fruit to release its thin juice. When we had done this same test a month before, the olive felt dense and unyielding, reminding me of lead bullets from the Civil War era I used to find as an archaeologist in Maryland. What used to feel like a bullet now felt fleshy and crisp, owing to the meatiness of the fruit and the tautness of the skin. I secretly ate a couple when alone, grinding my molars to break through the strong alkaline taste of chlorophyll before spitting it out in bitter disgust. Clearly, olives need a lot of work to make them palatable. First, however, they need harvesting.

The lexicon of harvesting is elaborate. The generic word for “harvest,” *syghkomidhí*, combines the roots “co” (*syn-*) and “cultivation” (*-kómi*), and conjures images of cooperative and systematic crop collection. This term is used in monoculture, as with grapes or melons, but also in instances of wild harvesting, as when Roúla and

¹⁴ *Archízei to mázema tou elaiókarpou stis próimes eliés me to héri í me prosektikó rávdhisma.*

¹⁵ *Aftó einai étimo.*

Mítsos taught me to identify wild asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) and the shoots of an undomesticated plant in the yam family—called *ovriá* (*Dioscorea communis*)—which we collected one cool spring morning in groves along a riverbank. Yet, in both formal and vernacular Greek usage, other words besides *syghkomidhí* denote the act of harvesting (see Table 7, below). A common term I sometimes heard that refers specifically to the gathering of olives is *mázema*, “collecting.” The distinction between these two words is meaningful: where *syghkomidhí* refers to the generic harvest of fruits, nuts, herbs, grains, etc. (including those found in the wild), *mázema* refers solely to the collection of domesticated olives.¹⁶

Table 7: Messinían Hierarchy of Terms: “Harvest”

<i>syghkomidhí</i>	co-cultivation	Generic (wild/cultivated)	(–)
<i>mázema</i>	collection	Specific (olives)	vernacular
<i>ravdhisma</i>	rodding*	Specific (olives)	
<i>rávdhos</i>	rod/olive harvest*	Specific (olives)	(+)

* Synecdochal derivation from *rávdhos* (rod)

However, the most common term used to refer to the olive harvest in Greece is *rávdhisma*, a gerund form of the word “rod” (*rávdhos*). Hence, *rávdhisma* best translates as “rodding,” exemplified by the oft-heard announcement, “tomorrow we are rodding”¹⁷—the act of harvesting is implied, as is the fact that olives are the fruits of this harvest. The synecdoche between harvesting olives and the instrument of threshing is even tighter in Messinían vernacular where the words for “rod” and “harvest” have become one and the same—*rávdhos*—distinguished only by grammatical gender.¹⁸ Thus, phrases like “we are going for *rávdhos*” (*páme ghia rávdho*), are colloquialisms encountered solely in Messinía.¹⁹ Taken together, these four synonyms of “harvest” fit in

¹⁶ In my encounters, the harvest of wine grapes is the only other harvest that enjoys a crop-specific term: *tryghos* (masc. sing.). A linguistic analysis comparing crop-specific terminology would yield further insights.

¹⁷ *Ávrio ravdhízoume*.

¹⁸ Rod is the feminine *i rávdhos*; harvest is the masculine *o rávdhos*.

¹⁹ A survey of Google search terms confirms a Messinían provenance, focused in local news-sites and blogs concentrated geographically between Kyparissia and Pylos.

a semantic hierarchy of actions whose increasing specificity underscores the symbolic importance of olives.

The so-called *rávdhos* of olives hits its peak in Messinía from around mid-November to late-December. Because ripening depends on elevation and temperature, groves in the coastal basin tend to be ready for harvest before those on the Messinian plateau (Figure 1-8, pg. 26). Although for this reason one might suspect that harvests start on the coast and move inland and upland, the logistics of daily life guarantee otherwise. Rain, for example, must be taken seriously, as any attempt to harvest a wet tree threatens the yield of next year's crop, either because wet limbs are more susceptible to breakage (a fact I confirmed more than once), or because they are more apt to develop small, knotty burls that can inhibit growth. Inclement weather, but also scheduling conflicts, labor shortage, and work priorities (e.g., paid harvest versus voluntary harvest) at this time of year all mean that the buzz of *rávdhos* can be heard anywhere and everywhere. In a frenetic climate where timing and coordination are key, grove owners scramble amongst themselves and within labor networks to knock out as many grove harvests as possible in as short a time as possible.

As elaborated in the following experiences, grove owners meet the demands of the *rávdhos* by relying on three different types of labor-teams: (1) hired labor, (2) mixed family and hired labor, (3) and family members only. Whether labor in these configurations gets compensated with olive oil or money is a question I will take up later while reviewing a form of sharecropping that crosscuts kin and non-kin relations. Before that, however, we should take a quick tour through a traditional form of reciprocated harvesting called “loaned” labor that exists more in nostalgia than in practice. All of these types of labor-teams, whether real or imagined, reveal a great deal about gender and hierarchy among olive farmers. More importantly, the harvest, as an agricultural rite, reinforces or makes new social relations that link kin and cross-kin with each other and, increasingly, with total strangers, in a system of cyclical obligation and exchange.

Loaned Labor (Dhaneikariés)

Ask any adult Greek about what makes a good olive harvest and they will paint a romantic picture that portrays it more like a picnic than hard labor. This is not the harvest laden with tense working relations and economic anxieties that I observed. These stories,

rather, begin with those words that mystify and distance—“long ago” (*paliá*) or “in those years” (*ekeína ta chrónia*)—and then images of men in caps holding threshers join figures of women in kerchiefs combing through olives, and descriptions of grandmothers dishing out good, rustic foods to fellow harvesters gathered around a cloth laid *al fresco*, all compose a lovely landscape of bountiful trees and good, honest peasants (one almost hears them singing folk songs!), a landscape that I never encountered. And an important element of this nostalgic narrative is the celebration (one might even say mourning) of the old-fashioned *dhaneikariés* system. Deriving from the adjective *dhaneikós*—“loaned”—*dhaneikariés* refers to an arrangement where one family cooperates with another to help harvest its trees and then, by the law of reciprocity, is repaid in kind when it comes time to harvest their own. These households were related either as agnates (siblings or cousins), affines (in-laws), or friends and neighbors. According to these narratives, harvesting through *dhaneikariés* was a happy, convivial occasion that promoted family friendships and even resulted in god-parentage or marriage proposals.

As frequently occurs with nostalgic constructions of the past, they sublimate and project critiques and anxieties arising from the here-and-now (Angé and Berliner 2015; Assmann 2006; Davis 1979; cf. Connerton 2009); the nostalgia for the *dhaneikariés* system of “long ago” is no exception in the Greece of post-2009, particularly in museum and commercial spaces—for example, regard panels (d) through (i) in Appendix 5: ELAÏS Factory Mural—and in popular discourse. According to the portrayal, for instance, this system of reciprocity allowed families to harvest without debt or payment (people didn’t care about money yet) and households actually helped each other out as neighbors and friends (people weren’t cutthroat yet). The harvest provided an honest living (big banks weren’t around to cheat you) and food was tasty and pure (you knew what you were eating). In fact, food and song feature heavily in these representations, and the very nature of work is envisaged as having been very different in the *dhaneikariés* model, imagining the potential for physically hard labor to be far from alienating or anomic, and being instead rich with sociality and a whistle-while-you-work ethos. One left-leaning blogger from Kyparissia describes the plight of modern olive harvesting thus:

Only in...Greece do we hate to go work for another or to make our friend a servant to us. That’s why we invented the *dhaneikariés*. You go to another for free work, he puts down

coffee and bread and cheese, and he will come, too, for help when you need him....When you work voluntarily you yield more, everyone together produces twice as much!²⁰

In conversation, nostalgists like this blogger often finish their narrative with a wave of the hand, concluding, *tóra pane 'keína ta chrónia*—“now those years’re gone.” Even children and young adults labored alongside the adults in the nostalgic version, a far cry from today if we are to believe older folks like one pensioner who exclaimed to me one day, “Now? [What kids] will go to the olives?!”²¹ Standing back, we must recall that reality wasn’t quite so rosy in the past, nor do my experiences confirm total moral decay in the present-day. For instance, it is true that kids rarely work in the groves (if ever!), not for the reason that they are lazy, but for the significant reason that it is the children who hold the fort and assume the responsibility of running the shops, cafes, and other family businesses while parents and other employees go to the groves. This type of family/work transformation helps families meet the needs of a traditional economy as well as a cash economy. Likewise, a few friends reported practicing variations on the *dhaneikariés* system in combination with the popular types of contemporary harvest systems, outlined below.

Sifting through this exegesis, an interesting element that comes out of the collective memory of *dhaneikariés* is that concerning reciprocity between families. From within this nostalgia, mechanical solidarity among neighbors is paramount, as is the fact that it wasn’t *individuals* engaged in reciprocal labor but entire *households* exchanging labor with other households. Thus, the division of labor (Durkheim 1997 [1893]) and the corporate form of the household (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Joyce and Gillespie 2000) are the operating concepts that structure how Messinians idealize harvests of yesteryear. The ideal is founded on the assumptions that a household benefits from a cashless exchange of labor for labor, and that they do so corporately with other groups, serving the collective interests of the home by finding mutual benefit with others. That insiders are able to establish and reciprocate labor relations with outsiders is not only an economic triumph, according to this model, but a moral one too. Therefore, if the practice

²⁰ *Kerásmata kai Dhaneikariés*. August 26, 2015. www.kyparissiotis.blogspot.com.

²¹ *Tóra? Pou na pane stis elies?!*

of *dhaneikariés* is the gold standard against which Messinians weigh the present state of harvest conditions, then the two qualities being valued—labor reciprocity and the “corporateness” of the family—are the ones to keep in mind as we move forward and outline the three types of labor relations in the grove.

Hired Labor: Mrs. Dhimáki’s Grove

Bóris says he is not Macedonian. He says he is *Skopjian*. Even in Messinía, far from the Republic of Macedonia (or FYROM), the naming dispute between Greece and its northern neighbor required Bóris, a 47-year-old immigrant, to bandy political tensions into jokes. Crossing the border nearly 17 years ago, he settled in Marathópolis where he has made enough of a living through home repairs and olive care to buy a respectable home with his long term girlfriend, and to send money back to Skopje to put his son through film school and help his daughter settle into a new marriage. A hulking man, whose 6’4” stature is heightened by piles of curly hair, he is easy to spot on the street. On any given night, shortly before his bedtime, he ambles from one tavern to another, greeting neighbors and employers as they dine, but never buys anything. It was precisely at one of these taverns, while downing an ouzo with one of Bóris’s regular employers—a feisty widow active with the village’s cultural society and owner of a modest grove—that introductions were made and I secured a job on his crew—for no pay—as a member of his *synergheío*.

The next day (four days before Christmas) I arrived by moped with a bag lunch and a liter of water at the grove of Mrs. Dhimáki. It was in this grove that I became immersed in the technical and financial ins-and-outs of the harvest. A gravel driveway led to a small but luxurious cottage with professional landscaping and a silver Mercedes parked in front. The grove was a 56-stremma (~13.8 acres) patchwork of several smaller groves, comprising about 1000 trees.²² The *synergheío* had already set up and begun harvesting. A *synergheío* (plural *synergheía*) is a band of workers put together for the task of harvesting. The word itself derives from “co” (*syn*) and “work” (*érgho*), underscoring the idea of collaborative labor. A foreman, the man in charge of a

²² An inventory of aerial photography reveals a total of 1050 trees in the estate. Mrs. Dhimáki’s grove, in addition to olives trees, also includes several dozen orange and fig trees.

synergheío (always a man), often recruits workers from family or friends, although, in a pinch, complete strangers might be hired too. Consequently, *synergheía* are somewhat ephemeral in their makeup and seasonal in their employment. Throughout the year, the foreman frequently works solo for a grove owner, performing manageable seasonal tasks, only assembling his *synergheío* every winter for the massive harvest. At this time he also tries to book as many jobs as possible, even launching a new harvest in the afternoon in order to charge a half-day's wages to a grove owner if the team has wrapped up another harvest early enough in the day. The members of Bóris's *synergheío* varied every year, depending on available workers in town, and even changed in the middle of my tenure with him.

Putting me to work, he handed me a *dhémpla*—an aluminum pole capped with a plastic threshing fork (Figure 2-10a,e). As I came to participate in more and more harvests, I grew accustomed to the *dhémpla*, though never wholly adept with it. The use of a *dhémpla*, which ranges in length between 1.5 and 3.5 meters, is to thresh olives by dislodging them from the trees without damaging the branches. Depending on the angle of approach, threshing a cluster of olives can be achieved either: (1) with a forceful downward brush on the tree limb (most efficient); (2) from inside a limb with an upward blow (imprecise but best for dense foliage); or (3) an aggressive up-and-down combing of the limb using the fork tines (requires the most muscle). Because olives are often higher than 6 meters and the long poles required to reach them demand control, work with the *dhémpla* is delegated to someone with good height and upper body strength. Being ample in the former though meager in the latter, I managed by taking advantage of my higher center of gravity. With arms stretched, wrists tightened, and knees locked, I summoned whatever musculature I had in my shoulders, propelling three meters of aluminum pole toward my target and relying on inertia to do the rest. This was terrible form. And with each thwack, olives and leaves hailed down around me. I considered it a good day if a hailing, plump olive didn't hurl itself into my eye.

For the next several days working on Bóris's crew, I whacked at limbs, dislodging olives and letting them fall onto the mesh cloth spread out beneath the trees by two female workers: a Bulgarian woman, named Néli, in her late thirties and another, Mími, in her early twenties. Although this was Néli's second season working in Bóris's

synergheío, Mími was newly invited thanks to a familial relationship with Bóris's girlfriend. As olives amassed in the mesh cloths, the two grabbed a corner of one and folded it onto a neighboring one. As the two workers moved in unison, the olives and leaves from one cloth rolled onto the other, consolidating into a single mass.

These cloths, called *liopaniá* (literally “olive cloths”)²³ are most effective when they span the area between two trees (from trunk to trunk), minimizing the number of cloths required to harvest adjacent trees, not to mention the time it takes to move them into place. Consequently, the widths of these cloths reflect the typical span between olive trees (4-8 meters) and their lengths (about 6-14 meters) are nearly twice as long (Figure 2-10b). Weight is another consideration. Like a thick garden-variety tarpaulin, some cloths are heavy polypropylene sheets of beige or brown color, which achieve zero friction when slicked with olive juice and morning dew (as I unwittingly confirmed). The more popular cloths, however, are composed of a lighter high-density polyethylene (HDPE) mesh, which has the added benefit of transparency and relative compactness when folded for storage or transport. Despite such innovations, however, these cloths require slogging across the grove, as the two Bulgarian women were doing, shouldering a corner of the cloth and pulling a train of wet plastic through brush and mud for many meters behind them—the image was not unlike that of Santa Claus hauling a heavy sack of toys while trudging through snow.

Workers in charge of the cloths are also responsible for sorting and sacking olives. Called *sákiasma* (sacking), this task is the most laborious and time-sensitive task in the grove. Having consolidated the contents of several cloths, Néli began removing twigs and leaves by combing, rolling, and re-combing the olives using a plastic rake with broad tines (called a *tsougrána* or a *chténi*). By the time Néli had discarded half of the debris, Mími had dragged two empty cloths to the front of the harvest line, set them up, and was returning to help Néli finish combing, rolling, and re-combing. Days later this pace and division of tasks remained unchanged even when Mími, having apparently returned to Bulgaria for reasons undisclosed to me, was replaced by a thirty-something Pakistani man named Sóna. Silently, almost distantly, the Bulgarian woman and Pakistani

²³ Singular *liópano*. A compound word from *élaio*- (olive) and *paní* (cloth, sheet, fabric).

man worked in unison: as Sóna squatted hard on his haunches and held open the mouth of the sack, Néli dug in her kneecaps to shovel olives into the burlap sack with both hands. Bending low to the sack, their faces disappeared under the brim of their dusty baseball caps—his a sun-bleached blue, hers a forest camouflage—and not a word was spoken. When each sack was halfway filled, Sóna would plant his feet firmly and give it a couple sharp tugs to help the olives settle down into its depths—now able to stand of its own accord, the sack sat erect as the two workers decanted the remaining olives directly from the cloth into the sack. When done, Sóna would speed the cloth to the front of the harvest line and set it up while Néli moved to the next cloth to begin another round of *sákiasma*: pooling, combing, rolling, and re-combing olives before feeding them into the sack’s mouth.

These sacks are a species unto themselves. Each sack, called a *sakí* (*sakiá*, pl.) is made of burlap and often bears the logo of the oil mill that furnishes them (Figure 2-11*i,j,k,l*). Jute is particularly preferred because this natural fiber allows olives to breathe, which is why I never encountered sacks made of synthetic fiber (except for use with coarser crops like potatoes, onions, maize, etc.). A full sack of olives stores about 4 cubic ft. of volume and weighs about 50kg (~110lb), based on industrial standards.²⁴ As I learned on later projects, some farmers prefer smaller sacks to larger ones, making for easier transportability; though others prefer fewer, if heavier, sacks. But there is often little choice given because oil mills provide farmers whatever sacks they have in bulk. And although the newcomer may be disarmed by the fleecy feel of its soft jute fibers and the satisfying image of a rustic, plump sack, all deceptions are exposed when a sack full of olives reveals itself for what it is: a full assault on the bearer’s cardiovascular and muscular systems.

As the Bulgarian woman and the Pakistani man worked in silence, two engines screeched incessantly through the grove. Bóris operated the first—a gasoline-powered saw mounted on an aluminum pole. With the saw growling in his hands, Bóris was leading the harvest. Advancing several trees ahead of the rest of crew to where Néli and Sóna had set up empty cloths for him, he circled each tree just as he had eight months ago

²⁴ By comparison, a standard bag of U.S. gardening mulch holds about 3 cubic ft. and weighs about 40lb.

during the *monóvergho* pruning season. Identifying those limbs that he had saved for this moment (those with a bounty of olives), he went to work harvesting them with his screeching saw. With his right hand on the grip and his left hand supporting the pole's weight, he moved the blade into place at the branch's base and pulled the trigger. One laceration on the underside caused the limb to bow under its weight, readying it for a final and clean cut on the taught upper side. Thus, with two decisive cuts each limb was severed. Every other screech of the blade signaled another olive branch on the ground, perhaps a dozen in total for each tree. When Bóris moved on to the next tree, I would take over where he left off, threshing the limbs that he kept as stock for next year's crop.

Competing with the noise from Bóris's saw was another machine operated by Milan, a Bulgarian in a knit cap and worn-out Nike shoes. He shadowed Bóris, careful never to obstruct his movements or get beneath a descending limb. Muscular and compact, Milan grabbed and dragged multiple branches at a time, towing them to the gasoline-powered *michaní*, a machine that does more than just add to the grove's cacophony. Sold in industrial catalogs as an "olive harvester" (*elaiosyllékti*), Messinían farmers simply call this mobile threshing station "the machine"—*i michaní*. Standing at mid-height, the *michaní* comprises a large metal hopper with two or three horizontal spinning rods with plastic tines that whip around. These spinning combs give anything placed over them a high-speed flogging and don't distinguish between an olive branch and the shaky hand of a rookie harvester. Grabbing a branch by the base, the Bulgarian man stood behind the *michaní* and expertly pulled the branch's foliage through the spinning tines before flipping it over for a pass on the other side. Thrashed by the whirling tines, olives had no choice but to detach from the branch and rocket outwards (onto the cloths) or fall into the hopper and through a mesh screen designed to filter out leaves. An agitator just below the screen would then coax the olives through a shoot and into a ready burlap sack. Stripped of all its fruit, the branch was then chucked onto a growing pile of beaten limbs behind the Bulgarian, one of many piles that Bóris would later revisit with kerosene and a match. Unlike Bóris's saw, which paused between screeches, the *michaní* roared ceaselessly with the regular sound of its engine layered by the whippy, whirring sound of branches and leaves getting threshed. It was only when all the branches had been cut and threshed that the *michaní* would be turned off for

relocation to the front of the harvest line, leaving olive cloths and olive sacks behind for the two sackers to process.

When performed in unison, these tasks (summarized below, and in Table 9, pg. 114) propelled the harvest crew through the grove at a productive pace, leaving sacks of olives in its wake; sacks which now awaited the final step: to be tied shut. Notably, this prerogative is reserved for one person in particular, the grove's owner. The owner in question, Mrs. Dhimáki, was the widow of a military officer and mother of two adult children now raising families in Athens. Living comfortably off of pensions and a rental property in Marathópolis, one can find her most Sunday mornings in the main square of Gargaliánoi enjoying a leisurely coffee with friends. As Bóris and his crew made their way through the grove, she sat on a crate tugging at her down vest, which bore the peculiar English wording that only a Chinese manufacturer could achieve: "Legendary Liberalist Lady." She made a visible effort throughout the harvest to place empty sacks where they would be convenient for sackers and even helped move the gear. To my surprise, she claimed to dislike everything about the harvest, preferring instead the springtime tasks of fertilization and irrigation. Perhaps for this reason, as I lumbered with my thresher, she whiled away the time waiting for the sacks to be filled by interviewing me about my family, my life in America, and my employment and pay grade. Our question-and-answer session was interrupted only once when Mrs. Dhimáki reproached the Bulgarian woman for letting too many leaves get in the sack. A couple times she also disappeared into the cottage to prepare coffee for our 10am break (she made mine medium sweet) and again during our 1pm lunch break. Except for these lapses, her presence in the harvest was...conspicuous.

When a few sacks were filled she walked over to them, donned an attractive pair of women's gardening gloves, and ran her hand over the olives heaped to the top of the bag, picking out a few leaves in the process. Sometimes, when Bóris had made sufficient headway with the pruning, he would double-back to meet Mrs. Dhimáki and, over friendly—even jocular—conversation, the towering Skopjian jostled the sacks so their contents would settle and stretch the burlap to its limits. At this point, the slight but graceful widow would lean in, give another perfunctory inspection, throw out a few more leaves, and nod for Bóris to tie the sack shut with twine he pulled from his pocket.

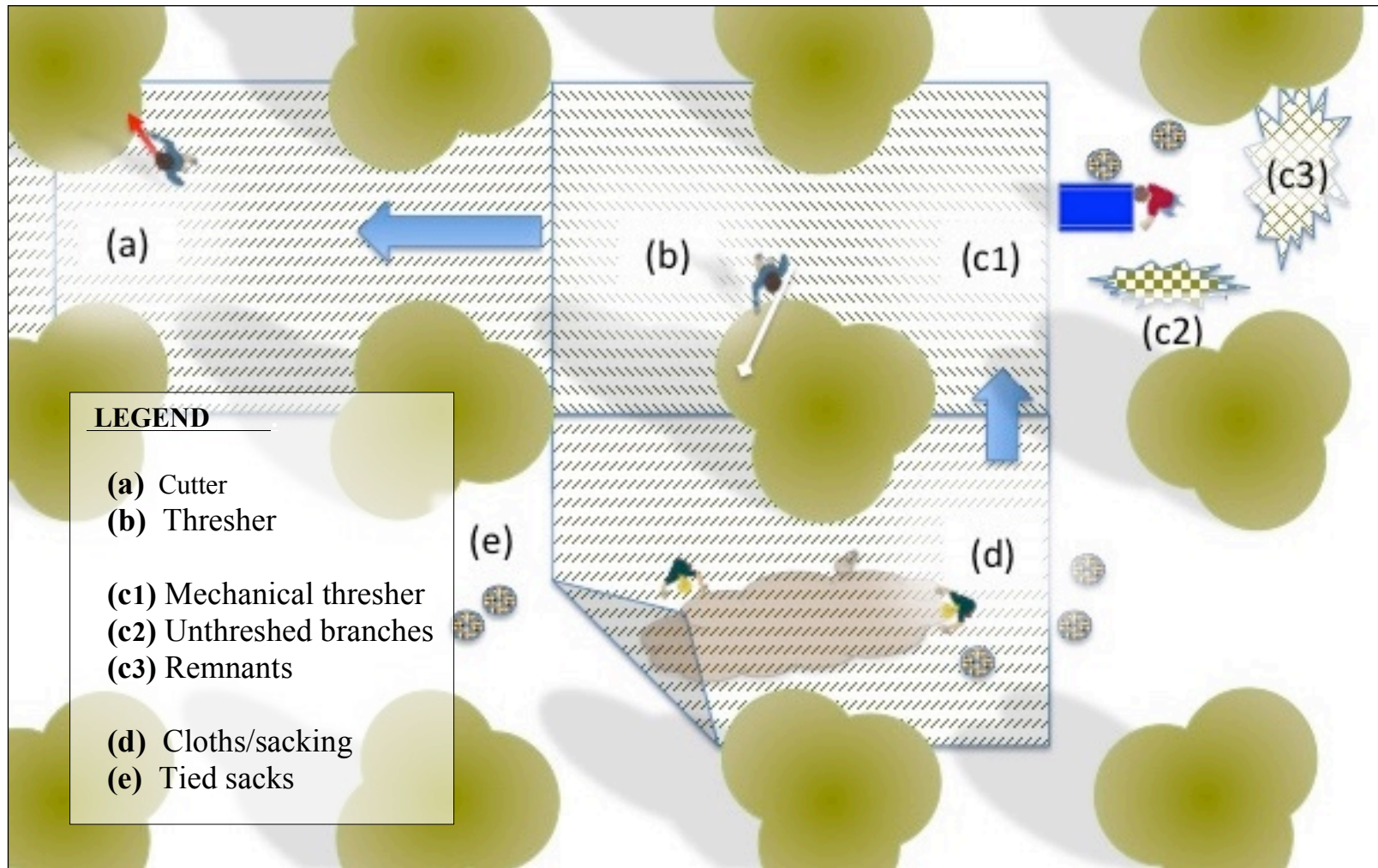


Figure 2-9. Harvest organization (birds-eye view). Branches not cut by the pruner (a) are threshed with a rod (b), while cut branches are taken to form a pile (c2) within arm's reach of the mechanical thresher (c). Threshed branches are chucked in a remnant pile (c3) for burning. The sackers (d) consolidate fallen olives on the cloths and scoop/decant them into burlap sacks (e), before setting up empty cloths for the pruner (a).



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Figure 2-10. The harvest sequence. (a) plastic threshers and handsaws; (b) olive cloths and the mechanical thresher are put into place; (c) the “cutter” prunes off fruit-laden branches; (d) cut branches are run through the threshing machine; (e) the manual thresher dislodges olives from the remaining canopy; (f) the sackers consolidate olives and leaves onto one cloth.



(g)



(h)



(i)



(j)



(k)



(l)

Figure 2-11. The harvest sequence (cont'd). (g) sackers clean out debris and collect olives; (h) clean cloths are dragged to the head of the harvest; (i) sacks are filled with olives; (j) sacks are securely tied by the grove owner; (k) olive sacks from two different mills; (l) olive sacks are loaded for delivery to the oil mill.

A few days later while lunching with Mrs. Dhimáki at her cottage table, I asked about her clear concern for the leaves in the sacks and her overall assessment of the crew. About the crew, she asserted that Bóris “is one of the better workers.”¹ He selects his team members and he is amenable to her pay scheme. While most employers typically hire and pay “by the couple” (*to zevghári*) at a rate of €30/day for a woman and €40/day for a man (indicating certain presumptions about gender and labor roles, which I take up below), Mrs. Dhimáki reported paying a flat rate of €35/day per worker regardless of gender.² When asked why she doesn’t take advantage of market prices and save money by paying female workers less, she merely cites the precedent set by her late husband, “We began it this way.”³ In turn, Bóris never argued with Mrs. Dhimáki’s pay scheme, and although he complies with other employers whose wages discriminate between men and women, he claims to have never understood the parity in wages to begin with.

As for Bóris, he enjoys the wage of a *kóptis*, a title that means “cutter.” A *kóptis* serves as the foreman who sets the overall pace and direction of the harvest, usually commanding this authority by dint of agricultural knowledge, physical strength, and ownership of the harvesting equipment. A typical foreman who supplies his own machinery commands a wage between €50-70/day, and Bóris was receiving €50 from Mrs. Dhimáki.⁴ All wages, Mrs. Dhimáki told me, would be disbursed to Bóris from the earnings of her oil as soon as it was pressed, and he would then pay his crew (in my experience, crews rarely wait more than a week to get paid, since mills rarely wait more than two or three days to process oil). Peering at me from over her Dolce & Gabbana spectacles, Mrs. Dhimáki also disclosed that she could save €5 per worker if she had provided them with lunches, an obligation that her cottage was not equipped for, nor one, from what I gathered, that she would meet eagerly.

While the rest of the crew sat outside unwrapping the store-bought sandwiches that they had brought, Mrs. Dhimáki also explained to me the importance of the leaves.

¹ *Eínai ap’tous kalýterous.*

² At the time, 1 Euro = 1.38 US Dollars. Thus, €30 equaled about \$41 (US), and €40 equaled about \$55.

³ *Étsi xekinísame.*

⁴ While Mrs. Dhimáki reported paying Bóris €35 per head, Bóris commented in passing that the Pakistani man should only be getting €25 but was going to receive €30, a discrepancy of €5, for which I cannot account.

Pressing her hands down the seams of her black slacks as though to ensure their neatness, she reckoned that she trusted Bóris, whom she had hired for the past six years, but oversight was important for quality control. The contents of the burlap sacks are, at the end of the day, what it's all about. Too many leaves, she explained, meant she would have to use more sacks from the oil mill, not to mention that twigs and leaves in the sacks would inflate her estimates of how much oil she could expect to get from the mill. Indeed, the ratio between *number of sacks* and *kilos of oil* is quite important to grove owners since this is their metric for comparing the productivity of olive crops from year to year. Ten or eleven kilos of oil from one sack, on average, indicate a great yield (and the “yes” year of alternate bearing cycles). But leaves and other debris skew these figures—they add noise to the data, not to mention more bulk that requires transport by hand and gas—hence Mrs. Dhimáki's stress on supervision and her role in authorizing that the sacks were ready, in the final step, be tightly secured.

Although the problem of bulkiness is of concern to grove owners, as I was to learn in subsequent harvests, Mrs. Dhimáki was not alone in her preoccupation with personally ensuring the integrity of the harvest—and the security of olive sacks. Yes, she



Figure 2-12. Propped on an olive sack, Mrs. Dhimáki watches her harvesting team.

hired a team of strangers—foreign laborers at that!—on whom she relied every year. But, in fact, as both of her children work professionally in Athens (her son is a dentist and her daughter a lawyer) she would never expect them—nor want them—to come and oversee the harvest. As she told me distinctly while peering through her spectacles, she would not allow it so long as she was bodily and mentally capable. It is her responsibility, for now.

Kin and Hired Labor: Mr. Leonídas's Grove

To say that someone has a twinkle in his eye is cliché at best and hyperbole at worst. But I make an exception for Mr. Leonídas, whose blue eyes have an honest-to-God twinkle. Sitting on his veranda with an unobstructed view of the sea, he loves

recounting stories of how he used to have a dog that would smile just as a person would, or how his father had found a chest of defunct government bonds that would have gained him a fortune before World War II, or that his grandfather was the one who rounded up parcels of wild lowland (*kámpos*) on this side of Marathópolis and cultivated them. Now aged 84, Mr. Leonídhas left Messinía as a mere lad to fulfill his military service, which was followed by a career in the postal office in Athens. It was while living in the capital that he met his wife, Mrs. Evthimía, whose personality matches the meaning of her name—"good humor." A 74-year old Pontian woman,⁵ she is petite but always poised for action and equally at home in the chicken coop as in the Athens metro, owing to her experience working in textile factories and grocery stores in the city. A devoted but childless couple, Mr. Leonídhas and Mrs. Evthimía left the capital twenty years ago upon retirement to live quietly off the land. I had become their neighbor and grown comfortable referring to them not by their proper surnames—Mr. and Mrs. Mastorákis—but more familiarly by their given names. In fact, there was a distant but clear line of sight between their kitchen door and my bedroom window, separated by two groves and a potato field. Being thus completely informed about my bedtime, they frequently and playfully ribbed me about my sleeping patterns and late nights; I reciprocated by kidding them about their dinner guests, afternoon siestas, and other goings-on I couldn't help but notice. Since their home was located right on the road bend to Marathópolis, their rhythms were easily observable: it was all the more noticeable, therefore, when their normal rhythms halted and the couple mobilized their household for the olive harvest. It was on his veranda that I asked Mr. Leonídhas if I could help with the harvest. "Whatever you desire, my Dionysáki," he said, twinkling.⁶ It was in the grove of Mr. Leonídhas and Mrs. Evthimía that I learned about labor relations within a harvesting team that is mixed between kin, known hired workers, and complete strangers.

When I arrived at the agreed upon time of 8:30 the next morning, I found two unexpected things. First was that Mr. Leonídhas had, maybe because he knows my

⁵ Pontians (also called Pontic Greeks) are ethnic Greeks who inhabited the Pontus region of present-day northern Turkey. Those who survived ethnic cleansing in the early 20th c. migrated to Greece in 1924 during the population exchange stipulated by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Mrs. Evthimía was born to such migrants in Thrace, northern Greece.

⁶ He refers to me by the diminutive (affectionate) form of my name.

sleeping patterns, graciously spared me from the actual starting time an hour earlier. Secondly, I found that, although Mr. Leonídhas cares for his vineyard and fruit trees with only his wife to help him, he has come to rely on extended family and hired hands to harvest his 150 olive trees. Strátos, the man Mr. Leonídhas put in charge of the harvest, was the man to whom I was to answer. A carpenter by trade, Strátos is in his early forties and could easily look ten years younger, were it not for his salt and pepper hair. Putting me to work, he handed me a *dhémpla*. Gauging the heft of the rod as I approached a tree—and gauging my own confidence—I began forcing, pushing, brushing, knocking, and beating olives off the trees as best I could. By the time I had threshed three trees I had broken four branches. This was when the second thresher on the team, a middle-aged Bulgarian man wearing a dusty pullover and black jogging pants came up next to me and modeled the actions for me. I watched as his *dhémpla* thwacked a cluster of olives cleanly to the ground, leveraging the sheer strength of his arm muscles in precisely the way I could not. “*Étsi*,” he said in a thick accent, “like this.”

While attempting to thresh, rather than break, branches, I learned that the man’s name was Penyo but had Hellenized his name to Pétros. He lives about an hour away in the prefecture north of Messinía, close to the two other women who were on this crew. One woman, another Bulgarian named Daniéla (Hellenized to Dína), has a mop of maroon-dyed hair and has been in Greece for 14 years, as has the second woman, Násia, who wore a pink athletic sweatshirt and tied her brown hair in a bun. As Násia later told me, she and Daniéla had met through their respective mothers (who were friends) and her own grandmother has been in Greece for over 20 years. In addition to seasonal work on the mainland, Násia lives and works on Santoríni for six months out of the year, waiting on tourists or working in restaurant kitchens. Consequently, she speaks some English in addition to Greek, whereas Daniéla relies on her young friend to communicate in either language on her behalf. They explained to me that they travelled southwards during the olive harvest, joining this particular *synergheío* on the fly. Both women had been put in charge of the *liópana* and the *sákiasma*. They worked in tandem, shuffling around in their galoshes as they sorted and sacked the olives and dragged the cloths into place as Pétros and I threshed trees.

But Strátos was the man in charge of all of us. For several years Mr. Leonídhas and his wife had trusted Strátos to harvest their grove while they were away in Athens. As Mrs. Evthimía remarked, “since he’s helped all these years, let’s not turn him out.”⁷ This business relationship, however, is far from a simple arrangement between the owners of a grove and a hired foreman with his *synergheío*. The chief reason the elderly couple favor Strátos is because he is their nephew-in-law—their *ghambrós*—having “taken” Mr. Leonídhas’s niece, Pelaghía, in marriage.⁸ With no children of their own, Mr. Leonídhas and Mrs. Evthimía frequently rely on Pelaghía and Strátos to housesit and care for their chickens and gardens whenever they are out of town. In return, there is tacit expectation that they will reciprocate both with long-term support—as when the time comes to settle their estate—and with short-term help—as with hiring him for the annual harvest of their grove. Strátos was not just a *kóptis*; he was *their* *kóptis*.

As Bóris had done in the grove of Mrs. Dhimáki, Strátos set the overall pace and flow of our harvest in Mr. Leonidhas’s grove, commanding his authority through his agricultural knowledge, physical strength, and ownership of the harvesting equipment. In fact, the olive cloths belonged to him, as did all the tools we were using—the *dhémpla*, the chainsaw, the handheld pruning saw, the cacophonous *michaní* and even the bailers used to fill the olive sacks. In addition to furnishing this equipment, Strátos procured the hired hands. He hired Penyo, Daniéla, and Násia based on their availability at short notice during peak season, having put out the word in the coffeehouses of Marathópolis before heading north to tap his network in Filiatrá. And even though he later confided in me that this was not the best crew around, his *synergheío* was thus fashioned and ready to work.

Equipped with his gas-powered chainsaw, he captained his team, telling the women where to set up the olive cloths, appointing trees for me and Penyo to thresh, and leaving the most responsible of tasks, the cutting, to himself. As the man holding the saw, the *kóptis*, like Bóris, harnesses the power to help or harm next year’s yield, deciding

⁷ *Afoú boíthise tósa chrónia, mín ton vgháloume éxo.*

⁸ Strátos is Mr. Leonídhas’s sister’s daughter’s husband. He has been referred to by the Mastorákis couple interchangeably as their nephew (*anipsiós*) and as their groom (*ghambrós*). Where the former term applies to any sibling’s child or to the child’s spouse (especially among more intimate relations), the latter term applies to the husband of any female consanguineal in the same generation or in subsequent generations.

which limbs to eliminate and which ones should remain to develop into olive-bearing limbs next year. But even this has been predetermined during the *monóvergho* season (six months prior) by Mr. Leonídhas, who selected the limbs that would be harvested this year, those that should be reserved for next year, and those that ought to be eliminated altogether. Thus, between *monóvergho* and harvest, a feedback loop emerges wherein choices made earlier by Mr. Leonídhas determine the branches to be harvested now, while what requires thinning the following spring is determined by Strátos and his judgment as *kóptis*. Even now, whenever the crew took a break, Mr. Leonídhas enjoyed a little pruning with the saw, following up on the work he had started six months earlier. Except for these little indulgences, he deferred wholeheartedly to Strátos, who made on-the-spot judgments as he approached each tree with his head cocked, scanning for limbs that had been preordained for harvesting and those he would preserve for the future: each growl of the motor and screech of the blade signaled another limb of olives on the ground.

Penyo and I took turns grabbing fallen limbs and stacking them near the *michaní*, which was operated by one of two older women. Petite but poised for action, Mrs. Evthimía was the first. She paused from her labor on the mechanical thresher only twice to perform those expected duties ascribed to women during harvest: to serve mid-morning coffee (a little after 10am)—either an instant Nescafé frappé or a traditional Greek coffee (I opted for a frappé), accompanied by a croissant —and to prepare lunch (served at 1pm), which always included beef or chicken for protein and an easy-to-prepare carbohydrate like pasta, rice, or potatoes. Otherwise, she spent the morning grabbing a branch by the base and pulling the foliage through the spinning tines of the thresher before flipping it over for a pass on the other side.

The second woman operating the *michaní*, unlike Mrs. Evthimía, spent the afternoon grabbing every opportunity to bark commands at the hired hands before turning around to berate and abuse them. Occasionally, she paused from her work to light a cigarette, letting it hang stiffly from her lips as she leaned over the thresher. Substantial in body and poised for protest, she claimed to be frail and complained of an inner ear imbalance, justifying her orders to Pétros to haul fully loaded sacks of olives (in excess of 85 pounds) only then to shriek that he wasn't moving fast enough. The acrid quality of

her voice reminded me of the time I was swimming at the beach and a person of similar disposition warned me to keep a healthy distance from the nearby dirty *arápidhes*—the dirty blacks. Except now I was in the grove, observing with curiosity and dismay how Mr. Leonídas and Mrs. Evthimía kept their own healthy distance from this woman, practicing, it seemed, a kind of appeasement policy.

Not recognizing me, she eyed me from the side the way a crocodile peers with one eye over the water and calculates a strike on its prey. Unsure whether to lump me with the dirty Bulgarians or not, she blinked that vile calculating eye from her sideways stance when I greeted her in formal Greek and with an American smile. “Good day to you,”⁹ I said with a nod as Mr. Leonídas introduced me—“Dionysákis is a good kid,”¹⁰ he declared, with that honest-to-God twinkle in his eye. Her equivocal smile made me, again, think of crocodiles, maybe even dragons. It wasn’t until the end of the day, after Strátos happily announced that we had finished harvesting the entire grove with forty minutes to spare, that she showed the bounds of her graciousness: directing her crocodilic gaze at him, she advised him that he should keep the Bulgarians forty minutes extra tomorrow since they got paid for a full day. As Mrs. Evthimía retreated quietly into the house and Mr. Leonídas shifted in his seat, she was forever recorded in my mind and notebook as the “Dragon Lady.”

Her name is Foúla Oikonómou, and upon asking (in gentler words) about their connection, Mrs. Evthimía informed me that she is Strátos’s mother and, therefore, her in-law (*sympethéra*)—Mrs. Oikonómou is Mr. Leonídas’s sister’s daughter’s husband’s mother. Chatting in the comfort of her kitchen a few days after the harvest, Mrs. Evthimía spoke of her in-law in very diplomatic terms. Foúla Oikonómou has come to assist in the harvest of the grove for the past three years, confining herself to threshing on the *michaní* (and, I suspect, bullying the foreign workers) because of her aches and pains. *But why*, I inquired, *would a son ask a woman in her sixties and in poor physical condition to work in his synergheío?* Mrs. Evthimía looked at me with confusion and, in a defensive tone, disabused me of my unwitting insinuation.

⁹ *Kaliméra sas.*

¹⁰ *O Dionysákis einai to kalýtero paidhí!.*

“But she doesn’t work in the *synergheío*. The woman comes by herself. She *always* comes by herself. She feels obligated because Leonídhas *gives her oil*. That’s why she comes.”¹¹

At once I understood that theirs was a relationship fueled by obligation. Neither Mr. Leonídhas nor Mrs. Evthimía would ever admit to disliking Foúla Oikonómou (and one does not ask such things), but their quailing reactions to her statements were nevertheless suggestive. On one hand, I never knew this mild-mannered couple to socialize with Mrs. Oikonómou even in their capacity as in-laws, neither at home over dinner, nor in the village as I had seen them do with others. On the other hand, Mr. and Mrs. Mastorákis are locked in an obligatory relation that began, according to Mrs. Evthimía, when Mr. Leonídhas presented Foúla Oikonómou with a canister of olive oil because she has no trees of her own. For reasons I explore later, exchanges of oil create and reinforce cycles of reciprocity. Therefore, Mrs. Oikonómou is not merely lending a hand to her son’s harvesting team (which spares him the cost of paying one wage); rather, by giving of her labor at Mr. Leonídhas’s harvest she is also paying back an obligation that begins with the gift of oil, presented out of kinship (she is, after all, an in-law). This arrangement, ostensibly based on obligation and reciprocity, has the happy effect of solving two social inconveniences. First, it gives the Mastorákis couple a buffered way to interact with their in-law that is preferable to the alternative (inviting her into their home), given their personality differences. Second, it secures a source of olive oil for Mrs. Oikonómou, a necessity in any Greek household, but a problematic one for the scarce few Messinians who have no means to make their own. At the end of the day, collaboration in the harvest affords both parties of in-laws a courteous means of affirming their mutual interests without stirring too much friction—Foúla’s disagreeable manner is trumped by the fact that she has joined the team of harvesters because obligation, and the repayment of it, is not something easily denied. When I asked Mrs. Evthimía if Foúla Oikonómou would help out again next year, her response was certain—“eh, since we will give her oil...”¹²

¹¹ *Ma dhen dhoulévei me to synergheío. I ghynaíka érchetai apó móni tis. Pánta érchetai apó móni tis. Aisthánetai ypochreoméni ghiatí o Leonídhas tis dhínei ládhi. Gi’aftó érchetai.*

¹² *É afoú tha tis dhósoume ládhi...*

By the end of the day, Strátos had led the harvest in boustrophedon motion through the grove, winding our way from the road fronting the property to the back of the house. As the harvest progressed, he pruned limbs, Penyo and I threshed, Mrs. Evthimía or Foúla Oikonómou ran the *michaní*, and Daniéla and Násia hustled in the rear of the line, sacking olives and freeing up cloths so Strátos could start pruning a new set of trees, thus moving the team ever forward. Except for the mid-morning coffee break and our lunch break, and despite the Dragon Lady's habit of stopping the Bulgarians to tell them that they were slow and inefficient, the division of labor moved through the grove at a constant clip. The entire grove (all 150 trees) had been processed by late afternoon, producing twenty-four sacks of olives. For Strátos this meant that he could take the team the next day to begin harvesting his *own* groves, or more precisely, those owned by his wife. For Mr. Leonídhas, these twenty-four sacks reminded him just how dramatic the effects of alternate bearing can be, given that his grove had yielded *eighty* sacks the year before (more than three times as many!). This was, indeed, a “no” year.

Mr. Leonídhas, nevertheless, paid meticulous attention to each of the sacks. As the women stuffed sacks, he followed in their wake, inspecting and securing each and every one, as his distinguished job was “to tie the sacks,”¹³ just as it had been Mrs. Dhimáki's. With assistance from Penyo, he consolidated the sacks, filling each to near capacity. When I filled in for Penyo (who forever imparted to me the skill of how to keep a sack open by cradling only my elbow and fist), it was a common sight to see a long strand of twine dangling from Mr. Leonídhas's lips as he checked each bag. First we grabbed a corner of the fabric and jostled its contents so they could settle, after which Mr. Leonídhas would lean in, give a perfunctory inspection and throw out wayward leaves or twigs. Then, grabbing ample fabric with one hand and methodically bunching more fabric with the other, he would begin making a “neck” in the sack, effectively pleating the bag shut two inches at a time. Finally, as he clenched the pleated neck with the same grasping hand, his free hand reached for the twine in his mouth and performed an impressive act of legerdemain: anchoring it first around the thumb of his grasping hand before passing it twice and thrice around the neck, he then made an overhand knot, pulling the string

¹³ *Na dhései ta sakiá.*

tightly to secure the neck shut before winding both ends of the twine simultaneously in opposite directions. He finished the operation with a square knot and, looking at me, a celebratory wink.

His prestidigitation did not impress me as much as the pride Mr. Leonídas's exhibited every time he tied an olive sack securely. As with Mrs. Dhimáki, the task of inspecting the bag contents, even if superficially, serves Mr. Leonídas's interests since he stands to gain or lose from the oil he produces. However, to seal the contents of each sack—either personally as Mr. Leonídas does, or with the nod of a head to a proxy as Mrs. Dhimáki does—is the sole prerogative of the *aféntis* (master) of the grove. This



Figure 2-13. (*Left*) Mr. Leonídas gives an olive sack a final inspection before (*middle*) securing it with an expert knot. (*right*) pleased, he celebrates with a twinkle in his eye.

prerogative, I came to find, points to the general preoccupation with integrity and containment that olives seem to invoke elsewhere in olive culture, as discussed throughout this dissertation. More telling, however, is the fact that this tying of the sacks seems to reinforce the fact that the contents of each sack belongs to the owner, even if he or she relies on in-laws or total strangers to process them. The satisfaction that they feel with each concluded knot, in addition to signifying a job well done is also, it seems, the kind one might get with signing one's name on a letter: they both effect a conclusion of an activity and impress the self—and the identity of that self—with the significance of that conclusion. This personal relationship finally struck me on my third harvest.

***Corporate and Corporeal Kinships:
Mítsos's Grove***

Working with the Psarópoulos family—Tásos, Roúla, Mítsos, and the formidable Kyra-Dóra—taught me lessons about the spiritual and logistical aspects of harvesting with one's own family. If hints of a gender hierarchy and exchange relations are only insinuated in a team-for-hire (Boris's *synergheío*) or the mixed group of relatives and paid workers (Mr. Leonídhas's grove), then the family harvesting unit amplifies them tenfold: kin-based farming organizes and is organized by beliefs surrounding gender, the body, spirituality, and reciprocity.

This final and most important lesson was waiting for me in my driveway one January afternoon in the form of a 7-kilo canister of newly pressed olive oil—oil that the family and I had made “together” two-weeks prior. Up to that point, the Psarópoulos family had invited me to work with them on three different harvests, both in the 2012-13 and 2013-14 seasons. What impressed me first was that the level of inclusion I felt came not so much from Tásos (with whom I worked throughout the year) but from his older sister, Roúla. Savvy and strong, when Roúla wasn't chain smoking, she was busy talking on one of the house's three cellphones, making things happen—everything from following up with friends about rabbit meat she had supplied them, to convincing the municipality to re-grade part of the kilometer-long dirt road leading to their settlement. One such phone call was made to me on Christmas Day to wish me season's greetings and to invite me to the family's home-based harvest.

Two days later it was damp but getting milder as I zipped my moped up a recently re-graded road to where Roúla (forty-five) and her husband, Mítsos (sixty-seven), have their home. Sitting atop an unfinished ground floor (reserved for their children to finish), their second-story home enjoys a view of the nearby sea and overlooks a neighboring house, the small dwelling that Roúla's mother and father—Kyra-Dóra and Mr. Poúlos—call home. Also, since his divorce, Tásos has come to call it home, too, especially since he started renting out his house in Gargaliánoi for extra cash. And despite having taken the initiative to modernize and expand its small architecture himself, the harvest of the family groves requires the collective force of his mother, Kyra-Dóra, his sister, Roúla,

and her husband, Mítsos.¹⁴ Between the small grove still belonging to the parents, the adjacent one belonging to Tásos, and the grove Roúla enclosed in her fenced compound, they have lots to do. Seniority plays some part in determining which grove gets harvested first, but so does the law of contingency—the threat of rain, for example, prioritizes the grove that can be harvested without leaving loose ends and muddy day-afters. On the day I was called in, however, it was the law of ripeness that we obeyed, as one grove at a particularly high elevation was due for harvest before all others.

With a small trailer in tow, we left the compound in a mid-sized Citroen sedan: Mítsos, Tásos, Kyra-Dóra, and myself, with Roúla at the wheel. After about an hour (~35km) southbound on the coast we turned into the mountains overlooking “sandy Pylos” of Homeric fame (*Odyssey* 1.80; *Iliad* 2.76). Through the small hamlet of Paliónero, where Mítsos pointed out the house he was born in—now a shell of stone and foliage—we pulled into what was to be today’s harvest site: a small grove of 89 trees (Mítsos reported 80) that he inherited from his parents upon marriage. It was at this point I began to understand why Roúla, and not Tásos, was the organizer of today’s harvest.

Once the equipment was unloaded and the cloths were laid out, we took no time synchronizing our distinct, familiar rhythms. While I manually threshed the trees, Tásos was at the front as the *kóptis* harvesting branches, Mítsos threshed on the *michaní*, and Roúla and her mother, Kyra-Dóra, were in charge of sacking and setting up cloths. As the men focused on work in the trees, work that, as they insisted, “wants strength” (*thélei dhínami*), women undertook tasks that kept them bent down to the ground. While harvesting this and other groves, the gendered division of labor within this family-based team was identical to what I observed in Mrs. Dhimáki’s group of hired hands and Mr. Leonídhas’s hybrid team of relatives and laborers. If anything, the feminine duty of feeding was more pronounced here, as depicted below, given Kyra-Dóra’s elaborate preparation of starch-and-protein meals in plentiful portions (sometimes bringing along entire casserole pots and serving plates) and Roúla’s efforts to pack the necessities for

¹⁴ The elderly Mr. Poúlos no longer joins in the harvest due to a bum leg, but pays the family an occasional visit in the grove.



Figure 2-14. Doing double-duty. (*Upper left*) Kyra-Dóra consolidating olives on cloths; (*upper right*) mother and daughter finish another sack; (*lower left*) Roúla prepares instant coffees during the mid-morning break; (*lower-right*) Kyra-Dóra serves spaghetti with meat sauce for lunch on a truck bed.

serving snacks and making iced coffee in the middle of nowhere twice a day (at 10am and in the mid-afternoon).

At home, Roúla's assertiveness (and Mítsos's corresponding passivity) is the exception that proves the rule of gendered labor in the harvest. The so-called "public" work of the household traditionally executed by men (if we are to believe ethnographic canon (e.g., Du Boulay 1974; Dubisch 1986b; Herzfeld 1985)), is done by Roúla: everything from ensuring my agricultural work permit to negotiating the terms for harvesting a cousin's grove. I attribute this role reversal in part to the contingencies of her married life. She and her husband spent a decade in the United States in the early 90s, cutting hair in a barbershop owned by Mítsos's uncle while raising two children. After Mítsos was diagnosed and treated for a brain tumor, they returned to Messinía where Roúla could nurse his recovery and continue raising the kids with the help of her family

and benefit from the overall lower costs of living. Because Mítsos never regained the full use of his speech (he has motor lapses in transmission that, interestingly, he corrects with English), Roúla has been the one standing with a phone to her ear making things happen, honing her instincts and sharpening the dark discriminating brown eyes she shares with her mother. In addition to this disability, however, Mítsos “suffers” from the condition of being a *sóghambros*,¹⁵ that is, a husband who resides with his wife and in-laws upon marriage, rather than moving his bride into patrilocal or neolocal housing (for discussion on matrifocal contexts in Greece, see Loizos and Papataxiarches 1991b; Papataxiarches 1991:157; Sutton 1998a). This results in good-natured teasing between Mítsos and his in-laws (though Roúla, sagaciously, never participated in this teasing), and his status as a *sóghambros* admits membership to a modestly sized club of husbands in Messinía who negotiate the mild social embarrassment of having a wife (and extended family) that enjoy the upper hand thanks to her/their superior wealth, among other things. This explains, in part, why Roúla and not Mítsos was the one in charge of organizing the harvest of his grove; under normal circumstances the owner would be the one taking such initiatives but, in this case, she is Mítsos’s proxy, recruiting her own family on his behalf. Yet, despite her role and his status as a *sóghambros*, the work of Roúla and Mítsos in the harvest remains predictably formulaic, relying on beliefs about gendered bodies: Roúla, though normally assertive, still takes the job of sacking and spreading cloths with her mother; Mítsos, although disadvantaged in other contexts, takes the task of mechanical or manual threshing like Tásos and myself.

Assumptions about the body, in addition to organizing the gendered division of labor, help Messinians like the Psarópoulos family perceive important parallels between parts of the human body and parts of the olive tree. The full repertoire of anatomical terms, what I call tree/human metaphors, ranges from the highly specialized (like those used by farmers trained in agronomy), to the mundane (like those learned by Kyra-Dóra as a child). When the monotony of threshing and sacking got the best of us, Kyra-Dóra and Tásos passed the time by lecturing and then quizzing me on the parts of the tree so I could better learn how “to do olives.” For instance, olive trees have eyes, knees, and

¹⁵ *eso-* “in” + *-ghambrós* “groom”

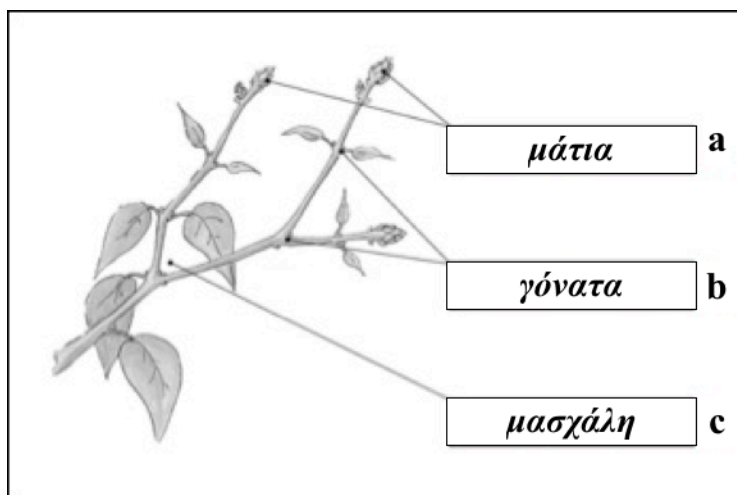


Figure 2-15. Anatomy of a branch. The stem and its divisions develop buds, called “eyes” (a). A node induces leaf or axil growth at the “knee” (b). The “armpit” is the site where a main stem diverges into a set of offshoots (c). (Adapted from <http://www2.ellinogermaniki.gr>)

armpits, each of which corresponds to a different anatomical part of the tree’s structure (Figure 2-15). One of the first things that Tásos taught me was how the “eyes” of each stem—in other words, their buds—develop into blossoms that will eventually give way to olives.¹⁶ So, when pruning it is important to consider where a limb “threw out

eyes”¹⁷ since these will develop into yields. That buds are equated to eyes makes sense in their ability to “look” for and grow toward the sun.¹⁸ Meanwhile, a short distance from the “eye,” new leaves or offshoots develop out of nodes, which in Greek are called “knees” (*ghónata*), given the tendency for a branch to grow—or bend—in a new direction at what resembles a knobby joint.¹⁹ In turn, the “armpit” (*mascháli*) is the site on thicker stems or branches where division has occurred (Figure 2-15c). The metaphoric use of the armpit makes sense if we think of it as the place where limbs—human or arboreal—articulate with the main body, which, in turn, is itself an anatomical unit that relies on the tree/human metaphor in both Greek (*kormós*) and English (trunk) languages.

¹⁶ This term seems to apply equally to terminal buds and axillary buds.

¹⁷ *Pétaxe mátia*.

¹⁸ Although I’ve never heard an unfruitful olive tree described using the idiom of blindness, numerous ophthalmic references are used in daily Greek. One of the most popular ones uses the phrase “my eyes” (*mátia mou*), as a term of affection, a likening of a sweetheart to eyeballs that expresses more immediately the connection between love and vision than, say, the English equivalent expression, “apple of my eye.” The Greek affinity between “affection” and “the optical” may account for why tree-buds are likened to eyes, especially if they have the potential, like love, to blossom.

¹⁹ An equivalency in English is our characterization of a long, spindly growth as “leggy,” imbued with its own gendered stereotypes (consider the sexiness attributed to Betty Grable, Tina Turner, and other female personalities celebrated for their legs).

The parallel that Kyra-Dóra and Tásos felt no need to quiz me on, but is worth noting for the reader is that between the olive fruit itself, the *eliá*, and how the same term applies to a mole on the skin. Similarly, the diminutive form *elítsa* (“little olive”) signifies a “little mole” or freckle.²⁰ All terms, and their semantic organization, are summarized in Table 8: Tree/Human Metaphors.

By far the most important part of the olive tree is the part called the *aetós*—the “eagle.”²¹ Its importance is twofold. First, the term denotes any branch that has a vertical growing habit. These so-called “eagles” are often at the apex of the tree branches and are counterpoised to the low-hanging branches perceived as “skirting” the canopy of the tree, which—as Kyra-Dóra emphasized by tugging at her own skirts—are called “aprons” (*podhiés*).²² While these so-called aprons grow horizontally and at a convenient height for harvesting, eagles offer the mixed blessing of bearing abundant fruit (thanks to abundant sunshine) but also of growing skyward in a way that frustrates the preference for short, compact olive trees. The general aversion to them was made clear to me by Tásos while cutting a tree that was—as he said in exasperation, and with a few choice words—“all eagles!”²³ Threshing these high branches causes a true pain-in-the-neck and often results in “pimples” (*spyriá*), the term for occasional olives that escape threshing and get left behind.²⁴

In its second meaning, the *aetós* embodies the spiritual dimension of the harvest. As the Psarópoulos family was harvesting the eighty-ninth and final tree of the grove, Roúla abruptly halted the proceedings, having suddenly recalled the need for the votive *aetós*. Pressed for an explanation, she revealed how it is customary at the end of the harvest season for the *kóptis* (in this case, Tásos) to present an *aetós* to the owner (*afentikó*) of the grove (Mítsos). With a pair of pruning shears (the only time I ever saw

²⁰ *Eliá* is also the Greek name for what is known in N. America as the “chuck” steak cut of beef (NAMP113), located behind the neck. It might be called the “olive,” I hazard, because braising chuck, which is rich in collagen and other connective tissues, produces abundant...liquid fat.

²¹ A second translation, kite, can be found in the dictionary (referring to the flying craft made of paper/plastic). However, Messinians predominately identify *aetós* with the predatory bird, referring instead to the airborne contraption as a *chartaetós*, literally a “paper eagle.”

²² *Podhiá* (singular fem.). A skirt, apron, or lab coat.

²³ *Ólo aetói!*

²⁴ One eco-conscious foreman told me it is good to leave some “pimples” to feed the birds.

them used) Tásos circled the tree thoughtfully as Roúla continued explaining (both for his benefit and mine), “It should look like a cross...with head and arms. And have lots of olives.”²⁵ In the resulting *aetós* that Tásos presented, the double imagery of a Christian cross, but also of a head and arms, even legs, were evocative—it was quite literally a *stick* figure. As he passed it to Mítsos’s waiting hands, Tásos and his mother proclaimed a familiar statement I had heard numerous times—“and in the next year!”²⁶—a common benediction conferring the hope that the present moment (e.g., a birthday or holiday celebration) may be relived again next year—in this case, that Mítsos and Roúla might complete another successful harvest.

In fact, the Psarópoulos family observed two more rituals to help encourage a successful harvest in the next season. The first was to ensure that we harvested the final row of trees from lower to higher elevation. Overhearing Roúla and her mother calculate where to set up the last olive cloths, she later clarified that the preference is to finish the harvest “*se ánodho*,” meaning to finish “on a rise” or “on the ups.”²⁷ Finishing “*se ánodho*” has a double meaning: “You finish your fields on an incline so your income doesn’t go downhill,”²⁸ added Roúla, as Kyra-Dóra concluded with the truism, “when you walk you don’t go with the head down, isn’t it so?”²⁹ The incline they chose was subtle, but had a significant enough grade to accommodate the custom, drawing a direct parallel between physical ascent and increasing productivity (or at least preventing a drop in it).

Although I didn’t investigate how fervently other families practice the custom of ending a harvest “*se ánodho*,” the second custom, nearly ubiquitous among Greek households, entails bringing the valedictory *aetós* home from the harvest to hang among religious icons in the household shrine. According to Tásos, “it is to please the Virgin

²⁵ *Na moiázei me stavró...me kefáli kai chéria. Kai na éxei pollés eliés.*

²⁶ *Kai tou chrónou!*

²⁷ *Ánodhos* (*áno-* “upper” + *-odhós* “road”), meaning: locational ascent (e.g., *the way up* is difficult); progression or development (the historical *development* of music); increase (the *increase* in global temperatures); accession (the *rise* of political power); upward elevating (the *rise* of smoke skyward), according to Georgacas (2005).

²⁸ *Teleíoneis ta choráfia se anifóra na min pérnei katifóra to isódhima.*

²⁹ *Ótan perpatás dhen pas me to kefáli káto, étsi dhen einai.*



Figure 2-16. The aetós. As presented to Mítsos in the grove (**above**); placed on the shrine (to the right of the clock) in Christina's home (**below**).

Mary,”³⁰ on which Roúla expanded: “So that the Virgin Mary blesses us so that we have a good crop again in the next year.”³¹ So fastidious was Roúla about bringing the offering home that she placed it on the dashboard above her steering wheel so it would not be forgotten (see Figure 5-5, pg. 214). The religious offering of the *aetós* should not be surprising given the Old Testament precedence of a dove delivering an olive twig to Noah, signaling the retreat of the Great Flood and God’s renewed relationship with humanity (Genesis 8:11). In this harvest ritual, however, the exchange is reversed such that the farmer delivers the olive twig to the divine, signaling faith and renewed appeals for blessing and aid in the coming growing season (the devotional olive branch is also emphasized in the rite of Baptism; see **Ch. 6**).

Where Roúla and others offer the olive branch to the divine as a token of gratitude and supplication, some identify it as an artifact of tradition. Tásos, while we were alone later on, offered a critical stance about the *aetós*, stating that “it is for those who believe, because it [the yield] is all based on weather conditions.”³² Others, like fifty-year old Christína, regard it as a seasonal object: “every year that’s what they do, they put an *aetós* in the house. [You know] how we put [up] a wreath every May Day? It’s just like that.”³³ From the perspective of this divorcee and new homeowner, the *aetós* represents an agricultural folk object marking the harvest season. I would even go so far as to suggest that it is the Greek analog of the traditional winter evergreen observed elsewhere in Europe (holly, tannenbaum, mistletoe, etc.) preserved in the home to resist the dark, cold season. Christína, like others, places hers on the mantle of the fireplace she had recently installed in her new home (**Figure 2-16**).

A third interpretation, obtrusively offered by one of my more “curious” neighbors (a healthy-lunged produce farmer and grove owner), attributes its origins to a historical system of farm patronage. While working in the grove of a third neighbor next to my adopted home, I was in the middle of giving the *aetós* to its rightful keeper (eager to show that I had learned the custom), when our curious, healthy-lunged neighbor leaned

³⁰ *Eínai gia na efcharístisoume tin Panaghía.*

³¹ *Ghia na mas evloghísei i Panaghía na éhoume kalí sodheía kai tou chrónou.*

³² *Eínai ghi’aftoús pou pistévoun, ghiatí einai ólo vasizómeno se kairikés synthikes.*

³³ *Káthe chróno aftó kánoune, vázoune aetó sto spíti. Pos vázoume stefáni ti protomaía? Étsi ki’aftó.*

over the cinder-block wall separating the two properties and bellowed, “*The aetós, the aetós?! And in the next year!*” after which he pontificated for my benefit how, in the olden days, big estate owners (*afentiká*) required an *aetós* from the field hands “to show that they finished the harvest.”³⁴ The neighbor’s reference to “big estate owners” harkens to the system of the feudal *chiflik* (Turkish *çiftlik*, Greek *tsiflíki*), an Ottoman system of land tenure that dominated parts of Greece beginning in the 16th c., in which the Greek peasantry worked lands inherited by Turkish lords (Aymes 2014; McGowan 1981). Within Greece, the system expired long before its official Ottoman end in 1919, but subsequent forms of land management shifted only slowly at first, carrying along with them, perhaps, symbolic vestiges of tithing like that of the *aetós*.

As a final point, although a few foreign workers (like Bóris) referred to the *aetós* in its purely agricultural sense (as a fruitful lofty branch), I only ever heard ethnic Greek farmers concern themselves with the *aetós* in its votive sense. Moreover, whether it is a religious offering, a traditional observance, or a feudal artifact, none of these are mutually exclusive and the *aetós* is capable of condensing all of these meanings into one polyvalent object. Its formal traits are consistent: it must be cruciform, anthropomorphic, abundant with olives, and must necessarily circulate from the grove into the home and from the hands of the foreman into those of the grove owner. It is what Victor Turner would have called a “nodal” symbol at the cognitive center of “intersecting sets of classifications” (Turner 1969:41-42). Yet, even taking this into account, the act of exchanging the *aetós* expresses a relationship of patronage: it is an *olive branch*—in all senses of the term—given from peasant to landlord and from mortal to All Holy in exchange for favor.³⁵ Even within a team of kin members, hierarchies of exchange, like metaphors of gender and bodies, are organizing principles.

The Psarópoulos family—Tásos, Roúla, Mítsos, and Kyra-Dóra—ended their harvest with this particular ceremony. But each phase of the daily harvest ended with that ever-important job of combing, rolling, and re-combing the olives before decanting them

³⁴ *Na dheíxoun óti teleiósane to rávdho.*

³⁵ The eagle (*aetós*) as a symbol of patronage is a question for historical research. Aside from the mythological connections between the eagle and Zeus (the patron god of, among other things, the marketplace and hospitality), the medieval double-headed eagle was adopted by the 12th c. as the emblem of the feudal dynasties ruling the Byzantine Empire in Greece.

into the sacks. From here, they would then be jostled so their contents could settle and stretch the burlap to its limits, before Roúla, the assertive personality who was always making things happen, would lean in, give a final perfunctory inspection, remove a few stray leaves and twigs, and, finally, tie the sack shut with twine she kept in the deep pockets of her sweatpants. Though not as deft and magical as the knotting of Mr. Leonídas, her knots were effective and economical. Catching my watchful eyes, she playfully asked, “what do you say Dionísi, am I tying them well?”³⁶ “Of course, a treat!”³⁷ I responded. Arching up her eyebrows and knodding her head the way that Greeks signify recollection, she thoughtfully commented, “Eh, and if only you saw my father. He tied them well. Eh, mom?”³⁸, a sentiment to which Kyra-Dóra whole-heartedly agreed: “Flawless!”³⁹ That so much emphasis is placed in the tying of sacks, both among the Psarópoulos family, but also among the other grove owners, teaches me two things. First, the fact that Roúla was the one inspecting and tying the sacks is consistent with the fact that she is, because of Mítsos’s disability, acting as the grove owner by proxy. Second, the fact that both these women touted the abilities of Roúla’s father to tie a knot further demonstrates how particular selves or identities can be tied (so to speak) with the securing of olive sacks. The tying up of olive sacks is a duty and office taken by heads of household (or their proxies), and just as occurs with respect to the perpetuity of the household (an idea taken up in the final chapter), it constitutes the securitization of the family’s wealth, at least, for this year.

“Half” Groves: Oil versus Cash

If the exchange of the *aetós* occurs between a patron and client, then what do we make of the exchange of cash versus oil in the context of the harvest? And what about the 7-kilo canister of olive oil that was given to me by the Psarópoulos family, my final and most important lesson? Having just reviewed family-based harvesting, hired labor groups, and hybrid teams, what remains to discuss is what happens at the time of harvest

³⁶ *Ti les Dionísi, ta dhéno kalá?*

³⁷ *E vévaie, mia chará!*

³⁸ *E, kai pou na évlepes ton patéra mou. Aftós ta edhene kalá! E, mána?*

³⁹ *Ápsoghos!*

in a grove cared for by a sharecropper. The consequences of sharecropping, in fact, help us define the Messinían distinction drawn between money and oil as compensation and, as it turns out, that between insiders and outsiders.

When the harvest of Roúla's family's groves had been finished, I once again zipped up the long dirt-lane that leads to the colony of the Psarópoulos family—this time, however, we traipsed a short distance up the lane to harvest the grove of an overseas uncle. Harvesting this particular grove proved special in one key respect: it marked another year in which Tásos, by agreement with his uncle, has been honoring the tradition of harvesting olive trees that are *misiakés*.

Deriving from the adjective *misós*—"half"—*misiakés* refers to an agreement wherein the owner of a grove shares half the yield with a person willing to work for all of it. This surrogate, called a *misakáris* (masc. sing.),⁴⁰ is like a tenant farmer (minus the need for actual tenancy) who trades on sweat labor for half of what is produced on lands owned by a landlord. Logistically, this sharecropping system of "going halvesies" makes sense when: (1) the landlord is not in a position to farm his/her land and, (2) the crop in question (like olive or grape) is permanently planted and requires long-term cultivation.⁴¹ This is especially true when an owner cannot hire a group of laborers or summon his or her kinfolk.

The "half-and-half" agreement between Tásos and his uncle came about when the uncle,⁴² while on a return visit from Canada, grew dissatisfied with the grove's overseer at the time—known as a *sémbros* (more on that later)—and invited Tásos to share in the annual yield if he would be willing to care for them in his continued absence. As Tásos explained to me, the *misiakés* arrangement with his uncle is far from typical since he does not truly shoulder 50/50 of the cost or yield: from an approximate oil yield of 200 kilos

⁴⁰ *Misakáris* (fem. sing.)

⁴¹ In contrast, a farmer seeking to expand his production of one-time seasonal truck crops like potatoes or melons may opt to rent a field. In this contractual agreement, the right to land use is exchanged for money only, not for a share of the yield (or derivative proceeds). Land rentals seem to favor non-kin over kin. One particularly egregious episode where these rules were broken concerned a land owner who, upon returning from a stay in Athens and finding a backyard full of eggplants, discovered that his opportunistic nephew had taken the liberty (in exchange for cash) of renting out his fields to a third party without his knowledge.

⁴² Tásos's Father's brother.

per annum, the uncle only requests about 14 (the equivalent of two canisters) for his household use; as proxy, Tásos sells the remainder of the uncle's half (86 kilos) and uses the takings to cover shipping costs to Canada and any expenses incurred throughout the year in the maintenance of the grove. The mathematics of this sharecropping ensures that the uncle breaks even but is nonetheless happy to possess not only a source of oil that is free and exceeds his needs, but also (I am told) a grove that is healthier and more productive than ever. For Tásos, the arrangement leaves his own equitable share (100 kilos) relatively untouched so long as he can recruit his family (and me) for free labor, a happy fact that helps his bottom-line—otherwise, his share of the oil (approximately worth €220) would go toward hired hands.

Importantly, not all such agreements involve kin-relations or result in profit, as shown when scrutinizing the finances involved. Such is the case of Ánna Vlachadhámis, a fifty-one year old Athenian widow who relies on a different kind of *misakáris* to care for the grove she inherited from her late husband. The particular surrogate she engages to manage the trees is referred to as a *sémbros*,⁴³ a loan word with a murky etymology from Slavic (*sebrû*) and the earlier proto-Baltic (*sepra*), where it signified a friend or companion. In Greek usage, however, the adoption more accurately signifies agricultural surrogacy, a paid *collaborator* in farming. For example, the original overseer that Tásos replaced in his uncle's grove was a *sémbros*, as is the man Ánna has hired.

Although generally conducting herself as a silent partner, an occasional on-site inspection, especially prior to harvest, is among the top of her to-do list when visiting Messinía from Athens. Because the grove is located in a village forty minutes from her family in Gargaliánoi, she thinks it best for a local farmer to manage the 70 trees it comprises. The financial forecast she budgets breaks down as follows. Regarding expenses, (1) the grove costs about €300 on average annually for general upkeep, and (2) ends up incurring another €200-280 at the time of harvesting, not to mention (3) expenses for transporting, taxes, and pressing fees charged by the oil mill: these expenses total upwards of €580-650. In terms of income, given that the grove yields almost 175-300 kilos of oil (depending on alternate bearing), she could fetch about €630 in oil sale, based

⁴³ Plural *sémbroi*

on the market price at the time. In short, Ánna's *misiakés* trees neither make a profit nor lose money over the long-term. Whether she gets ahead or loses money from one year to the other is, like the alternate bearing of olives, "one yes, one no." What is more, because the surrogate assumes half the financial burden, Ánna doesn't need to provide capital up front since *misiakés* surrogates reimburse themselves at the end of the season from oil sale revenues; this further incentivizes them to maximize the yield of someone else's grove and recruit free labor from their own kin. Under the current economic circumstances, the prospect of breaking even is a relief to Ánna considering that the best Messinians can hope for nowadays is a tidy grove that won't fall into ruin or need selling. Like oil on water, they stay afloat.

In daily usage, both a *misakáris* and a *sémbros* are said to operate in a *misiakés* system, but the semantics are subtler than that. What distinguishes the two is that, while the *misakáris* is compensated with half of the olive oil yield, the *sémbros* is remunerated with money. Thus Tásos ends up owning half of the oil produced in his uncle's grove but the *sémbros* hired by Ánna ends up receiving cash commensurate with the volume of oil produced and sold, oil that belongs to Ánna only. This distinction also explains why Mrs. Dhimáki compensates Bóris, the towering Skopjian, with euros rather than with oil for his annual harvest of her groves: he is her *sémbros*. What remains as the distinguishing factor between a *misakáris* and a *sémbros* is the distinction between olive oil and cash as the form of compensation at harvesttime.

As one final example shows, the categorical divide between cash and oil deepens in the presence of kinship or friendship. While in the middle of harvesting her own grove with her family team and me, Roúla parlayed an impromptu visit from a relative into an ad hoc *misiakés* arrangement. It was during our mid-morning coffee break when Mítsos's nephew, Fánis, a middle-aged divorcee from Pylos, paid the Psarópoulos family a visit in hopes of recruiting their assistance in harvesting his groves. Deteriorating health, he said, prevents him from leading a harvest, as does taking care of his senile mother (Mítsos's aunt by marriage), with whom he lives. Within moments, as Mítsos, Tásos, Kyra-Dóra, and I listened quietly, Roúla—ever making things happen—had Fánis agreeing to her

terms: “five people for as long as it takes,”⁴⁴ using her own equipment, but he would loan his 4x4 Nissan Navara for transportation, and he would give her...half the oil.

For four weeks after that, it was our daily habit to check the weather report around 5am and, unless there was rain, pull ourselves into the Nissan Navara where I tucked myself in the nook between the dusty backseat and the heavy truck door, in part to avoid the gaze of Kyra-Dóra, and in part to rest my sore body (I agonized in silence...*why couldn't it have rained today?*). Each day we synchronized our distinct, familiar rhythms—interrupted only by the daily visit from Fánis, who spent an hour or two bellowing about the inevitable snap elections. By the time we had finished harvesting all 179 trees, Roúla and Tásos had collected enough olives to produce 371 kilos of oil, half of which belonged to Fánis and the other half to them. They sold their half at market price, split the purse between the two of them, and compensated me 30€ per day in cash as hired labor, encouraging me for the first time to wonder whether my skills as a thresher might actually be worth something.

The fact that Roúla and her nephew-in-law arranged a *misiakés* deal solely for the purposes of the harvest is highly unusual. Neither she nor Tásos could be called a *sémbros*, for they were paid in oil and only engaged temporarily. Nor were they like the itinerant laborers employed by Bóris or found in Mr. Leonídhas's grove for a one-time gig as harvesters. Rather, they were one-half of an exchange of labor agreed upon between two affinal groups (a nephew in-law and the family of an aunt in-law), a near-kin relationship in which cash would be a reproachful form of payment since it implies formality and cold contractual business. *One does not pay cash to a relative*. Olive oil, the gift given by Mr. Leonídhas to his nephew-in-law's mother for her contributions in the harvest (however vexing), balances obligations incurred among kin-relations. It repays debts and restores relative equality across a marriage alliance. Contrarily, in the context of a formal transaction between an employer and a laborer, a cash payment does not only conform to the expectations of workers in a cash economy, but is equally powerful in maintaining distance within certain relationships. Thus, social hierarchy is

⁴⁴ *Pénte erghátes óso chreíazetai*.

reinforced with money; but where collateral status is important—as it would be between affines—only olive oil will do.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that olive oil holds the power to generate social relations. The same rings true in the context of the olive harvest, where one important insight I gained from my farming friends is that olive oil both reprises existing connections and creates new labor alliances. When Roúla and Tásos brought me with them to harvest the grove of an in-law, my weeks of hard threshing were compensated with cash (which I immediately spent on neck and back massages). But why cash? Simply because, to the owner of the grove, I was a hired hand: an outsider. All the more meaningful, then, was the 7-kilo tin of olive oil that I found in my driveway upon returning home after the harvests were done. When Tásos brought me to aid in the harvest of his uncle's grove, a grove in his own backyard and in which he himself was a vested *misakáris*, my voluntary contributions to his home and livelihood were immediate and intimate. It was in the context of friendship. Therefore, the tin of oil was not a payment for services rendered (as between an owner and hired laborer), but a gift for obliging Tásos and his family, a gift that pulled me into the sphere of ally and collateral—an act of reciprocity. I had come full circle and experienced both vehicles of debt mediation in the harvest: money and substance.

Comments

Ideally, the labor for harvesting olives occurs in teams of 5 to 7 people. Nowhere did I observe or hear of larger crews, nor was it ever suggested to employ more than one crew to harvest more than one grove simultaneously. Instead, a single crew would be expected to harvest sequentially all the groves that belong to an owner, working as many days as necessary to harvest all trees, weather permitting. The working pace and division of labor within these teams make them a mobile assembly line in the grove, a small scale outdoor processing plant that resembles the pre-factory labor models of plantations (e.g., Mintz 1985:ch. 2). Not surprisingly, the standard organization of oleicultural labor does not operate without structural principles that reflect broader cultural worldviews. Specifically, analysis of the bodily and organizational practices of these harvesting teams reveals three key aspects that echo broader themes of this thesis: tree/human metaphors,

hierarchies of self and Other (through gender and race), and relationships built on the exchange of substance versus money.










First, there exists a conceptual parallel between olive trees and human bodies. If we compile all the lexical terms used to classify parts of the olive tree and examine how they are also used to classify parts of the human body, a clear pattern emerges (Table 8). While some overlaps in classification share certain visual similarities (e.g., hair/foilage), others share similar positions and scales with respect to a central axis (e.g., trunk/torso, branch/upper arm, axil/armpit). Furthermore, while some parallels are anatomical classifications, others are more conceptual analogs. For instance, the words for “roots,” “seedling,” and “fruit” are also metaphors used to convey kinship descent (“places of origin,” “only-child,” and “offspring,” respectively), a common phenomenon documented in other parts of the world too (e.g., Bouquet 1993, 1996; Fox 1971; Turner 1967). Similarly, terms of wellness or unhealthfulness (like “malnourished” and “stagnate”) are used to evaluate the vigor of trees and humans alike, as they are also used in other contexts to evaluate the strength of abstract social systems (e.g., Sontag 1978; Weston 2013). Such clustering speaks to Marilyn Strathern’s understanding of what “culture” is:

Culture consists in the way analogies are drawn between things, in the way certain thoughts are used to think others. Culture consists of the images which make imagination possible, in the media with which we mediate experience...they give form and shape to the way we think about other artefacts, other relationships. (Strathern 1992:33)

As Frederick Damon explores in his analysis of tree-human relations in Muyuw (2017; see also 1998), people organize and process information around them through classification *within* a named system (e.g., roots, branch, foliage), and through categorization *across* domains (e.g., roots, feet, base)—to put it in structuralist terms, classifications are *paradigmatic* whereas categories are *syntagmatic*.

Among all these tree-human parallels collected in Messinía, I discern seven linguistic clusters or axes—(though one might argue for a different number)—each of which constitutes a different category of organization. Following this, it is worth noting that olives (including small olives and leftover olives) belong in the same cognitive category as things that mark the human skin (specifically moles, freckles, and pimples). But why, if we assume that olives are highly esteemed, do they belong in the same

Table 8: Tree/Human Metaphors

Term*	Dendritic	Anthropic	Axes
<u>Anatomic</u>			
<i>kómi</i>	foliage	hair [†]	 follicular
<i>máti</i>	bud	eye	 somatic
<i>ghónato</i>	node	knee	
<i>mascháli</i>	axil	armpit	
<i>vrachíona</i>	branch (large)	upper arm	
<i>kormós</i>	trunk	torso	
<i>rógha</i>	berry, grape	nipple [‡]	 mammary
<i>vizaíno</i> (v.)	saps / drains	to suckle	
<i>eliá</i>	olive	mole	 dermal
<i>elítsa</i>	small olive	freckle	
<i>spyriá</i>	leftover olives	pimples	
<i>rózos</i>	knot	callus	
<u>Analogic</u>			
<i>aetós</i>	apical branch	eagle	 altitudinal
<i>podhiá</i>	low lateral branch	apron or skirt	
<i>kachektikó</i>	stagnate/attenuated	malnourished	 alimentary
<i>laímargho</i>	sprout	glutton	
<i>karpós</i>	fruit	offspring	 descent
<i>vlastári</i>	sprout or seedling	only-child	
<i>rízes</i>	roots	lineal place of origin	

* The list of terms is compiled from conversations and oleicultural reading material in Messinía. Unless otherwise noted, all terms are noun forms.

[†] Formal and typically feminine.

[‡] Also used for “fingertip,” according to Triantafyllidis (1998). However, I never observed this usage.

relational category as skin blemishes and imperfections? I offer two suggestions. First, that small and unharvested olives might be equated to freckles and pimples, respectively, can be attributed to the fact that having either poses an undesirable, even embarrassing, situation, not to mention that there also exists a visual similarity between, say, a pimple on otherwise clean skin and an unharvested olive on a clean tree canopy. Second, the lumping together of olives and skin anomalies makes sense if we consider that religious applications of olive oil occur exclusively on the body's surface. As I explore later, (Ch. 5 and 6), unlike wine or bread, two religiously important substances that must be ingested to have a ritual effect, olive oil is never ingested in ceremonies but is instead a substance of anointment: it works *on the skin*. What is more, the use of oil to anoint the body results in a ritual “marking” of the skin—especially marking the sign of the cross multiple times in Baptism or Unction—a ritual act that bestows a new social status, like an identity, and sets one person apart from another: not unlike a distinguishing birthmark or freckle.

Both of these suggestions are, for now, mere speculations and require further investigation. What categorical overlaps, for example, are conceptualized between the human body and the anatomies of wheat and grapevines? Are there any terms shared exclusively with certain other crops, as the term “mole” is to “olive”? And what about categorical overlaps across the anatomies of humans, crops, and even abstract social systems like “economy” or “state.” Especially given the present situation, the latter question implicates understandings of agriculture and other traditions (seafaring?) as culturally fundamental to Greek presumptions about the nature of nationalism, governance, and markets. For now, let us satisfy ourselves with the conclusion that, when it comes to olive trees and human bodies, Messinían farmers not only presuppose close, distinct parallels between the two, but that these tree/human metaphors constitute a particular way of perceiving, understanding, and imagining the “natural” world.

The second insight I gained from work in the groves is that assumptions about gender and race not only inform one another in the grove, but also structure the organization of labor. As I observed across different teams, specific tasks rank from high to low in terms of their symbolic value and level of laboriousness—what they deemed “hard work” (*sklirí dhouleíá*). It probably comes as no surprise, then, that these same

tasks are also indexed to masculine or feminine labor roles. As shown in Table 9, masculine bodies labor with their upper bodies (pruning and manual threshing) while feminine bodies labor at the waist (combing and sacking olives); mechanical threshing, meanwhile, enjoys neutral ground. So prescriptive is the bodily arrangement of labor that arm location is actually a good indicator of where a task ranks according to gender and importance: pruning and threshing require upstretched arms while combing and sorting require arms bent low to the ground. Indeed, the higher or lower one's arms, the more masculine or feminine is the effort and, concomitantly, the higher and lower the job's prestige. (I submit that it is no coincidence that the mechanical thresher, a technology that "neuters" the arms in a perfectly horizontal position since the labor is mechanized by the spinning rods, is the one team role performed both men and women).



Table 9: Hierarchy of division of labor, from highest to lowest in regard

			<u>Team roles</u>	<u>Afentikó</u>
Greek	masc.	high.	<i>kóptis</i> (pruner)	
			<i>ravdistís</i> (manual thresher)	
	neut.	mid	<i>i michaní</i> (mech. thresher)	<i>dhésimo</i> (tying)
			<i>ta paniá</i> (cloths / combing)	
“black”	fem.	low	<i>to sákiasma</i> (sacking)	

Table 10: Hierarchy of Immigrant Labor (from high to low)⁴⁵

<u>Work</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
service / domestic	Eastern European
olive groves	Slavo-Balkan
	South Asian
truck crops	African
	mávros (black)

That men whack olives at the treetops as women separate debris from the yield can be attributed to Greek assumptions about the relative strengths (and weaknesses) of the sexes. Men’s work emphasizes energy and coarseness, women’s work stresses discernment and refinement—the first of women’s many recurring roles in refining olives for household use (**Ch. 4**). There exists within this gendered framework, however, an important paradox. On the one hand, it devalues the nature of women’s work in the harvest, even paying women about 75% of what men earn in the harvest and making women—even prostitutes—the butt of jokes (Figure 2-17). On the other hand, the

⁴⁵ Ethnic attributions are taken from informants; they may or may not represent actual nationalities. The table does not include migrant groups popular elsewhere but absent in Messinía (e.g., Filipina caretakers in Athens). A complete profile requires further up-to-date research.

diligent work of women, even though it suffers from lower prestige, is nevertheless regarded as crucial in the harvest. Hence why employers hire and pay “by the couple” (*to zevghári*), perceiving masculine and feminine actors, despite assumptions about biological inequality (or maybe because of them!), as constituting a singular interdependent, complementary unit. It is a matter of principle that it takes two genders to make oil.

As it turns out, the same hierarchy that organizes the division of labor by gender in the grove is the same one that Messinians use to divide labor by race. As I observed when Sóna, a Pakistani man, quietly sorted and sacked olives alongside Néli, a Bulgarian woman, a man is more likely to perform the jobs of women when he is racialized as “black.” In Greece, categories of race and ethnicity frequently get blurry—Greeks often use the word “tribe” (*fyli*) to refer to both—and such distinctions are deeply rooted in the project of Greek nationalism.⁴⁶ While these entanglements merit their own separate treatment, in the context of Messinian labor relations, the label of “black” (*mávros*) gets applied especially to immigrants from South Asian countries (in Greece, a majority are from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan) and Africa (Senegal and Nigeria). Consequently, these were also the people to whom lower-prestige, lower-paid, feminized jobs were given.

The situation beyond the grove is further suggestive (Table 10). On the one hand, “black” South Asians were hired by Messinian farmers mostly to work in fields and green houses, while Africans were hired only for seasonal truck crops like eggplants and melons. On the other hand, Eastern European immigrants (largely from Moldova, Poland, Lithuania, and Romania) were hired for domestic work (e.g., housekeeping) or work in the service sector (e.g., wait staff). Work in the olive groves, however, pooled immigrants primarily from Slavo-Balkan countries (the majority of whom are Bulgarian or Albanian) as well as from South Asia. To explain this bias, many Greeks relied on ideas of ethnic—and therefore racial—temperament and predisposition. As Mrs. Evthimía stated one day while we were discussing an Albanian worker whom we both knew in Marathópolis, “they [Albanians] are more industrious” (*prokoméni*)—the implication, in addition to

⁴⁶ But a good place to begin is Michael Herzfeld's 1987 monograph *Anthropology through the Looking Glass* (Cambridge University Press).

being that Albanians are “more” suited for working with olives, is that others are less so. Another explanation, this one stressing environmental and agricultural similarities, was actually given by Tímos (the Albanian in question) and Bóris (the towering Skopjian) who, on separate occasions, defended their jobs as foremen by reminding others and me that, yes, olive trees grow in their countries too.

While these findings are provisional and merit a broader examination of employment across work sectors, they nonetheless indicate, among Messinians, an organizing principle that distinguishes between workers who are near-Other, and workers who are far-Other. While non-black Europeans are allowed to serve Messinians food in restaurants and even enter and clean their homes, other cannot. In fact, someone can be too black to harvest an olive tree.

The consequences of this principle are twofold. First, because black men are relegated to the same labor roles as women, they suffer a pay disparity and are confined to low-prestige, lower income opportunities. And if black women are relegated to an even smaller range of labor roles in the grove (this remains an open question for lack of data), an even bleaker consequence is that the hierarchy with which Messinians comprehend gender difference informs broader, more dangerous, assumptions about racial differences too: the division of labor in the grove according to race has built into it an identification of blackness with femininity.

The third insight gained by working in the grove, and one which gives perspective on the first two, is that the harvest reveals two tensions or axes that structure labor and debt relations. The first axis concerns modes of exchange. Observations confirm three acceptable ways to pay someone back for laboring in a grove:

<u>Exchange</u>	<u>Recipient</u>
(1) cash	strangers
(2) olive oil	affines, agnates, friends
(3) reciprocal labor	affines, agnates, friends

Cash, the first form of exchange, was given to hired hands only, myself included. It is directly opposed to olive oil, which was given for labor done only by relatives (including in-laws) and close friends. The final form of exchange, reciprocal labor, I encountered

only in popular, nostalgic discourses about the *dhaneikariés* system in which extended family, in-laws, or neighbors were said to have combined their efforts to meet mutual goals. Because such an exchange anticipates reciprocation by way of olives and olive oil, I take it to be an “oleic” form of compensation unlike money. Thus, oleic and monetary forms of exchange constitute two poles that shape labor relations in the harvest (Figure 2-18).

The other dimension is that of relatedness. With respect to the grove owner (or the *misiaakés* surrogate), the labor recruited for the job clearly falls into inner or outer circles of membership. Hence, the makeup of a harvesting team ranges from one extreme (only members of a nuclear family) to the other (a hired foreman with a team of strangers); allies fall in between (in-laws and friends). In this way, the annual reciprocation of labor (either at the individual level, as with

the Dragon Lady, or at the household level, as with *dhaneikariés*), is a yearly reiteration of alliances across social boundaries, or, as in the particular case of race, has also come to iterate difference and separation.

Finally, these three insights concerning tree/human metaphors, hierarchies of gender and race, and establishing relatedness through substance versus money, find common ground in the body. On one hand, the olive harvest is universally deemed as grueling work and thought to take a hefty toll on the body. As discussed earlier, that toll can be viewed anthropologically as an exchange in which sweat or blood are sacrificed for the very fluid that, from the perspective of Messinians, preserves life: oil. Ethnographically, the stick figure of the *aetós* (the eagle) best crystallizes symbolic associations of “gift” and “body” in Messinía. The fact that these are crystallized (better yet, *dendrified*) in an olive branch shaped like a human figure and a Christian cross is

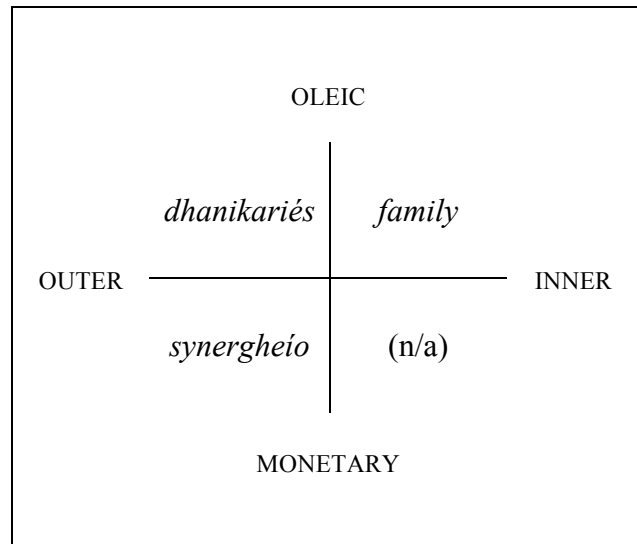


Figure 2-18: Types of harvest teams, by relation (horizontal) and mode of exchange relative to owner or surrogate (vertical).

significant when placed in the household shrine after the harvest. Thus different forms of bodily “giving” occur in back-and-forth exchanges between humans and the divine where olive culture is the mode of this exchange: one gives oneself to the harvest, trees give of their fruit, one gives of the fruit (the *aetós*) to the divine, the divine gives bounty in the ensuing harvest. In this way, olive culture posits the laboring body not as a “maker” of olives and olive oil, but as a giver and receiver of these. It is with this principle in mind that we now turn to the oil mill, where olive oil is received before it is given.

THE OIL MILL

Chapter 3

Oily air. If you can conceive of the depth, heaviness, and rawness of oily air, then you can begin to imagine the environs of an oil mill. From about a hundred yards away, our mid-sized Citroen sedan breached an invisible fog, dense like the air around newly varnished furniture but green to the nose like chlorophyll. With Roúla at the wheel and her husband, Mítsos, in the passenger seat, I poked my head between the two from the back seat and peered at the mill in front of us. A rectangular box made of cinder blocks and corrugated sheet metal that sat in the center of a paved lot, it looked like a hangar. As I have learned, the mill is indeed like a hangar or a simple storehouse, but one that protects a fortune's worth of expensive machinery capable of turning ripe olives into fortunes of a different kind. More importantly, it encloses a space of particular meaning to olive farmers, a space of commensality and ritualistic waiting—what I will call a rite of anticipation. In short, the oil mill is a space of liminality.

In 2011, there were approximately 2,500 oil mills in Greece, about 300 of which were in Messinía (Vasilopoulos 2011).¹ Statistically, this amounts to about one mill for every four square miles of Messinían earth. In fact, just on the four-mile commute from Gargaliánoi to Marathópolis one encounters no less than five mills (Figure 1-8, pg. 26). Rarely does one find a mill in a town itself. Rather, some oil mills cluster around a town's outskirts, as does the one in Gargaliánoi, a stone's throw from the soccer field and the cemetery. Others are located among the groves themselves, often on family land along key roads between villages.

With respect to their numbers and geographical distribution, oil mills very much resemble countryside chapels (*xoklisia*). Actually, oil mills resemble chapels in two other respects as well. First, they are popular, peripheral, and seasonal. Like countryside

¹ Current, detailed figures are hard to find. The most reliable source, the International Olive Oil Council (cited in Prosodol.gr), reports 2,590 mills in Greece in 2009. More recent sources mention a partial count of 2,300 mills operating on a two-phase system (Vasilopoulos 2012) and 1,200 mills as operating at 500-ton output (Fratzola 2014).

chapels, they remain dormant most of the year, opening their doors only during special occasions: chapels during annual feast days for the saints they commemorate, oil mills during the harvest season. Second, mills are like chapels and churches with respect to the divide between lay clientele and practitioners of specialized knowledge. Their routine operations, though familiar to some, remain mystical to most. On one hand, the technical process of oil extraction conforms to specific industrial standards, architecturally configured in a complex circuit of machinery and laid out step-by-step by commercial and governmental bodies. As summarized in Table 11 (pg. 132), the technical process of turning olives into oil begins with the cleaning machine, then moves to the mill and a malaxer, before ending with a centrifuge separator and a series of filters. In this respect, the process of extraction is uniform and specialized, and well-documented (e.g., Boskou 2006; Del Fabro 2009; Massimo Mazzotti 2004). In contrast to this specialized knowledge, however, everyday farmers share an “observer’s” narrative of the steps involved in modern oil extraction, a narrative based on how they experience the process from their perspective as clients in the mill. While some narratives are more sophisticated



Figure 3-1. Pallets of olive sacks await pressing outside an oil mill near Pylos.

than others, they all emphasize what they believe to be the significant phases involved in transforming olives into liquid gold. The tour that Roúla and Mítsos gave me as we waited for their oil to be processed was no exception.

Two Narratives

Before we even entered the building, we approached a bank of wooden pallets that sustained the weight of as many as 30 olive sacks stacked chest-high. Approaching one, they pointed to the *etikéta*, a small metal plate pinned in the center that prominently displayed a number (Figure 3-3a). This label indicates the tracking number that a farmer's particular sacks are assigned as soon as they get dropped off (usually the evening of the harvest). These wait here for no more than 3-4 days, though the earlier they get processed, the better, so that they do not “get bitter” (*pikrísoune*) or “boil” (*vrásoune*) and “get set alight” (*anápsoune*)—referring to the effects of oxidation through the idiom of heat. Having then checked in at the front office—Mítsos introduced me as his American nephew, after which point our fictitious kinship became a running joke—



Figure 3-2. The oil mill in the off-season. Two banks of malaxers double the processing capacity.

we wandered freely inside. The interior of the mill is drafty and hums with motors, amplified by the hard surfaces of the concrete floor (burnished for wheeled transport) and the plastered walls (often tiled for easy cleaning). The metallic gleam of stainless steel, which reflects from banks of motorized, electrified equipment, adds another dimension of cold, engineered utility. Yet, despite the mess of machines, hoses, levers, pipes, pumps, switches, nozzles, and dials, none of the oil mills I visited restricted the movement of clients. Open access is a universal feature of the oil mill's design and management: there exists a tacit prerogative for a farmer to observe the processing of his or her crop first-hand and up-close.

When a forklift brought in Roúla's and Mítsos's sacks, Mítsos and I watched as a black immigrant (who reported his origin as Senegalese) used pruning shears to snip the string that Roúla and her mother used to ever-so-carefully tie the sack shut only two days earlier. As the contents spilled into a hopper set into the floor, we stood right up to its edge and peered in. When we visited a different mill the following year, the unloading area was identical to this one except for the fact that the newer one was enclosed in a vestibule. Presumably erected for safety and to help keep out the winter weather, farmers still looked on with obvious care, practically pressing their faces against the glass. Interestingly, the overall effect of farmers gazing from behind the large, insulated glass pane as strangers processed their olive sacks reminded me of car owners in the U.S. who watch through windows as their vehicles get serviced in oil changing stations or, as used to be medical practice, fathers gazing for the first time upon their newborn babies from behind a window in the maternity ward viewing room (Figure 3-3b, pg. 125). Whether through the barrier of glass or up close and personal, in both mills, the unloading area is clearly a space of protective supervision.

From the sunken hopper, an elevator carries the loose olives up to a conveyor belt and past a ventilator hood (*aporofitira*) that suctions out loose leaves. The olives then fall into a sluice where they get jostled by the high power flow of water before going through a tank that lets dust and leaf debris float away. This sluice and wet hopper comprise the "washing machine" (*plyntírio*; a word referring to any generic mechanized washer, including a dishwasher, laundry machine, and carwash). After the *plyntírio*, olives are described by mill operators as entering a machine called a *thrafstira* (crusher, mill), but

which farmers like Mítsos describe as a *spastíra* (breaker), which “breaks them, cuts them.”² The distinction in register is small but noteworthy: while mill operators unsurprisingly described for me the high-powered hammer mill used to physically crush the olives (pit and all!), farmers were split over recognizing this as the actual moment of crushing. In fact, many skipped this machine entirely in their narratives of the oil process, attributing the crushing of olives to the stage they most emphasized: malaxing.

Save for the initial unloading of olives from their sacks, farmers actually show little interest in their progress until the stage of malaxing. In fact, it was only because of my incessant picture-taking at the washing machine that Mítsos sidled up to me, curious as to what I could possibly have found so captivating about olives in water. Rather, the machine that most farmers identify as important is that resembling an over-sized laundry machine with a horizontal screw that agitates its contents: the *malaktíras* (malaxer). According to their narrative, once in the *malaktíras*, the olives undergo *zímoma* (kneading; the same verb used for dough), a softening that transforms fragmented olives, skins, and pits into a pulpy *poltós* (poultice, slurry). While millers also referred to this paste as a *moústos* (must), a term applied also to the soupy mixture produced by pressing grapes in wine-making, the usage of “*poltós*” was popular among both millers and farmers. In Greek, the word *poltós* not only describes a soft, wet, pulpy mass, but gelatinous masses too (e.g., *vasilikós poltós*, “royal jelly”). Thus my friends regard this *poltós* as neither a solid nor a liquid, but as a suspension of particles in liquids and liquids in particles—a liminal state of matter pregnant with oil. At the cellular level, the malaxer performs a softening action that permits small droplets of fat contained within olive flesh to collect into globules and, thanks to the fat’s density and surface tension, to be released from the water and vegetable solids in which they were bound. It is both suggestive and warranted, then, that one Greek manual should explicitly identify kneading in the *malaktíras* as “how olive oil is born”³ (emphasis added).

It was when the olives entered the *malaktíras* that Roúla, who had been renewing social ties at the front office, excused herself to join in observing the olives with Mítsos and myself (Figure 3-3c). Like most farmers, she and Mítsos watched closely as a worker

² *Tis spáei, tis kóvei.*

³ *Pos genniétai to elaióladho*

turned a lever controlling the inflow and outflow of olive mix to and from the malaxer. Moreover, in a bank of six malaxers, each unit was labeled with the name of the farmer whose olives were being processed; while this particular mill affixed dry-erase boards to the front of each malaxing unit, other mills indicated the client's name with erasable marker on the stainless steel housing itself. Though no one ever reported blunders or tricks resulting in the diversion or mixing of crops while malaxing, Messinians pay special attention as their product flows to and from the malaxer. When their particular mass of olive mud was fully loaded in the malaxer, the interest and excitement that Roúla and Mítsos expressed was evident as they peered down into the vat from an open hatch at the top. Gazing in, warmth hit our faces, a result of the heated water circulated around the malaxing tank to warm and relax the contents.⁴ “See how it smells!?”⁵ she marveled towards me. Indeed, the aroma was unlike any other and the helical agitator looked alive and independent as it spiraled through the green slurry. Mítsos turned to me with a choreography that combined dramatic sniffing, the Greek hand gesture that signals sensuous appreciation (open palm, rolling in the air), and a mouthful of boisterous English—“bYOOtiful!”

Malaxing is also the time for commensality and sociality (Figure 3-3d). Satisfied that the malaxer was doing its job—it takes between 30-60 minutes depending on the load size—Mítsos pulled me to a spot recognized by everyone as their favorite thing about the oil mill: the hearth. Amongst machines of stainless steel and cutting-edge technology, a wood-burning fireplace of brick sits antithetically in a corner. In this corner (corners are traditional placements of hearths in Greek homes), Orthodox icons of the Virgin Mary and Child peered from the wall next to the chimney breast (a traditional placement in homes for shrines). The hearth burns brightly and hotly and is equipped with all the tools needed for making *psomí kapsalistó*—charred bread—also called *kapsála* for short. *Kapsála* comes up again and again in Messinians' idealized descriptions of the oil mill experience, along with the raw aroma of new oil. Mítsos's enthusiasm as we warmed ourselves by the fire was apparent. Once we toasted the bread

⁴ The gauges I observed indicated 35° C (~93° F) ± 4.5°.

⁵ *Eídhēs pos myrízei!?*



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Figure 3-3. Inside the oil mill. (a) a pallet of olive sacks is tagged and ready for transport; (b) a farmer supervises from behind glass as his sacks are unloaded; (c) a couple observes their oily sludge during the malaxing stage; (d) enjoys *kapsála* and wine by the mill hearth; (e) expressed oil gets decanted and weighed with a digital scales; (f) a mill worker pumps newly pressed oil into a labeled barrel for home delivery.

a few inches above glowing charcoals, a nearby farmer offered us a drizzle of oil fresh from the nozzle, which Mítsos eagerly topped with coarse salt. The crunch of crusty, salty bread and the slick greenness of oil went down quite adversely—each and every raw fat molecule dug itself into my throat and dragged its unctuous claws into my esophagus all the way down. Bottles of wine and sometimes cognac, the beverages of hospitality (Gefou-Madianou 1992c; Papataxiarches 1991), waited on the table to help wash it down and warm the farmers; one could even imagine a bottle of whiskey magically appearing for special clients (Bampilis 2013). At tables like this, neighbors, cousins, and old schoolmates—all olive farmers—gossip over crop yields, tax fees, Christmas plans, and other farmers. As the fire crackles and a neglected radio quietly broadcasts popular *laiká* songs, they array their cell phones on the table and clink their glasses in a toast—*Kai tou khrónou!* (And to next year!). Roasted peanuts, alcohol, and bread disappear from the table as quickly as cigarette butts, coffee cups, and empty bottles accumulate. Add to this the occasional Christmas decoration and the aforementioned icons on the hearth’s chimney breast above the mantelpiece, and the elements of hospitality are complete. Here, by the hearth, is the space of ritualistic waiting (a rite of anticipation) that engages people in a fleeting but romanticized commensal relationship centered on consuming the three substances of domestic (and spiritual) life—wine, oil, bread.

While farmers attribute the liminal transition point of oil from olives to the phase of malaxing (marked by a rite of commensal anticipation), mill operators instead identify the decisive step as the phase of separation. In this phase, the pulp is pumped from the malaxer to a long, horizontal machine that is non-descript on the outside but harbors within its casing the mind-boggling speeds of centrifugal force. Mill operators called this machine the Greek word for “separator”—*dhiakhoristíras* (*dhiá-* “through” + *-khorízo* “separate” or “divide”)—or referred to it by the industrial loanword *ntekánter* (decanter).¹ Farmers, on the other hand, seemed underwhelmed or even ignorant about its function in their narratives of oil extraction, in part, I suspect, because centrifugal separation happens invisibly under the hood. Rather, they expressed only a vague sense that “the mix gets

¹ In one mill, the button for the centrifuge was hand-labeled as *NTEKATER*, probably a spelling error rather than a variant form.

processed and the oil comes out, [pause] and the solids and everything.”² Technically, the centrifuge decanter draws out two things in addition to oil: (1) pit, flesh, and skin solids, collectively called the *pyrínas* (kernel, nucleus), and; (2) liquid residue, called “olive juice” (*liózomo*), whose organic load of nitrogen and phosphorous make it legally unfit for wastewater dumping without undergoing treatment.³ Yet, this machine (along with the hammer mill) is the most opaque and mystified from the perspective of farmers.

From the perspective of oil millers, however, the centrifuge enjoys a status of near-fetishization. So important is it to millers that they display billboards of the type and manufacturer of their decanter for all passing by the mill. As shown in the upper and lower left images of Figure 3-4, one mill in particular, Messiniakí Ghi (trans. “Messinían Earth”), located on the outskirts of Gargaliánoi, decorated their centrifuge with garlic (*Allium sativum*) tied into braids and bunches of pomegranate (*Punica granatum*). According to Greek tradition, where the former ensure protection and ward off harm of both a physical and metaphysical nature (especially the evil eye), the latter promote fertility and prosperity. In fact, a bunch of pomegranates also hung from the hammer mill, which first crushes the olives, while another braid of garlic dangled from a hose leading into the stainless steel storage tanks. The fact that, of all the machines, it was the centrifuge that millers fortified against danger and adorned to promote prosperity only signifies its special status in their hearts and minds.

What is more, the centrifuge in this particular mill is the first thing one sees upon entering. This was true elsewhere too, as at the Lamboúsis Brothers mill where the centrifuge was located in the center of the floor between two banks of malaxers. The centrifuge in the mill Mítsos and Roúla brought me to claimed a prominent position in the center of the back wall; this would be an otherwise unremarkable accident of spatial planning rather than an aesthetic choice, were it not for the two museum-quality banners hanging above it on either side, nicely framing (even celebrating!) the piece of

² *Epexergázetai to míghma kai bgáinei to ládhi*, [pause] *kai ta stérea kai ola*.

³ These are byproducts of the three-phase centrifugal mills, which produce higher up-front revenue (from sale of the solid byproducts to refineries that produce low grade pomace oil), but are slightly less profitable in the long-term because of environmental disposal costs. Commercial and governmental analysts advocate for the eventual move to two-phase centrifugal mills already adopted in Spain. Presently, three-phase mills comprise 80% of Greece’s oil-making technology. (Vasilopoulos 2012; Voumvaki, et al. 2015).



Figure 3-4. Syncretic efficacies. (*above*) A space-age centrifuge decanter, with garlic and pomegranate hanging from a hose on the left side for good fortune and protection. (*lower left*) a bunch of pomegranates do the same on the stainless steel hammermill; (*lower middle*) detail of banner above centrifuge, depicting an obsolete, wind-powered mill; (*lower right*) an Orthodox icon of the Crucifix resting next to a chemistry lab stand used for testing olive oil.

machinery. One banner portrayed an elderly man harvesting olives into a woven basket, while the other banner depicted an old stone mill and screw press in operation (Figure 3-4). Given how decisively these nostalgic depictions of obsolete technology flank the space-age machine for oil extraction in the center of the mill, this vignette (complete with the hanging garlic) portrays the value that the mill operator places on his centrifuge: a technological centerpiece that bridges tradition with science. Serving as a contrast, at the Lamboúsis Brothers was erected an old edge mill (two vertical millstones atop a bedstone) as a permanent fixture of the parking lot, reminding me of numerous other places where I had observed mill stones used as elements in formal landscaping or as folksy monuments in many public and private spaces (see **Ch. 4: Consuming Oleiculture**). However, where landscapers decontextualize old millstones to decorate plazas with elements of old-world quaintness, millers like the Lamboúsis Brothers instead recontextualize these decommissioned stones in their natural habitat as artifacts of the mill's evolving material culture and technology.

Up to this point in the milling process, no oil has been seen except for glints of it in the slurry of *polτός*, which has been conducted through a maze of steel pipes and plastic hoses, and processed in the dark behind metal housing. But it is at this point in the process, when oil gets filtered and decanted into an open tank, that farmers see their oil emerge for the first time and their narratives of the whole process realign with those of mill operators. Having endured the g-force of the centrifuge, olive oil gets pumped to the top of a tower where it undergoes gravitational filtration (*filtrárizma*) through a series of graduated mesh disks or “plates” (*piáta*). As farmers explained, filtering ensures that oil is *pio katharó* (cleaner), while millers elaborated that filtering removes particles suspended in the oil, affecting the oil's degree of clarity and, consequently, its shelf-life. From the filter tower, oil pours forth into a settling trough where a large-diameter nozzle then directs it at the same speed as a garden hose into a large steel tank. The effect was dramatic and stirred Mítsos into another round of theatrics—“bYOOtiful!” Roúla, meanwhile, kept the dark discriminating eyes she inherited from her mother, Kyra-Dóra, on the digital scales mounted high above the tank. The digital reader displays the weight of the tank's contents to within a half-kilo. We watched for nearly ten minutes as the

flicker of numbers matched the flow of oil until both slowed to a trickle and then ceased altogether. When the weighing was done, so was the process of extracting oil.

The process of assessing oil, however, was another matter. Millers and farmers involved in bottling and selling oil assess the pH of olive oil in compliance with market and trade standards. In order to measure the acidity of oil (acceptable values should be no higher than 0.8% acidity), millers set up a small testing station in a quiet part of the oil hangar. A simple collection of tubes, beakers, eyedroppers, testers, and lab stands constitute this laboratory. While the lab in the Messiniakí Ghi mill, accoutered with its posters and garlic and pomegranates, was uncharacteristically “modern” and unembellished, the lab in the Lamboúsi Brothers mill was another story: propped against a cardboard box between a lab stand and a forgotten bottle of tested oil was a Greek Orthodox icon depicting the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Figure 3-4, lower right). As is the case with similar icons installed in a variety of businesses,⁴ this icon ensures protection, prosperity, and general propitiousness. That the juxtaposition of these two constituencies—of chemical science and of spiritual intervention—strikes no one as incongruous demonstrates the naturalness of this association in the context of the oil mill. Where the icon literally represents the self-evidence of the Divine, chemical analysis claims its authority by the power vested in the predictability, control, and calculability fetishized in modernity (Ritzer 2004)—not to mention the fetishization of oil itself as a commodity. Indeed, despite their apparent differences, the icon and lab tools constitute, together, an assemblage of truth-telling devices: they are both tools of divination aimed at assuring the purity of olive oil.

Comments

I have already characterized oil mills as sharing certain characteristics with Greek Orthodox chapels. Their use is seasonal, they are numerous, and their locations are peripheral to town centers. More interesting, however, is that, like chapels, oil mills are spaces in which Messinians exhibit a ritualistic level of regard. While I am not arguing

⁴ I even saw the icon of St. Basil in an establishment that, once I was propositioned, I realized was a brothel.



that the profession of oil miller is parallel to that of the clergy (ethnographic evidence never suggested so), what I am arguing is that the frames of reference with which Messinians understand the process of oil extraction—especially “lay” interpretations—reveal something greater about the symbolic relationship between material processes and narrative explanations. More remarkable is that the drama built into their narrative model of making oil is reproduced in the very sociality exhibited by visitors to the mill: the rites of transformation observed throughout the space, from olives to sludge to oil, get mirrored in the social organization of farmers as they enter separately but then join one another in commensality before separating out again. In this sense, the oil mill, much like a chapel, is a place where groups dramatize with one another the same invisible laws they believe to govern the universe.

To reveal the ways that oil mills are ritualistic spaces akin to chapels, I triangulate three data types collected on the numerous tours of mills I was given and the hours I spent waiting with families as their crop underwent the physical transformation from solid into liquid in the mill: (1) Messinian explanations of how olive oil is made, (2) the operational sequence of oil extraction, and (3) the social/symbolic elements that are external to (but frame!) the process of extraction. First, I treat their explanations as stories or narratives that, like genesis myths, reveal culturally meaningful values when subjected to structural analyses (Leach 1967; Lévi-Strauss 1987; Wagner 1978). But to restrict the myth of oil genesis to the purely symbolic realm of story-telling would be to ignore how closely, in this context, explanatory models are constituted also by material technological processes. In an event that is as much about *doing* as it is about *telling* (perhaps more so, since the *telling* is an exogenous artifact of the anthropological encounter), the meaningful parts of a narrative cannot be taken as independent of materiality (e.g., Allen 1997; Basso 1996; Keane 2003; Latour 2014; Morgan 2010). Consequently, a complementary way to analyze the content of these narratives would be to view them as ethnological accounts of how to effect certain material outcomes.

Members of a culture or a society have “ideas” (which we call “representation,” whether they are conscious or not) about every element of a technical process: raw materials, sources of energy, tools, actors, where and when things should take place, etc. And these technical representations are part of wider symbolic systems. (Lemonnier 1993:4)

In this vein, one would break down the narrative stories of oil milling into what R. Cresswell calls “a series of operations which brings a primary material from its natural state to a fabricated state” (Cresswell 1976, cited in Lemonnier 1986:150). Through the lens of an operational sequence—also known as the *chaîne opératoire* (Lemonnier 1986)—the analysis that follows bridges the genesis myth of oil (an explanatory model) with the mechanized operations that actually extracts oil from olives (the material technological process). Taking these technical/classificatory representations one step further, I examine them in a framework that is, for lack of a better term, “meta-technological.” Adapted from Gregory Bateson’s notion of meta-communication as “communication about communication” (Ruesch and Bateson 1951:209), I examine the material culture and social dynamics that unfold *around* the science of oil pressing: the tools used to understand the tools that make oil. Thus, in the same way that prosody, pitch, and volume comprise paralinguistic elements that convey more than just the structure and content of a speech act, commensality, inspection, and good luck charms comprise some meta-technological aspects of oil extracting technology. Analyzing such meta-technological frameworks alongside the explanatory models and the operational

Table 11: Phases of Oil Extraction

<u>State of Matter</u>		<u>Operational Phase</u>	<u>Millers</u>	<u>Farmers</u>	<u>Sociality</u>
Solid 	Olive	leaf removal / washing	plyntirio		separation
	Suspension 	Pommace (poltós)	milling	ekthlípsi	spastíra
malaxing*			zímoma		
Pit / Juice / Oil		separation†	dhiachorismós	n/a	
Liquid	Oil	filtration	filtrárizma		separation
		weighing	zýgizma		

* Stressed by farmers.

† Stressed by millers.

sequence with which Messinians perceive the process of making oil, and the ritual and liminal qualities of the oil mill become visible.

Certain segments of production clearly matter more than others. As summarized here in Table 11, the power of oil extraction—the pivotal moment of transformation—is ultimately ascribed to the centrifuge separator by millers, and to the malaxer by lay customers. Where millers adorn the centrifuge with fetishes for good luck and frame it as the centerpiece of the factory floor, farmers actually engage firsthand with the malaxer through an embodied choreography of sight and olfaction (“bYOOtiful”). More telling, however, is that the discursive and ritual emphasis on these particular machines demonstrates a cognitive stress on the liminal phase of the extraction process in which the contents are neither wholly solid nor entirely liquid. While in the malaxer, the harvest is described by lay farmers as a *poltós*, connoting slurry with traits akin to jelly and paste.⁵ For Messinians, the nature of this slurry is that it is a suspended state of matter that is neither the solid mass that comes before extraction, nor the precious liquid that comes after it. Categorically, it’s a mess. Even millers, with their specialized knowledge, classify this oily sludge with must (*moústos*), the muddy substance that results when grape solids and grape juices blur into one another in wine-pressing. Going a step further, millers pinpoint centrifugal separation as the exact moment when new and pure categories of matter materialize from an incoherent mass: olive solids, vegetative juice, and oleic fat. From the viewpoint of the millers, the purity of these categories is self-evident and backed by laws of gravitational physics.

One more point on the issue of purity and sludge. Both millers and lay farmers comprehend the state of in-betweeness in the malaxer or centrifuge as a co-suspension of heterogeneous parts (a cocktail of solids, liquids, and fats). And while it is constituted by all the parts, it is not a *union* of these parts! (That distinction, I guess, belongs to the unprocessed olive). The cognitive difference between a *mess* of oleo-material (the *poltós*) and a *union* of that same material (the unprocessed olive) can be understood by

⁵ The etymological connection between Greek *poltós* and English *poultice* (from Latin *pultes*) should not be discounted. Both characterize a semi-liquid state. Moreover, a poultice (typically a soft, wet mass of plant material) is used to treat aches and pains when applied topically on the skin, a medicinal application not unfamiliar to ritual and household users of olive oil.

comparison to a certain degree with the Holy Eucharist, which is not the discrete units of [bread] *and* [wine] simply mixed together, but a *union* of the two—body *with* blood in the communal chalice (Iossifides 1992).⁶ The Eucharist transcends pure categories of bread and wine to become, symbolically, the united essence of Christ. The slurry of oleo-muck, however, does not transcend. It awaits discreteness. It waits to give birth to purity. It releases something that is, despite the intensity of human input, “extra virgin” (*éextra parthéno*). And this new, qualitatively superior state of matter is achieved despite (or maybe because of!) a highly technological process that requires, along with some spiritual assurance, the mechanical manipulation of Newtonian forces. In its own rite of passage, the olive enters the mill a raw and unprocessed solid, undergoes transformation in which the potentialities of matter are, literally and figuratively, thrown into suspension, and it emerges (like Athena fully-formed from Zeus’s forehead) pure and superior.

Turning our analysis to the oil mill as a whole, we see another type of in-betweenness invoked through the symbolic use of material spiritual objects. Agricultural talismans for protection and prosperity (strands of garlic or pomegranate) are used to adorn particularly important pieces of machinery precisely because the material processes that they perform—although accomplished by scientific technology—are nevertheless subject to assistance or harm by immaterial forces too. Equally telling is the use of religious icons in spaces where one might otherwise rely only on the laws of chemistry; the placement of Orthodox icons at the oil testing station exemplifies how the metaphysical can intercede in matters of the physical. Although these juxtapositions might illustrate a relationship characterized as syncretism between scientific technology and folk tradition—a theoretical stance fraught by false binaries of science versus religion or modernity versus tradition (Latour 1993)—they do show that Messinians discern a difference between physical and metaphysical states of nature, but that they also presume a coherence or interaction between the two.

Even outdated millstones erected like monuments and decorative posters depicting elderly men and pre-electric machines help ascribe a transcendent quality to the

⁶ As the altar boys of St. Andreas showed me, a favorite occupation of theirs during Sunday service is to munch on surplus Communion bread dunked in leftover (unconsecrated) wine—since neither made it into the Communal chalice, this is a wholly non-spiritual (and tasty!) snack.

oil mill. In one way, these archaic representations are used as a physical and historical backdrop to highlight the advancement of high-tech machinery. In doing so, they simultaneously function like museum artifacts that not only objectify and romanticize the “yesteryear” of oil processing, but also construct the oil mill as functioning at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. In sum, these material objects render visible the aura of historicity that mill operators and lay Messinians project on the enterprise of oil production. And the centrifuge separator, with its invisible g-force power, and the stainless steel malaxing machines, a far cry from the ox-powered millstones of yore, are emblematic of that transcendence for millers and farmers, respectively. Thus, while the mill affords farmers a space to reconnect with others, it also affords a space where Greek moderns reconnect with the historical promises of technology.

Lastly, we must address the “para-technological” role of sociality and commensality in the oil mill. Is it a mere coincidence that the merry occasion of sharing toasted treats and alcohol or caffeine with co-villagers occurs at the same time that olive crops are in a *transitional* moment of processing? Can we assert a deep-structural linkage between the commensality that develops at the hearth-side table (a suspension of hierarchy) and the transformation of olives into oil in the guts of the mill (a suspension of states of matter)? On one hand, none of my friends indicated a conscious connection between the liminality of one with the liminality of the other.

On the other hand, the patterning of social interactions vis-à-vis oil extraction is unmistakable. It is while olives macerate in the malaxer—the machine with which farmers are most fascinated, being indifferent to the machines that come before or after—that they relax and enjoy the company of other farmers. That is, while the olives are mixing, so are they! In contrast to this, it is when the olives are being unloaded and, later, when the oil is being weighed, that farmers return to the pursuit of their self-interests—when farmers evaluate their olive yields and their oil output—that they stand apart physically and symbolically and evaluate each other. Hence the shift into commensality marks the suspension of competition—and of oily solids—with the sharing of food: even a drizzling of someone else’s oil.

But is this the only interpretation of the sharing of food in the mill? When looking at the presence of food in other businesses, it turns out that feeding one’s clients is a

conventional form of Greek customer service, but in transactions of a particular kind. Step into a hair salon, law office, or other professional service establishment, and you will likely be treated to a coffee made to your liking.⁷ This affords the practical benefit of keeping customers happy while they wait—which is one thing salons, law offices, and oil mills have in common. But to treat someone to food or a drink is to also arouse the social poetics of Greek *kérasma*, a commensal gift tethered to relations of intimacy and/or obligations of indebtedness. A *kérasma* can entail a single cup of Greek coffee or an entire seafood feast, the value of which indexes the obligation created or reciprocated (Bampilis 2013:19-28; Herzfeld 1985:149-62; Papataxiarches 1991). Even the hearth in the oil mill, whose presence is framed by traditionally domestic designs (in terms of placement, form, and accouterments) helps shed the distance inherent in formality in favor of comfortable familiarity. I am not claiming that millers are retaining clients through obligations of commensality (for the commensality is shared *between* millers and farmers, but also *among* farmers). However, another trait that salons, law firms, and oil mills have in common is that the type of business transacted is of a very personal, even intimate nature. Hair, legal troubles, and family oil are not to be taken lightly. Unlike mass-made commodities like potato chips and laundry detergents hurled into the shopping cart at the Álpha-Víta Supermarket, these are delicate matters that demand oversight and input from the client: they demand discretion. Family oil demands discretion too. This also explains the tacit policy of open access in the very architecture and management of the mill: even if through a glass pane, the farmer will watch. Thus, commensal treats in the oil mill help lubricate and contextualize the transaction that occurs between the miller and the farmer as one that is personal and based on patronage. Simultaneously, they lubricate and contextualize social exchanges that occur between neighbors, cousins, and old schoolmates—all olive farmers—adding the oil mill to the list of spaces that, like churches, are arenas of social circulation and potential scrutiny.

Between the blurring of physics with the spiritual, the modern with the traditional, the solids with the liquids, and the formal with the commensal, the oil mill operates in the

⁷ The two popular coffees in Messinía are “Greek” (also known as Turkish), boiled and served with the grounds in a demitasse, or an “frappe” usually made with instant Nescafé and served iced. Both coffees are served sweet, semi-sweet, or “plain” (*skéto*) to taste.

Messinian landscape as a space of in-betweeness...or simultaneity. Some of this is exegetically explicit, some is only visible through analysis. But when we triangulate the three types of data I collected at the oil mill—Messianic narratives of oil genesis, the operational sequence of oil extraction, and the symbolic

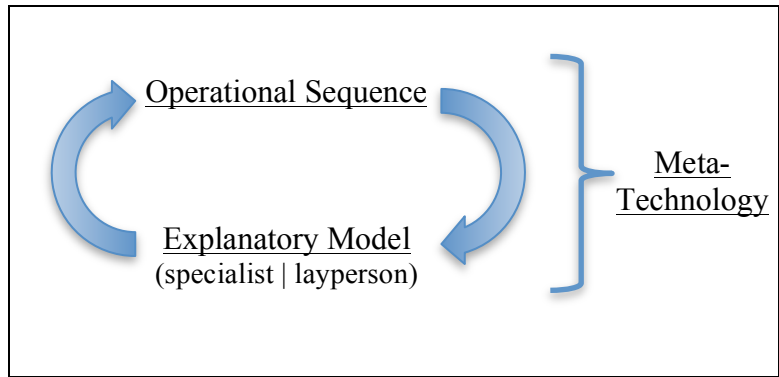


Figure 3-5. Contextualizing Technical Transformation.

Conventional ways of effecting material change (Operational Sequence) are locked in a discursive cycle with conceptual understandings of how certain material transformations are achievable (Explanatory Model), some more authoritative than others. The relationships between various do-ers and knowers of technical transformation are framed by the social symbols invoked in that cycle (Meta-Technology).

meta-technical elements of extraction—the analysis undoes otherwise nice (but faulty!) distinctions between events that are purely technical, purely social, and purely discursive. Rather, because the peculiar space of the oil mill is so good at showing how these “dichotomies” are actually mutually constituted, to study the oil mill is to examine what Latour calls the “Parliament of Things,” a hybridization of three objects formally separated in modernist empiricism: natural phenomena, social phenomena, and discourses framing the two (Latour 1993:142). Similarly, though in no way attempting a critique of modernism, Pierre Lemmonier proposes a bridge between cognitive and material processes in his theorization of an Operational Sequence (built on Mauss’s idea of “technique” (1968:371)). Although this model hybridizes two orders of reality normally kept apart, it is also shallow in its attention to broader social contexts that—to adapt Bateson—offer technical knowledge about technical knowledge. This meta-technology, composed in the oil mill by lucky garlic, open access, and toasted bread, are cues and propositions that codify the relationships between the do-ers and knowers of technical knowledge. This is the level at which technology or certain ways of knowing achieves an air of mysticism or, at least, hierarchies of access. Within the grand scheme of olive oil, the oil mill stands at the agricultural limen—a hangar of ritual-like transformation—between raw, inedible olives, and what might as well be liquid gold. It is to the golden value of this liquid that we now turn.

THE HOME

Chapter 4

Roúla calculated. This was not a bad yield. And it was consistent with what they got from another grove earlier last week. From the 15 sacks of olives they harvested from her husband's grove, the average oil extraction was nearly 10 kilos per sack. In general, the annual average of oil extracted from a 50-kilo sack ranges between 7-12 kilos of oil. Roúla and Mítsos were satisfied, and so was Kyra-Dóra, who posed the oft-heard question at this time of year: *póso píge?* (How much did it go?). Most everyone agreed that, yes, yields fared very well that year.

Market prices, though, were another matter. Before returning home, there was still the matter of Roúla and Mítsos selling their newly-pressed oil. Stepping into the box office at the front of the mill, Roúla, Mítsos, and I (still playing the role of American nephew) took a seat. This was the only place that the mill operator, Mr. Kaldhís, hadn't shown me on the tour he gave me earlier. Papers and binders formed messy stacks and an HP printer was set up in the corner. Pictures, laminate shelves, and worn but modern furniture suggested a mid-2000s vintage. A laminated fee schedule, a printed form with hand-written corrections in marker, was mounted on the wall (Figure 4-1). The most prominent thing on the desk in front of us, even more than the HP computer, was a corded desktop telephone. Picking up the receiver and using speed dial, the miller connected with someone for whom typical phone courtesies were overlooked: "hey, Micháli?! [pause] It's Pános. Let me ask you, where do we find ourselves?"¹ In what sounded amazingly like a transaction between a client and stockbroker (for that is very close to what it was!), Pános reported that oil prices were going at €2.30 per kilo and had been the same when he called a few hours earlier. Still shouldering the receiver to his ear, he punched figures into a calculator handily located next to the phone base, looked up at Roúla and reported "three hundred thirteen and ninety five [cents]...let's say three

¹ *Éla, Micháli? [pause] Éla , o Pános eímai. Na sou pw, pou briskómaste?*

hundred fourteen.”² Before I could register what happened, Roúla and Mítsos had consented to the sale of their oil. In fact, the time it took for them to make their decision seemed to me much faster than the time it took the old printer to issue them their receipts. A stamp and some signatures on the printouts made the transaction official, though the delivery of €314 in cash and coin made it complete.

FEE SCHEDULE	
20 12 2013	
8%	FOR THE PROCESSING OF OLIVE-FRUIT (transport of olive-fruit & olive oil from the producer).
9%	PROCESSING OF OLIVE-FRUIT & DELIVERY (TRANSPORT) OF OLIVE-OIL FROM THE OIL MILL
12%	TRANSPORT OF OLIVE-FRUIT FROM THE FARM. PROCESSING OF OLIVE-FRUIT & DELIVERY OF OLIVE-OIL TO HOME.

Figure 4-1: Oil Mill Fee Schedule. Example from Mr. Kaldhís’s oil mill, typed and handwriting.

With the twist of a valve, the oil pressed from Mítsos’s small grove was pumped from the weighing station into a stainless steel tank (about 15 x 5 ft. in dimension) where it mingled with the olive oils of other farmers who also chose to sell. Only a few weeks prior, however, a twist of the valve diverted another batch of oil—pressed from the first grove that Roúla and Mítsos harvested that season (a grove belonging to Roúla)—into large plastic barrels that they later took home using a borrowed pickup truck. In all, they kept about 31 gallons of oil in their storehouse (*apothiki*), oil intended for household use over the course of the year until the next harvest (they used four 30-liter plastic barrels, similar to those used for trash at public events). For clients who do not have anyone to borrow a pickup truck from, the mill offers door-to-door delivery for a fee, using a truck with a specially installed tank on the truck bed (imagine a dwarf version of a gasoline truck). The precious contents of the tank are pumped through a lengthy hose into a vat or series of barrels that occupy a permanent spot in a family’s basement, garage, or storehouse. Everyone in Messinía with a grove has a place to store bulk oil. Everyone.

A little while after the sale, as Roúla, Mítsos, and I were waiting for dinner to be served at a roadside grill house—much to my surprise³—I asked them why they didn’t

² *Triakósia dhekatría kai enenínta pénte...as poúme triakósia dhekatéssera.*

³ Roúla pulled into this grill house on our way home much to my surprise since neither had ever mentioned such dinner plans, nor were they the type to splurge when food could be gotten at home. I attribute this sudden decision to eat in a restaurant—and treat me—to the fact that I was a

keep this batch of olive oil like the one from last time. Throwing her head back slightly, she responded:

well look, since we already have some. The oil we made back home is more than enough. So it's in our interest to sell (*dhósoume*) it.⁴

Roúla's reply typifies the logic of most families. When a family in Messinía presses olives at the mill, the resulting oil has two destinies. First, a family retains enough oil for necessary everyday use as a comestible, ritual, or functional substance. Any extra oil beyond their needs will be sold for cash through the oil mill or a co-op. As we will see in the examples presented below, what was once a mass of raw, inedible fruit gets transformed, thanks to the oil mill, into a product whose social value increases vastly upon entering (perhaps a better word is *integrating*) into the domestic and public sphere. This social fact underlies the imperative for olive-growers to, above all else, secure oil and olives from the family groves for everyday use. Moreover, the domestication of oleiculture is integral to gender; women are the doorkeepers and circulators. They catalyze the transformation of oil and olives from the (raw) world of the grove to the intimate (cooked) sphere of the home, and to that of the divine. First, however, we ought to examine the use of olive oil and, more generally, representations of olive culture, in consumerist and urban contexts. Looking at how images of olive culture are deployed in both the marketplace and in urban landscapes, we see how they come to invoke meanings of Greekness and tradition, but also of cosmopolitanism, in various settings: in short, we see that oleiculture is implicated in the process of place-making. It is to these aspects of the social life of oil—as a *consumer* symbol and as a marker of *place*—that we now turn.

Consuming Oleiculture: Aesthetics of Cosmopolitanism and Locality

It is always considered a windfall to have produced surplus olive oil and to have the option of selling it. Although selling one's oil is, at best, a chance to come out ahead a couple hundred Euros or, at worst, a chance to break even, this is contingent on the

witness when they received several hundred euros in cash, a fact that might have caused some embarrassment and an obligation to "spread the wealth."

⁴ *E kita, afoú 'échoume. To ládhi pou bghálame spíti fíanei kai perissévi. Opóte simféri na to dhósoume.*

whims of Mother Nature and market forces, not to mention the size of one's grove.⁵ On this last point, I estimate (and my friends and informants seem to agree) that ~120 is the magic number: a grove of fewer than 120 trees will produce enough olive oil to satisfy the annual consumption of an average Messinían household, but a grove with more trees than this will produce enough extra oil to sell. Regarding market forces, a great deal has already been written about the political and economic dimensions that shape the commodity chain of olive oil from the oil press to the store shelf (IOC 2002; Lazaridis 2004; Meneley 2004, 2008b; Mueller 2011; Voumvaki et al. 2015), which I summarize as follows: the majority of Messinían olive oil that makes it to overseas consumers—indeed of Greek olive oil altogether—goes through Italy first, which also enjoys the lion's share of the profits. This is because Italy is the world's biggest importer, bottler, and exporter of oil, funneling oil from Spain (the world's largest producer in volume) and Greece (the world's third largest producer), and the rest of the Mediterranean world.

Consequently, my Messinían friends are keenly aware of why the wholesale price of oil, for example, might go up by €0.15 per kilo in two days. They keep an eye on the shape of Spanish and Italian harvests since these affect the market prices offered by middlemen in Italy, which, in turn, carry over to bulk merchants in Athens or Pátras and trickle down through phone conversations to agents and farmers in the local oil mill. It was this same supply chain that made its presence known in the modern white box office where Roúla decided to sell her oil to Mr. Kaldhís and the invisible man on the other end of the phone. Indeed, these phone conversations are where Messinían farmers begin and end their formal engagement with the global supply chain, though it persists informally every time a newspaper is slammed on a table in the coffeehouse with exclamations about flashfloods in Andalusia or shipping scandals in Bari. Farmers are plugged into the world market.

The commodification of olive culture is also implicated in a global market of another kind: tourism. Tourist shops sell an array of items emblazoned with signs of olive culture—from functional items like aprons and potholders to tchotchkes like framed

⁵ To my knowledge, no rigorous study has yet addressed the effects of global climate change on oleiculture, but while a few popular media sources suggest dire consequences (e.g., Souissi 2017), others hold contradictory views (c.f., Dimitropoulos 2017; Vasilopoulos 2013).

prints and paperweights—iconic use of the olive, the olive leaf, the olive tree, and olive oil (sometimes all combined together) abound. Pricier souvenirs make indexical references to olive culture, as with jewelry boxes, serving spatulas, or chess boards carved from olive wood, complete with a brown old-timey looking card—tied with raffia twine—extolling the virtues of olive trees as sustainable sources of wood and the skilled craftsmanship that goes into carving it. Similar discourses are used with respect to soaps and body creams made from olive oil, bearing labels in earthy greens and browns that feature English keywords like “extra virgin,” “pure,” “traditional,” “organic,” “natural,” and other descriptors invoked in the genre of the “artisanal.” So much effort is put into the simulation of the artisanal that one soap maker at the “Naked King: Handmade Soaps” boutique in Ghiálova showed me how, after the bars of soap are removed from their box-molds, she shaves off the hard edges to make them look less uniform and mass-produced and more rustic and hand-made (Figure 4-2). It is within this same mold of the artisanal that bottles of olive oil, marketed by large estates, are sold as gifts and souvenirs of authentic, wholesome oil alongside expensive jars of olives. And if one wants a sample of the real thing, one can even purchase actual living olive trees, but miniaturized into 16-inch bonsais (and certified compliant with international air travel standards) with branches styled into gnarls and twists—a portable model of an olive tree made from a real olive tree! Such invocations of tradition, authenticity, and wholesomeness typify the commodification of olive culture, at least where tourist markets are concerned.



Figure 4-2. Boutique soap. (*Left*) wearing a lab coat, a soap maker gives new, uniformly shaped bars of soap a more hand-crafted, artisanal appearance; (*right*) artisanal oil soap with rose blossoms.



Figure 4-3. Oil-centric museums. (*Upper left*) Foreign visitors gaze at oil containers from Greek antiquity at the Museum of Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta; (*upper right*) a Greek youngster studies a motorized scale model of a diesel oil press; (*lower left*) the Kefalonian museum, converted from an obsolete mill; (*lower-right*) an American tourist browses olei-themed trinkets and bottles at the Sparta Museum gift shop.

Interestingly, the area of Marathópolis (indeed most of Messinía) lacks any focused agrotourism, which, as happens elsewhere in Greece, offers tourists the experience of picking and pressing olives in an abbreviated and Disneyfied setting. In fact, some informants pointed to this as a wasted opportunity (and evidence of Messinían backwardness). “Here, we have everything that foreigners (*xénoi*) want. But we don’t organize,” explained a part owner of a small camping resort and former president of an olive oil co-op in Gargaliánoi. Meanwhile, in other rural locales like Stavropíghio (outside of Kalamata), visitors get a guided tour through a traditional oil mill equipped with obsolete stonemilling technology. And in places such as the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta (about 2 hours away in the heart of southern Peloponnesus), nearly 15,500 tourists walk through two floors of exhibits on the history of oil’s symbolism and the evolution of milling technologies from the Bronze Age

through today (see Figure 4-3).⁶ Other museums, such as the “Olive Museum of Pylaros” (in Greek)—but called the “Olive Story Museum” in English—on the island of Kefalonia fold the oil mill experience into a folk life museum focused on local memory of oleiculture and the olive press (Figure 4-3, lower right). The consistent story that these museums tell tourists is that, while oleiculture is alive and well today, it also runs deep in Hellenic history and has shaped the Greek landscape.

Similar stories, though with an environmentalist twist, are told to Greek schoolchildren. In this form of consumption, olive culture and its very landscape are pressed into pedagogical service to teach Greek youngsters about the environment and



Figure 4-4. Olei-centric education at KPEK. (*Upper left*) Students from Leonídhio refashion paper products to depict “Stages of Olive Production: ‘Traditional Olive Mill’”; (*upper right*) a child’s painting of a traditional olive harvest; (*lower left*) a sunny, hillside grove made with tissue and construction paper; (*lower-right*) using plaster and clay, schoolchildren reproduce fossilized branches, oil lamps, cosmetic bottles, and other archaeological artifacts.

⁶ Number reported was for 2013, in which year Greeks made up one-third of all tourists. Thanks to the Museum director, Mr. Ghiánnis Baghiókos, for sharing this and other information with me.

Greek history. For instance, at the Center for Environmental Education of Kalamata (KPEK),⁷ students are taught not only the dangers of pollution and waste, but also the importance of reusing household materials. These virtues are stressed especially in the curriculum of the so-called Olive Program (*Próghramma Eliás*), for which the Center recruits local agricultural or natural resources to design locally-specific activities. For instance, fieldtrips to KPEK are often paired with visits to the traditional oil mill in Stavropíghio, mentioned above, which make for a day in which kids experience and then do crafts centered on the traditional mill and the general role of olive culture in the environment. As depicted in Figure 4-4, upper left, for example, middle-school students from Leonídhio (in eastern Peloponnesus), depicted machinery involved in the *Stages of Olive Production: “Traditional Olive Mill”* using paper, plastic can lids, toilet paper tubes, tape rolls, and other household objects. Other craft projects include simulating fossilized olive leaves found by paleobotanists but using plaster casts, as well using modeling clay to reproduce oil lamps, cosmetic bottles, oil containers, and other archaeological finds related to olive oil (Figure 4-4, lower right). In one particular activity, elementary school children from Chalkída (located three hours north of Athens), created a poster on which different drawings of olive trees are pasted around the title *Olive, “Gift of Life.”* They also created a poster, already presented in Figure 1-6 (pg. 23), whose popping bright colors and lollipop-shaped trees depict Messinía as made up of every imagined variety of olive tree, a child’s visualization with an apt title: *Messinía Prefecture / A Boundless Grove.*⁸

In Gargaliánoi itself, my friend Litsa, who is both a teacher and the principal at one of the two elementary schools, directs a field-project in which students identify and measure the trunks of olive trees that are “super-centenarian” (*yperaionónies*) and located in the groves of students’ family and friends. She and I first met at a Christmas crafts fair, a school fundraiser in which she and other mothers (and no dads in sight) made decorations from everyday household objects (like bottles repurposed into Christmas

⁷ There are many such educational centers in all administrative districts throughout Greece supported by federal and European funding.

⁸ Also depicted in that map is an historical Messinía, since the only buildings depicted appear to be located in the areas of Kalamata, Pylos, Methoni, Koroni, and Malta: towns popularly known for their still-standing medieval castles.

wreaths with yarn) and—the thing that caught my eye—using plastic beach toys as molds for homemade olive oil soap. The cream-colored bars of soap, which sold for €1.5, were made by combining oil, water, and potash over heat, and then solidified in the shape of boats, roses, turtles and other molds usually reserved for childrens’ sand creations. Discovering our shared obsession with olive trees, we rendezvoused in a coffeehouse a few weeks later where she ordered (unlike everyone else I know in Greece), an herbal tea and showed me the form used for her survey of ancient olive trees. This form, lifted directly from educational material supplied by the KPEK, is the one she uses to complement other exercises that derive from her broader initiative in educational environmentalism—one that stresses, as she puts it, “protection of our place” (*i prostasía tou tóπου mas*)—and which includes visiting local oil mills, cleaning up beaches, decorating the trees of the Gargaliánoi town square, and having students prepare and maintain a vegetable garden in the schoolyard. For this educator, whose thoughtful pedagogy stresses the protection and the environmental presence of local place (*tópos*), olive trees are imagined both as constituting that environment and also as datum points of local historical depth.

Associations to Greek history and the landscape inform the use of olive culture in another aspect of Greek life, too. That is, in the use of trees in urban spaces to signify quaintness and nostalgia. Especially when employed in the landscaping of commercial areas, olive trees are employed as markers of Hellenism and folksiness. In cities like Athens and Kalamata, for instance, potted olive trees have recently begun ornamenting doorways, balconies, and table-tops everywhere. The popularity of olive trees has steadily increased on residential balconies, joining the typical repertoire of houseplants; hibiscus, ficus, bougainvillea, palm, and the ever-ubiquitous basil plant in the summertime are now joined by a meter-tall tree of silver green. Moreover, olive saplings have become common centerpieces on the dining tables of moderately to expensively priced restaurants in neighborhoods as diverse as the touristy Thisío promenade in Athens, to quieter squares in suburbs like Holargós north of town. While some trees are housed in regular pots, others (like that pictured in Figure 4-5, upper right) are planted in olive cans, echoing the practice observed especially in the provinces of repurposing empty cheese tubs and oil tins into planters. Other spaces in the city use olive trees as



Figure 4-5. Urban olive trees. (*Upper left*) a commercial square on Kefalonia designed with a simulated grove at its center; (*upper right*) A table-top olive tree planted in a vintage tin can at a pricey Athens bistro; (*lower left*) planters of olive trees form a hedgerow between a restaurant patio and the city street; (*lower right*) grand olive trees on a street corner in Kalamata.

more integral parts of the architectural design. Examples range from the small-scale use of trees as a hedgerow to separate restaurant diners from the street, to the large scale incorporation of massive trees in a commercial square, fabricating a copse of olive trees as its centerpiece (Figure 4-5, upper left). On the one hand, the use of olive trees in the design of urban commercial spaces can be, in part, attributed to their cheapness, their relatively few demands, and their hardiness in the face of heat and dust. On the other hand, the symbolic associations of these trees to folklife, history, and ethnic identity make them ideal ornaments in a cosmopolitan landscape whose ur-symbol is the Acropolis. Lest we forget, the Acropolis is revered as the mythological birthplace of both the Hellenic nation and Athena's olive tree.

To be clear, I am arguing that the aesthetic fetishization of the olive tree is a culturally *urban* phenomenon, an obvious fact when we observe that olive trees are entirely absent from public or commercial spaces in rural places like Messinía...with three interesting exceptions. In Gargaliánoi, the only place I observed ornamental use of olives was to flank the modern glass entryway of one of the priciest hair salons in town, a store where urban taste is its stock in trade. These trees were planted in tall, slender containers and groomed in round topiary shapes. In a similar case, one notices the graphic use of an olive tree in a café-pizzeria in the Gargaliánoi town square. In this logo (Figure 4-6, upper left), a stylized olive tree was selected to complement the establishment's name, Filema, which means "food offering" or "treat," and which is distinguished by its modern, contemporary design; indeed, this was one of the first cafes on the square to



Figure 4-6. Cosmopolitan olive trees. (*Upper left*) The logo for Filema features a stylized olive tree and, written under it in English, the words "pizza-spaghetti-café"; (*upper right*) olive tree in the Filiatrá square with a plaque commemorating Olympic participation; (*lower left*) though a new grave in the Gargaliánoi cemetery is unfinished, a young olive sapling is already positioned in front; (*lower-right*) this new, contemporary-style model home outside Marathópolis features two olive trees in its landscaping.

offer a modern, contemporary service: food delivery. The use of the tree is subtle but distinct: where urban use of actual olive trees invokes folksiness and quaintness, images of it in the provinces connote a kind of urbanity.

The second exception I observed concerns an olive tree planted in the town square of Filiatrá, north of Marathópolis (Figure 4-6, upper right). Unlike the ornamental trees of the hair salon, with their pompom foliage and sleek containers, this tree is planted right in the ground and looks otherwise unremarkable except for a plaque near its base indicating its commemorative purpose:

PLANTED ON 26-3-2004
UPON THE RECEPTION
OF THE OLYMPIC FLAME⁹

In the same way that the stylized olive trees at the hair salon betray an Athenian sense of fashion on the part of its proprietor, or the modern, zippy service of the pizzeria managers, the olive tree in the public square does not signify the town's quaintness and folksiness. Rather, it memorializes the town's direct participation in a popular event of national and global magnitude: the 2004 Olympic Games hosted in Athens. The olive tree marks the town's moment of cosmopolitanism.

One final place where the tree's urban aesthetic is practiced is—of all places—the cemetery. Something I first noted in 2013, the use of potted olive trees in the cemetery of Gargaliánoi is quite sudden. In fact, at one grave, a commemoration had been recently performed when I visited and so the plot had, presumably, been recently spruced up; at the other grave, the tomb was so new that its installation was still incomplete, as shown in Figure 4-6, lower left. Out of hundreds of graves, only these two graves used olive trees for adornment. The newness of olive trees in mortuary culture is, I suspect, the beginning of a trend and something that Messinians will adopt readily but not without caveats.¹⁰ About Greek mortuary aesthetics in Athens, scholars like Jill Dubisch note how the neo-classical styles of Greek shrines and tombs indicate a conscious invocation of,

⁹ Translation mine.

¹⁰ When I mentioned the mortuary use of olive trees to Roúla and her daughter, their immediate concern was whether they were rooted in the grave or not, recoiling with obvious disgust at the idea that olives and oil might be harvested from a gravesite. My assurances that the trees were potted and placed adjacent to (not on) the grave itself placated them.

and therefore, claim on, the modern nation's ethnic roots in Greek antiquity (Dubisch 1989). However, as Neni Panourgia argues, the mortuary aesthetics of modern Greeks:

should be viewed within the perspective of the dominant architectural and artistic language of nineteenth-century Europe, not just as an atavistic quirk of nineteenth-century Greek nationalists. (Panourgia 1995:194)

In other words, aesthetic choices made in the metropole of Athens were received from European intellectuals and through the European interpretation of what it meant to be modern, including the (re)appropriation of artistic forms from Greek antiquity (see also Damaskos and Plantzos 2008; Hamilakis 2003, 2006, 2007; Herzfeld 1986b; Yalouri 2001). In the curious case of the two potted olive trees, I argue that a similar aesthetic filtration has occurred, this time adapted from the Athenian metropole, which has successfully objectified the olive tree as a folk object, having passed it back and forth through Western and European lenses that perceive olive culture and Mediterranean Diets, and Ancient Greece and modern Greekness, as shades of the same image.

The aesthetic consumption of olive culture within Greece, therefore, takes several forms but tells a consistent story. The relation between center and periphery is key, as is the value of authenticity. In Carrie Douglass's study of bullfighting in Spain, the relation between the core and periphery is reflected in a linguistic relation between the verbs *ser* and *estar*, where the former reflects a sense of essential, permanent condition (like authenticity) and the latter implies transitional, temporary placement (Douglass 1997:57-58). In urban contexts, invocations of olive culture signal ethnic and folk Hellenism, a representation heavily exploited in areas of tourism where such folk Hellenism also implies pre-modern (or anti-industrial) authentic artisanal knowledge. In rural contexts, invocations of olive culture signal a consciousness (even an environmental activism) of locality, and that locality's connections to the metropole and unfolding events further abroad. In both contexts, the aesthetic of olive culture indexes—or at the very least reveals—the cultural interconnectedness of places rural and urban.

While the trickle-down force of “fashion” is implicated here (consider Bourdieu), we must also account for the geographical movement of people between peripheries and metropolises and the interpersonal relations between rural and urban kin groups. Moreover, we must consider how these social relations influence, even reproduce, shared meanings in other domains, like those of gender and the body. Enter household oil.

Household Oil: Comestible, Ritual, Functional Use

Different women of different ages and living in different spaces shared more than just their stories with me. At 80 years old, the first woman is the matriarch of four daughters, one granddaughter, three grandsons, and two great-grandsons. She acts and thinks very much like a *ghiaghiá*—a grandmother. She lives in Gargaliánoi with her youngest daughter who, at nearly forty years old, is (still!) unmarried. On a daily basis she prepares a batch of food and packs plastic containers for her third daughter and her grandchildren, who receive them with mixed feelings since she challenges the stereotype that Greek grandmothers are wizards in the kitchen. The matriarch in question was my grandmother, Eléni, the woman for whom I spent many months running errands in the market, commenting on the news in the living room, and being fed at the kitchen table (one of my first memorable meals being a lip-burning spaghetti because Americans, she speculated, love black pepper...).

The daily procurement and preparation of food is a dominant concern of this matriarch, as is the annual production and distribution of olives and olive oil. In early December, I watched as she picked up the landline phone on the 1960s hall-tree in her foyer and punched in digits she had located in a small notebook. Within ninety seconds she had arranged the matter at hand—finding laborers for the harvest—and concluded her side of the conversation using an imperative form in the Messinían fashion, “...*Afoú prépei, prépei!*”—“...It must, it must!”



Figure 4-7. Eléni, matriarch of the Vlahadhámis family.

A week later, while her daughter was at work, I volunteered to drive Eléni from Gargaliánoi down to the coast and up a winding lane to the collection of adjoining groves which, so far as the law was concerned, were owned separately by each of her daughters, but which, for all practical intents and purposes (i.e., the actual care and pressing of olives), Eléni

oversaw as a single unit. As the olives were harvested by the hired team of laborers (led by the Skopjian immigrant, Bóris, with whom I had worked), Eléni puttered among the olive trees, tidied up the grove hut, and cleaned some wild greens she had collected (reviewed in Table 5, page 56). The very next day, those greens were in the oven baking into a pie, and the olives were in the mill getting pressed into oil.



Figure 4-8. Eléni explains a recipe in her kitchen.

When I returned to Eléni's house after days of intensive harvesting, the holidays were approaching and the kitchen smelled of baked *kourambiédhes* (Greek shortbread cookies), which everyone generally agreed were one of Eléni's rare triumphs in the kitchen. Having accepted a cup of instant coffee, I hadn't even taken my first sip yet when—after I unwisely asked about the status of the oil harvest—she had me up from the kitchen table and following her out the kitchen door, through the courtyard and into the 13 x 5 ft. *apothiki*—the storehouse (Figure 4-9). With crates of potatoes and onions on the floor in front of me, a kerosene boiler for the house's heating system in the corner to my far left, and what could have been an exhibit called "Luggage through the Ages" hanging at eye level on the cinderblock walls, I had walked into the middle of an assortment of tin canisters and barrels full of olive oil. "This will go to Athens," she said as she waved her hand over the barrel to the right before pointing to a tin container in the back, "and that will go to my daughter in America." As I helped her tuck the heavy vessels in a neat row out of the way, she rounded out the inventory, "and two for Ánna the Athenian ...[gesticulating her hand in thought]...and another for Fofó." Having accounted for a daughter in Athens, a daughter in the U.S., a niece in Athens, and a sister in Marathópolis, I asked if Christína, her third oldest daughter (a divorcee residing across town and a mother of two adult children), would receive a tin. *That's an ignorant question*, her body responded, as she shrugged and cocked her head of thick salt-and-



Figure 4-9. Voúla gets oil from the storehouse, where hardy vegetables, water bottles, and household supplies are also stocked. Harvesting tools are visible in the back corner.

pepper hair back. But vocally she responded by making use of the imperative form in the Messinían fashion, “ ‘em, I already gave her one, she was the first! *Afóu prépei*.”...*It must*.

After coffee it was lunchtime and Eléni began the familiar task of wielding a paring knife in one hand to cut the vegetable she held in the

other hand (all performed without the safety of a cutting board). Having added salt, oregano, and red vinegar (eventually she stopped using extra pepper for her American guest), I watched her perform—as I had hundreds of times before—the closing ceremony of the *roí*, the olive oil cruet that is a fixture in all Greek kitchens. Pulling the *roí* out of the cupboard (most keep it in the lower cabinet closest to the stove/oven), she pivoted around to the table, held it above my plate (all foods on the plate participate in this ceremony regardless of their color or creed), and tipped it gently downwards until there appeared from its tiny spout a glimmering and fragile thread of gold that quickly thickened into an undulating cord that danced before sinking into the wrinkles and shallows of the food’s surface, as Eléni’s grip on the *roí* conducted and kept time. All this in four seconds.

With her fingertip, she wiped a stray drop that still clung to the spout of the *roí* and wiped it on the brim of the salad bowl where it slid down, leaving a faint glistening trail.

Two weeks later, in a bottom kitchen cupboard between a pantry cabinet and a stainless steel sink nearly 170 miles from that little kitchen table rested a medium-sized barrel of olive oil whose harvest, pressing, packing and shipping were overseen by Eléni. The barrel, seen in Figure 4-10 (right), had been transported there by Eléni’s second oldest daughter, Ánna, in the trunk of her car to her home in Piraeus, the port of Athens. Two more things travelled with her from Gargaliánoi that day. The first was a large glass

jar of kalamáta olives that Eléni had first sliced down to the pit with a pairing knife (a painstaking task) and then cured for three weeks in sea-water (the salt removes their bitterness and makes the meat digestible) before replacing the sea-water with a marinade of red vinegar, oil, oregano, and thyme, completing the process. The second was two oil containers that Ánna had earmarked to fulfill an annual standing order from one of her cousins, Ánna the Athenian (*i Athinéa*)—whose moniker helped Eléni’s family distinguish between their Ánna (born in Messinía) and the other Ánna (born in Athens to Eléni’s brother)—Ánna the Athenian would come pick up her oil canisters as soon as she found the 60€ (30€ per container) for compensation. The extra cash would help out—if only in a small way—with a single-income budget for the month, which Ánna (a widow) invariably struggled to stretch. For Ánna to make ends meet is, Eléni insisted, another thing that (to use an imperative form in the Messinían fashion) *prépei*...“must.”



Figure 4-10. (Left) Having refilled the silver *roí*, Voúla then fills a bottle used for frying; (right) in her kitchen near Athens, Eléni’s daughter, Ánna, stores a year’s supply of oil harvested by Eléni.

As soon as I got the chance, I talked to Ánna the Athenian in her apartment north of downtown, curious to trace *our* oil (I started thinking of it this way) to her kitchen. Looking at me through the heavy smoke of a cigarette, she replied in that slightly whiny, infantile voice that signifies urbane femininity in Athens: “well look, I like it because you know what you’re eating. Unless you go to stores you know, you don’t know what they put in it. While this one, it’s pure. It *reminds* of (*thimízei*) the village.” Unsurprised by the

“pure and wholesome” line (I’d heard versions of it elsewhere), I returned to the verb, used in the intransitive form, in question,

Dionisios: what do you mean it *reminds* (*thimízei*)...?

Drawing another puff from her Marlboro, she shifted and repeated my question as though taking stock of her thoughts,

Ánna: what does it remind (*thimízei*)... [clicking tongue] in other words (*dhiladhí*), it has that flavor, it’s different, not like the commercial ones (*emporiká*). It reminds of...eh, of the way it is in the villages.

D: In Marathópolis...?

Á: Eh, yeah.

D: In other words (*dhiladhí*), what does it have?

Á: Eh, for example the way it was at the birth-house (*patrikó*) of my father when we used to go summers.

D: ...hm...

Á: Simply, it reminds of something different (*to káti állo*), it has that something else.

On the tram back to Piraeus I reflected on my frustration in the interview, stemming from the peculiar ability for the verb *thimízei* in Greek to signify two things: *recall* in the episodic sense (*it reminded me of that time in Paris*) but also *evocation* through resemblance (*it conjures images of Paris*).¹¹ This further spurred me to think about memory in food, especially David Sutton’s trenchant work on their intimate connection, forged by a food’s so-called synesthetic qualities: associations between bodily senses and key memories or impressions (Sutton 2000, 2001, 2010; see also Holtzman 2006 and Mintz 2002). That evening, I watched Ánna, *our* Ánna, make the same silent music in her modern kitchen as her mother did back in the village, tipping, thickening, conducting, and inviting the oil onto my food. Thankful for my company (her son was away doing his military service) she made the casual, but happy Greek dinner I’d encountered throughout Greece: two eggs with bright orange yolks, fried in olive oil with potatoes, served with crusty bread, a salad, feta cheese, and...olives...whose meat, sliced down to the pit with a pairing knife, were still melding in Eléni’s herbal, vinegary, oily marinade. It reminded me—and conjured impressions—of Eléni’s kitchen.

¹¹ The reflexive verb “is heard” (*akoúgetai*) is similar in that it signifies both social activeness (*is Sam “still around”?*) and the *reception* or *sensation* of sound or flavor (*the pepper is “audible” in this pasta*).



Figure 4-11. Mína rests in the porch of her grove cottage.

Equally far from Eléni's storehouse (and, coincidentally, about a half-hour walk from Ánna's apartment in Piraeus) lives a second woman, aged 78. Her small studio apartment is efficient and tidy. Within one city block, she has access to a supermarket, church, bank, and, above all, her daughter and son, and the restaurant that they own and operate. Dividing most of her time between her apartment, her children's restaurant, and her daughter's home—located right next door (the daughter owns both adjacent apartments)—she finds most everything she needs right there and only makes it to Messinía a few times a year out of a sense of duty.

It used to be that she would accompany her late husband every summer to escape the city heat and visit Marathópolis to stay in the cool grove cottage that his grandfather built over a century ago. Since her husband's death a few years ago, however, she can count only three reasons left to visit Gargaliánoi. The first is to check up on their old house in town, which is now padlocked and shuttered. The second is to tend to her husband's grave in the family plot. The third is to oversee the harvest, pressing, and delivery of olive oil. When I asked about the latter, she responded: "well, I must, my dear. The kids work. They want to but you see how they can't. What can they do?"¹²

It was late August when Mína visited her padlocked and shuttered home in Gargaliánoi and I found her in the basement storehouse amidst five barrels of oil. She had completed her list of projects for this brief visit and had one final task left to complete

¹² *E prépei, mána mou. Ta paidhiá dhoulévoune. Théloune allá na pou dhen boroúne...Ti na 'kánoune ki'ekéina?*

mere hours before returning to Piraeus—and, armed with a long-handled saucepan and a bright orange funnel, she got to work (Figure 4-12). Using the saucepan like a dipper, she pivoted from a barrel to an oil tin placed next to it on the floor, transporting quarts of oil at a time. To prevent any spillage as she decanted the pot, she held a soup dish under it at an angle, allowing runaway oil to pool and stream slowly and steadily over the brim and into the funnel. I watched as she did this repeatedly, leaning down, her thick arms jostling back and forth, moisture accumulating around her temples, her tired hands losing precision by the end of the hour. Renegade oil spread itself out on the floor and glistened, waiting to be sopped up by some crumpled paper towels or sucked into the fibers of a cheap *kourelouí* rug nearby. Wet-looking stains on the concrete floor suggested a long history of tired hands.



Figure 4-12. (*left*) Mína in her storehouse, with large barrels next to her; (*middle*) using a soup dish, she decants oil into a funnel; (*right*) three containers of olive oil ready for her son's restaurant in Piraeus.

Three canisters of oil would last until her next visit three months later at the commencement of harvest. Each canister weighing upwards of 30lbs (and containing ~4 ¼ gal.), I moved them for Mína to the front gate where they sat in the shade until loaded into the trunk of a hired car which, at a cost of €5 per vessel plus twice the cost of a bus ticket for her as a passenger, would unload her and the cargo right at the door of their destination 4 hours away in Piraeus—the restaurant.

Mína: Everyone says it is the best oil. They go crazy.

Dionisios: [referring to her son]. Does Pótis use it for cooking...or...?

M: No, no on the salads. They say we have the best salads.

D: And what do they use for cooking.

M: [conciliatory shrug]. Different oil.

It was earlier than expected when I saw her again in late October. Wearing a blue sweater, silver sneakers, and sweatpants under her skirt, she looked warm as she supervised a crew of three hired Bulgarian laborers. Spreading out their oil clothes and swatting at the trees with their *dhémples*, olives went flying. The crew finished in two days, but not before, with a gentler swat, Mína and the other woman on the crew tackled an olive tree bearing the *mavroliá* variety intended not for pressing into oil but for curing and eating. Reserving these dark black (almost blue!) plump olives in a separate bucket, and then funneling them into an old plastic jug with seawater, she regrouped in the basement of her padlocked and shuttered home in Gargaliánoi where she filled more canisters of oil and waited for them to be loaded into the trunk of a hired car—this time with the additional cargo of table olives delivered right to their destination in Piraeus—her home.

When I visited her children's' restaurant the following January, the foreign tourists that comprise most of the diners were few in number, but take-out and delivery orders from neighborhood locals kept the kitchen bustling. Sitting with Mína at the employees' table in the back, I was spoiled with all kinds of savory dishes of *Polítiki* cuisine (i.e., from Constantinople), plus one out of place (and out of season) traditional Greek *choriátiki* salad of peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and—the only things in season—feta cheese, olives, and a drizzle of olive oil and vinegar. While the olives were obviously purchased in bulk (I developed an eye for this, and her son told me as much), there was no need to ask about the provenance of the oil. Nor was there, the next day, any need to ask about the provenance of the olives served on my salad in the home of her daughter—they were the *mavroliá* variety. A faint glistening trail on the rim of the bowl revealed where a fingertip had wiped a stray drop that still clung to the spout of the *roí* (I had developed an eye for this too).

The domestic trajectory of olive oil does not end at the table. Of course, these women begin every recipe with a quarter-inch of oil in their pot or frying pan, after which it will rest and wait safely in the confines of the oven until the next batch of frying. And, of course, when this oil grows too dirty with fried food bits to be used again (about 3-6

fryings, thanks to masterful use of the slotted spoon), they will add it to a jar of oil reserved for use as fuel. And, naturally, every kitchen cook knows that they have the perfect substitute within arm's reach when they're out of butter or margarine. But there is so much more to it than that: I have witnessed the use of olive oil to lubricate fussy door hinges and machine parts; I watched a baby's diaper rash get swabbed with it; handmade bricks of soap containing it cluttered up shelves and storehouses; children screamed bloody murder as mothers and aunts used it to coax urchin spines and thorns out of stinging toes; *yiayíás* with heads of thick salt-and-pepper hair lauded it as the precursor to fancy hair conditioners; it drowned head lice and eyeballs in the punch line to stories that began with the words *I remember when growing up...*; and amidst all this, even I can recall—quite viscerally—the piercing sensations and popping sounds that warmed drops of oil made as they trickled unnaturally and traumatically into the deepest recess of my ear canal, administered (when I was a child) in the middle of a long and tearful night by my mother as she treated an ear infection the way she knew in the old country.

The virtuosity with which housekeepers utilize olive oil was displayed especially in the season after the harvest was done and it was too wet and chilly outside to do anything but sidle up to a fireplace and watch television. While the nightly news reported how cold and desperate Athenians (or black market vendors) were felling trees in public parks and breaking down old furniture to fuel their woodstoves (adding carcinogens and asthmogenic toxins to its already poisoned skies), Ánna showed me how to make kindling by rolling up newspaper and napkins she had saved from restaurant deliveries and soaking them in the *mourgha* of last year's oil—the sediment that eventually collects at the bottom of all containers of oil. She even drizzled some of the cloudy substance directly onto the logs, where it soon fizzed and enticed the flames. While Ánna had no option but to purchase firewood from a vendor (who told her they were oak logs from the north), her sister, Christína, like so many others residing in the Messinían countryside, was blessed with her own stock of olive branches freshly pruned in the harvest. Adding a drizzle of oil from the reserve in the frying pan, the flames licked at the fallen food bits and set the green wood bubbling and boiling.

Finally, if women like Ánna, Christína, Mína, and Eléni are economic and mindful about stray drops and the medicinal and functional applications of oil, then they

are equally conscientious about oil's spiritual role in both the home and the church. Located in the home of each of these women is a shrine called an *ikonostásio* (literally, an “icon station”), a religious feature that has been documented throughout Greece (e.g., Danforth 1989; Du Boulay 1986; Dubisch 1986b; Forbes 2007; Hamilakis 2007). While some shrines are elaborately carved wooden frames in which are placed religious icons, bottles of holy water, flowers from pilgrimage sites, and even nuptial crowns, other housekeepers do without the frame and opt to arrange these objects in some spot on the mantle or on a bookshelf (Figure 4-13, below; see also Figure 2-16, pg. 101, for a mantelpiece shrine). Either way, no household shrine is complete without a *kantili*—an oil lamp.



Figure 4-13. Household shrines. (*Left*) A traditional wooden shrine with a pendant oil lamp, hangs in the corner above a china cabinet; (*middle*) a tabletop lamp in a shrine on a bookshelf; (*right*) a simple lamp inside a decorative lantern sits prominently behind the kitchen stove.

The lamp in Eléni's home was of the tabletop style (there are also hanging lamps) and was illuminated every Saturday night around dinnertime (the eve of Sunday worship) and on the eve of all holy days throughout the year. Normally throughout the week, about an inch of murky water sat at the bottom of the cup, on top of which floated a blackened wick (*fytili*). When the time came to light it, Eléni (or her daughter, Voúla) would remove the glass insert from the lamp and replace the old water from the tap before adding olive oil directly from the kitchen *roí*. Then, discarding the old wick, she would take a new pink one and insert it into the *kantilithra*, the piece of metal and cork designed to keep the wick afloat (the wick is only ½ inch long). The result is an ingenious design—millenia

old—in which a healthy burning flame on a raft floats on a layer of oil, fueled through the wick, which then extinguishes itself once the oil has burned up and the wick sucks up water from the layer underneath. Amazingly, I encountered an innovation on this design in an Athens Metro station—of all places!—at a craft expo where the design of the so-called Economically Smart Kantilíthra replaces



Figure 4-14. Packaging for the Economically Smart Kantilíthra. The majuscule words next to the Greek flag read: **GREEK PRODUCT**.

the traditional gold-painted cork and metal floater with a clean-lined aluminum and rubber one, doing away with the disposable wick (*read* wasteful and expensive) with a simple reusable glass pipette that draws oil up through capillary action. “With the new economic *kantilíthra*,” the packaging explains, “you consume 100ml of oil in 108 hours,” compared to 48 with a “plain *kantilíthra*.” Time will tell if this re-design starts showing up in homes across Greece. Though, clearly, the designers believe that the commercial market is ripe for investing in a greener, cheaper, and modern *kantilíthra* for a traditional oil lamp.

Oil lamps also enjoy prominence as objects of mortuary culture. Zipping through Marathópolis in my moped and peering from behind the visor of my helmet, a sight that grew familiar to me was that of one or two women, usually older and wearing the black clothes of mourning, walking in the direction of the cemetery and lugging grocery bags. Sometimes, if the sun was just coming up or was about to set, I could spy a golden bottle-shaped silhouette through the tissue of plastic. Eventually, I came to participate in this same walk in Gargaliánoi when I accompanied Voúla or one of her sisters to the cemetery at the edge of town where their father (Eléni’s husband) was buried in 1992. Like many other tombs, the tomb of Ghiórgchos Vlachadámis (and his fellow occupants) is clad in marble and comes up to about waist level from the ground—a shrine of marble and glass caps the “head” of the grave and may contain many things (shrines for children’s tombs are exceptionally elaborate) but always a portrait of the dead, religious



Figure 4-15. Cemetery shrines. (*Left*) A single oil lamp burns within the shrine of this family burial; (*right*) two oil lamps flank this family shrine, which itself glows with the light of a third lamp.

icons, and...oil lamps. Sliding aside a heavy marble slab at the base of the shrine reveals a deep hidden compartment—I feel like Indiana Jones every time I do this—storing everything a conscientious attendant to the tomb would need, including briquettes of incense, matches/lighter, a small broom for tidying up the tomb, cloth or disposable towels, and...a bottle of olive oil. This is not the oil of kitchen drippings and food bits. It is pure and of table quality, drafted directly from the barrel in the storehouse like that for distant relatives.

The importance of oil for the grave was made clear to me one day when Eléni asked me to deliver a bottle of oil to her sister, Fofó, in Marathópolis while I would be visiting there. This liter of oil, she helped me understand, does double duty. Eléni rarely goes to Marathópolis (much less finds the energy to trek out to its cemetery) so much of the obligation of tending to the family plots falls on her sister. However, her sister does not have a ready oil source of her own (she and her husband were considered poor, though they did well by opening a store in the village). Therefore, Eléni’s delivery of oil to her sister does double duty. It fulfills a familial obligation to her deprived sister who cannot, herself supply oil for the grave, but also represents her own commitment, as she puts it, “to honor” (*na timíso*) and care for the resting places of her parents and deceased relatives remotely. Thus, especially where graves are concerned, the exchange of oil

satisfies several familial obligation(s)—both those between living kindred, and those between the living and the dead.

One final and important spiritual exchange of olive oil concerns the gift of olive oil to the church. Particularly devout housekeepers (which means most of the older generation), take it upon themselves to contribute time and certain (comestible) goods to their local parish. The network of women involved with a church regularly is relatively small—these are the women who organize an occasional charitable event (*filóptochos*) or undertake the sprucing up and decoration of the church on certain feast days. However, the contribution of three food substances in particular—wine, bread and oil—is less collaborative and more contingent on individual household relationships to the Church, a fact that is reflected in the spiritual tradeoff expected for such gifts. When asked why they give to the church, many explain, “it is for the good,”¹³ and “because it is right,”¹⁴ and that they do it “so [they] help”¹⁵ the church, and by extension, the broader community.

Social obligations also come into play. On more than one occasion, for example, Fofó, Eléni’s sister, told me that the priest of Marathópolis asked her personally to make some loaves of leavened bread as he feared a low supply. Yet, while most women cite piety or social obligation as the reason for gifting food substances to the church, the voluntary gifting of wine or bread on the part of these women almost always accompanied a spiritual request in return. These requests were typically for prayers that either bless certain family members (called *Ypér Ygheías*, “For the Health”) or were on behalf of the soul of deceased ones (called *Ypér Anapáfseos*, “For the Repose”). Gifts and requests of this type surge during



Figure 4-16. Loaves of Prósforo (offering) made by Eléni with the special stamp symbolizing Christ.

¹³ *eínai ghiá to kaló*

¹⁴ *ghiati eínai sostó*

¹⁵ *ghiá na voithísoume*

important holy days and feast days, or at places of pilgrimage. Submitted on slips of scrap paper or even on specially designed forms—you can download these online—long lists of names are read out loud during a prayer in the liturgy when Holy Communion is being prepared and oftentimes sound like a veritable reading of a household’s descent lines. Eléni, ever the matriarch, always prepared her prayer lists by Saturday night and listed all four daughters, her granddaughter, her three grandsons, her two great-grandsons, and all attached spouses. With a loaf of bread and a list of names, she set out

on Sunday mornings to lobby on behalf of her family’s spiritual interests.

Nevertheless, the first gifts, wine and bread, work their symbolic magic through collective ingestion, through commensality. Wine takes the least effort since it entails procuring and giving to the church certain varietals obtained from a short list of vendors. This gifted, usually sweet, wine is the one used in the rite of Holy Communion, in which it is consecrated and transformed into the literal blood of Christ for worshippers to consume (see **Ch. 5**). The second gift, bread, is a plain, circular, leavened loaf made of flour, water, salt and yeast (it has no flavor, save for whatever mild sourness the yeast



Figure 4-17. Loaves given by housewives to the church rest on a table, while a bottle of gifted oil can be spied just left of the doorway.

imparts), on top of which is imprinted a stamp bearing a symbolic representation of Orthodox cosmology (Figure 4-16). Although much more can be said about this so-called “offering”—its name, *prósforo*, literally means “towards” or “forwards” (*pros-*) and “bring” (*-féro*)—so, “[thing] brought forward”—suffice it to say here that every segment of each loaf gifted by women to the church is used in some way, either in making Holy Communion (consecrated as the body of Christ) or as *antídhoro*, pieces of bread blessed and distributed to all congregates in the church. In sum, both the gifts of wine and

bread—so called “Honorable Gifts” (*Tímia Dhóra*)—are given to the Church for every churchgoer to consume as a group in one way or another: they are both comestible and commensal. Not so for gifts of olive oil.

Gifts of olive oil are given in exchange for blessing and intervention, though its symbolic use is quite different. Voúla, the most religiously devout of my friends, always took a one-liter bottle when visiting the Sepetó Convent; Mína gave a small bottle to the *presvytéra* (the wife of the priest, a position that assumes certain obligations) of her church in Piraeus; and summertime worshippers added bottles of all shapes and sizes to a growing collection for the countryside chapel celebrating the feast of the Virgin Mary, sometimes with notes appealing for certain prayers—but sometimes not. In all these instances, oil has one particular destiny: oil lamps. Whereas wine and bread are comestible gifts intended for the commensality of all congregates (via Holy Communion), olive oil is intended to fuel the countless oil lamps that populate churches, chapels, and convents, just as it was when the Hebrews devoted their first-press of oil to priests for fueling the Menorah (Porter 2008).

The spiritual use of oil in this way does not contribute to socio-spiritual relations in the church through commensality and bodily ingestion, but the contributions of oil from particular households nonetheless get collectivized—the bottles are never marked—and enter a general pool for use in illuminating the Church. In this sense, oil’s spiritual connection to the divine functions not through the body, but outside of it. Moreover, it is a substance that, from a peculiarly Mediterranean view of physics, is an in-between state



Figure 4-18. Gifts of oil fuel church lamps for divinities like the Theotókos with Christ-child.

of matter. As Anne Meneley explores in her discussion of historical Mediterranean perceptions about oil and its properties:

in order to produce light, olive oil must change its form. In fact...a key [property] of olive oil is combustibility. It is a fluid, a material, and through the process of combustion, becomes dematerialized to form light and smoke....One might argue that in an oil lamp, oil is halfway between thing and energy, between liquid and light, evoking something like a merging the [*sic*] material and the transcendent. (Meneley 2008a:312)

Indeed, in an Orthodox tradition where Christ is, himself, light and illumination (“I am the light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12)), the power of oil to keep a flame resonates deeply, especially because fire is somehow fueled by its opposite, liquid.¹⁶ Is it any wonder that in the most venerated Greek churches, an oil lamp is posted at every saint’s icon, every archway overhead, and, as discussed in **Ch. 6**, the exalted Holy Light on the Altar itself? The gift of oil bears greater significance if we consider how olive oil symbolizes wealth (**Ch. 7**). As a cognate of wealth or fortune, women’s gifts of family-made oil to the Church ties their household into cyclical relations of tithing and exchange, in which the church intercedes on behalf of a household with prayers, and the household—through family-made oil—perpetuates the light (literally and metaphorically) of spiritual life.

Comments

In sum, if family-based oleiculture begins in the grove but arrives in the home, it is because of women like Eléni and Mína, who, although they live in disparate landscapes and live different lifestyles, share two things in common. The first is that these two women happen to be related by marriage—they are co-brides (their husbands were brothers), a fact that is of little consequence here but bears mentioning because they own adjacent olive groves. More important, however, these two women—indeed all the women presented here—perform what they feel are, in their own way, certain imperatives as *noikokyrés*, a term that literally means “ladies of the house” (from *en-* “in” + *oikos*

¹⁶ This view must be rooted in the Aristotelian cosmology that dominated early medicine and alchemy in medieval Europe and the Middle East through to today, in which four elements could combine, divide, and transform in certain, powerful ways.

“house” + *kyrá* “lady”) but is best connoted as “*keepers* of the house.” Women like Eléni and Mína, by ensuring that every member of a household has enough olive oil for household use, but also that deceased members of the family are honored with a burning flame (Alexiou 2002; Danforth 1982; Håland 2014; Panourgiá 1995), and that entreaties on behalf of all family members are made to the divine through gifts of oil to the Church, are not merely social distributors of olive oil but also its social integrators.

Ushering oil and olives into the domain of the domestic and consumable, they



Figure 4-19. Eléni and Mína are co-brides and mediators. Here, they inspect their adjacent groves.

process an inventory of ripe oil like stock managers; they transmit it to members of younger generations; they remember the dead with it; they seamlessly convert it from a food into a medicine and into a tool; they exchange bottles for spiritual security; they convert waste into warmth; and like alchemists, they even metamorphose the raw and inedible into the expensive and craveable. These are not mere chores. They are imperative (“It must, it must!”) and tie feminine gender roles interdependently with the continuity of daily life on earthly, spiritual, material, monetary, and bodily planes. As

noikokyrés, such women manage boundaries and nudge matter into place. They are mediators.

In her aptly titled article on rural Greek women, Jill Dubisch explains how “Culture Enters through the Kitchen”:

Rather than being equated in a simple fashion with one side of [nature/culture] oppositions, women are concerned with maintaining boundaries, mediating between realms, and transforming substances suitable for one realm into those proper for another. (Dubisch 1986a:207)

Noikokyrés “nudge” olive culture between the domains of the raw and the cooked (table olives), the dwellings of earthly families and spiritual families (oil lamps), the spaces of the domestic versus the agricultural (the storehouse), and even the scapes of the city and the village (comestible memory). Oil also fulfills obligations within their households (Eléni and her daughters) but also *between* them (Eléni and her sister). Even when money comes into the picture, as when oil is commodified from the storehouse into tins for direct sale between family members (the two Ánnas), or from the storehouse and onto menus (Mína and her son’s restaurant), it is women who do it. Analytically, then, we should look not at how women are consolidated with nature *or* culture, but as the catalytic agent between the two. The same can be said for the model propagated by the canonic honor/shame paradigm that women are categorically subordinated as agents of shame (and men of honor) rather than as negotiators or brokers in highly gendered but personally felt processes of mediating these values. Eléni and others generate and maintain—even lubricate—social relations in precisely the way men do not. If women are mediators, then oil is a significant medium in their repertoire.

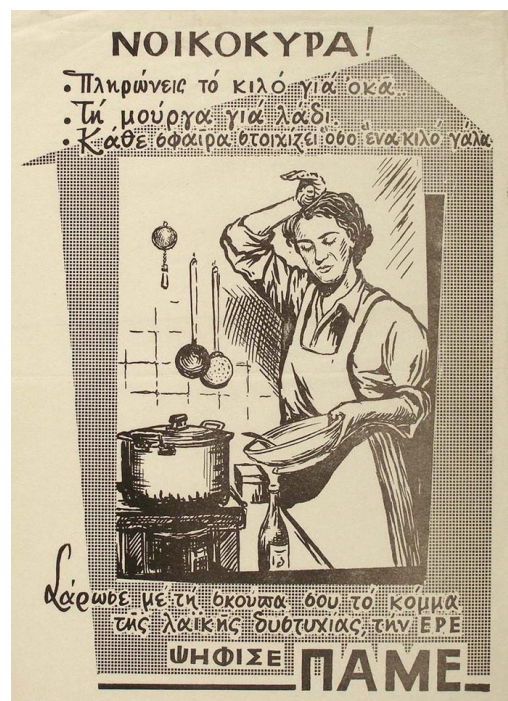


Figure 4-20. A ca. 1952 political poster urging beleaguered housewives to vote for the United Democratic Left party. The top lines read: *NOIKOKYRA!* / You pay one okka [1.282 kilos] for a kilo / [and] oil for oil dregs. (Source: www.thetoc.gr/magazine/i-istoria-tis-proeklogikis-afisas)

The exception to this is when olive oil is sold in the oil press directly to middlemen for mass-market distribution. In these cases, gender roles do not come into play so much as the roles inherent to property and ownership, for it is in this type of exchange that Messinians draw a line between that which is *family* olive oil (oil used in the creation of social/spiritual relations) and that which is a tradable asset (surplus oil). The latter, a stockpile, gets liquidated for cash in hand. In such a transaction oil is stripped of associations to a particular family and so of its capacity, therefore, to act as a gift and extension of the self. Yet, the anonymization and collectivization that it undergoes in the vat of a merchant middleman is not so different from the anonymization and collectivization it undergoes in the church reserve of the priest: the priest is a kind of middleman through which the family receives spiritual profit, while the merchant profits the family through access to a global money market. From this, some implications follow concerning the commensal or collective aspects of oil and identity.

THE OLEI-RITUAL

Conclusion

From this ethnographic survey of the social life of olive culture—cultivating, milling, and consumption—many conclusions follow concerning this process's relationship to kinship and Greek society. The first concerns the collectivization (and anonymization) of family-made oil in religious and commercial contexts. In the case of the former, one might hypothesize that the collectivization of family oils in the church (the gifting of household oil for ceremonial uses) reinforces a collective spiritual identity—pure essences uniting in the house of God—in a kind of liquid totemism (consider Émile Durkheim or Claude Lévi-Strauss). Yet, the ethnographic evidence simply doesn't support such an idea. In fact, it reiterates the centrality of the Eucharistic substances of wine and bread in establishing a sense of spiritual communion, and suggests that gifts of olive oil secure a family's self-interests rather than some greater good of the community.

Does the same ring true when selling family-made oil into the international commodity chain? Does pooling it with the oil of other Messinians and even of other Greeks heighten or undermine a collective sense of ethnic or national unity? On one hand, the selling of family-made oil to market middlemen resembles similar exchanges with the church in that it gets pooled, collectivized, and anonymized. Indeed, so alienated is this oil from identifiability that even its Greek origins become inscrutable when it is exported and mingled in Italian bottling plants with oils from other circum-Mediterranean countries, only to reach foreign consumers under Italian labels (Mueller 2011). Although one might conclude that this neuters any connection to nationalism, a number of olive-centric discourses within Greece suggest otherwise: in tourism, architecture, education, and other modes of representation in Greece, olive oil and olive culture are construed through the vocabularies of temporal and spatial Hellenism. In the first instance, olive culture gets refracted through a lens that perceives it as simultaneously a link to yesteryear (and even antiquity) but also to the scientific future. In the second instance, it is charted onto relational maps of locality. Although none of my Messinian informants

made explicit use of the idiom of *terroir*—the notion that a particular comestible, like wine or cheese, is imbued with traits from the local environment in which it is made—it is worth noting that the two informants who did were Athenian. For them, Messinía was “blessed” and reminded them “of the way it is in the villages,” impressions that, like *terroir*, imply a model that ascribes phenotypic difference, (potentially including that of humans), as materially based in “place” (Bassett et al. 2007; Besky 2014; Charters et al. 2017; Demossier 2011; Halvaksz 2013; Parker 2015). Within these outliers, though, overwhelming evidence points to a peculiar Greek version of *terroir* in the intense way in which olive culture helps relate and distinguish between two polar landscapes of the Greek nation-state: those of folk localism and of modern cosmopolitanism. These contradictory and relational spaces add geographical texture to the binary that Michael Herzfeld (1987a, 1991) and others (e.g., Hamilakis 2003, 2007; Yalouri 2001) characterize as central to Greek national consciousness, a political subjectivity suspended between two poles stretched between Europe and Orient. Specifically, this binary sets the stereotype of *romiosíni* in opposition to the stereotype of *hellenism*. *Romiosíni* identifies the insider view of Greek culture, including Byzantine and Ottoman history, and its references to the Orient and multiculturalism dominate popular Greek culture and popular self-representations of “low Greece.” On the other hand, *hellenism* connotes the globalized image of Greek culture, the idealization of pure ancient Greeks by Westerners, an imported (one might even say “white-washed”) view of “high Greece.” Olive-centric discourse, composed by images of oil, trees, groves, machines both obsolete and cutting-edge, farmers both old and young, and women wearing either aprons or lab-coats, evokes contrasting meanings of quaintness and modernity, depending on their context, meanings that become shorthand “of our place” (*tou tóπου mas*) as a geography of co-incidence. In urban centers, oleiculture gets objectified into artifacts of tradition; in the province, it evokes Greece’s place among the cosmopolitan world.

The geography of co-incidence that constitutes modern Greece is reinforced in other ways too, at least where olive culture is concerned (for an excellent treatise on Greece as coincidentally modern and ancient vis-à-vis archaeology, see Hamilakis 2003). Indeed, the annual rite of vacation (*paratherismós*)—although its roots in wheat harvesting might have been forgotten in the south of Greece—is regarded as a special

retreat precisely because it is framed as a withdrawal from built municipal environments. The same polarity is assumed in the transmission of olive oil from the countryside of Messinía (the so-called “boundless grove”) to the city. Thus, every time Eléni or Mína observe the imperative to deliver oil to relatives in Athens, they not only link families separated by great distance but also bridge two landscapes regarded as worlds apart.¹ Therefore, although the commodification and popular consumption of oil does not raise overt nationalistic fervor in Messinía (the way that, for example, soccer does), its invocation in commercial discourse both structures and is structured by the duality that constitutes Greek national consciousness.

A second item worth noting is that, despite how all-encompassing olive culture is in Messinía, outside forces to a great extent shape the parameters of this experience. For instance, in the space of oil mills, industrial byproducts and waste (mostly in the form of pomace, pit solids, and vegetable water) determine the level of waste management and/or refinement needed to meet government regulation, while temperature, pH-level, and the type of technology used in milling qualify (or disqualify!) an oil from receiving a commercially certified grade of, for example, “extra virgin, cold press.” In this respect, the technical configuration of any mill in Messinía is the artifact of industrial standardization, consumer taste, and bureaucratic oversight. Furthermore, it is important to note that these pressures are international in scope and echo Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) formulation of distinct but concurrent global “scapes”—from Italian-made machines and critical scientific panels that grade oil on its quality (technoscape), to the status afforded to authentic, traditional superfoods by consumers (ideoscape) and the clientele and revenue that these beliefs draw in the market (financescape), even farmers uninterested in entering the global market end up producing and consuming an oil that has been globally imagined by virtue of the fact that these global forces converge in the technical configuration of mills and markets.

Yet, despite such globalizing forms, Messinians protect the space of oil mills with their own folk talismans, harvest groves with their own genres of labor arrangements, and

¹ Equally implicated in this is the Mediterranean Diet, especially given the central role that oil is thought to play in it, meriting its own analysis of constructions of oppositional locality (Mediterranean/non-Mediterranean) and knowledge (Western biomedicine/ traditional diet).

consume oil as only they know how to do. Olive culture configures much of what is taken for granted in Messinía, like the calendric cycle and the ecology generated by farmers who weave between agricultural landscapes, mills, and urban environments as a matter of course. This brings us to the final conclusion evident in the ethnography: olive culture in Messinía is a total ritual process. Indeed, the story of olive oil from the grove to the home can—and should—be theorized as a tripartite ritual process broken down into (1) preliminal, (2) liminal, and (3) post-liminal phases where the material processing of olives is accompanied by correspondences in Messinían kinship in oil's (1) cultivation, (2) pressing, and (3) transmission and consumption.

Cultivation of the olive grove entails deconstruction and segregation. As the Messinians say, the harvest cuts, melts, and undoes the body. Like tonsuring, it marks the body and the mind of those doing the harvesting. The toll it takes, expressed by Messinians through the idiom of pain characterizes the sensorial (what Turner called the *orectic*) aspect of the ritual symbol. Harvesting discriminates women as sackers, and men as cutters; feminine roles are to be performed low to the ground; masculine ones up in the canopy. The harvest is backbreaking. It is also exclusive. The grove, whose symbolic associations as a distinct space outside the ordinary, is the setting for various calendric rites of separation: summer vacation, the commencement of Lent, Easter, the harvest. The latter most dramatizes the grove's purpose as a space of renewal; everyday affairs are put on hold, people withdraw from paid work, and society segregates itself into family units, based on agnatic or affinal kinship. In other words, every year Messinians observe a practice wherein they draw boundaries of relatedness, discriminating between those who are co-kinsmen (eligible co-harvesters) and those who, in any other context might be a mundane coworker or neighbor, are ineligible to participate as co-harvesters. Even in nostalgic visions of the *dhaneikariés* system, in which it is said two unrelated households collaborated to harvest each other's grove, co-harvesters were implicated as potential candidates for marriage or god-parentage. Thus, as with other preliminal rites of segregation, participation in the harvest complies with certain criteria of membership based on relatedness and subdivided by gender.

At first blush, foreign contractual laborers challenge this model. How can I argue that the harvest encompasses a phase of rigid social segregation if much of the harvest is

outsourced to foreigners? In one respect, these laborers are already assigned a status outside the realm of Greek sociality, existing as they do so far beyond the margins of the *ethnos* (Bulgarians, Albanians, Pakistanis, Afghans, etc.) that many are even racialized as “black.” Furthermore, as I have already argued (see pg. 117), such foreign workers are contracted not for oil but for cash, effectively excluding them from any enduring relationships built on obligation: upon payment they are dismissed, though the process continues nonetheless for its true participants until ritual consummation.

Liminality is achieved in the oil mill, a space in which inheres the power to transform states of matter and the social value of oil itself. Like churches, mills are sites of transubstantiation, though instead of an altar there is a mechanical marvel with similar abilities to take the mundane and earthy and rarefy it into a substance of liquid gold—indeed, of virginity. Also in this space merge the forces of the physical realm with those of the metaphysical—as Byzantine icons watch over test tubes and talismans from the garden protect space-age machinery—so that the process of extraction is achieved through the communion of science and tradition rather than their segregation. The stimuli of heat, taste, sight, and smell also mingle, creating a space unlike any other, imbued by Messinians with sentiments and memories, both lived and imaginary, that engross the senses. It is a special place and a special time. Commensality, sharing of one’s oil and distributing drinks with others, casts aside the pretense of obligation and formality, making room so that the state of anticipation (a kind of in-betweeness) that includes all who are present. Indeed, because the phase of pressing is the only segment of the ritual not under the immediate ownership of the farming family (in the majority of cases), it requires not only personal oversight but also a level of trust and camaraderie between the farming family and the mill operators. Theirs is more a complementary relationship than a patron/client one. Most importantly, when Messinians enter the office of the mill owner, tethered by phone to an invisible buyer in Athens, their oil stands at the threshold dividing household oil from commoditized oil, the limen between that which is “us” and that which is of the outside world.

Finally, in the post-liminal phase, oil is integrated into—and integrates—key aspects of Messinian life. It feeds the lines of kinship near and far, connecting the kitchens of mothers and daughters through what they keep in their pantry and how they

apply it. It drips into every aspect of life in one way or another—it goes into a container as a simple liquid but every time it comes out can metamorphose into something different: medicine, food, lubrication, hygiene product, fuel, cosmetic. Or it comes out as a gift to garner spiritual favor for the household, tying the home to the church and the church to the divine through its ability to illuminate. That same illumination, in turn, honors the obligation of the living to commemorate the dead, connecting the members within a household on both sides of the grave. It also honors obligations, which, though they cross outside the bounds of a household, as among cousins or in-laws, cannot be expunged with cash because they are debts rooted in kinship. What is more, it generates new bonds, as that one deemed sacred between godparent and godchild, linking their households in kinship too (**Ch. 6**). Olive oil is, in short, a substance of relatedness.

From the grove, to the press, and to the storehouse, the social life of olive oil constitutes a ritual process practiced by tens of thousands of Messinían families. Experiencing this ritual with but a handful of them, its ability to generate or reiterate social relations is apparent. Olive culture—the symbol system encompassing the social life of olive oil—shapes the rhythms and relationships that constitute a vast part of everyday Messinían life. Through olive culture are labor transactions, religious feasts, and familial exchanges animated and given aspects of significance. It reifies the criteria with which landscapes, human anatomy, gender roles, and other races are classified. For everyone I worked with olive culture is not so much a way of life as it is life itself. As Kyra-Dóra might say, understanding how “to do olives” is to understand how “to do Messinía.”

SECTION II: THE MESSINÍAN BODY

Introduction

If the first half of this dissertation argues for a social “body” of olive oil—via its birth and circulation—then this half focuses on olive oil in the social body. We specifically turn our attention to the cultural understanding of the human body in Messinía and the ways that oil and other substances naturalize and lend material reality to indigenous theories of physiology and states of matter. As such, this section explores the nature of substance exchanges that frame symbolic constructions of (1) individual bodily selves and (2) bodily interrelatedness.

Regarding individual bodies, Chapter Five—titled “Bodies Possessed and Contained”—outlines the ways in which Messinians implicitly perceive the human body as a vessel unit or container into which substances or energies can flow, but also from which they can be emitted, both with great consequence for physical and spiritual wellbeing. Having outlined this “economy of containment,” Chapter Six demonstrates, through related case studies, comportment that reinforces or strips the body of its integrity and boundaries, creating relations between persons.

Taken together, both of these chapters show the Messinian body to be, among other things, a religious body, a social body, and a medical body all wrapped in one. Its defining characteristic, however, is the cultural presumption that it functions as a container whose contents, both physical and metaphysical, are constantly under threat of spilling from within or spoiling from without, thanks to foreign agents. As we will eventually see, the Messinian body contains and protects bodily properties that make up one’s personality and personhood. Consequently, the defense of integrity, in all its physical and social dimensions, is of the utmost moral imperative. As it turns out, all this is generated through flows of various substances—some mundane, some divine—but of which one principal essence is olive oil.

BODIES POSSESSED AND CONTAINED

Chapter 5

Introduction

The rush of a waterfall could be heard in the valley below as we climbed the steps to the convent. The building was impressive. Its stone and wood architecture, enveloped on one side by scrub and cedars, appeared under the evening sky mere inches from sliding down the mountainside into which it was built. Through the main gateway and up a well-worn staircase we passed into a small courtyard where, along with others, we waited for the chapel doors to open so we could meet with Pappoúli. He could answer all my questions, personal or spiritual, I was told. This is why we drove an hour north along the coast of Messinía before turning up into the mountains for another hour of nauseating, unsettling roads. This same trip is undertaken by many faithful who turn for spiritual counseling to the sweet old man who, although his real name is Father Ghiórgchos, is called by everyone Pappoúli (grand-daddy). At the convent of Sepetó, Pappoúli is both the *ghérontas*, the religious minister of the convent's services, and the *pnevmatikós*, the spiritual counselor who administers the Sacrament of Confession. It was for Confession that we were now waiting.

Voúla takes this trip every month or so, mostly when she feels the need. Nearing the age of forty, she has found in the past five years a new interest in leading a more religious life because “there are more important things we ought to be thinking about.”¹ Unmarried and the youngest of four daughters, she lives with her elderly mother (Eléni) and works full time at an opticians shop. Voúla's friends characterize her as religious, though not a zealot or proselytizer, and they have occasionally accepted invitations to join her in visiting Pappoúli at Sepetó. At her urging, I agreed too, curious to understand her enthusiasm. When the doors were finally opened by a capable looking nun

¹ *Éinai pio simantiká prághmata pou prépei na skeftómaste.*

announcing Pappoúlis's readiness, the eleven visitors waited to take their turn. Voúla thought it best to go before me so as to offer Pappoúli an introduction. The wait gave me time to take stock of the other visitors. Six women, five men. None over the age of 45, I think. In fact, there seemed to be two young couples in their thirties, neatly dressed, ready to confess. The wait also gave me time to take stock of the questions I wanted to ask—personal or spiritual? Or ethnographic?

After about ten minutes Voúla stepped out, beaming, and held the heavy door open for me. Inside, the church was devoid of electricity and the form of the bearded man before me was softened by the dim glow of candles and oil lamps. Smiling politely, I sat in the chair opposite him, trying to recall all the rules of Church etiquette. Despite my apprehension, his manner was calming, and his voice more so. After asking me to expand on Voúla's introduction—do I find anthropology useful? Is there a Greek Orthodox church where I live? Am I still unmarried because of my studies?—he asked me what I would like to talk about. After some pause, I abandoned a deliberate line of questioning and let myself “go with the flow.”

Dionisios: I've been having dreams lately...

Pappoúli: [interrupting and waving his hand gently]—do not worry about these things. It is natural for a man your age to think about such things.

D: No, no...I don't mean those kinds. I mean macabre dreams.

P: [silent nod]

D: People...my people, that they have died, or some such. I see them as if they have died.

P: [pause]—when is the last time you received Communion?

D: [taking a thoughtful, nervous breath]—maybe a year...or thereabouts?...Maybe last Easter?

P: [warmly]—Well, it is important for you to look after your soul and your body. Satan has ways of confusing us and upsetting us. Do you wear a cross? It does good to wear a cross for the blessing and protection of God, my child. And I will pray for you and I want you to fast and prepare for Communion. It is a blessing. And these dreams mean nothing but that we need to be careful from Satan, not giving Satan a margin (*perithório*) to work...[looking empathetically at me]

D: Yes, I understand.

(I didn't understand).

P: Are you ready for us to pray?

D: Yes.

The hem of his brocaded robes fell to the floor as he stood up. To my surprise, he then took his *epitrachilion*—the ornate stole worn around a priest's neck signifying his divine

investment—and covered my head with it. Bowing under the heavy fabric, I felt his palm rest on the crown of my head as he supplicated God “for the blessing and protection of His servant, Dhionýsios.”

As we will see in this chapter, Voúla and other Messinían friends incorporated me in dramas of the body in which certain key elements kept playing a role. At the convent of Sepetó, the elements seem incidental—doors, candles, lamps, fasting, covering, Communion, body, margin, soul. Meaningless by themselves, when put together in a framework they form an integrated, if invisible, network of meaning, invisible also to Voúla and others in some ways, though no less real or intuitive. In fact, they play a supporting role in the social life of olive oil even when its presence is not dramatically visible. Altogether, they comprise elements of a cosmological order at the center of which is the divide between the material and the immaterial universe, perfectly ensconced in the divine but fragile union of the human body and soul. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the priest’s covering on my head, the prescription to fast and receive Communion, even the waterfall beyond the monastery gates, add up to a unique total that captured in one evening the logic by which my Messinían friends understand the multidimensional nature of the human body and the things connected to it. This chapter examines three instances of spiritual life—Holy Communion, religious fasting, and the evil eye. While Communion has nothing to do with olive oil per se, it has everything to do with managing flow. Altogether, these cases help us construct a Messinían theory of body comprising two tenets. First, these cases show how Messinians characterize the body as being of an extremely porous and conductive nature. Second, they demonstrate that Messinians approach moral questions of the body with an implied “economy of containment.” Altogether, this chapter illustrates an assumed division between body and soul, and the margin (*perithório*) inherent to that divide. The cases offered here help explain the sentiment and logic behind Pappoúlis’s advice at Sepetó, and perhaps the subsequent tranquility of my dreams.

Holy Communion: Containment and Emission

*“Mamá, I stepped on a thorn!”*² cried Chrístos, scrunching his face in distress. Turning our attention toward his cry and away from the feast that lay before us—spinach pie, skewered chicken *souvláki*, village salad, potato fries, grilled pork chops, roasted potatoes, pasta salad, and hunks of feta—we watched the eight-year old boy toddle cautiously towards his mother, wary that any misstep in his Spiderman flip-flops would drive another prick into his toe. He settled in a chair so that Soúla, his mother, could extract the thistle. Sitting at the table were four generations: eight-year old Chrístos and his older brother; his father, mother and her cousins; his grandmother and her two sisters; and his great-grandmother, Eléni, the matriarch of the family. Satisfied that this, too, would pass, Chrístos’s great-aunts and cousins comforted him collectively and turned their attention back to the food, all except for Chrístos’s great-grandmother.



Figure 5-1. Does this small wound compromise the integrity of Communion?

Craning her neck to observe the extraction, Eléni’s gaze grew reproachful until she suddenly sputtered—“Em, you’re not careful! People don’t play like that. And it’s a shame!”³ Realizing the shame to which Eléni was referring, Voúla took new interest in the sad toe. “Did it bleed?”⁴ she inquired. The question earned everyone’s renewed attention. The response was about to draw the table into a lively and eye-opening debate: “A little.”⁵ As I explain below, the symbolic ramifications of this debate reveal fundamental assumptions about the nature of the body for Eléni and others, chiefly, in how it is perceived as capable of receiving, but also losing spiritual substances.

² *Mamá, pátisa agkáthi!*

³ *Em, dhén proséchis! Dhe paízoun étsi. Ki’eínai amartía!*

⁴ *Mátose?*

⁵ *Lígho*

The day was August 15, the holy feast day of the Dormition of the Theotókos (*Koimisis tis Theotókou*), the day commemorating the physical death (spiritually, the *sleep*) of Mary the Bearer of Christ and her ascent to Heaven.⁶ After Easter, it is the most celebrated feast-day of the year and marks a time when three things happen. First, it marks the height of the summer season when Messinians dodge the hellishness of urban asphalt and concrete in the dog days of summer to spend several weeks in their rural (especially if seaside!) homes (see **Ch. 2** about the summer season). In a notorious mass exodus, Athenians also take their vacation time during the days immediately before and after the feast, shutting down businesses and crowding roads to a standstill to enjoy their time resting and reconnecting with family and friends back in the village. Secondly, the feast comprises a good-humored holiday when households gather together in the afternoon, often with extended families, over abundant food, drink, song, and, if spirits are high, even dancing. In the evening, these same kin may go out for dinner and dessert, inviting friends along, especially when younger Messinians extend the celebration into the bars and clubs until the morning hours. For people named María/Mários, Panaghiótis/Panaghióta, or another variant (feminine or masculine) of the of the Virgin Mary's name (she is usually called the All-Holy, *Panaghía*), the food and hospitality are of double importance—in fact, this was precisely the occasion for the present feast, hosted by Ánna for her teenage son, Panaghiótis, whom we all greeted and toasted at the table. Finally—and most pertinent to the question of the pricked toe—the Dormition feast marks the end of a two-week period of religious fasting which culminates in receiving Holy Communion.

Both Christos and his older brother, Michális, partook of Communion earlier that morning. In fact, nearly everyone at the table, myself included, did what was required to prepare for the most common sacrament of Greek Orthodoxy. Briefly, Holy Communion commemorates the Last Supper in which Christ offers himself as the sacrifice for humanity's salvation. In Orthodox doctrine and in everyday Sunday worship, the ritual preparation and distribution of Communion is the centerpiece of the Church's function (the Divine Liturgy). Communion is the mixture of two elements, which, according to

⁶ In Anglophone Orthodoxy, the day is also called the Assumption of the Theotókos, for she was *assumed* into heaven in all her physical and spiritual essence.

scripture, is what Christ gave to his disciples in lieu of the traditional Jewish Seder: bread (as body) and wine (as blood):

Take, eat, this is my Body, which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink of it all of you; this is my Blood of the new Covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

*(The Divine Liturgy of
St. John Chrysostom)*

Λάβετε, φάγετε, τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα, τὸ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κλώμενον, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες, τοῦτό ἐστὶ τὸ αἷμά μου, τὸ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

*(Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ
Αγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου)*

When ingested, Holy Communion is the act of consuming the actual transubstantiated body and blood of Christ. Holy Communion (*Theía Koinonía*), therefore, is the most sacred practice in Orthodox worship and a blessing to one's overall wellbeing.

This meaning is abundantly clear to worshippers like Eléni and Voúla. What was less clear to everyone at the table, however, was whether or not the thorn that had pricked Christos's toe had negatively affected the Communion he received mere hours ago. Stooping down to assess the wound for herself, great-aunt Voúla, in a more nurturing and teacherly tone than Eléni's reproachful one, explained to the young boy that, "if one bleeds it's not good if he Communed."⁷ Christína, Christos's grandmother, wanting to make sure they weren't making a fuss over nothing, interjected: "sure, but it's one thing to be punctured and another to bleed."⁸ Soúla, Voúla, and Christína, having each observed the microscopic wound, concluded that, yes, a droplet of blood had "likely"

⁷ *Áma matósei kaneís dhen káneí afoú koinónise*. The regular Greek verb *koinonó* lacks a perfect English equivalent. As an intransitive verb, it connotes receiving the sacrament of Communion; e.g., "*koinónisa símera*" (I [received Communion] today.). As a transitive verb, it connotes administration of Communion, as a priest might do; e.g., "*koinónisa tous pistoús símera*." (I [administered Communion] to the faithful today.). Meanwhile, the regular noun *koinonía* refers not only to the sacrament of Communion, but also to society, fellowship, and philosophical *comunitas*. Given the nuanced richness of this word, I adapt and employ the English "to Commune" in uppercase to refer to the reception/administration of the Sacrament, and the lowercase "to commune" to explore and connote the full non-sacramental reach of interpreting "Koinonía."

⁸ *Entáxi, allá állo na tripitheís kai állo na matóseis*.

(*málon*) escaped the punctured skin. Consequently, great-grandmother Eléni's reproach was justified: the spiritual and physical benefits of Communion had been compromised.

The question surrounding the bleeding toe compelled me, if nervously, to ask about a more delicate issue that women must consider during Communion: menstruation. Why are menstruating women not permitted to partake of Communion? Christína's response to my question was vociferous and simple: "Stupidities!"⁹ Christína, the third of Eléni's daughters, has very critical and pragmatic views about many social issues relative to other women her age and older, perhaps owing to a tumultuous past that began when, at the age of 17 in the late 1970s, she defied her parents to elope to Athens with her high school sweetheart, survived his drunken fits of violence until she filed for divorce at 35, and subsequently raised two teenagers as a single woman by working multiple jobs—now at the age of 50, she pays a mortgage on a house she recently bought in her own name, helps to raise her two grandsons, and enjoys relative contentment and absolute independence with a long-term boyfriend whose appeals for marriage (much to her family's chagrin) she has rejected multiple times. I had watched her spar with her family before, especially her 80-year old mother, over the issues of party politics, cohabitation versus marriage, homosexual rights, and other social questions of the day. On today of all days, over the feast of the Dormition of the All-Holy Virgin Mary, the mother of God, Christína was challenging Orthodox ritual with respect to women's status—"I don't believe those things they say. When they say that we are unclean and that it's not right to Commune when we have our periods."¹⁰

The stricture to which Christina was referring concerns the Church's formal prohibition against women who are undergoing menstruation from partaking in Holy Communion and indeed all ritual activity. It accounts for why female custodians of a church are forbidden from entering the inner sanctuary (except for those past menopause, and even then at a distance from the altar), and is related to why a woman must be ritually cleansed on the fortieth day after giving birth (see the following section on evil eye). However, as with many religious matters, Church ministers disagree about the

⁹ *Vlakeíes!*

¹⁰ *Dhen ta pistévo aftá pou léne. Ótan léne óti eímaste akáthartes kai dhen káneí na kinonísoume ótan échoume períodho.*

strictness of observing the menstruation taboo. Father Sérghios, for instance, acknowledges on one hand the dogmatic stance of many priests who, citing the canonic works of Church founders, believe that “her uncleanness” (*to akátharton aftis*) prevents a menstruating woman from receiving Communion as well as venerating the holy icons, greeting the priest, and even entering the church nave (the main congregational space). Chatting one day over an iced frappe coffee in the main square, this priest spoke to me from behind the heavy beard and the stovepipe-like kalimavkion headdress required of all clergy. For priests like this highly educated man (he holds a degree in nursing in addition to theology), the patristic view about mensal dirtiness and its sacrilegious status is immutable. On the other hand, Father Sérghios harbors a more prescriptive rather than proscriptive attitude about the menstruation taboo.

The important thing is that in order for someone to Commune the Blood and Body of Christ, one has to be clean spiritually as well as bodily. And that is why it holds that women shouldn't be in a period of menorrhea. [pause] And actually neither should men who have had nocturnal emissions the night before. But the spiritual preparation, of course, is more important. That's why Confession and repentance are necessary before someone Communes.¹¹

Father Sérghios self-identifies as more humanistic and pragmatic than some of his peers, not all of whom are strict adherents to the rules in their parishes. But even in strict ministries the reality is that it is up to individuals themselves to observe the strictures, as it would be unthinkable logistically for a priest in the middle of administering Communion to interrogate for menstruating women and nocturnally emitting men. As with fasting, self-discipline and, by extension, good conscience, is the ideal way of preparing the religious body and mind (although maturing daughters may be subject to policing by their mothers and other kin). Indeed, personal commitment and self-discipline accounts for why any official stance of the Church—in this case regarding physical and moral cleanliness—is not immune from the kind of critique that Christína was expressing and which was renewing debate at the table.

¹¹ *To kyriótero einai óti ghia na koinonísei kápoios Sóma kai Aíma Christou, prépei na einai katharós psychiká allá kai somatiká. Kai gi'aftó ischeí óti oi ghinékes dhen prépei na einai se períodho emminorrýsias. [pause] Kai kanoniká oúte oi ántres pou eíxan oneíroxi tin proíghoúmeni níhta. Allá i psychikí proetimasía, vévaia, einai i spoudhaióteri. Gi'aftó h Exomológhisi kai i metánoia einai aparaitita prin koinonísei kaneis.*

Why should a period be considered an *akatharsía*, Christína reasoned, “since it is natural?”¹² Her characterization of “impurity” or “filth” (*akatharsía*) went unquestioned by others at the table. In fact, Eléni, the elder matriarch, defended it. As though issuing an edict, she impressed a line in the vinyl tablecloth with the butt of her knife: “when a woman is *adhiátheti*, it doesn’t do good for her to Commune, out of respect.”¹³ Her use of the term “*adhiátheti*” (indisposed)¹⁴ is a common way of speaking about a woman’s period of menstruation politely, but also refers to mild ailments like headache or torpor. Thus, a menstruating woman is “unavailable” or “indisposed” in the same way one might be if one felt “under the weather” or “out of sorts” or “not at one’s best” (see the following section on the evil eye). The retort came from Ánna, who permanently resides in Athens and is the second of Eléni’s daughters. Hers was a frequent critique I heard in Messinía about many of the Church’s seemingly arbitrary observances and their historical, rather than spiritual, bases: “Hey guys, these [rules] are not referred to *anywhere* by Christ! The priests made these. *People* created them!”¹⁵ Christína’s and Ánna’s remarks were echoed loudly by Eléni’s granddaughter, Soúla, who was the youngest woman at the table (aged thirty-one). Notorious for her temper (unlike her husband, an ineffectual man who lacked opinion and who chomped quietly on a drumstick), Soúla used the whole instrument of her voice and body, stressing every other syllable with a chop of her hand in the air, adding little substance to the points made by her mother and aunt but rather infusing them with characteristic nerve (*névro*) and conviction.

Finally, Voúla, the oldest sister and most religiously devout, broke her thoughtful silence. “Yes, but it is a question of respect. The point is to show respect for *anything* that is sacred.”¹⁶ None of the responses that followed Voúla’s comment questioned the basis of that respect, or for why menstruation should pose an inherent problem. As the debate raged, the feasters stubbornly repeated the crux of their own positions—uncleanliness,

¹² *Afou éinai fisiologhikó.*

¹³ *Ótan mia ginéka éinai adhiátheti, dhen káneí na koinonísei apó sevasmó.*

¹⁴ *a-* “un” + *-dhia-* “through” or “across” + *-thési* “pose.”

¹⁵ *Re paidhiá, aftá dhen ta anaférei pouthená o Christós! Oí papádhēs ta ftiáxane. Ta dhimioúrgisan i ánthropi!*

¹⁶ *Nai, allá éinai théma sevasmoú. Skopós éinai na díchnoume sevasmó gia otidhípote ieró.*

respect, unfounded tradition—sentiments that bounced from one end of the table to the other. By this time, however, Christos was playing soccer with his brother in the yard again, having forgotten all about his toe and oblivious to the disagreement it had started.

* * *

The debate about the dos and don'ts of Communion reveal several things about how my host family viewed the body with respect to Orthodoxy. Leaving aside for now the question of the bleeding toe, the debate over Communion and menstruation suggests changing attitudes about the status of women's bodies in the Church. On one hand, all but the most devout women in my family objected to branding menstruation as a disqualifier for ritual participation. The objections raised by Christína and Ánna challenge the very stigma inherent in menstruation taboos ("that we are unclean") and deconstructs them as rules of social, rather than divine, origin ("*people* created them"). Implied in these challenges is an argument against the Church's gender hierarchy as a product of culture rather than nature ("since [menstruation] is natural"), a critique not unlike that explored in feminist theory (Ortner 1974; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995)—though I suspect none of these women would identify themselves with social feminism per se. On the other hand, Eléni (aged 80) and Voúla (aged 39), stress the ethic of the taboo ("to show respect for *anything* that is sacred"), which focuses on working towards one's best possible self (not "when a woman is *adhiátheti* [indisposed]"). Implied in this line of thinking is, first, the Orthodox maxim that one ought to faithfully "believe and not question" (*písteve kai min erévna*); and second, the moral imperative for humanity to acknowledge and be humbled by its imperfect nature. Ironically, both of these viewpoints—menstruation as natural versus menstruation as indisposing—reflect the principles of egalitarianism so engrained in Greek cosmology (e.g., Campbell 1964; Herzfeld 1985; Papataxiarches 1991), the former seeking to level gender hierarchies and the latter to reinforce personal humility.

More important, the second thing that the debate reveals is a difference in logic between popular discourses about the Communed body and discourses that reflect official Church doctrine. Whereas Orthodox doctrine explains the trouble with menstruation and



Figure 5-2. Holy Communion. (*Left*) Blessing the bread and wine moments before transubstantiation; (*right*) carefully receiving Communion.

bleeding as a problem of spiritual-cum-somatic reverence (the soul's intent reflects one's bodily conduct), popular explanations portray them as problems of material *containment*. As Father Sérghios elaborated one Sunday after I observed him perform the ceremony of transubstantiation, bodily functions like menstruation and nocturnal emissions are not sinful, *per se*. Rather, they “represent and emphasize the consequences of our fallen states” (Orthodox Tradition [accessed June 2014]) and remind us to endeavor to transcend our human defects. Thus, partaking of Communion, to ingest the actual body and blood of Christ, demands that we strive to overcome our corruptible selves—physical and spiritual—and approach, as best we can, righteousness.

Being holy, [Christ] comes only to those who strive to [*sic*] holiness. He cannot enter into that which is evil without destroying it. The Eucharist, hence, is the fire that cleanses, for those well prepared, and the fire that burns, for those not prepared. (Orthodox Tradition [accessed June 2016])

Doctrinally, then, the menstruation taboo begins and ends with the fundamental belief in bodily pollution versus ready disposition, as does the taboo on Communing the morning after having wet dreams. To shrug off these bodily disgraces would be to commit an act of spiritual negligence. Thus, a discipline of the religious self entails both a regimen of prayer and fasting (to be “well prepared”) but also a policing of yourself when your bodily corruptions degrade you. This is precisely the imperative of sobriety and humility that Voúla and Eléni invoked at the feast table with regard to mensal impurity

(*akatharsía*). As Eléni declared, a woman is not suited for Communion if she is “indisposed” (*adhiátheti*).

The corollary to personal humility is unequivocal reverence for the Eucharist itself. Just as the U.S. Flag Code forbids any part of the American flag from touching the ground, so too are worshippers charged with safeguarding Communion from being wasted, spilled, or otherwise desecrated. As with religious images and scripture (which should be consumed by fire rather than disposed of among refuse in a waste bin) any and all remains of the Eucharist from church service must be consumed by the priest rather than discarded, as I observed in the inner sanctuary of St. Athanásios church. This reverence for the physical substance of Communion also accounts for austere views against spitting or vomiting. As one text explains to a young Orthodox audience:

We are always careful that we do not allow Communion to fall from the communion spoon or from our lips onto our clothing or to the floor. For this reason we move very slowly toward the chalice and the communion spoon, and we do not pull our head away quickly after receiving. We are careful not to bump the chalice or the hand of the priest. After receiving Communion, we do not chew gum (or spit), because when we dispose of our gum it may contain particles of Holy Communion. (Coniaris 1998)

In light of these instructions, along with what other clerics expressed to me, it is clear that the substance of Communion—indeed its very *particles*—are susceptible to desecration if one were to bleed, expectorate, or vomit the fluids that it had glommed onto in the body. In short, the ecclesiastical discourse (1) envisions Communion as mingling with gastric and circulatory substances, and therefore, (2) cautions against the emission of these for the remainder of the day after having Communed, out of reverence. Consequently, the Church would characterize the bleeding of Christos’s toe as a shame (*amartía*) and careless disposal of Communion—the actual shedding of Christ’s body and blood.

In contrast to the Church’s doctrinal stress on reverence, popular explanations of bleeding and the menstruation taboo rely on the idiom of material *containment*. Exegetically, both problems are categorized as breaches in the flow and internalization of Communion by the body. For instance, while sipping a strong cup of Greek coffee one day, Ghiórgchos, a prominent, retired oil merchant, thoughtfully reasoned how “a woman’s period...[pause], it makes sense that it doesn’t do for her to Commune just like, when one Communes, it’s not good to spit chewing gum or to get cut and for blood to

run.”¹⁷ For Ghiórgchos, the logic against such bodily emissions centers on the importance of keeping Communion in the body long enough for it to work its divine purpose, specifically by nighttime. Whereas the ecclesiastical model cautions against emitting fluids out of deep respect, the model presented by Ghiórgchos and other Messinians demonstrates a concern with compromising, indeed negating, the substantive power of Communion. It takes for granted the biological proposition that, like food and medicine, Communion must be contained in the body in order for it to incorporate Christ and achieve biophysical “union with the Divine” (*théosis*). In effect, the bodily substance of each Communer is temporarily, but fundamentally, changed. Consequently, Communion becomes a medium of kinship, too. According to Iossifides (1992), Communion helps both laity and clergy come together in a moment of corporeal commensality with the ultimate goal of transcending all earthly ties—including those of kinship—and joining an all-encompassing divine kinship mediated through Christ. Therefore, the discharge of bodily fluids during the Communal period, I suggest, is considered an annulment where any breach in the natural flow of vital essences, even by a single drop, wholly compromises the spiritual essence mingled therein and the spirituo-somatic relationships it forms.

Once we have received Communion, we must remember that we have become one with Christ and with all those who received Communion with us. The same Christ now lives in all of us. We are all living icons of Jesus. It is by loving one another that we love Jesus. After receiving Communion our bodies become holy chalices. God has come to live in us. His blood now flows through our veins. (Coniaris 1998)

Simply put, the integrity of the bodily vessel ensures the integrity of Communion. Indeed, the principle of integrity seems to be the guiding virtue when it comes to the Orthodox body and Communion. This principle, along with the biological proposition that Christ’s blood and body integrate with our own at the level of biophysical substances, was best characterized by Dézi, a computer software instructor in her early forties. She explained to me that, if one were to bleed after having Communed, “it is thought that it *apoválletai*

¹⁷ *I períodhos tis ghinékas* [pause], *logikó einai na min káneí na koinonísei ópos kai ótan koinoníseis dhen káneí na fíteís tsíchla h na kopeís kai na tréxei aíma.*

[miscarries] from the blood.”¹⁸ The verb *apoválletai*, which Dézi consciously selects to characterize the effect of bleeding, is rife with “dis-integrative” meaning. According to language authorities, in addition to signifying (1) the failure or abortion of a fetus in the context of obstetrics (cf. Paxson 2002, 2004, 2005), the verb *apoválo* (first person, sing.) also means (2) to reject something (like one’s citizenship); and (3) to expel a component or member (as from a cluster or group) (Kriaras 1968; Triantafyllidis 1998). Given these common usages, I offer that Dézi’s characterization of bleeding as the miscarriage of Communion can be attributed to its material expulsion from the body (the biological iconicity of the one-drop rule), the rejection and forsaking of it through moral failure (hence the emphasis on respect and spirituo-somatic disposition), and the consequent abortion of the union with Christ and spiritual kinship that reproduces Christendom. Not unlike the ecclesiastical discourse, this popular discourse envisions the body as a vessel designed by God to contain spiritual and somatic essences. The difference, however, is that any chink or leak in this container is thought to nullify and spoil the integrity of those sacred contents which integrate at the level of substance. Consequently, most Messinians would categorize the bleeding of Christos’s toe and female menstruation, both, as violating the one-drop rule of containment. The symbolic ramifications of this belief reveal the fundamental assumption about the nature of the body, as understood by the devout and the critical alike, and how the body is capable of receiving, but also losing, spiritual substances.

Fasting: Vital Foods and *Egkráteia*

If Communion demonstrates the containment of spirituo-somatic substances, then fasting shows how Messinians manage the inflow of potentially dangerous—or vital—substances. On the first day of Greek Orthodox Lent, called Clean Monday (*Katharí Deftéra* or *Kathará Deftéra*), the feed on my Facebook account broadcast an endless stream of photos posted by friends and acquaintances. On this day, housewives begin an annual scrub-down of their homes while children fly kites in the countryside. Yet, the incessant feed of posts on my Facebook were mostly food-selfies (self portraits with

¹⁸ *Theoreíte óti apoválletai apó to aíma.*

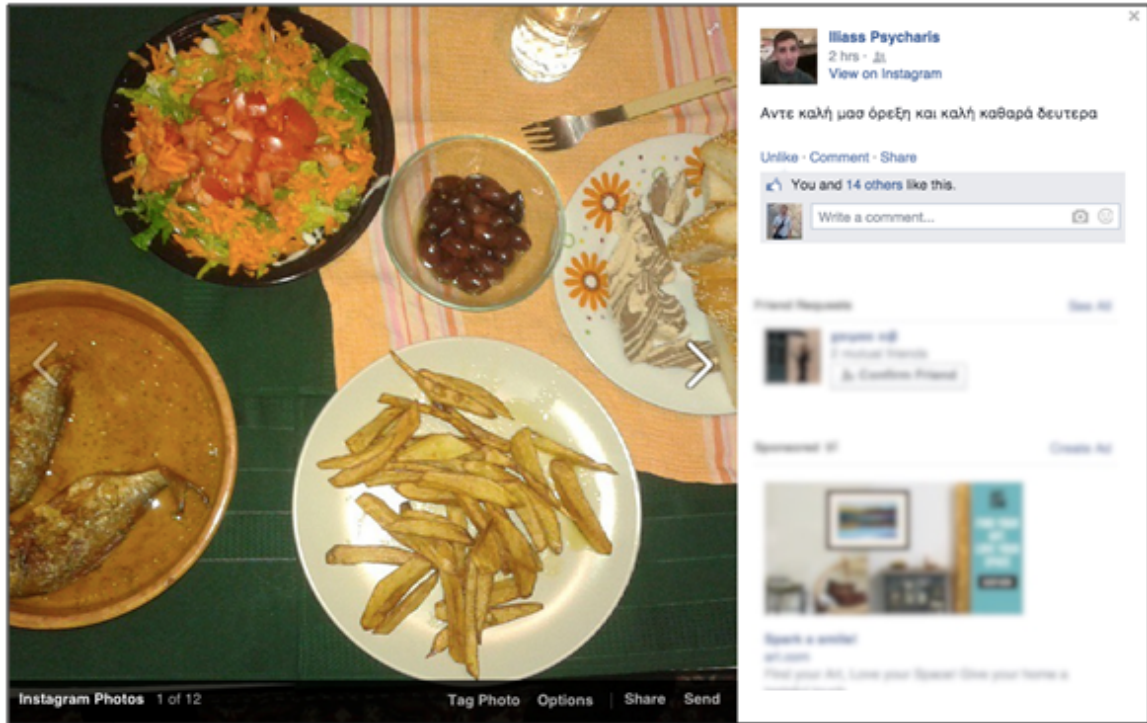


Figure 5-3: Facebook post, “Bon appetite to us and happy Clean Monday,” from 24 year old Ilías.

food), showcasing dining tables crowded with dishes of calamari, potato fries, marinated octopus, salad greens, olives, eggplant salad, fried squash, *taramosaláta*, and thick chunks of sweet tahini halva—all foods that comply with the holy day’s complex food rules of Orthodox fasting.

Some fasts are more popular than others, others are more demanding, and there exists remarkable confusion about fasting’s more involved rules. When to fast and what foods to shun top the list of questions posed to priests, the elderly, and Google, especially before religious holidays. Some do it religiously, others occasionally, and a few accidentally. Despite the general confusion and even disagreement about fasting, one thing is certain: fasting is good for you. As this section explores, the assumption underlying the virtues of fasting is that one’s self-control can change one’s physical and metaphysical wellbeing. Moreover, the means by which one’s wellbeing can be regulated (and the chief source of confusion) is the practice of self-control (*egkráteia*), as defined by Messinians. To better understand this principle of temperance and its control over the body, we must first understand the purpose for fasting, the rules for its observance, and general beliefs about dietary health.

In Messinía, as throughout Greece, “fasting” (*nisteía*) refers to the abstention from certain foods and activities observed for religious purposes by those intending to partake of Holy Communion. As such, fasting is primarily thought of as a practice for the religiously minded, although everyone—religious and nonreligious alike—are subject to accommodations made during peak seasons on restaurant menus and supermarket shelves to meet the increased demand for permissible foods. It is perhaps for this reason that the first way people describe fasting is as an exercise in dietary abstention (*apochí*). The second way people describe fasting, especially the more devout, is as a mental and spiritual exercise in contemplation (*sképsi*) and repentance (*metánoia*). When it comes to the practice of *nisteía*, which I did first for a week at the behest of Pappoúli and again in August for fifteen days, I found that, depending on who you ask, there exists a persistent tension between the stress placed on its dietary versus mental demands, and the stress placed on the rules of observance versus the spirit of observance. As we will see, these tensions between the material and immaterial constitute the very battleground for fasters struggling to gain physical and mental wellness.

Detoxification and Self-Restraint

As described by my friends and acquaintances, there are two key explanations for why fasting benefits the body and mind. The first, a biomedical one, argues that periodic abstention from certain foods results in the detoxification of one’s *orghanismós*—one’s overall constitution. This detoxification (*apotoxínosi*) is especially effective when the foods in question are deemed to be “heavy” (*variá*). “The power of *nisteía* is that you fast from *ghalaktompoúreka*, meats, and grease-fats,”¹⁹ argued Spiridhoúla, a spry elderly neighbor with whom I shared hour-long swims at the deep end of the local beach. For Spiridhoúla, who reports her age as being seventy-four (and a half!), Orthodox rules of fasting encourage periodic diets that replace foods like *ghalaktompoúreka* (a rich, syrupy, flaky, custardy, heavy pastry) with legumes, vegetables, and other standbys considered to be “the good healthy foods eaten by our grandfathers and grandmothers.”²⁰ From her perspective, fasting not only cleanses the body of toxins, but also celebrates a back-to-

¹⁹ *I dhínami tis nisteías einai óti nistéveis apó ghalaktompoúreka, kréata, kai ksígia.*

²⁰ *Ta oraía ygieiná pou tróghane oi pappóudhes kai ghiaghiádes mas.*

basics regimen, revisiting a former nutritious way of life. Spiridhoúla's theory of detoxification is one espoused also by Messinians skeptical of religion. On one hand, they share in the nostalgia for foods that "are not adulterated"²¹ by industrialized production and existed prior to "urban lifestyles."²² On the other hand, where non-religious Messinians use the theory of detoxification to explain "old-fashioned" (*paliomodhítika*) religious customs in terms of rational, biomedical science, Spiridhoúla's understanding of the biophysical effects of fasting, through the language of nutrition, only enriches her faith in Orthodoxy and Church wisdom.

The *nisteía* market, too, capitalizes on the science/faith interplay in fasting. *Nisteía* cookbooks with self-conscious titles like *Diet and Nisteía: Theory and Practice* (Karakasidou 2015, translation mine), for example, offer recipes based on "a combination of scientific wisdom and lived experience."²³ This market, which reproduces traditional *nistísima* recipes but with an air of nutrition savviness, shares in the same exegesis through which Spiridhoúla and her counterparts explain fasting. This exegesis of *nisteía* captures not only a shared critique about the modern diet and its negative effects on wellbeing, but also the belief that detoxification and old-fashioned eating are the remedy. Put simply, this interpretation relies on a decidedly biomedical discourse to explain, as a bodily and dietary phenomenon, how religious fasting benefits Orthodox practitioners.

The second explanation for why fasting benefits the body and mind relies on an Orthodox discourse of somatic and spiritual conditioning. According to this explanation, the power of fasting rests in the act of bodily and mental *preparation* for Holy Communion. One must achieve the appropriate *dhiáthesi*, that is, disposition. One's *dhiáthesi*, in this context, derives from the agreement between one's emotional/mental willingness and one's bodily readiness. As we saw in the case of menstruation (see above), a person whose body is unclean cannot be "*dhiathésimos*" (available or open)—with respect to fasting. But one's mental and emotional content must also accord with expectations. To prepare appropriately, I was told, one must practice *egkráteia*. *Egkráteia* is the virtue of restraint, temperance, and self-control especially from physical impulses

²¹ *dhen eínai nothevména*

²² *astikés synítheies*

²³ *Syndhiasmós epistimonikís ghnósis kai vioménis empireías.*

and desires. Within this perspective, fasting pits worshippers against their basic, indulgent human natures. Alimentary and sexual drives top the list of impulses requiring restraint. For this reason, fasting is referred to as an “exercise” in one’s self-improvement, a word that, in Greek—*áskisi*—shares in the history of “asceticism,” the exercise of austere self-discipline typical of monastic life (Kaelber 1987; Wimbush and Valantasis 1995).

Messinían priests and laymen alike emphasize the bodily struggles of fasting, and also the mental, conscious work involved. According to Father Sérghios, fasting requires “self-discipline” (*pitharcheía*) and “struggle” (*aghóna*) if fasters are to know victory. Indeed, athletic metaphors employed in Sunday sermons characterize fasting as the “training” (*propónisi*) that worshippers, like “athletes” (*athlités*), undergo to condition their bodies and souls for God. Such athletes, This same struggle is what Ánna calls a “personal effort” (*prosopikí prospátheia*) to be mindful of the rules and meaning of fasting—that is, to be conscious of relinquishing certain foods and to be dedicated to staying the course when temptations arise. As I discovered during the times that I fasted, the ubiquity of prohibited ingredients—especially olive oil—in common dishes necessitates constant mindfulness when preparing meals and vigilance when one is being fed. Such mindfulness constitutes part of the struggle, a “no pain, no gain” approach central to *egkráteia*.

A second aspect of Orthodox fasting centers on inner reflection. Although most people were preoccupied with the challenge of giving up certain foods, many were firm about the mental, conscious work involved too. For instance, many were quick to distinguish the exercise of Greek fasting from what they perceived to be the Catholic practice of Lent, in which Catholics were thought to fast as a display of personal sacrifice. Far from viewing it as sacrifice, Messiníans rather view *nisteía* as bringing one’s physical state and comportment into alignment with one’s conscience, hopefully guided by divine will. For people like Voúla, the struggle of *egkráteia* applies also to conscious thoughts and behaviors. Drawing from scripture (Matthew 15:11), she states that “we don’t get polluted by the things we put in our mouth, but by the things that come

out [of it].”²⁴ By this, she means the temptation to engage in selfish, hurtful, or superficial preoccupations like gossip or holding grudges. Instead, she and her cohort of friends (who self-identify as religious) advocate for prayer and scriptural reading at all times but especially during *nisteía*. Just as fasting conditions the body for peak physical readiness, so too does it train one’s conscience mind to prepare for Christ.

Given the connections to physical exercise and inner reflection that people draw when describing the virtue of *egkráteia*, the perceived benefit of fasting becomes clear: fasting helps lift humans above their corrupted, physical nature. Just as Spiridhoúla’s theory of detoxification, which presumes a state of dietary pollution, posits fasting as cleansing and nutritious, so too does the theory of temperance presume humans to be polluted by their physical inclinations, which should be curbed through vigilance and self-restraint. To use the shorthand of ritual structures (Turner 1969; van Gennep 1960), fasting constitutes the rite of separation (what better separation than through food-avoidance?) prior to the liminal rite of the Eucharist in which devotees admit Christ into their bodies, effectively transcending earthly kinship in favor of *communitas* with the divine and fellow worshippers (finally, the rite of reincorporation invites all to the commensal feast as reconfirmed members of the Orthodox faith). In short, fasting helps people struggle through their inferior selves toward truer, purer selves. It entails a trial of mind over matter where the strength of *egkráteia*—to restrain oneself—empowers one to control by sheer will the baser inclinations of one’s corrupted, earthly self.

Rules of Fasting: Nisteía and Katálysis

The ecclesiastical rules of fasting concern sexual and dietary abstinence. Sexual abstinence primarily includes refraining from intercourse and masturbation. For a man and woman to engage in sexual *synousía* (intercourse, literally “co-essence”) is to prioritize one’s physical urges (*ormés*) over one’s spiritual needs (*psychikés anágkes*). This is especially true of intercourse committed the evening prior to Communion and for reasons discussed above (see section on Holy Communion), ejaculation and menstruation also pose transgressions. Interestingly, although priests, the elderly, and more religious Messinians were informative about sexual constraints in fasting, persons of middle age or

²⁴ *Dhen mas molýnoun afta pou vázoume sto stoma mas, allá aftá pou vghainoun.*

younger knew much less about them. Indeed, among closer friends and acquaintances with whom sex is a comfortable (and frequent) topic of discussion, some even expressed surprise about their existence. The discrepancy between the two populations regarding sexual abstention in *nisteía*, I suspect, has to do with shifting attitudes about religion and about the sexual body (Kantsa et al. 2010; Papataxiarches 2014). Suffice it to say that the association of sexual abstinence with *nisteía* in popular discourse is less known and practiced than is dietary abstinence.

In the canon of dietary *nisteía*, the simplest rule is to abstain from all foods, including water, the day of receiving Holy Communion. This is called an absolute fast (or simply *nisteía*) and constitutes the barest preparation for Communion. Most people agree that this period of abstention begins with the day's commencement, either from the moment you wake up or, depending on your reference, from midnight "at the time you sleep."²⁵ Considered the easiest fast to observe because of the short time commitment, it is preferred among mothers for their children, who are generally considered too weak physically and undisciplined emotionally to endure extended fasts (in contrast to the elderly who, despite a lifetime of practiced will-power, may be considered too feeble to risk extended fasting). As we learn from an instructional text directed at youngsters:

On the morning before going to the Divine Liturgy to receive Communion we do not eat or drink anything if our health allows, just as one would not spoil his appetite by eating before a special meal, so we sharpen our spiritual appetite for Christ through such fasting. (Coniaris 1998)

Hence, absolute fasting prepares the body and whets the appetite for the "special meal" of Communion. Finally, only after one has Communed can the normal diet resume—indeed, for an estimate of how many people had been fasting prior to Communion, a count of how many worshippers scurry to the coffee houses after church to be revived by wine and meze will do the trick.

Other rules of extended dietary fasting are readily available in published forms, but nevertheless enjoy a status of being quasi-arcane knowledge. For example, one item I spotted in the corner of many coffee tables or tucked conveniently among periodicals and shopping lists was the *Mégas Kazamías*, the Great Almanac. The *Mégas Kazamías*, of

²⁵*Tin óra pou koimáse.*

which there are over six competing versions, is a collection of horoscopes, recipes, dream interpretations, jokes, trivia, short articles, witticisms, city distances, and a monthly breakdown of agricultural chores, lunar phases, civic holidays, and religious observances—including fasting—all packed in a booklet whose cover depicts a wizard peering through a telescope, and whose scrolls, globes, and celestial robes signify the arcane knowledge within.²⁶ At the very most, it is within this highly calendric but seemingly mystic context in which the world of fasting is couched. At the very least, familiarity with fasting is somewhat specialized knowledge.

This is especially true given the aura that surrounds grandmothers and other elderly women—it's almost always older generation females—with whom people consult about fasting dates and restrictions, though priests are also sometimes consulted. Eléni and Voúla, who has acquainted herself with the rules of observance to the point of advising others, gave me an outdated *aghiológhion* to keep. This *aghiológhion* (literally, “holy record”)²⁷ is a spiral-bound calendar attractively arranged so as to display at least one holy observance (usually a saint's feast or commemoration) for each day of the year. Where the reverse side of each day lists the appropriate scriptural and hymnal readings for liturgical observance for private and church prayer, the obverse side illustrates, along with the holy icon of the day, a small pictogram representing the permissible fare for the day (a fish, a wedge of cheese, a broken egg, etc.), and a small caption in red italic font. Many households I visited had similar versions of this calendar on the refrigerator or pinned above a desk: in fact, it was the only calendar I saw in households through most of Greece.

According to these references and my Messinían friends, certain dishes and ingredients are considered *nistísima* at all times—in other words, *allowed* for consumption. These food groups include: (1) vegetables, greens, and fruits; (2) beverages like coffee, tea, and herbal infusions (chamomile and sage are the most popular); (3) cereals and cereal-based products like bread, pasta, barley, oats, sesame oil and tahini;

²⁶ The Greek tradition of almanac printing dates back to the mid-19th century, though takes its name and DNA from the 1753 Italian almanac *Casamia* (*I Laíki Kazamíes*. December 29, 1996. To Vima. Electronic article accessed July 4, 2017 [www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=84817].

²⁷ (trans. “holy record”; *aghio*- “holy” + *-lóghio*- “record” or “log”)

and (4) legumes and nuts (Table 12). As such, there is a specialized market for these *nistísima* foods, and it is common practice to substitute these for others in traditional home-cooked recipes (e.g., eggplant for meat). Importantly, all these permitted *nistísima* foods derive from plant—rather than animal—sources.

In contrast to these *nistísima* foods, certain dishes and ingredients are *prohibited* during periods of *nisteía*. This list of food groups is well-defined and organized in increasing levels of strictness as follows: (1) meats, (2) eggs and dairy, (3) fish, and (4) olive oil and wine . At the most basic level and considered the easiest to observe, is abstention from meat. What counts as meat (*kréas*) is generally defined as the flesh of an animal that has a spine and bleeds. In fact, the bloodier the flesh, the “meatier” it is

Table 12: Foods of Nisteía

<u><i>Nistísima</i> foods</u>	<u><i>Nisteía/Katálýsis</i> foods</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetables, greens, fruits • Herbal/bean infusions • Cereals/cereal products • Legumes/nuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat • Eggs/dairy • Fish • Olive oil/wine
(plant-based foods)	(“vital” foods)

In an absolute fast (*nisteía*), nothing is permitted, including water.

thought to be (Greek cuisine favors medium to well-done preparation, as rare or medium-rare are considered raw and dangerous). The meat category also includes poultry and any byproduct derived from the carcass, like lard or broth. It does not include eggs, dairy, or dairy products, which enjoy a category of their own—these “things that derive from animals”²⁸ constitute the second level of dietary *nisteía*. The third level prohibits the consumption of fish. However, this excludes foods derived from fish eggs, primarily caviar or *taramosaláta*, and shellfish and other mollusks (seasonal favorites include pastas and pilafs decked with snails, octopus, shrimp, calamari, and/or mussels). Why

²⁸ *Prágmata pou proérxontai apó zóa.*

does *nisteía* prohibit fish but allows these other seafood? The criteria, I was told, are the same as those concerning the spine and bloodedness of meat: mollusks and shellfish are invertebrate and “if you prick them they don’t give blood.”²⁹ Importantly, all these prohibited *nisteía* foods derive from animal sources considered “bloody” and vertebrate, the exception being the final—and strictest—category of prohibited foods: olive oil and wine.

When invoked, fasting from olive oil and wine (*nisteía ínou kai elaíou*) signifies the gravest of dietary prohibitions. It does so with respect to (1) Greek cuisine, (2) the Church calendar, and (3) the overall symbolic hierarchy of foods. First, in the culinary realm, both oil and wine occupy such a constituent part of the daily diet that their absence incurs a disruption in the kitchen and a sacrifice at the table (about oil consumption, see **Ch. 4**). Although table olives are permitted—a good housekeeper keeps an oil-free batch for just such occasions—frequent debates surface as to whether abstention from olive oil includes, by extension, avoidance of other plant-based fats like vegetable oil, sunflower oil, canola, and even margarine. One camp argues that *nisteía* applies only to olive oil and its members rely on alternative plant fats (mostly vegetable oil) to substitute for olive oil during *nisteía*. In the other camp are those who argue that the spirit of *nisteía* demands refrain from liquid fats in their entirety. This same argument applies to alcohol, as the intention of fasting, according to Father Sérghios, is to partake of contemplation, not “wine and various wine-spirit drinks.”³⁰ In any case, whether one espouses a minimalist reading of the prohibition, or argues for the spirit behind the prohibition, oil and wine are the only proscribed foods among all the *nisteía* groups that generate such strong culinary arguments.

The second way that the oil-and-wine fast evokes the highest level of gravitas is by marking occasions of religious importance. One occasion is when fasters who intend to partake of Holy Communion on Sunday may forego oil and wine on Wednesday (commemorating Christ’s betrayal by Judas) and Friday (recalling his subsequent crucifixion). Another instance concerns the fact that, normally, the consumption of oil and wine on weekends is practically mandated by the Church since it does not formally

²⁹ ‘*Ama ta tripiseis dhen bgházoun aíma.*

³⁰ *Ínou kai ton diafóron oinopnevmatodón potón.*

permit the fasting of these on Saturdays or Sundays. This priority applies even to annual holidays that, when they occur on a regular weekday, would otherwise call for an oil/wine fast. Consequently, if oil and wine are considered default mainstays of the weekly Orthodox diet, then all the more meaning is attributed to the times when they should be shunned. One such instance is Holy Saturday (*Meghálo Sávvato*), the day before Easter dedicated to mourning Christ's death and entombment. This is the singularly most attended of holy days and the one day of the year that a typical non-faster and non-church goer might conscientiously participate in the fast or, like my eighty-two year old friend, Mr. Leonídas, grudgingly endure it because his wife enforces it in the kitchen—if you don't fast for Christ's funeral, then when *do* you fast? In both cases, worshippers are called on to fast from oil and wine, considered the most challenging of the dietary abstentions, but also the one marking the holiest events of the Orthodox calendar (for more such events, see Appendix 9).

The special status given to oil and wine during fasting is also apparent when analyzing the overall hierarchy of food categories. That olive oil and wine are blessed is a fact in Messinía. The fast calls for both of these foods “since wine is blessed just like ‘little old oil,’”³¹ as Ánna explained to me one evening over a *nistísimo* meal of oil-free tomatoes and cucumbers. One significant difference, however, is that wine, unlike oil, “does the blood good.”³² Indeed, the sanctity of these two foods becomes most apparent when one arranges the food groups with respect to rules of consumption and abstention, revealing a hierarchy of encompassment. As shown in Figure 5-4, for example, if *nisteía* calls for the avoidance of eggs/dairy (*nisteía tyroú kai óon*), then meats are also eschewed, but fish and oil/wine, which are superior, are allowed. Thus, we see a system where meat constitutes the simplest fast, but is also entailed in an eggs/dairy fast, which in turn is subordinate to a fish fast and so on. By the same token, when *nisteía* calls for abstention from oil and wine, none of the other marked foods (meats, eggs/dairy, fish) are consumable either, and thus a wine and oil fast is also called a whole (*plíri*) or general (*ghenikí*) fast. In effect, a ban on oil and wine amounts to a ban on all unsanctioned

³¹ *Afoú einai to krási evloghiméno ópos to ládhaki*. Anna refers to olive oil in the diminutive, personal, form (*ladhákí*).

³² *Káneí kaló sto aíma*.

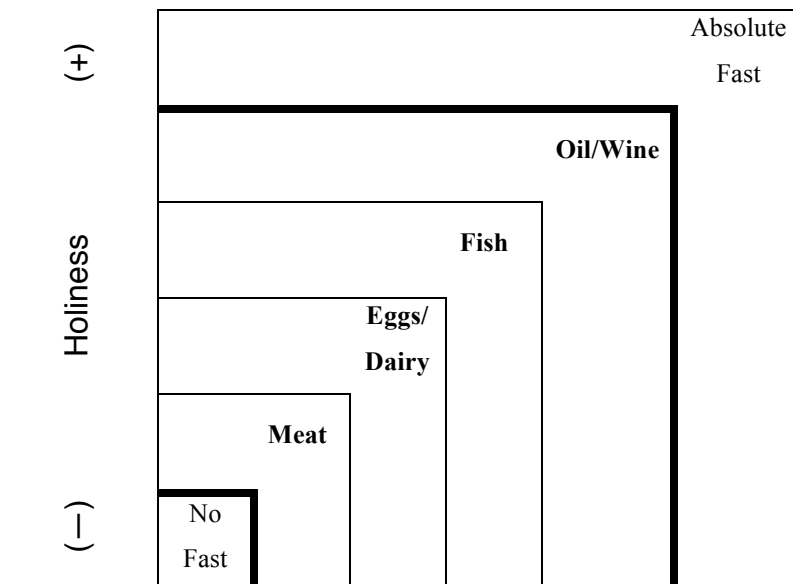


Figure 5-4: Hierarchy of Abstention and Consumption

foods. Short of an absolute fast, in which not even water is consumed, oil/wine is the most one can forgo. For this reason, they are also the most basic of one's needs.

This is most obvious during a break-fast (*katálisis*), when a fast is broken in order to celebrate a holy day but also to give fasters a dietary respite. For example, the normally strict *nisteía* of Lent can be broken March 25, on which day (the Annunciation of the Theotókos) Messinians enjoy a break-fast of fish (*katálisis ichthios*) plus oil and wine (superior to fish), but must still forego the category of eggs and dairy, and meat (inferior to fish). An implication of this model is that breaking-fast with meat amounts to a regular, non-fasting diet: indeed, I never encountered anything called a “break-fast of meat.” More importantly, however, this hierarchy implies that the first and most basic food category for refueling and recuperating one's constitution is the olive oil/wine food group. An example of this, previously mentioned, is that Saturdays and Sundays are reserved for break-fasting with oil and wine especially during periods of extended *nisteía*. Put simply, olive oil and wine are the staples separating the realm of “food” and the total absence of food.

* * *

The observance of fasting—its rules and benefits—reveals two assumptions about the dietary body in Messinía. The first assumption concerns the meaning of different food groups. Several ethnographic studies mention how Greeks distinguish between foods (e.g., Du Boulay 1974; Friedl 1962; Herzfeld 1985; Sutton 2001, 2014). Herzfeld's analysis of gender and food in Cretan Gléndi (1985), for instance, outlines a symbolic world where meat—its acquisition and consumption—projects masculinity, whereas vegetables do the same with femininity. The sexual differentiation encountered in Crete between meats and vegetables resembles, in certain ways, the same gender distinction that others have observed between wine and bread. Throughout rural Greece and the Mediterranean the social life of wine—from cultivation to fermentation and consumption—belongs in the domain of men. Likewise, the social life of bread—from leavening to baking and distributing—belongs in the sphere of women (Counihan 1999; Gefou-Madianou 1992b; Iossifides 1991, 1992; Papagaroufali 1992). My findings suggest that the foods from these ethnographies—meat, vegetables, wine, bread—reflect a worldview best understood by analyzing the rules that structure fasting (cf. Douglas 1966, 1972; Lévi-Strauss 1969). I have already noted a distinction between plant-based staples and animal-based foods, where the former comprise the list of permissible foods. On the other hand, however, a distinction between plant and animal derivation does not account for why wine and olive oil, both plant-based products, get lumped together with foods that are clearly animal-based.

Within the context of fasting, I would argue that all the *nisteía* foods—meat, dairy/eggs, fish, and wine—constitute “vital foods” which form the basic building blocks of the life force. The evidence for this hinges on the role that blood plays in defining *nisteía* categories. During fasting, blood comes to define the difference between edible and inedible food groups; hence, for example, the Messinían distinction between forbidden seafoods that bleed (fish) and permitted seafoods that don't (shellfish). Furthermore, just as Greek diners fear impurities in rare meat and prefer their steaks cooked well-done, blood—its presence or absence—marks the status of foods as safe or dangerous (see also Iossifides 1992). Taking a cross-cultural look at blood, Carsten suggests that,

normally hidden in the body, when it becomes visible it gives access to the truth. Because of its living qualities, bleeding is a sign of crisis. Good blood is a sign of health, while either too much or too little blood in the body may cause sickness and require regulation through medical attention. Blood can thus secure life, but also be a source of danger through its lack of boundaries. (Carsten 2013:S5)

Thus, the prohibition observed during *nisteía* is very much a prohibition against the presence of blood and the capacity to bleed. And if the presence of blood in these foods impregnates them with the potential to sustain life—or the threat of depleting it—then ritual fasting erects boundaries to its exclusion from bodily entry, a precaution that Orthodoxy shares with Judaic and Islamic dietary laws (Chehabi 2007; Douglas 1966; Sered 1988). It is no accident, then, that the flow of semen and menses also threaten the period of fasting owing to their inherent reproductive vitality, sexual intercourse being the most vital of behaviors. Consequently, fasting temporarily arrests the vital force in worshippers, suspending them in a state where they are neither being infused with the life force nor hemorrhaging it.

In addition to differentiating between sterile foods and foods that conduct the life force, vitality organizes the internal relationships of *nisteía* foods, as shown when comparing meat and wine. Despite their apparent differences and the fact that these occupy opposite poles within the food hierarchy, they both encapsulate the substance of “blood” in telling ways. One on hand, meat is the most basic vital food. It is considered necessary for the body and an appetite for it signifies vigor. In fact, distaste for meat may signify death. One friend explained to me that “in the end everyone doesn’t eat meat,”³³ recalling how his grandfather’s cancer manifested its full hold when he lost interest in consuming flesh. Vegetarianism, too, is suspect. Over a second helping of ouzo and meze, a gang of diners exclaimed that, “for better or worse, [meat] can’t be replaced by other foods,”³⁴ and further critiqued that “it’s one thing to say you don’t eat meat because ‘you play the vegetarian’ and another because you don’t like it,”³⁵ the implication being that, unless your health is suffering, eschewing meat is a form of pretension. Messinians,

³³ *Óloi sto télos dhen tróne kréas.*

³⁴ *Kalós í kakós, den anaplirónete apó álla.*

³⁵ *Állo na peis óti dhen tros kréas giati to paízo chortofágho kai állo na min sou arései.*

therefore, ascribe revulsion to meat to a weakening body or a weakness of character, whereas a hardy appetite for flesh is, by default, natural and healthy. Put simply, meat reigns supreme as the food of the hale and hearty.

On the other hand, wine's connection to vitality extends beyond flesh. Where the vitality in meat registers in one's physical health, the vitality of wine resonates in both the physical and metaphysical spheres. Wine enjoys synonymy with vitality when transubstantiated into Christ's eternal blood in the ritual of Communion. Not only does wine do the blood good, as Ánna noted, but also, unlike meat and fish, which merely *contain* blood, wine *becomes* blood. Of all the vital foods, wine enjoys special status because, rather than conduct the vital force, it *is* the vital force. If the fear of raw meat stems from the fact that its blood is dead and, therefore, impure, then the celebration of wine hails from the fact that it is living blood, the blood of divine everlasting life (for a discussion on the Orthodox principle of *Anémakti Thisía*, that is, Bloodless Sacrifice, consult Iossifides 1992). As a spirituo-somatic substance, it pulls together the soul and body in union (Bynum 2007; Carsten 2013). Even at the dinner table, untransubstantiated wine unites one's inner and outer selves. It is no ordinary beverage, but one synonymous with health, commensality, and effervescence (cf., Durkheim 1965), as has been shown throughout the Mediterranean (e.g., Braudel 1972, 1977; Brun 2003; Gefou-Madianou 1992a; Helstosky 2009) and particularly in Greece (Papataxiarches 1991). In imbibing wine and wine spirits at the coffeehouse, men not only find platonic masculine love (what Papataxiarches translates as "heart-friendship"), but also "the preserve of personal autonomy" (Papataxiarches 1991:177). Building on this, Iossifides concludes that "alcohol relations...in the coffeehouse, as within the ritual of Holy Communion, stress the expression, the coming into, of one's true nature as well as creating a sense of community distinct from secular kinship" (1991:94). These traits of wine resonate closely with Bildhauer's analysis of medieval texts, which characterize blood's unique capacity to reveal the "true" inner person, morally and medicinally (2006), and what Carsten concludes are blood's "truth-bearing capacities" (2013:S12). In sum, wine and wine spirits in social and ritual contexts generate: (1) the emergence of one's true self among one's cohort of friends and worshippers, and, (2) links of bodily and/or spiritual relatedness between these persons. At the analytic level, wine—like

blood—is the idiom used to express relatedness and selfhood. Taken together, we see that both meat and wine bear the traits of blood, but qualify them in different ways. Whereas meat is vitality in flesh, wine is vitality itself. Meat connotes bodily vigor; wine expresses the vigor of the body’s union with its spirit. The former is a somatic necessity, the latter, spirituo-somatic. Thus, as one moves up the *nisteía* hierarchy from meat to wine, vitality encompasses fuller ideals of existence—meat satisfies a basic, physical, and worldly need; wine fulfills the joining of physical and metaphysical states of being.

But what about olive oil? It shares a dietary gravitas with wine, and yet bears no associations with blood. Indeed, it occupies a position at the margins of vital foods. Within the hierarchy of food abstention, where meat represents the crudest food and the least effort in fasting, olive oil—like wine—reigns as an all-encompassing food of maximal effort: to abstain from oil means also to abstain from all other designated foods. Oil and wine are the most ritually pious substances and rest at the threshold between an earthly, bodily diet and the kind of absolute fasting endured by ascetic saints. They represent the most rarefied form of vitality—the body that eschews oil has, in practice, crossed the line separating the realm of “food” and the absence of food. Yet, whereas wine and its subordinates (fish, eggs/dairy, meat) infuse the body with vitality, I suggest that, within the formal *nisteía* structure, olive oil reinforces the boundaries of the body. As this dissertation argues in Section II: The Messinían Body, olive oil is: (1) a substance of bodily boundary maintenance, (2) an idiom of fulfillment versus emptiness, and (3) the essence of purity separating heaven and earth. For now, the hierarchy of foods presented above allows us to assume that oil and wine are counterparts (and probably complements) in the highest echelon of food piety.

The second major assumption revealed by fasting in Messinía is that, through practice, one’s inner will comes to control the body’s physical state. Fasting does not, in and of itself, do a body good. As an *áskisi*—an exercise—the goal to practice restraint, discipline, and commitment is captured in the *struggle* (*aghóna*). Struggle is what effects spiritual and bodily preparation and does so in highly gendered ways. About this type of struggle, Caroline Bynum reports that, in medieval Europe, fasting among female Catholics entailed a denial of bodily urges, including lust and gluttony, in a way that abnegated their own gender and sexuality (Bynum 1987). Among female saints, the

consequences of ascetic fasting—like arrest in menstruation and lactation—effectively proved their piety and neutered their sexuality precisely in physiological terms. The moral ideal for female worshippers to transcend sexuality through the struggle of fasting, to take control of their unruly bodies, finds a noteworthy parallel in Susan Bordo’s analysis of anorexia nervosa among contemporary American women. Within the context of Western gender structures, which posit women as weak, passive, and dominated by emotions, women’s refusal to eat constitutes a responsive act of control over hunger and the body, the kind of symbolic control profoundly associated with masculine rationality and power (Bordo 1993). Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that Cretan men in Glendi “portray themselves as rational, self-controlled, and strong, in contrast to the affectionate but also gullible, incontinent, and often weak-willed women” (Herzfeld 1985:90), when they demonstrate their prowess in combating hunger via meat eating, sheep raiding, and wine drinking, among other demonstrations of autonomy. Ravenous eating and disciplined hunger, therefore, become the means by which men and women, respectively, transcend the formal opposition between the genders:

masculinity : rational :: femininity : emotional

In these analyses, fasters’ struggle to transcend their bodies, an exercise in restraint, discipline, and commitment—a battle of mind over matter and, by extension, culture over nature (cf. Ortner 1974).

In Messinía, these qualities constitute the virtue of *egkráteia*, a word whose derivation from *en-* (“in”) and *-krató* (“to hold” or “to possess”), suggests the value of being *in possession* of oneself. I suggest that, in Messinía, fasting entails the inner struggle to come *in possession* of the body’s physical state. In this respect, *nisteía* manipulates one’s constitution (*orghanismós*) to be *in keeping* with the will of one’s (spiritual) conscience. (Compare to how men are thought to manifest their true, inner selves with the commensal use of alcohol in coffeehouses (Papataxiarches 1991:177)). The agreement that ought to exist between moral intent and bodily practice is expressed in the sentiment of proper *dhiáthesi*—proper disposition. *Dhiáthesi* ensures that the spirit behind an action and its execution are in accordance. It concerns your willingness to be in possession of your faculties and, as we saw in the previous section with menstruation, to humbly recognize occasions when you are not in possession of your faculties, when you

are “in-disposed” (*adhiáthetos*). In the context of fasting, *dhiáthesi* dictates that you keep your mind focused, and your mind keeps your body shut to unclean foods and deeds. Even the theory of detoxification, with its medico-scientific bent, presumes a world where nutrition is the moral imperative and where fasting reclaims ownership of one’s diet from the modern food industry. Whether nutritive or religious, fasting is the practice of regulating bodily input and output in order to embody—to realize physiologically—a moral state of being. Thus, in Messinía, the intent of fasting brings two distinct but connected spaces into alignment: our external physical selves, and our internal invisible selves.

The Máti and Mátiasma

Scribbling on the back of an envelope which she had kept for scrap paper, Christína turned to me one day and slipped the paper face down on the kitchen table. Six months prior, I had complained to her about feeling *adhiáthetos*, that is, out of sorts—general malaise with a dull headache. Looking me over, she suggested that I might be *matiasménos*,³⁶ affected by the evil eye. Within moments she was returning from the kitchen sink, armed with a mug of water and a dish of olive oil. Having made the sign of the cross thrice over the mug, she dipped her index finger into the oil and muttered inaudibly to herself as she let three drops of olive oil fall from her fingertip onto the water’s surface. Rather than collect and float on the water’s surface, the drops formed a lacy veil and dispersed: this, she told me, was evidence of *mátiasma*.

Where fasting demonstrates the capacity to restrain the body and to manage the inflow of vital substances, the complex of ideas surrounding the evil eye in Messinía indicates the body’s ability to conduct non-material substances, too. In Messinía, Greece, the evil eye—the *kakó máti* (bad eye), commonly abbreviated as just the *máti* (eye)—comprises a symbolic complex that, when invoked, locates the cause of bodily discomfort in the act of receiving someone’s envy or admiration. It is variably described as a negative energy, a dark force, or a work of the Devil. As I observed, the state of physical discomfort afflicted by the *máti*—a condition called *mátiasma*—illustrates the acceptable

³⁶ (m.) *matiasménos*, (f) *matiasméni*

idea among Greeks that the biophysical condition of one's body can be affected by the immaterial yet potent "germ" of social appraisal.

My analysis, however, examines the intervention required for curing *mátiasma*, intervention that requires the metaphysical force of the *máti* to be mediated through another person's body or symbolic materials (like oil and charcoal) that come to encompass it before they "disintegrate" it and "take it away." On the one hand, discourses and practices centered on the *máti* are ordered in ways that resemble Western forms of pathology: there are symptoms, diagnostic trials, etiologies, therapeutic cures, and preventative measures. That is, the existence of a cause and a cure is already assumed. On the other hand, the Greek logic of *mátiasma* differs from Western germ theory with respect to one key tenet: by drawing causal connections between somatic disease and positive social regard, the social reality of the *máti* presumes that the material body can be affected by invisible social forces too, an impossibility in allopathic medicine. This points to a broader pattern in Greek symbology where the body is receptive and conductive, able to receive and transmit metaphysical entities, like the *máti* in *mátiasma* or Christ in Holy Communion (discussed above) that come to inhabit symbolic media such as oil or wine. Therefore, in order to understand what the evil eye reveals about the body's nature, this section maps the role of material mediation in curing evil eye afflictions, beginning with the formal traits of *mátiasma* in Messinía.

Observations in Messinía and a survey of the ethnographic literature in Greece (Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976; Hardie 1981 [1923]; Herzfeld 1986a; Mousioni [n.d.]; Roussou 2005, 2011; Veikou 1998) and among the Greek diaspora (Rouvelas 1993) reveal a multitude of diagnostic and curative measures for *mátiasma*—some contradictory—depending on region, generation, religious versus secular authority, and family tradition. Despite such variability, significant agreement exists. Common symptoms include headache, weakness, fatigue, listlessness, appetite loss, and sudden fits of yawning or weeping. In babies, the *máti* may be indicated as the reason for incessant crying, screaming, and excessive fussiness. Among plants and animals, the sudden withering of crops or inexplicable deaths of livestock, poultry, or draft animals are also suspect. Rosebushes, fig trees, apricot trees, and other plants prized for their beauty or fruit are especially susceptible, as are horses and mules. Moreover, objects that suddenly

break, especially valuable or admired possessions, may also have been subject to the *máti*. In Messinía, friends revealed that cars, household appliances, and even dishes cooking in the oven had been ruined by the destructive force of the *máti*.

According to most Messinians, the *máti* comprises a negative energy force (*enérgeia*) generated by envy or admiration. A growing minority of Greeks, especially those versed in New Age discourse or its critic, biomedical skepticism, attribute *mátiasma* to energy fields and karmic spiritualism, or the power of suggestion and the placebo effect, respectively (Roussou 2011). The majority of Greeks, however, agree that the energy of the *máti* transmits the power (*dhínami*) or ability (*dhinatótita*) to do harm inherent in someone's envious gaze or voiced compliment. It is inherent because the *máti* is considered natural and the potential to unleash it is a part of human nature—and, so, universal—although some people are more likely than others do so thanks to some innate quality—tradition identifies persons with unusual physical appearance, like blue-eyed people (*ghalanomátidhes*) or persons with unified eyebrows (*smighména frídhia*), as especially predisposed. Despite such proneness (or because of it), Greeks draw a strong distinction between the *máti* and witchcraft (*mághia*), where witchcraft implies motives that are calculated and aggressive while the unleashing of the *máti* is always passive and unintentional.

The Greek Orthodox Church, by contrast, distinguishes between common knowledge of *mátiasma*—delegitimized as a form of superstition and magic—and the officially recognized form called *vaskanía*, which identifies jealousy and grudge as motivations for injury and Satan as the exclusive agent. Because *vaskanía* is an “operation of the wicked spirit [and] a work of the devil,” the dogma of the Church is that only divine intervention can loosen its grip. In reality, however, most clerics tolerate and reframe folk practices (through scriptural instruction) to combat the *máti*, and lay Greeks perceive no discontinuity between ecclesiastical and folk understandings of *mátiasma*. As has been shown elsewhere (Stewart 1991), folk beliefs and rituals like *mátiasma* are wholly integrated with those of Orthodox theology, forming a broader Hellenic cosmology. Within this cosmology, I argue, the evil eye is one more example of how the body is presumed to be receptive and conductive.

Despite the shades of nuance, one thing is certain about the *máti*: it is not of the physical world and it is dangerous. It is not associated with diet or environmental conditions. Nor do congenital conditions make some people more vulnerable to *mátiasma* than others. However, what does make a person more susceptible to attack from *máti* is the possession of enviable qualities. Anything that draws a remark of admiration—from attractive physical features to one’s attire or hairstyle for the day—can result in *máti*. The oft-heard complaint “they eyed it!” (*mou to matiásane*) can be applied to easy targets like luxury items, prestigious jobs/roles, and even relationships. Tradition also points to pregnant women, women who have given birth in the last forty days, and soon-to-be-married individuals as vulnerable, as are infants and especially newborns that “have not yet passed forty days” of age (*asarántista*).³⁷ According to my friends, the social transitioning of these persons—what anthropologists would call their liminality—makes them more vulnerable precisely because they are under more scrutiny in these periods of change and, therefore, more likely to be the object of envy or resentment.

Xemátiasma: Diagnosis and Cure

If one suspects an affliction of *mátiasma*, one calls on a trusted relative, friend, or neighbor versed in *xemátiasma*,³⁸ the act of detecting and treating the condition. The fact that one calls on an intimate relation for *xemátiasma* is significant in two ways. First, it demonstrates that *xemátiasma* entails a dyadic relationship. People cannot cure themselves. Second, it demonstrates the intimacy prerequisite in a healer/victim relationship. Only rarely does one solicit an Orthodox priest, and even then, only in persistent cases that merit a full exorcism (*exorkismós*), or because one identifies with the Church’s official stance that lay engagement with *mátiasma* comes exceedingly close to witchcraft and ought to be left to ordained ministers. While most allude to convenience as the chief reason for preferring the help of non-priests, another reason may reflect a Greek distaste for impersonal, institutional interventions in highly personal matters (for attitudes towards bureaucratic institutions, see Herzfeld 2005). Related to this is the fact that

³⁷ After forty days, the mother and baby are (re)entered into the community in a formal rite of integration called “churching” (*ekkliiasmós*), after which time their vulnerability dissipates.

³⁸ Literally un-eyeing; compound form: *xe-* “un” + *-mátiasma* “condition afflicted by the eye”

money or gifts must never be given in exchange for a *xemátiasma*. In fact, even thanking a healer verbally after the execution of a *xemátiasma* will undo its effects, underscoring a relationship between the healer and the victim that focuses on something other than a business-like transaction for services rendered. For reasons explained below, no exchanges are allowed.

The majority of practitioners are women, although a few men are also known to be adept healers. In fact, one is supposed to learn the craft from a member of the opposite gender (cf. Hardie 1981 [1923]), and from older to younger as the alternative compromises the power wielded by the teacher and the initiate. It is with these rules in mind that, six months after my first experience with Christína, on Holy Thursday,³⁹ she (an older woman) instructed me (a younger man) on the craft of *xemátiasma*. Not only did the instructions have to be in writing (so that they would not be spoken out loud), but I also had to destroy the slip of paper once I committed its contents to memory. Additionally, the reason that Christína waited until Holy Thursday to teach me how to diagnose and dispel the evil eye is because this day, the day that the Orthodox Church commemorates Christ's Last Supper and the pedilavium (washing of feet, Latin), is the best day to pass this particular "wish" (*efchi*) from one person to another. All these considerations, I was told, preserved the potency of the incantation and cure.

In Messinía, practitioners favor two therapies in particular. While salt, Easter flowers, cloves, fire, smoke, and white candles are appropriate ingredients of *xemátiasma*, each with their own prescriptive uses, the most common therapy—and the one that Christína formally taught me—concerns the use of water and olive oil. According to her and other practitioners, the water must first be handled with silence. The "unspoken water" (*amílito neró*) is an element in other rituals, too, where silence preserves water's inherent purity.⁴⁰ Although subject to this stricture, the water—about

³⁹ The Thursday prior to Easter Sunday which marks the beginning of the Passions.

⁴⁰ The unspoken water (*amílito neró*) is present also in celebrations at New Years (the first drawing of water for the new year) and the birth celebration of St. John the Baptist, among others. In these traditions, the water is drawn by maidens from a spring and considered especially pure and potent. For more about spring water, consult Stewart 1991. And for *nero ásmpórsto* in Macedonia, see Hardie 1981 [1923].

“two fingers” deep in a cup⁴¹—comes from the ordinary tap. The olive oil, on the other hand, ought to derive from the oil lamp from the household shrine. As I witnessed with Christína and others, however, this ideal was not always observed and even normal kitchen oil is easily blessed if one prays over it “so long as you have correct thinking.”⁴² Finally, some practitioners advise the victim to prepare by sitting with arms and legs uncrossed “so that the goodness can act.”⁴³

Initiating the *xemátiasma*, the practitioner recites the following Orthodox blessing silently over the water, making the sign of the cross (*sfrághisma*) three times: *In the name of the Father (+), and of the Son (+), and of the Holy Spirit (+), for [name of mátiasma victim]*.⁴⁴ It is at this time that she may begin yawning. This *khasmouritó*—a fit of intense yawning—is a sure sign that the *máti* has befallen the victim. Indeed, the stronger the victim’s *mátiasma*, the more intense will be the practitioner’s yawning fit.

The next step calls for her to let three drops of oil fall from her fingertip into the water and look for one of two things to happen: either (1) the drops of oil remain immiscible from the water and may pool together into a distinctive layer (as one expects oil to do), or, (2) they blend with the water and disperse into smaller droplets, perhaps spreading to the sides of the vessel. According to Christína, if the oil maintains its natural tendency to separate from water, then no evil eye is present. Conversely, if water and oil do mix, then the *máti* is present and a prayer is said, followed by ritual spitting (uttering *Ftou!* or *Ptou!* three times) and making the sign of the cross (*sfrághisma*) on the victim’s forehead with the residual oil on her finger.

At this point, the evil eye has been cured. Indeed, the very act of identifying its presence is the same as curing it. As the oil blends and disperses in the water, so too does the evil eye—“the badness dissolves” (*dhialíetai to kakó*). This is true in an alternate version (which I never observed but was told of by friends), which calls for three live charcoals to be used in place of olive oil: should the charcoal sink or disintegrate, then not only has the *máti* been diagnosed, but it has simultaneously been driven out of the

⁴¹ *Dhío dháchtyla*. In cooking and other tasks, a finger width is a common measuring unit for liquids.

⁴² *Arkeí na écheis sostí sképsi*.

⁴³ *Na mporései to kaló na drásei*.

⁴⁴ (+) indicates moments of signing with the cross.

victim. Moreover, the hiss of each charcoal extinguishing in the water is desirable and equates to damping the energy of the evil eye. However, as with oil, the *máti* is not to blame if the charcoal behaves naturally and floats. Given these two examples, two important points emerge. The first concerns the material nature of the two ingredients and its role in diagnosing the evil eye. When oil or charcoal behave counter to their natures and lose their immiscibility and integrity in water then the supernatural *máti* is to blame. Secondly, in order to determine a supernatural reason versus a natural reason for one's discomfort, the energy of the evil eye must necessarily transfer to the mediating object. As with static electricity, we determine that a doorknob is charged when the knob shocks us, transferring (and neutralizing) the charge in the same process.

This analogy is exemplified in an embodied method of exorcism, a kind of sympathetic diagnosis where the practitioner, bearing the victim in mind, comes to suffer from the same discomfort as the victim. Consequently, this technique has the advantage of convenience, as I observed once while drinking at a coffeehouse with Christína's youngest sister, Voúla, when our conversation was interrupted by a cellphone call from her best friend who complained about feeling lethargic. As Voúla revealed to me later, she recited the Lord's Prayer while thinking intently of her friend. Relying on her own body as a dowsing rod, she experienced the telltale *khasmouritó* yawning, concluding that the evil eye had indeed struck her friend and was now gone. In fact, she called her friend back several minutes later to check if she felt better, which she did. This example, coupled with the fact that a self-*xemátiasma* is simply not effective ("it doesn't take"), stresses the central role that second-person, embodied mediation plays in locating and curing the evil eye. Physical bodies, both of healers and of material substances, absorb the energy of the evil eye and, therefore, neutralize it.

Perhaps this explains the effectiveness of preventative measures, primarily in the display of talismans. Charms (*phylactá*) among older people include metal coins depicting the saints, the cross, and the Virgin and Child, and are typically worn on the body. By far, however, the most popular charms among all ages are glass beads of indigo blue or a glass disk depicting the shape of an eye. This trendy *máti* is sold as various forms of jewelry for personal wear, or in larger forms, often combined with horseshoes and garlic heads, for use in the home (Figure 5-5). I observed such *máti* decorations in

bedrooms above the headboard, but also in doorways, hallways, or the room where visitors were usually entertained. They also hang from rear-view mirrors in countless cars, taxis, and buses, often alongside Orthodox icons. The popularity of this *máti* has been challenged only by the *komboskíni* (from the roots *kómbo*- “knot” and *-skíni* “string”) a string bracelet of black knots (one for each year of Jesus’s life) and blue beads. Originally sold at convents and monasteries (but now also commercial and online stores), these bracelets have achieved the status of religious charm and fashion accessory at once, and are ubiquitous among younger Greeks. In fact, it is a *komboskíni* that Christína gave me as a gift to protect me when I was returning home from my field research.



Figure 5-5. Protective charms. (Left) A *máti* and bead assortment dangle from the rear-view mirror; **(right)** the *komboskíni*, worn with a fashionable *máti* (photo credit: Penelope Kavadias).

The association between these charms and spaces of transition—architectural thresholds and modes of transportation—is important. Just as Greek lore maintains that crossroads are the favorite haunts of demons (Stewart 1991), so too are transitional areas spaces of vulnerability to the evil eye. In fact, the tension between inside and outside is invoked in some of the more popular incantations documented in other parts of Greece where water used in *xemátiasma* is thrown out the window or door while saying “out with the evil, in with goodness” (Hardie 1981 [1923]:118).

The same applies to spells that banish the evil eye, commanding it to retreat “to the mountaintops, the wild mountains, where the snakes and skinks are, that is where you

[evil eye] should go to eat, to drink, to hunt”⁴⁵ or “to the wild mountains and the unfruited trees, out badness, out badness, out badness.”⁴⁶ Indeed, the principle of expulsion invoked in these spells is significant in two ways. First, it points to assumptions about what constitutes a space of “other”—a wilderness of snakes, skinks, and unfruited trees (nature) versus (as emerges throughout this dissertation) the human touch required to make trees productive (culture). Second, it reflects the transferability of the *máti* and is the same operating principle assumed in the use of amulets. While charms of a religious nature appeal to divine powers to quash afflictions of the evil eye altogether (Hardie 1981 [1923]), secular charms, like blue beads, horseshoes, and depictions of eyeballs act as conductors that draw the eye to themselves before it strikes potential victims. Whether mounted above passageways or adorning a body, *phylactá* interfere with the flow of the evil eye either by absorbing its inertia or driving it away.

* * *

My experience with exorcism reveals some core traits of how the evil eye is understood in Messinía: the belief that certain individuals cause misfortune or disease; that they do so wittingly or unwittingly; that the afflictions are motivated by sentiments of envy or admiration; and that it is inflicted through demonic, energetic, or other metaphysical forces. However, it also reveals a model of the body that presumes it to be receptive and conductive, able to physically channel and relate to symbolic substances—like oil or wine—that manage the metaphysical.

Existing theories of the evil eye have traditionally interpreted it in terms of social crisis. This notion relies on the rule of functionalist anthropology that rituals identify and restore social ruptures caused by certain transgressions of norms. According to this line of thinking, social forms of envy and magic are critical elements in a technology of social control (Foster 1965; Kluckhohn 1962; Wolf 1955). About institutionalized envy, Wolf writes that it:

⁴⁵ *Sta óri, sta ághria vouná, pou'nai ófidhes, liákonía, ekeí na pas na fas, na pyies, na kynighíseis.*

⁴⁶ *Sta ághria vouná kai st'ákarpa dhéndra, éxo to kakó, éxo to kakó, éxo to kakó.*

minimizes disruptive phenomena such as economic mobility, abuse of ascribed power or individual conspicuous show of wealth. On the individual plane, it thus acts to maintain the individual in equilibrium with his neighbors. (Wolf 1955:360)

The ethnographic accounts presented above lend themselves to this easy interpretation. In Greece, where the moral norm is that of egalitarianism, the imperative for secrecy and downplaying one's successes is a commonplace of Greek ethnography (Campbell 1964; Herzfeld 1985; Loizos 1975; Loizos and Papataxiarches 1991a). Given that such behavior is also the surest way to avoid rousing envy, the evil eye may be seen in this context as playing a socially useful role in humbling the conspicuous display of wealth and tempering the stress arising from social and economic differences. John Roberts claims that "social inequality is probably a precondition to any elaboration of the evil eye" (Roberts 1976:261). *Mátiasma* signals a state of individual excess or superiority that threatens the stability of collective life: bodily distinction, social superiority, economic riches and other positive diacritics disrupt the norm (Roussou 2005; see also Galt 1982 for an Italian example).⁴⁷ So, it is argued that evil eye is symptomatic of rupture: social rupture and, therefore, moral rupture.

To take a step beyond the eye-as-rupture theory, however, I must address the fact that this rupture manifests itself in the body as physical discomfort and disease: literally the aches and pains of having transgressed a social expectation (of modesty, humbleness, equality, etc.). When the evil eye strikes, one's inner moral turmoil is bridged with one's outer discomfort and dis-ease. Physical disease, in the loosest sense, is a model of disorder—bodily, spiritual, emotional, and social. Thus, to diagnose and to heal the evil eye is to partake in a social discourse that constantly toggles between social and physiological order. For a curer in Messinía, the mere act of diagnosing bodily symptoms of the eye is also to acknowledge the social conditions that placed the victim in the eye's path. As an anthropologist who has experienced the evil eye affliction in my fieldsite, I also appreciate the power it has had in integrating and dis-integrating my own body in cultural research.

⁴⁷ In Crete, the same principle applies but in the opposite direction: the evil eye affects persons who are at a social disadvantage—indexed by undesirable traits, low prestige, poverty, and other social hindrances—counterpointing their inferiority in an egalitarian context (Herzfeld 1986).

I have discussed the evil eye as a symbolic complex, the ways that Greeks come to constitute and represent it, and the means by which they eradicate it. Diagnosis and cleansing of the evil eye occur through the medium of a separate material object. As Christína taught me, the evil eye is detected when the oil does not adhere to itself but rather blends with the water, contrary to its expected nature. The cure, similarly, is the oil's act of dispersal. In the initial prayers, the oil becomes integrated with the evil eye. Then, having dis-integrated with it, it is transferred to the victim's forehead in the shape of a cross. The principle of integrity is central in the immiscibility of the oil (its natural tendency to separate, rather than mix, with water). Thus, I observe that: (1) the evil eye is considered a fluid energy that can be transferred from one body to another, and (2) the physical integrity of the medium—or rather its dis-integration—is actually how the eye comes to be dis-integrated from the victim's body.

Specifically, integrity is a central concern with respect to the inner and outer dimensions of the body. It explains why one must sit with uncrossed legs and arms if one is to be healed, opening their body to permit the outflow of the evil eye and the inflow of blessings. We find iconic or metaphorical resemblances between healing agents (vessel of water/oil) and the bodies they come to heal, especially if we consider the body to be a unit with inner and outer dimensions, as Greeks do. For example, pregnant women or women who have recently given birth are considered to be more “open” and hence, more vulnerable to the evil eye. Babies, too, are thought to be vulnerable especially so until their bodies are “sealed” in the rite of baptism (see **Ch. 6**). Moreover, the metaphorical resemblance between the body and household architecture is compelling. Thresholds and passageways of the body and of the home are sites of potential danger. Amulets, while worn to protect the body from the gaze of passersby on the street, are also placed at the threshold of the door to protect the home from outsiders who pass through. Finally, this division between inner and outer explains the imperative to exhort the eye to go reside with snakes and skinks on the mountaintops away from civilization, among unfruited trees, away from the domestic realm.

The evil eye exists in many cultural contexts. Concepts of the evil eye appear in Vedic (Gonda 1969), Avestan (Forrest 2011), and early Greek writings (Onians 1988), as well as among Germanic and other Indo-European peoples. Although the evil eye is also

found in a number of other regions, the idea and practice of the evil eye is widely recognized to be part of a common Indo-European heritage (Gravel 1995). In many of these cases, it has been suggested, the evil eye demonstrates a historical lineage of ideas about the body and health, including ideas related to Galenic humoral balance and well-being. If so, this is consistent with the present argument that the evil eye in Messinía presumes a receptive and conductive body.

The claim in our own English language that the eye is a window to the soul echoes the above sentiment and assumes that the external, physical selves (our embodied state) and our internal a-physical selves (our moral state) are spatially distinct but connected. Despite the western binary of body and soul—or because of it—I suggest that parallel strategies of healing in both western biomedicine and the evil eye share some similarities: the shared assumption that an offending agent, like cancer, for instance, can and should be extracted belies a model of the body as a vessel whose integrity can be threatened. In Messinía, the receptive and conductive abilities presumed to inhere in the body are the same abilities that make it both victim and healer of the evil eye.

Conclusion: An Economy of Containment

In the convent of Sepetó where I began this chapter, Pappoúli assured me that “we need to be careful from Satan, not giving Satan a margin (*perithório*) to work...” Disturbed by unsettling dreams, I was warned of the dangers of this “margin,” a word—*perithório*—that, as I recorded it in my notebook, made me examine the blank space between the text on the page and the very limits of the paper I was writing on. In addition to conjuring images of page layout, common Greek usage of the word *perithório* connotes: (1) the “free or blank space at surface edges or at the edges of material bodies of certain dimensions;” and (2) metaphorically, “freedom for action, movement, etc., that exists or is given between certain limits or restrictions” (Triantafyllidis 1998:, translation mine). As the present chapter has shown, the margin in which Satan can work (or be expelled from) has metaphorical but also real dimensions.

The three case-studies above locate the Messinían body at the intersection of the physical and metaphysical realms. First, in the case of Holy Communion, the body ingests the divinity, which has been converted from the immaterial into the material

through ritual. Not only does the divinity transcend this planar divide, but because it becomes subject to the laws of biophysics—able to combine, circulate, absorb, and spill—the body is a vessel simultaneously capable of containment but also of leakage. Second, in the case of fasting, the body comes to regulate its own constitution through the addition or subtraction of vital behaviors and substances. Dietary and behavioral proscriptions work in tandem to ensure inner and outer integrity of the body, thus achieving the appropriate physical and spiritual disposition. Finally, in the case of the evil eye, a body falls victim to invisible forces that come to inhabit it, owing to the transgression of that body possessing properties of distinction, real or physiological. In order to rid itself of the force, the body depends on the material intervention of other bodies—human or fluid—that conduct its flow elsewhere.

Thus, by analyzing emissions, ingestions, and possessions, we conclude certain things about the conceptual anatomy of the Messinian body: specifically, that it is receptive and conductive in nature; it is to be conducted according to a moral ethos of containment; and that the virtuous body is a self-possessed body. First, Messinians conceive of the body as a physical vessel capable of receiving and conducting spirituosomatic entities. Its form and contents are coterminous with the person and of the material world. Yet it is highly conductive of meta-physical essences too, which affect physical wellbeing. Anthropologically, this model of the body differs greatly from others documented ethnographically. For example, the Melanesian body, described as a mosaic of gendered parts, is a dividual body able to objectify, extend, and transfer fragments of itself to other persons through food transactions (Kahn 1986; Meigs 1997; Strathern 1988; Young 1971). Owing to its partible nature both within and beyond the skin, it is “an entity that can dispose of parts in relation to others” (Strathern 1988:185), meaning that relations found within the body exist also beyond it (as discussed later, the act of “disposing” is significant here!). In contrast to this, the Dravidian body possesses “fluid boundaries” that readily issue and absorb substances that *flow* between bodies. In this schema, bodies are imagined as internally whole with constitutions whose integrity may be compromised by cross-flows, hence the existence of complex prohibitions about contact, especially between castes (Busby 1997; Daniel 1984; Khare 1976, 1992; Khare and Rao 1986; Marriott 1976). One final model, from Amazonia, posits the body as

divided between inner and outer aspects: the inner aspect is universal and human in nature, though its outward aspect (described as skin or clothing) resembles an animal or human in form, depending on the perspective of the viewer (Vilaça 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Thus, inner essence and outer appearance are relational, and food consumption—through the opposition of predator/prey—distinguishes between the groups of viewers (Mentore 1993; Viveiros de Castro 2012).

In contrast, the conductive body in Messinía is a bounded, individuated and material unit, but vessel-like in its capacity to receive and conduct immaterial essences, even from other bodies. In this respect, it resembles the Dravidian, permeable body as a receptacle and conduit of substances, though differs in how substances flow: not as physical contagions *between* bodies, but as metaphysical agents—energies or spirits—that manifest themselves through physical states of wellbeing. On the other hand, with respect to the duality of inner and outer dimensions, the Messinían and Amazonian bodies are inversions of one another since, on one hand, the Amazonian model presumes the inner core of all bodies to be universal (human) but relativizes the outer shell—what Viveiros de Castro (2012) terms “multinaturalism”—while, by contrast, the Messinían body, as a conducting body, presumes the outer vessel to be of a universally human nature whereas its inner contents are subject to change through vital behaviors and foods.⁴⁸

Doubtless, the metaphor of characterizing the body as a vessel in flux owes much to the humoral paradigm of Hippocratic and Galenic science, especially the moral imperative to balance internal constitutions, a task in wellbeing that was simultaneously dietary, behavioral, contemplative, and spiritual (Galen 1916; Hippocrates 1984; see also Conrad 1995; Kuriyama 1999; Pormann and Savage-Smith 2007). In fact, the ancient model presumed a direct causal relationship between the internal combination of fluids (humors) and the balance of temperaments (mental/behavioral states), a fact that explains the ancient imperative to achieve physical and mental equilibrium.

⁴⁸ That the body’s form exists prior to its contents, which are subject to processes of intervention, corresponds, respectively, to the useful distinction Strathern (1988) draws between the “given” and the “made” in kinship and gender analysis.

Which brings us to the second conclusion about the conduct of the Messinían body: it is subject to an economy of containment. This notion of an economy of containment is not new to Greek or Mediterranean ethnography, although the theoretical application of its tenets has been monopolized by questions of sexuality and competition, thanks to the dominance in these regions by the honor and shame paradigm (e.g., Brandes 1980; 1987; Campbell 1964; Douglass 1984; Dubisch 1991; Gilmore 1987; Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992; Pitt-Rivers 1955), though not without critique (Herzfeld 1980, 1984). Where the honor/code paradigm concentrated on the containment of female sexuality and the conduction of male prestige, deriving in large part from its methodological focus on household gender relations and analytic oppositions between public/private domains, I have presented three examples from ritual contexts that demonstrate how an economy of containment actually encompasses gender differences and speaks to a broader cosmology surrounding Greek personhood.

In these ritual cases, the economy of containment figures as the formula for determining good and bad practice. In Communion, ingestion or emission of the Eucharist determines the person's unity with God; in fasting, consuming or abstaining from vitality determines the body's unity with the soul; and in the evil eye, the invasion or expulsion of bad energy determines one's unity among social equals. In all three cases, containment is discriminatory and exclusive: some things stay in, others stay out. More importantly, what is considered a moral flow (absorption, abstention, and expulsion, respectively) or an immoral flow (spillage, consumption, and invasion) is determined by the role that personal control plays in directing these flows. One's mastery over what enters and leaves the body reflects positively on that person's moral "disposition," which leads us to our final point.

Taken together, the story of the Messinían body is a story of possession. Exegetically, the virtue of self-control—*egkráteia*—calls forth the restraint and temperance needed to eschew indulgences. In practice, *egkráteia* controls the foods and thoughts necessary for fasting and Communion, and tempers the kind of showiness that, in social situations, provokes the envious evil eye. Linguistically, the term for self-control, *egkráteia*, suggests the value of being *in possession* of oneself. To be in control of your body and how others appraise it is imperative. We already knew this with respect

to female sexuality in the honor/shame paradigm, where any misstep gives “margin” to the community to judge and act; but here the imperative suffuses broader aspects of Greek cultural life. In Messinía, self-possession brings two distinct but connected spaces into alignment: our external physical selves, and our internal invisible selves. If such unity fails, then “margin” is the space of disagreement between the two, the margin in which the devil (or society) can take liberties. Within an economy of containment, self-possession ranks among the profoundest of virtues, owing to the threat (or blessing) of possession by other entities.

Anthropologically, the virtue of *egkráteia* makes sense if we confront these rituals as what they are: instances of spirit possession. In classical anthropology, spirit possession evokes an altered state of consciousness “that is indigenously understood in terms of the influence of an alien spirit, demon, or deity” (Crapanzano 1987:12; see also Bourguignon 1973; Cohen and Barrett 2008; Crapanzano and Garrison 1977; Giles 2004; Lewis 1971). As Raymond Firth explains in *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, spirit possession refers to “phenomena of abnormal behavior which are interpreted by other members of the society as evidence that a spirit is controlling the person’s actions and probably inhabiting his body” (1967:296). In Greek Communion,⁴⁹ Christ very much inhabits the body of worshippers, virtually altering their biochemistry at the particle level to relate them through the genome of Christ. Among victims of the evil eye, bad energy occupies the inner space of the victim (or of her possessions or home), causing physical discomfort and mental distraction. On the other hand, fasting constitutes a rite of separation in which the exercise—*áskisi*—rests precisely in struggling to be in full possession of one’s faculties, to the point where it resembles a “form of knowledge” and an embodied “way of knowing,” in Janice Boddy’s analysis of spirit possession (1994:424).

In these cases, the altered state among Messinians, though not as visceral and dramatic as that among the Tikopia (whose model of possession centers on outside agents), derives from natural human weakness and a struggle of will-power. Hence the

⁴⁹ Orthodox Communion has not yet, to my knowledge, been analyzed explicitly in terms of spirit possession, nor have the curious behaviors of icons—e.g., in dreams and in rural landscapes—been analyzed as analogous to that of non-Western spirits, although Danforth’s description of St. Constantine (1989) and Stewart’s (1991) analysis of demons offer good starting points.

Messinian trope of “disposition.” Whereas to be positively disposed (*dhiathésimos*) entails struggling—through fasting—to achieve control over what flows into and out of the body, to be indisposed (*adhiáthetos*) means, on one hand, suffering the humility associated with taboos like menstruation and nocturnal emissions which stem from their uncontrollable nature, and, on the other, the idea of being “out of sorts” or “not quite one’s normal self.” In the former case, the person is in full possession of her/his body, in the latter, the body is calling the shots. And if one is physically ill and “indisposed” because one has lost control of how they are socially appraised, then the cure rests in regaining possession of the body from the evil eye. In these ways we see how disposition—or indisposition—are pathological measures of one’s ability to master *egkráteia*, that is, to be in possession of one’s self.

Messinians themselves draw the distinction between the material (*ylikó*) and the immaterial (*áylo*). Tellingly, Greek language users evoke the latter term interchangeably with the term for “bodiless” (*asómato*). On the one hand, such synonymity reveals an almost coterminous identification of the body with the concept of materiality. On the other hand, the three cases-studies presented here very clearly demonstrate how Messinians, if not all Greeks, believe in (1) the presence of metaphysical entities, and in (2) the body’s ability to channel these entities internally. By the final chapter of this dissertation, I argue that household bodies—estates—also channel properties, physical and metaphysical properties, in the same way that personal bodies do, concluding that the Messinian house, like the self, is defined through practices of possession and disposition. Before that, however, the next chapter must explore processes of boundary maintenance by which personal bodies—but also architectural bodies!—take shape and enter relationships of belonging.

KLIRONOMÍA AND THE SEAL: HOME AND BODY

Chapter 6

Introduction

Every Sunday during regular Orthodox service, the following prayer is repeated three times for the congregation to hear, once in the beginning, again in the middle, and one final time at the end of the Divine Liturgy:

Lord our God, save Your people and bless Your inheritance; protect the whole body of Your Church; sanctify those who love the beauty of Your house; glorify them in return by Your divine power; and do not forsake us who hope in You.

*(The Divine Liturgy of
St. John Chrysostom,
emphasis added)*

Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, σῶσον τὸν λαόν σου καὶ εὐλόγησον τὴν κληρονομίαν σου· τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας σου φύλαξον· ἀγίασον τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας τὴν εὐπρέπειαν τοῦ οἴκου σου· Σὺ αὐτοὺς ἀντιδόξασον τῇ θεϊκῇ σου δυνάμει καὶ μὴ ἐγκαταλίπῃς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἐλπίζοντας ἐπὶ σέ.

*(Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ Αγίου
Ιωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου;)*

Penned by one of the founding fathers of Eastern Christian tradition, St. John Chrysostom (349-407 C.E.), this prayer tangles together many of the important terms discussed in the previous chapter—body, house, and Church. However, unlike the previous chapter, which focuses on how these units interconnect through the flow of oil, food, and other substances, this chapter begins with an unlikely question about St. Chrysostom’s wording in one of Orthodoxy’s cornerstone prayers: what is the nature of the inheritance that God is implored to bless?

In standard Greek, the word *klironomía* translates to “inheritance” in two respects. First, it refers to the assets and monies that accrue after someone’s passing (Kriaras 1968; Triantafyllidis 1998; translation mine).¹ This juridical sense is coded in its compounded word-stems (*klíro-* “allotment” + *-nómos* “law”). In colloquial usage, *klironomía* also refers to a variety of meanings centered on the concept of “inheritance.” According to

¹ Περιουσία που περιέρχεται μετά το θάνατο κάπ. στην κυριότητα κάπ. άλλου.

Greek language authorities, it may refer to: (1) an allotment, usually of land; (2) property, possessions, or powers derived from inheritance; (3) the legal or social right to inherit; (4) the heirs and descendants of an inheritance; and finally (5) *to the religious laity, the faithful*. Where the first definitions refer to the objects accrued (Definitions 1-2), the act of accrual itself (Def. 3), or to the persons who accrue (Def. 4), it is the last definition that intimates a relationship between “inheritance” (as we know it) and religious identification. Given the polysemic nature of *klironomia* in Greek linguistics, what does the *klironomia* to which the faithful refer when they implore God’s Grace reveal about the nature of inheritance in its physical and metaphysical aspects? The question is important because it makes room in the domain of Greek religion—which has been analyzed primarily in terms of families, cosmology, or body (Bratsiotis 1968; Campbell 1964; Iossifides 1991; Sant-Cassia and Bada 1992; Stewart 1991; Sutton 1998a)—to address cultural definitions of wealth. By answering this question, we paint the second half of the portrait started in the previous chapter: the portrait of Greek Orthodoxy as a kind of mini-house society comprised of flows of essence and wealth.

To answer this unlikely question, the present chapter takes an equally unlikely path. It surveys three events centering on the theme of spiritual and somatic *integrity*. The first event concerns the meanings of Baptism and Chrismation, which has sophisticated explanations within Church and lay narratives, but also evidences a preoccupation with purity and spatial fortification. The second event concerns the Paschal vigil and the observances that occur in the home for Easter. While these are taken as symbolic representations of Christ’s death and resurrection, they also demonstrate patterns focused on fortifying the integrity of dwelling places and entryways. The final event, the Burning (or Blowing Up) of Judas, depicts the dishonorable fall of a traitor, but also dramatizes the underlying relationship between moral and physical corruption. I conclude that all three events elicit a dialectical relationship between moral integrity and physical integrity. More important, however, is that they evidence a symbolic parallel between the human body and the family household. In the intricate world of Orthodox ritual, hierarchies of patronage (in the spiritual sense) blur conventional distinctions between persons and possessions.

All three discussions delve into the symbolic particularities of ritual essences like water, light, fire, and olive oil, necessary for piecing together the larger web of meaning in Messinían ritual. Messinians consider all three of these events to bear religious significance although with some reservations, as we will see. For this reason, the theological tone of this chapter, juxtaposed to representations from popular culture, aims not to draw boundaries between official doctrine and secular interpretations of spiritual matters, but to better situate key events in an integrative Orthodox worldview (Stewart 1991). Also for this reason, it avoids engaging with anthropological theories of economy or money until **Ch. 7**, electing instead to focus on the internal logic of a Greek Orthodox relationship to wealth and economy.

Rites of Initiation: Vaftísia and Mýro

Baptism

Mélpi sat me down in the armchair opposite the flat screen television, bringing me a hot demitasse of Greek coffee, prepared sweet, and a tall glass of water. I took a sip of water, exclaiming the perfunctory “to your health!”² as she pushed a videotape into the old VHS player in her entertainment center. “May you be well, my mother. Now wait, let’s see...,”³ she muttered as she pressed a precise combination of buttons on a collection of remote controls. Achieving at last a grainy image on the screen, the timestamp in the lower corner indicated a recording date of 23 August 1993. Mélpi had agreed to show me the baptism of her son, Antónis, now aged 20 but barely one year old in the video. As footage of the baptism rolled it became clear to me that Antónis’ baptism, performed in a country chapel just over the mountain, resembled the one that I performed thirteen years previously in America as a godfather.

Baptism (*váptisma* or *váptisi*) is one of the seven sacraments of the Greek Orthodox Church (Constantelos 1967; Rouvelas 1993). This sacrament (*mystírion*), is performed along with the sacrament of Chrismation (discussed below), and is referred to in Messinía in the plural neuter form—*vaftísia*—referring possibly to the multiple immersions of the baby in a baptismal font. As Mélpi told me, it is important for the child

² *Stín ygeiá sas!*

³ *Ná’sai kalá mána mou. Ghia kátse tóra na doúme.*



Figure 6-1. Baptism, illustration from *Euchologion to Mega*

to “take a name” and “to become Greek Orthodox.”⁴ While most of my friends, like Mélpí, stressed the role of baptism in bestowing a person’s name and initiating religious life, Father Sérghios was careful to characterize it as a rite of passage: “Baptism is the sacrament of entering the Church. It’s the infant’s entry into our faith (pause), its integration into our faith and into Christ. It is for its spiritual good.”⁵ Here, Father Sérghios refers to the rite of baptism both as an “entry” (*eísodhos*) and as a “spiritual good” (*pneumatikó kaló*).

In fact, the very architectural and spiritual dimensions of this ritual entry were dramatized vividly in the rituals that unfolded on Mélpí’s television screen and in my memory as a godfather. The baptism of Antónis began in the church narthex, the back segment of the church opposite the inner-sanctuary. Held by his godmother (*noná*; masc. *nonós*), whom Mélpí praised to no end as “the best person” (*o kalíteros ánthropos*), Antónis wore a blue and white striped shirt and shorts over an infant’s bodysuit. His demeanor was generally calm; only occasionally did he go wide-eyed with curiosity when approached by the priest, a rather bulky man with a bald head and long beard atop an imposing mass of black robes, speeding through his prayer book. It was also in the narthex, I recollected, where the baptism of my goddaughter, Olivia, began.⁶ The priest who presided over our sacrament, however, was younger, more soft spoken, and much more carefully groomed than the one looming over Antónis in the video.

⁴ *Na párei ónoma; Na gínei ellinorthódoxo*

⁵ *Eínai to mystírío tis eisódou tou anthrópou stin ekklesía. Eínai i eísodhos tou vréfou sti thriskeía mas (pause), i myisi tou sti thriskeía mas kai sto Christó. Eínai gia to pneumatikó tou kaló.*

⁶ I reconstruct this experience from memory, as well as from video and photos. Text is transcribed from the instructional materials every godparent receives from the clergy and is expected to review prior to the Baptism.

Just as Antónis' godmother was instructed to do, so too was I instructed to face with my back to the altar toward the Church's front entrance (westward), holding Olivia in my arms, and to follow the priest's lead:

Priest: Do you renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his worship, and all his angels, and all his pomp? [*Pointing to my line in the prayer book and feeding my line in whisper*: I do renounce him]⁷

Dionisios: I do renounce him.

P: Have you renounced Satan?

D: I have renounced him.

P: Then blow and spit upon him.

D: *Blows into the air thrice, and then spits on the ground thrice.*

P: *Turns Dionisios and Olivia to face the altar (east) and asks:*

Do you join Christ?

D: I do join Him.

P: Have you joined Christ?

D: I have joined Him.

P: And do you believe in Him?

D: I believe in Him as King and as God.

At this point in the script, both Antónis' godmother and I were expected to recite the Nicene Creed, a summary of the Church's basic tenants and whose memorization in the Church's koinē dialect of Greek induced many anxieties on my part. Perhaps this anxiety explains why I didn't realize until watching Antónis' video that the exchange between the priest and the godparent in the Church's narthex is one of sponsorship; rather than testify to his/her own Orthodox convictions, the godparent actually speaks on behalf of the initiate (*katichoúmenos*) about to be baptized (Chock 1974; Rouvelas 1993; cf. Herzfeld 1982; Stewart 1991).

In the video, Antónis' godmother now faced toward the altar (east) but remained far behind the arcade that separates the narthex from the congregation. The priest then instructed her to state the child's given name for the first time, and asked God to make the candidate worthy of baptism by cleansing away all sins and filling the child with the Holy Spirit (*Aghío Pnévma*). It was at this point in the video that the portly priest, Antónis, and his godmother left the narthex and moved through the congregation to the front of the church where the large baptismal font was located and ready with water. This

⁷ Each question and answer couplet was repeated three times. After asking each new question, the priest whispered to me the response I was to state.

font (standard, *kolymvíthra*; Messinian, *kolympíthra*) became the locus for the rest of the rite. Even the cameraman shifted focus: from a side table where the godmother began removing Antónis' baby-boy clothes, to the priest who was now sanctifying the baptismal water, making the sign (*sfrághisma*) of the cross three times in the font's water, praying:

But do You, O Master of All, declare this water to be water of redemption, water of sanctification, a cleansing of flesh and spirit, a loosing of bonds, a forgiveness of sins, an illumination of soul, a laver of regeneration, a renewal of the spirit, a gift of sonship, a garment of incorruption, a fountain of life. For You have said, O Lord: "Wash, and be clean; put away evil from your souls."

Αλλά συ, Δέσποτα των απάντων, ανάδειξον το ύδωρ τούτο, ύδωρ απολυτρώσεως, ύδωρ αγιασμού, καθαρισμόν σαρκός και πνεύματος, άνεσιν δεσμών, άφεσιν παραπτωμάτων, φωτισμόν ψυχής, λουτρόν παλλιγενεσίας, ανακαινισμόν πνεύματος, υιοθεσίας χάρισμα, ένδυμα αφθαρσίας, πηγήν ζωής. Συ γαρ είπας, Κύριε· Λούσασθε, και καθαροί γίνεσθε, αφέλετε τας πονηρίας από των ψυχών υμών.

As Antónis' godmother struggled to remove the last of his clothing, the camera centered on an adolescent boy holding a container of olive oil next to the font. As the boy (the godmother's own son) held the oil, the priest formed the sign (*sfrághisma*) of the cross three times and prayed (my emphasis):

Sovereign Lord and Master, God of our Fathers, Who did send to them in the Ark of Noah a dove bearing a twig of olive in its beak as a sign of *reconciliation and salvation* from the Flood, and through these things prefigured the Mystery of Grace; and thereby have filled them that were under the Law with the Holy Spirit, and perfected them that are under Grace: do You Yourself bless this Oil by the power (+) and operation (+) and descent of the Holy Spirit (+) that it may become an *anointing of incorruption*, a *shield* of righteousness, a *renewal of soul and body*, and *averting* of every operation of the devil, to the removal of all evils from them that are anointed with it in faith, or that are partakers of it.⁸

Δέσποτα, Κύριε, ο Θεός των Πατέρων ημών, ο τοις εν τι κιβωτώ του Νώε περιστεράν αποστείλας, κάρφος ελαίας έχουσαν επί του στόματος, καταλλαγής σύμβολον, σωτηρίας τε της από του κατακλυσμού, και το της χάριτος μυστήριον δι' εκείνων προτυπώσας· ο και της ελαίας τον καρπόν εις πλήρωσιν των αγίων σου Μυστηρίων χορηγήσας, ο δι' αυτού και τους εν νόμω Πνεύματος Αγίου πληρώσας και τους εν χάριτι τελειών· Αυτός ευλόγησον και τούτο το έλαιον, τη δυνάμει (+) και ενεργεία (+) και επιφοιτήσει του Αγίου σου Πνεύματος (+), ώστε γενέσθαι αυτό χρίσμα αφθαρσίας, όπλον δικαιοσύνης, ανακαινισμός ψυχής και σώματος, πάσης διαβολικής ενεργείας αποτρόπαιον, εις άπαλλαγήν κακών, πάσι τοις χριομένοις αυτό εν πίστει, ή και μεταλαμβάνουσιν εξ αυτού.

⁸ (+) indicates moments of signing with the cross.

The priest then took the oil and poured it into the font (*kolympíthra*), three times, each time in the shape of a cross.

Even amongst Greek Orthodox in America, it is customary for the godparent to supply all the necessary items for the baptism, including white hand towels, bath towel, and sheet, as well as the olive oil intended to consecrate the baptismal water (and soon, the baby). Reflecting on Olivia's baptism in America and how my mother procured olive oil from a chain supermarket before transferring it to a faux crystal decanter, I asked numerous friends in Messinía who have sponsored or organized baptisms from where they sourced the olive oil: unanimously, everyone supplied baptismal oil from their own family-made stock. In fact, Mélpí's certainty that the oil used for her son's baptism must have derived from his godparents' groves—"eh, what else would it have been?"⁹—evidences how the default and ideal oil for the rite of Baptism is family-made oil from the godparent's household.

As the video rolled, Mélpí eagerly pointed out people in the audience and shared trivia about their lives—relatives with histories of emigration and friends with big estates (*periousíes*). Her chatty commentary overlapped with the priest's hurried invocations, adding to the cacophony of Antónis' fussy cries as the last bits of his clothing were removed. At this point (about half an hour from when the video began) I had finished my coffee and started sipping the rest of the water, withdrawing mentally from the noise in the living room to recall with appreciation how quiet my goddaughter, Olivia, had been up to this point in the ceremony, oblivious to what was awaiting her next.

Turning back to the video, Antónis, now nude, was transferred to the arms of the godmother's adolescent son, who held him nervously. The priest then instructed the godmother, whose hands were now free, to cross her right hand palm-up over her left, forming the sign of the cross (Figure 6-2b). Positioning her cupped hands over the font (*kolympíthra*), the priest poured as much as a cup of olive oil into them—much of it dripped into the holy water and layered on top as a slick film. What happened next was executed with swift precision. Scrunching his thumb and forefingers into the sign of the cross, he dipped them into the godmother's oil, and then smeared the sign (*sfrághisma*) of

⁹ *e, ti állo thá'tane?*

the cross—in oil—on a precise combination of Antónis’ body parts (Figure 6-2c). First, on the forehead, breast, and between his shoulders, as though painting with his fingertips, while praying:

Anointed is the servant of God,
Antónis, with the Oil of Gladness, For
healing of soul and body.

Χρίεται ο δούλος του Θεού, Αντώνης,
έλαιον αγαλλιάσεως, Εις ίασιν ψυχής
και σώματος.

Undaunted by Antónis’ protests, the priest moved deftly from right to left, adding anointed oil in the sign (*sfrághisma*) of the cross, this time to the ears and mouth, saying:

For the hearing of Faith.

Εις ακοήν πίστεως

Then, to the thighs and under the soles:

That he may walk in the paths of Your
commandments.

Του πορεύεσθαι τα διαβήματα σου.

Back up to the upper arms and down to the hands, before turning the baby around, and making the sign (*sfrághisma*) of the cross on each shoulder, moving consistently from right to left.

[That] your hands have made me, and
fashioned me.

Αι χείρες σου εποίησαν με, και
έπλασαν με.

This elaborate marking of the body was complete within a mere twenty seconds, so much so that it completely escaped my memory when it was done to my own goddaughter. However, what happened next elicited the same complaints from Antónis, my goddaughter, and all other babies whose baptismal videos I watched. As the biological parents looked on from within the crowd, the priest rolled up his sleeves, grasped the baby from under its arms, and held it above the font as the godmother slathered the remainder of the olive oil all over its body, beginning from the top of the head, then down the arms, neck—“under the chin!”—belly, genitals, legs and feet (Figure 6-2d). For Olivia’s sake, I remember trying to speed through what must have been for Olivia a distressful ordeal (if her wails were any indication), while at the same time heeding the warning to anoint her entire body, lest (as I was cautioned) any unoiled parts of the baby be cursed for life with a foul smell! Moreover, the video showed the adolescent son also smearing Antónis with oil, sheepishly anointing just the legs and



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Figure 6-2. Baptism and Chrismation.

(a) Olive oil presented by the godmother; (b) pouring oil into the godparent's hands; (c) the priest anoints the child's extremities; (d) the godparent anoints the whole child; (e) *Aghio Mýro* blessing the sole; (f) the *neofótistos* in garments of white.

shoulders. Asking Mélpí why the adolescent boy also anointed Antónis, she explained that the godmother wanted for her son to be a godparent too because “God sees these things and is happy” (*o theós ta blépei aftá kai chaírete*). For the rest of the ritual, the adolescent son (now Antónis’ new godfather) performed no other duties after slathering Antónis’ extremities with oil. Asking my friends why this minimal work should qualify him to be a godparent, many expressed the self-explanatory sentiment that “he held oil” (*épiase ládhi*).

Holding the baby high in front of him, and turning eastwards to face the altar, the priest then dipped the oil-slicked baby into the font, immersing it as much as possible and wetting the top of the head with a splash of water. Audience members, including Antónis’ parents, chuckled and smiled each time the forceful wails of the oily, bedraggled baby were transformed to comic gurgles with each dunking, briefly allowing the priests’ words to be heard:

The servant of God, Antónis, is baptized in the Name of the Father (×), and of the Son (×), and of the Holy Spirit (×), both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.¹⁰

Βαπτίζεται ο δούλος του Θεού, Αντώνης, εις το όνομα του Πατρός (×), και του Υιού (×), και του Αγίου Πνεύματος (×), νυν και αεί και εις τους αιώνας των αιώνων. Αμήν.

Chrismation: The Ághio Mýro

The Sacrament of Baptism is over once the priest returns the child—wet, oily, and grumpy—into the waiting arms of the godparent, who wraps the baby in white linen. However, this is where the second sacrament, that of Chrismation, begins. Simply put, the baptized child, now identified by a Christian name, receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. Although officially called the *mystírio tou Chrísmatos* (Sacrament of Chrismation), Mélpí and others called this ceremony with reference to its key ingredient, the *Ághio Mýro* (Holy Myrrh). The *Ághio Mýro* goes by several names in the Church. For instance, Eucharistic oil (*élaion eucharistías*), chrismal oil (*élaion chriseos*), Eucharist chrism (*élaion efcharistías*), and heavenly chrism (*chrísma epouránion*). Nonetheless,

¹⁰ (×) indicates moments of dunking the infant into the font.

Messinians refer to it simply as *mýro*, connoting the special oil that “carries” (*forei*) the Holy Spirit.

However, unbeknownst to my Messinian friends, the *mýro* reflects a strict prerogative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, which produces the holy essence once every decade and distributes it to all Eastern Orthodox Churches (Antoniadou 2002; Dudley and Rowell 2008). Made of 57 different botanical and aromatic ingredients, chief of which is olive oil, the sanctified essence is used for: the inauguration of new churches and the sanctification of the Holy Altar (*Aghía Trápeza*); the consecration of holy objects and icons; and the disposal of holy relics. In short, the *mýro* marks all physical objects that constitute the material world of the Orthodox Church, from the largest cathedral to the smallest knucklebone of St. Demetrius, and everything else in between.

The *mýro* is used in two more important ways. First, it is used to bless the coronation of monarchs in Orthodox nations. Second, and as Mélpí and I were about to see in the video of her son’s baptism, it is also used to anoint individuals who come to Orthodoxy from other faiths or through the Sacrament of Baptism. As the video rolled, the priest began to pray (my emphasis):

Compassionate King of All, bestow upon him also the *seal* of Your omnipotent and venerated Holy Spirit, and the Communion of the Holy Body and Most Precious Blood of Your Christ; *keep* him in Your sanctification; *confirm* him in the Orthodox Faith; deliver him from the Evil One and all his devices; *preserve* his soul, through Your saving fear, in purity and righteousness, that in every work and word, being acceptable before You, he may become a *child and heir* of Your heavenly Kingdom.

Δέσποτα παμβασιλεύ εύσπλαγχνε, χάρισαι αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν σφραγίδα τῆς δωρεάς τοῦ αγίου καὶ παντοδυνάμου, καὶ προσκυνητοῦ σου Πνεύματος, καὶ τὴν μετάληψιν τοῦ αγίου Σώματος, καὶ τοῦ τιμίου Αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου. Φύλαξον αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ σωῆν αἱγιασμῷ· βεβαίωσον ἐν τῇ Ὁρθοδόξῳ πίστει ρύσαι ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων αὐτοῦ, καὶ τῷ σωτηρίῳ σου φόβῳ, ἐν ἀγνείᾳ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ διατήρησον ἵνα, ἐν παντί ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ εὐαρεστών σοι, υἱός καὶ κληρονόμος τῆς ἐπουρανίου σου γένῃται βασιλείας.



Figure 6-3. Chrism, illustration from *Euchologion to Mega*

This said, Antónis was approached for the first time as a *neofótistos* (newly enlightened one) by the priest, holding a silver vessel containing the *Ághio Mýro*. Using a small brush dipped into the vessel of *Ághio Mýro*, the priest made the sign (*sfrághisma*) of the cross on Antónis' forehead, ears, chest, back, hands, and feet, each time repeating the phrase "The Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Amen" (*Sfragheís doreás Pnévmatos Aghiou. Amin*).

Soon, the child was dressed in garments of white, gifts from the godparent. Whereas Antónis gave his godmother little trouble in dressing him, I recalled that Olivia was so obstinate with me after her dunkings that her grandmothers stepped in to clothe her—her parents, meanwhile, were required not to interfere. I was also not aware, as I learned from Mélpi and others, that these clothes were not to be laundered with normal clothes and instead should be washed in the sea (at least for their first laundering) as they had absorbed the sanctified oil. When pressed to explain this proscription, the best they could offer was an educated guess relating to the baptism of Jesus. As Roúla stated, "Maybe because when St. John the Baptist baptized Christ, he did it out in nature. Because the River Jordan was blessed. The laundry machine will not do. Those [clothes] are blessed."¹¹ Despite the inexplicable basis for this prohibition, one thing was certain to my informants: the white clothes worn by the newly baptized child bore a special status precisely because they absorbed the sanctified oils of Baptism and the *Ághio Mýro*.

Another proscription concerns the treatment of the *neofótistos* itself. According to Mélpi and other mothers, the newly baptized child should not be bathed in order for the olive oils from both the Baptism and the Chrismation to be fully absorbed. Furthermore, the child was to be brought back to the church for the next two Sundays to receive Holy Communion, completing a post-Baptismal regimen of three Holy Communion (the first one being administered following Chrismation). Finally, the baby was to be kept indoors for the rest of the day following Baptism. Although I knew the Church did not sanction this, Mélpi insisted that the *neofótistos* was especially susceptible to the evil eye on this day (*tha to matiásoune*), one of the reasons why godparents might present the child with a turquoise eye (*máti*) or pendant along with the gift of a cross and necklace made of

¹¹ *Ísos epeidí ótan o Ioánnis o Pródromos eváftise to Christó égine éxo sti fýsi. O Iordánis Potamós ítan evloghiménos. Dhen káneí sto plyndirio. Autá éinai evloghiména.*

precious metal. All these gifts are intended for *fýlaxi* (protection) of the newly enlightened child. The significance of these gifts escaped none of the videographers whose baptismal videos I surveyed. As the image on the screen zoomed in on the cross and chain being placed around Antónis' neck, I asked Mélpí if he now possessed it so many years later. She responded, "Granted! It's *keeping* him now while he's serving¹²", referring to the fact that the cross is the only jewelry allowed while serving in the Greek armed forces, aside from a wedding band.

We continued chatting until the end of the video, which included footage of the candy favors (*bomboniéres*) being distributed to all the attendees, action shots of kids running around the church, and, of course, Antónis himself, visibly drained of energy but contently reunited with his pacifier in the arms of his mother. I remember too how, after Olivia's Baptism and Chrismation in America, she slept all the way home.

* * *

The meanings of Baptism and Chrismation have sophisticated explanations within Church doctrine. On one hand, the rituals themselves reiterate the baptism of Christ and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Laypersons also interpret these sacraments as representations of Christ's baptism, as they understand it. On the other hand, analysis of prayers and practices reveal structural themes concerning the imperatives of purification and sealing. In turn, both of these themes prefigure a spiritual mode of belonging and "ownership" that, I claim, underlies much of Orthodoxy.

To begin, the Sacrament of Baptism is understood to cleanse the soul of the original sin incurred by Adam and Eve, a tenet of Christianity thoroughly documented by anthropologists and theologians (Bratsiotes 1968; Kaelber 1987; Rouvelas 1993). The most significant way baptism is thought to purify the soul is through immersion in the font. Literally, the name of the baptismal font, *kolymbíthra*, connotes a diving or swimming place (from *kolýmvi*, swimming). According to Orthodox exegesis, the *kolymbíthra* symbolizes a divine womb in which the child receives a second birth as a

¹² *Ennoeítai! Ton fýlæi tóra sto fadarilíki.*

child of God. It also interprets the three sequential immersions as symbolic of the three days of Christ’s burial and resurrection, according to the Paschal narrative (Bratsiotes 1968; Rouvelas 1993). However, the tripartite immersions yield also a literal death and rebirth, according to Father Sérghios: “Attention, though, because this is also the reason it [baptism] symbolizes also the death of the old person and the rebirth of the new [one].”¹³ The Sacrament of Baptism does not only dramatize the narrative of Christ’s death/resurrection, but mimics it in a process believed to actually transform the spiritual state of persons, transforming the “unwashed” so that they may enter the House of God.

Analytically, the purification process must be understood through the symbolic “work” done by its two key ingredients: water and olive oil. Just as wine and bread must be combined to elicit powerful qualities in the Sacrament of the Communion, both water and oil are invoked for the “renewal of soul and body,” suggesting their complementarity in the holy baptismal font. Prayers sanctifying baptismal water invoke God to make it the water of “redemption...of sanctification, a cleansing of flesh and spirit...a laver of regeneration, a renewal of the spirit.”

Table 13: Water/Oil Complementarity

Water		Olive Oil	
redeemer		agent of incorruption	
cleanser	renewer	shield	
laver		aversion	
(Purifier)		(Defender)	

In turn, the prayer that sanctifies olive oil resembles an herbalist theory of the olive: the prayer first cites the Old Testament narrative of a dove delivering Noah an olive twig, signaling the retreat of the Great Flood—which washed away the wicked—and God’s reconciliation with humanity. It is thanks to this precedence, the prayer assumes, that olive oil is the ingredient predisposed to adding “an anointing of incorruption, a shield of righteousness, a renewal of soul and body, and [an] averting of

¹³ *Prósexe ómos giatí aftós einai kai o logos pou symbolízei ton thánato tou paliou anthrópou allá kai thn anástasi tou kainoúrgiou.*

every operation of the devil.” As shown in Table 13, when these baptismal elements are taken together, they play specific but complementary roles: although both are invoked as renewers, water is the element of purification while olive oil is an element of defense. The former washes the initiate’s soul of impurities, whereas the latter protects it from new adulteration. If we consider the qualisigns of oil propounded by Anne Meneley (2008; see also Meneley 2005, 2007), we might add that water removes evil as an ablutionary medium, whereas olive oil fortifies because it is the essence of purity itself. This relationship echoes the myth of Noah in which God’s extension of the olive branch (literal and figurative) signals the retreat of the floodwaters and the washing away of wickedness. The co-incidence of olive and seawater is insinuated also in the Messinían belief that garments should be laundered in seawater if they have absorbed sanctified oil. In short, water and oil must combine in complementarity to elicit the power of purification and reconciliation.

Given the symbolic constitution of sacramental water and oil, I conclude that the rites of Baptism and Chrismation are founded on the moral importance of sealing the physical and, by extension, spiritual body. I refer to the act of “sealing” here in its multiple meanings: to envelop, to apply a mark or designation, and to authenticate or assure. The first way these rituals underscore a morality of “sealing” is through the act of anointing the infant’s body with olive oil, especially in the care taken to envelop the entire body. Pondering this imperative with me one day, Father Sérghios mused that olive oil works as an *epikálypsi* (sheathing or overlapping; compound form, *epi-* “over” + *kálypsi* “coverage”). The bad luck thought to befall any unanointed parts (e.g., permanent odors) evidences concern for a weakness or lack of coverage. Here it might be analytically useful to recall the myth of Achilles, whose immersion in the waters separating life and death made him invulnerable except for one fateful spot on his heel, which failed to get immersed (Statius, *Achilleid*, Book I; see also Burgess 2009). In comparison, immersion in baptismal water signifies death and rebirth at the same time that an enveloping by olive oil—*epikálypsi*—fortifies against weakness. In short, the imperative to sheath or envelop the whole body with oil connotes an intervention against harm and imposes a first line of defense: baptismal oil is the initiate’s *epikálypsi*, its hermetic seal.

The importance of enveloping is further evidenced in how baptism itself is a metaphorical outer garment. One of the petitions to God in the Sacrament prays that the initiate “preserve the garment of Baptism” (*dhiafylachthínai...tin stolín tou Vaptísmatos*), framing the Sacrament not just as a rite of investiture, but also as the vestment itself. Indeed, critical junctures throughout the ritual are marked by the sloughing off and donning of clothes. The ritual comprises a repetitious pattern of covering and uncovering. Before the child is stripped for baptismal immersion, its clothes are said to symbolize the sin borne prior to entering the Church.¹⁴ Once baptized, the white linen sheet used by the godparent to hold the baby was said by my informants to symbolize the soul’s new purity. Likewise, the new baptismal clothes, all white, project the child’s status as a newly initiated, purified member of Orthodoxy. Importantly, the new and white garments are necessarily gifts from the godparent, the same person who sponsors the infant’s social integration and bestows its name after enveloping him/her in baptismal oil.

Whereas this form of “sealing” with holy oil connotes the enveloping of the initiate, another form concerns his/her sealing with a mark or designation. Hence, the second way in which Baptism and Chrismation underscore the moral ethos of “sealing” is through the application of *sfrághisma*. In ecclesiastical missals, *sfrághisma* refers to the sign of the cross executed by the clergy. Priests typically makes the sign (*sfrághisma*) of the cross in the air facing the congregation during the Divine Liturgy on normal Sunday services. However, in the context of initiating a new church member, priests execute the *sfrághisma* directly on the body in prescribed locations (forehead, mouth, arms, feet, etc.) with sanctified olive oil.

At first blush this act can be taken as a simple blessing. However in colloquial Greek, the term *sfrághisma* refers to a polysemic cluster of words centered on sealing or stamping. According to language authorities (Kriaras 1968; Triantafyllidis 1998), *sfrághisma* connotes (1) a hermetic seal, as on a container, or a figurative seal (as on the lips of someone keeping a secret); (2) piece of wax or adhesive ensuring that the contents of a document or container have not been tampered with; (3) an official notice placed on the doors of a seized or condemned structure/space; (4) a marking with a signet or stamp

¹⁴ Although I had heard a few people express this, I observed no discriminatory treatment of pre-baptismal clothing.

on a document or object that ensures authenticity or ownership. I suggest that these colloquial definitions have ritual equivalents in how the body is marked by holy oil, claiming it as, respectively: (1) impenetrable, (2) unadulterated, (3) safeguarded by the Church (physically and spiritually), and (4) confirmed as belonging to Orthodoxy. In fact, the prayer invoked during Chrismation supports this analogy, asking God to bestow upon the initiate the *seal* of his divinity, to *keep* him/her sanctified, and to *confirm* his/her soul, all actions that connote the Church's custody of the initiate. As we have already seen, the Holy Myrrh issued by the Ecumenical Patriarch is used to consecrate churches, icons, relics, and every scrap of material culture in the possession of the Orthodox Church. So too does Holy Myrrh iconically "stamp" the initiate's physical (and spiritual) self as belonging to the Church. Moreover, each *sfrághisma* on different parts of the body resembles a claim on the capacities of the initiate's body (sight, sound, strength, mobility, etc.) made by the Church on God's behalf. While in the custody of the divine, these claims bestow protections upon the welfare of the body and the soul. As I discuss in the next section, safeguarding physical and spiritual welfare defines the covenant exchanged between God and humanity, according to Greek and Messinían religious cosmology.

In addition to substantiating the Church's claims on physical and metaphysical belongings, holy oil also generates the spiritual connection understood to exist between the godchild and the godparent. Even a nominal application creates this link, as evidenced by the adolescent boy who assumed the role of godfather simply because "he held oil" (*épiase ládhi*). On one hand, ethnographic accounts have documented how Greeks believe that the link between godparent and godchild resembles that between biological parents and offspring (Campbell 1964; Chock 1974; Herzfeld 1982). Specifically, godparents, like biological parents, can pass down traits to their godchildren, chiefly temperaments, talents, habits, or preferences (for example, artistic ability or a fear of swimming). On the other hand, I suggest that the *sfrághisma* of oil effects this transmission, but also stresses the importance of custody in these relationships. A fifth definition of *sfrághisma* not yet mentioned refers to the metaphoric "stamp" of an influential factor shaping one's personality or development, as in the expression "he was stamped by his teacher" (*sfraghístike ap'ton daskaló tou*) (Triantafyllidis 1998). Therefore, while biological kinship may be characterized by

the transmission from parent to child of physical traits, the spiritual kinship between godparent and godchild is marked by the transmission of metaphysical characteristics. Indeed, the divide between physical and metaphysical kinship in Baptism/Chrismation is rendered palpable in the spatial segregation of the child's biological parents throughout the duration of the rite.¹⁵ All this is to suggest that the moment the sponsor anoints the initiate with holy oil is the moment that the spiritual kinship between godparent and godchild is forever sealed, a kinship that entails the same claims of guardianship on the part of the godparent toward the metaphysical wellbeing of the godchild to whom he is now in custody.

To conclude, the two forms of symbolic sealing with holy oil—enveloping and *sfrághisma*—reveal a religious preoccupation with the body that places God as its custodian. Thus, the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation reveal two fundamental assumptions about the nature of the body by Orthodox Messinians. First, these rites presume that the body (like the soul) has inborn weaknesses that require purification and fortification. Simultaneously, they presume that the body becomes the possession of God's custody through the covenant enacted in these rites. Therefore, the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation presuppose a dialectical relationship between somatic corruptibility and spiritual propriety: submitting to divine custody simultaneously erases weakness and Original Sin—a *tabula rasa* of the body's and soul's integrity.

The covenant responsible for inaugurating someone's spiritual and moral integrity is one of patronage. The relationship of subject/patron is reproduced within the Orthodox cosmological hierarchy: the relationship linking the godchild to the godparent, the initiate to the Church, and the individual to God. In these relationships, the godparent sponsors the child for membership into the House of God, which in turn ensures a patron/client exchange of offerings for Sacraments, which further guarantees the immediate physical and metaphysical patronage of God. This trifold mode of belonging to Orthodoxy secures a person's status as *klironómos* (inheritor) of the godparent's spiritual birthright, of the

¹⁵ According to Rouvelas (1993), some regions observe the total absence of biological parents from the church altogether during baptism, even withholding knowledge about the child's name from its biological parents until it is officially declared by the godparent.

Church's sacramental treasures, and of God's kingdom, whose royal seal is literally stamped (*sfrághisma*) on the subject's body as a mark of integrity.

In the section that follows, we see how olive oil and its counterpart, light, signify the mark of integrity and the importance of sealing entryways, underlying, again, an Orthodox theory of belonging and *klironomía*.

Paschal Vigil and Holy Light of Easter- Integrity of the home

By the time we reached the central square, the church bells signaling the commencement of Easter Mass had already rung some time before. The time was 11:45pm, only fifteen minutes before the pivotal ritual of Easter week, the *Anástasi* (Resurrection). Four generations of the Vlachadámis family ambled down the side street, their moods were light, but their gaits belied low levels of energy. Eléni, the 80-something matriarch had been cooking all day and was now trotting along slowly but happily. Her fifty-year old daughter, Ánna had not slept well the night before, suffering from a toothache and stuffed into the small guest bed after a three-hour drive from Athens. Michális and Chrístos also tramped along, the younger sleepy and grumpy, the older anticipating the feast awaiting us afterwards. Within minutes we arrived at the *plateía*, where countless other families were converging.

The throng of people (perhaps one thousand five hundred?) staked out a spot in view of the town's main church. The *plateía* quickly filled with men in dress shirts and jackets, women in heels and jewelry, and children bundled in scarves and puffy coats. Many traded greetings of "*kalí Anástasi*" (happy Resurrection) as they ran into neighbors and cousins, or an obligatory wave if spotted out of earshot. Others exchanged wishes of "*kalí Lambrí*" (happy Easter), a widespread expression in which *Lambrí* is an adjectival cognate of Páscha (Easter) that literally means "brilliance." Despite the exchanges, household members kept to themselves, chattering in anticipation, some even catching up with relatives who have just arrived from Athens and elsewhere. At times, the murmur of the crowd outcompeted the melismatic chants and endless drones broadcast over the church's PA system. Voúla was inside, no doubt, listening attentively.

***The Holy Light:
Life from the Tomb***

The *mesoniktikón* (matins, also known as Midnight Office) (Zerbos 1869) began around eleven o'clock and included a reiteration of the Acts of Apostles.¹⁶ Thus, the priests gathered around the *epitáphios*, a sacred depiction of Christ's death, usually placed on the altar, but housed in the funeral bier during Holy Week to reiterate the story of Christ's death and his Harrowing of Hades. During the last ode ("weep not for me, O Mother, for I shall arise..."), the *epitáphio* cloth, which depicts Christ's death, was carried from the *kouvoúklion* (wooden canopy) and laid upon the *Aghía Trápeza* (Holy Altar). The placement was meant to invoke the image of a burial shroud in an empty tomb (John 20:5). At this point, all lights and candles were extinguished, plunging the church into darkness. The church interior, it is said, must resemble the interior of Christ's tomb. It was about this time that we arrived outside in the *plateía*, and so did, it seemed, most of the townsfolk.

"Now, we wait for the Holy Light!"¹⁷ said Eléni, stressing the gravitas of the moment to her great-grandson, Christos, who was now noticeably irritable and fidgety. The *Ághio Fos* (tr. Holy Light, sing. neuter) to which Eléni was referring is the flame that burns permanently in an oil lamp atop the Holy Altar. Although the church looked dark to us outside, inside some the attendees were privy to a very dull glow cast on the icons above the altar. The so-called *akoímiti kandhila* (vigil lamp)¹⁸ typically burns in front of another permanent fixture of the Holy Altar, the *artofório* (a container of precious metal that reserves the Eucharistic elements for the sick. In Greek, it literally means "bread-bearer"). Thus, the vigil lamp currently on the altar table was burning its Holy Light in the presence of the mortuary *epitáphio* of Christ's body.

Many worshippers consider the *Ághio Fos* that burns in the vigil lamp to be among the most sacred of elements, augmented by the belief that the Light they would soon receive came directly from Christ's tomb in Jerusalem. Thanks to the miracle of modern aviation, the *Ághio Fos* travels directly from the hands of the Greek Orthodox

¹⁶ Voúla, Father Sérghios, and others helped describe the events that unfolded in my absence.

¹⁷ *Tóra periménoume to Ághio Fos.*

¹⁸ Literally, the "sleepless lamp"

Patriarch of Jerusalem to Athens and other Orthodox nations. Upon arrival in Athens, it is greeted and venerated at the airport by a delegation of state and church officials, who then disseminate it to cathedrals throughout Greece, including the one in Gargaliánoi, I was told.¹⁹

More important, however, is the narrative surrounding the Holy Light's miraculous origin, recited as the *Afi tou Aghiou Fotós* (the Lighting of the Holy Light). According to reports (Kausokalyvitis [n.d.]), the miracle is executed every year, on Holy Saturday (*Meghálo Sávvato*), by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem under careful surveillance at the Church of the Resurrection,²⁰ the church housing the sites attributed to Christ's crucifixion—Calvary (*Golgothás*)—and his entombment/resurrection—the Holy Sepulcher (*Panágios Táfos*). The morning of Holy Saturday, officials from Armenian Orthodox and other non-Greek Churches conduct a security sweep of the Holy Sepulcher, the burial chamber of Christ's body, confirming the absence of any electrical sources or fuels that might produce a flame. They also check that the vigil lamp has been extinguished. Once inspected, *the Sepulcher doors are sealed with beeswax and stamped by officials of the various Churches.*²¹ Then, custom dictates that the Armenian, Arab, and Coptic officials, among others, venerate the Greek Patriarch (kissing his hand) so that they, too, can partake of the miraculous Holy Light. Following this protocol, the Patriarch removes his vestments except for his Paschal white robes, which ministers and police carefully inspect for incendiaries. Holding two paschal candles (*lampádhēs*), he breaks the seal upon the tomb doors, enters, and begins praying.

Although none of my interlocutors have witnessed the miracle itself (though some have made pilgrimages to the Holy Sepulcher), many shared similar descriptions of what happens next. As Voúla and others explain, the *Ághio Fos* emanates from Christ's tomb

¹⁹ I was not able to confirm a direct tie or count the degrees of separation between the *Ághio Fos* in Gargaliánoi and the original from the Holy Sepulcher. Regardless, the convictions expressed by my interlocutors' confirmed their emotional and discursive investment in a direct pedigree.

²⁰ Known to most westerners as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

²¹ The Church of the Holy Sepulchre serves as headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Jerusalem, who enjoys the lion's share of custodial privileges, with lesser privileges granted to the Armenian Apostolic and Roman Catholic dioceses, among others. Should the Greek Orthodox Patriarch fail to effect the miracle, protocol grants subsequent attempts to ministers of other custodial Churches. Franciscan Catholics exempt themselves, denying the miracle's legitimacy.

above the stone slab that sealed his burial, spontaneously lighting the vigil lamp and the Greek Patriarch's paschal candles, from which his Orthodox counterparts receive the Light. Other friends added that the *Ághio Fos* spreads around the church as a heatless, sky-blue streak of light that ignites the candles of the Greek laity waiting outside the church.

It was in a similar setting—with candles at the ready—that Eléni reminded her great-grandson what we were waiting for. As the church clock neared midnight, young Chrístos passed the time using his fingernail to shave slivers of wax from his paschal candle, his *lampádha*. Unlike ours, his *lampádha* was blue with white ribbon, a gift from his godfather; whereas the rest of us each received a *lampádha* that Christína and I bought at the supermarket earlier in the week. In fact, we shopped at two stores before finding ones that Christína thought were reasonably priced and not overly elaborate: a six-pack of plain white candles, almost 2-feet long, for five euros from the chain supermarket. When I asked her about the golden candles that were also in the Easter display case, she smiled and began to reminisce about how, as a little girl, she would help her father sell these candles, made of golden beeswax, at his general store: “these are only for the *Epitáfio*,” referring to the funerary procession of Good Friday night. For the Resurrection, however, Christína was emphatic: “so long as it’s white!”²² A quick survey of the crowd confirmed that everyone indeed held white paschal candles similar to ours, with one exception: many children, like Christos, clutched a *lampádha* decorated with ribbons, drip-cups, and colorful wax (pink and blue seemed the most prevalent for girls and boys, respectively). Most were gifts from godparents, accounting for the bulk of priority deliveries during Easter week (Christína worked overtime at the courier service to deliver them all by the morning of Good Friday). To be sure, the *lampádha* industry has cashed in on the increasing popularity of kids’ paschal candles with figurines of popular cartoon characters, princesses, soccer mascots, and Hollywood superheroes. With this exception, however, one thing is certain: while the funerary ritual of Good Friday calls for a *lampádha* of humble beeswax, tonight’s Resurrection ceremony demands nothing less than a refined *lampádha* of silky white paraffin.

²² *Arkeí na 'nai áspri!*

The spiritual life of the *lampádha* begins the moment the priest presents the *Ághio Fos*. In Gargaliánoi, this began about three minutes before midnight; when intense chanting suddenly burst from the PA system, a slow-tempo melody stirred with the melismatic turns and vocal climbs that characterize the sound of Byzantine spiritualism. The priest soon emerged from the church, along with his deacon and altar boys. He had doffed the black robes that signified mourning over the crucifixion and entombment of Chris, and was now wearing shimmering white robes with gold and red adornments. While a large *lampádha* flickered in his right hand, he and the chanters bellowed:

Come ye and receive the light from the
unwaning Light and glorify Christ, who
is risen from the dead.

Δεύτε λάβετε φως εκ του ανεσπέρου
φωτός και δοξάσατε Χριστόν τον
αναστάντα εκ νεκρών.

The *Ághio Fos* spread from one *lampádha* to the other exponentially, spreading within families and between strangers indiscriminately, casting a warm glow in the damp plateía (Figure 6-4). From the dais, the Priest and chanters delivered the Gospel recounting Christ's Resurrection, and, lifting his *lampádha* as high as his arm could stretch, burst forth chanting the Resurrection hymn:

Christ is risen from the dead, by death
itself, trampling down death; and upon
those in the tombs, granting life.

Χριστός ανέστη εκ νεκρών, θανάτω
θάνατον πατήσας και τοῖς ἐν τοῖς
μνήμασι ζωήν χαρισάμενος.

No sooner was the first word of the hymn uttered that the church bells pealed joyfully, the bang of firecrackers erupted like an unending string of gunshots, the multitude of worshippers began to sing the hymn in unison, and a sea of flickering flames danced up, down, right, and left, drawing the sign of the Orthodox cross in the air. After the third refrain of the hymn, Eléni embraced me, kissing me on each cheek, saying, "Christ is Risen" (*Christós Anésti*), to which I responded "Truly He is Risen" (*Alithós Anésti*). Thus it went with every member of the Vlachadámis family, exchanging the formal embrace and the traditional paschal greeting with one another in no particular order, all the while being careful not to extinguish the flame of our *lampádha*, or worse, to accidentally burn someone mid-embrace.

With the exception of Voúla, who intended to stay another hour until the end of the Divine Liturgy to break her fast with Holy Communion, the Vlachadámis family

decided to break their fast sooner. In the same way that a majority of families arrived together for Resurrection, so too did they join the mass exodus back to their homes. As we ambled our way up the main street leading to Eléni's neighborhood, neighbors greeted each other, again, but this time with the formal embrace and exchange of Easter greetings affirming Christ's resurrection. All the while, they protected the flames of their *lampádha* from drafts with their hands or drip cups (Figure 6-4). Others still had the foresight to bring household lanterns to which they transferred the *Ághio Fos* to the tealight candle sheltered within. Those living farther away opted to drive back from the plateía, impressing me with the odd sight of a packed car illuminated by candlelight.

Equally impressive was the sight of the entire neighborhood starkly lit against the black night. Bulbs burned brightly in porches and doorways as living rooms and dining rooms flooded light and life onto the streets—shutters that would normally have been sealed tight at this hour had been thrown wide open. The purpose of this mass illumination became clear upon hearing a stray comment from Eléni to Ánna, pausing to appraise the new porch lights that her neighbor had talked about installing “in time.” Pressing her for details, Ánna explained the lights to me thusly: “That’s how they do. They show happiness for the holiday”²³ It became clear to me that this particular way of showing happiness was specific to Easter. This also explained why housewives had been fussing with brooms and brushes to whitewash their sidewalks and entryways: a Paschal preoccupation with brightness.

This preoccupation was expressed most abstractly by what happened when we arrived home. “Shall I [be the one to] do it?”²⁴ Christína asked, stepping up to the front entryway. In her right hand, she raised her *lampádha* overhead so that the flame of the *Ághio Fos* nearly touched the lintel of the doorway, which was marked with the shadow of a cross (Figure 6-4). This was the ubiquitous *moutzourotó stavró* (smudged cross) I had seen overhead while going through the front doors of homes, some family businesses, and even on the aluminum lintel of elevator doors in an Athenian apartment tower. Three times she traced the shadow—up, down, right, and left—allowing the soot from the candlewick to blacken and redefine the cross. “Bravo! May we be well enough

²³ *Étsi kánoune. Díxnoune xará gia th giortí*

²⁴ *Na to káno eghó?*

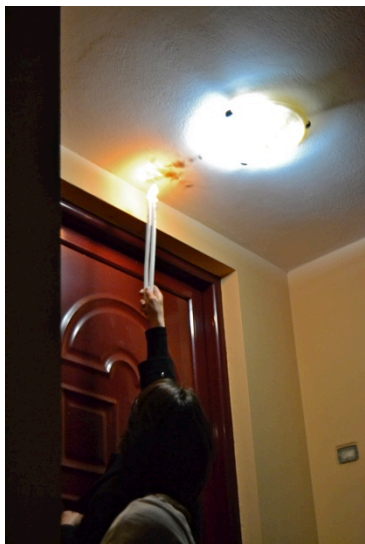


Figure 6-4. Paschal Vigil and Holy Light.

(Upper left) The *Ághio Fos* spreads among the faithful

(Above) Returning home with *lampádhes* in hand.

(Far left) Christína reaches to burn a *moutzourótó stavró* (smudged cross) above the doorway.

(Near left) Eléni will burn the household's oil lamp for forty days with the *Ághio Fos*.

from the candlewick to blacken and redefine the cross. “Bravo! May we be well enough to do this again next year” (*Brávo! Kai tou xρόnou!*)¹ exclaimed Eléni, to which Ánna declared “Health, the everything.”² Opening the door, we all passed under the renewed smudged cross.

Once inside we burst into laughter as Christína revealed that wax from her *lampádha* dripped onto her glasses as she was restoring the *moutzourotó stavró*. The good humor continued for another two hours, though not without the serious task, first, of lighting the household oil lamp, the *kantili* (Figure 6-4). Eléni poured fresh olive oil into the small glass and replaced the wick. Then, carefully taking a *lampádha* (one of the three still burning), she lit the wick and sheltered it with a chimney lamp. As Voúla explained to me the next day, one ought to burn the *Ághio Fos* in their home throughout the *Pentakostí* period (the fifty days until the Feast of Pentecost). A few days later, I observed her replenish the lamp with fresh olive oil after carefully transferring the Holy Light from the lamp to a reserve candle, and then back again when a new wick was in place. This was her daily routine for the entire fifty days. What’s more, she ensured that I took with me the Holy Light in a lantern that I might keep in my home too. When she learned some time later that I had clumsily let the flame go out, she stopped by the church with a lantern and urged me to safeguard the *Ághio Fos* anew: “But you must, it’s a blessing [pause]. It keeps you. It’s a blessing of God [pause] both spiritual and for your health.”³ Once the *Ághio Fos* was safeguarded in the household oil lamp, Eléni retired the *lampádha* collection to the under-sink cabinet for emergency use during electrical outages; the spiritual life of the *lampádha* was now over, but the annual cycle of Orthodox holy days had just begun.

Breaking the Fast and the Easter Feast

The Orthodox new year (more symbolic than functional) began by breaking the fast we observed for the past week, and which Eléni and Voúla had observed for the

¹ A coarse translation, this common wish is uttered during holidays or other delightful events. It closely resembles the French “encore a la prochain année.”

² *Ygeía, to pan.*

³ *Afoú prepei, einai evloghía. Se filáei [pause]. Eínai evloghía tou Theoú [pause]. Kai pnevmatiki kai ghía tin ygheía sou.*

entire forty days of Lent. While the men were in the living room sleepily eying a musical Easter program on television, the women busied themselves in the kitchen and dining room, warming dishes they had prepared earlier and setting the night's feast: ground beef *keftédhes*, lemon roasted potatoes, oregano chicken, mixed greens pie (*chortópita*), American-style chef salad, feta and gruyere cheese platter, lettuce and dill salad, beets, olives and a traditional Paschal fast-breaker of seasoned organ meats (mostly intestines, heart, and liver) served in a lemon-egg rice soup.



Figure 6-5. The Vlachadámis family feasts after the midnight vigil.

To this rich mix we added the blood-red Paschal eggs dyed Holy Thursday, each taking a turn at competing in their *tsoúgkrisma* (cracking). The winner of this game is said to have good luck for the year, and is determined by the person who picks the Paschal egg most able to withstand a direct hit from another egg. One person holds an egg either large “butt” end up (*kólos*) or small “nose” end up (*míti*). The other person then, matching the end, cracks it into the other, declaring, “Christ is Risen” (*Christós Anésti*). The egg ends are then rotated and the other person, taking his/her turn to crack the opponent's egg responds, “Truly He is Risen” (*Alithós Anésti*). Thus it goes, everyone at the table competing with each other until the only person left carrying an intact egg is declared winner. This custom was a favorite of little Christos and Michális, who relished walloping the eggs of their seniors and saved the best eggs for the repeat competition at Easter supper.

Easter supper took place the following afternoon around 3pm in the family's country home among the olive groves. ““Christmas in the city, Easter in the village, as they say”⁴ Christína told me as we descended toward the groves with her dog, Miloú in the backseat. The Easter feast was hosted at the home of Eléni's son-in-law, Dínos, who built a retirement home for himself and his wife (still working overseas) across the lane from Eléni's cottage. Eléni's widowed brother-in-law and nephew were invited too, as was the nephew's Albanian girlfriend (though not without discreet comments from his cousins). The menu was much the same, with a few more lavish additions—I contributed a braided Paschal sweet bread (*tsouréki*) from a recipe that was (mostly) successful—and the guest of honor, a spit-roasted kid goat. The substitution of kid meat for the traditional lamb was welcomed by everyone as a refreshing change, describing the kid meat as leaner and cleaner than lamb. Most of the day felt like a picnic, warming ourselves around the charcoal pit and admiring the browning skin of the goat. In fact, the conversation was remarkably food-centric, but death-centric too, sharing recipes and memories from past Paschal feasts, and constructing an obituary timeline of the Easters that marked deaths in the family.

The meal, which commenced by singing the Resurrection hymn, lasted an hour and a half, after which I decided to help carry some of the heavier food trays to the kitchen sink. With bits of goat and crusty potato, I made my way to the door, walking under three smudged crosses that Dínos had burned into the lintel overhead. Therefore, I wasn't surprised when, inside on the fireplace mantle next to an icon of the Virgin Mary and a family portrait, I saw that our host was also preserving the *Ághio Fos*.

* * *

The *Anástasi* ritual in Gargaliánoi duplicates the miracle that occurs in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. In most churches, the holy altar (*Aghía Trápeza*) features a stone slab surface and represents Christ's tomb (Rouvelas 1993). This explains why the *epitáphio* portraying Christ's death is placed on the altar prior to the Resurrection ritual.

⁴ *Christoúghenna sti póli, Páscha sto chorió, ópos léne.*

It also the stage for transubstantiation (described earlier), since the body and blood of Christ were made everlasting only by the defeat of death in the tomb. However, the holy altar (*Aghía Trápeza*) and the accouterments necessary for Páscha reflect direct adaptations of from early Judaism (Fine 2005). Compare, for example, the Greek vigil lamp and *artofório* to the Israelite *Menorah* and *Lechem haPānīm* (see Table 14).

In fact, a nuanced interpretation of the Paschal service and the *Ághio Fos* demands knowledge about their institutional derivation from Jewish Passover. The fact that Easter is considered the “Christian equivalent of the Jewish Passover” (Baldovin 1987:557) is well documented in religious studies (e.g., Baldovin 1987; Bradshaw and Hoffman 1999). Given my observations in Messinía, I conclude that Páschal sacraments focus on reproducing and reinforcing the structure of the “dwelling place,” meaning the archetype and symbolic integrity of the tabernacle in both its Hebraic and Byzantine forms. Specifically, we see this in the interconnected meanings embedded in the Resurrection service, the *Ághio Fos*, the *moutzourotó stavró*, and the breaking of the Paschal eggs.

The story of Passover, according to the book of Exodus, focuses on Moses’ liberation of the Israelites from Pharaoh’s bondage. Having stubbornly resisted nine plagues delivered by God upon his dominion, Pharaoh finally relents upon completion of the tenth plague: the death of all first born sons. In preparation for this plague, God instructed the Chosen People (through Moses) to slaughter a lamb or kid and smear its blood on the doorpost and lintels of every Israelite home as a mark of their faith in the lord’s protection. At midnight, death entered all the homes of Egypt to claim its victims, but passed over (*pasach*) the homes marked with the sacrificial blood (Exod. 12:7). God also commanded the Israelites to make a burnt offering of the lamb/kid in his name and to eat the roasted meat that night before their delivery from Egypt. The annual observance of that meal (*Pesach*) came to be known in English as ‘Passover’ and in Greek as ‘Páscha.’

More parallels exist between the ritual spaces of the Greek Orthodox ecclesia (church) and the Israelite tabernacle from which it is adapted. The Israelite tabernacle was divided into two spaces, the Holy Place (*mishkan*) and the Sanctuary (later called the Holy of Holies in the First Temple of David)(Exodus 25-27).

Table 14: Jewish and Greek Symbolisms

Jewish Tabernacle	Greek Orthodox Ecclesia
<u>Ritual Spaces</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>mishkan</i> (outer shrine) • sanctuary/Holy of Holies containing Ark of the Covenant (inner shrine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nave (outer shrine) • sanctuary containing Christ's tomb, proxy by <i>Aghia Trápeza</i> (inner shrine)
<u>Accouterments</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lechem haPānīm</i>- literally "Bread of the Presence," loaves located permanently on a dedicated table as offering to God from faithful • <i>Menorah</i>- lampstand whose design was illuminated by God to Moses and fueled by consecrated olive oil • Veil- Screen depicting cherubim segregating sanctuary from congregation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Artofório</i>- literally "Bread bearer," a container that permanently reserves the Eucharist bread as offering to faithful from God • <i>Akoímiti kandhila</i>- lamp whose sacred flame is illuminated by Christ's resurrection and fueled by olive oil • <i>Ikonostásio</i>- Screen of icons segregating sanctuary from congregation
<u>Narrative</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passover (<i>Pesach</i>) • lamb/kid as sacrifice • from Israelites to God • for protection from death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter (<i>Páscha</i>) • Christ-as-lamb sacrifice • from God to Christians • for eternal life
<u>Theology</u>	
Vehicle of divinity is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ark of the Covenant, word of God Medium of faith/delivery is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood of lamb 	Vehicle of divinity is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus Christ, son of God Medium of faith/delivery is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light of Christ

The Holy Place, like the ecclesiastical nave after it, was the outer shrine in which lay worshippers congregated. Meanwhile, the Sanctuary of the tabernacle was the inner shrine containing the Ark of the Covenant. This area was screened by a veil depicting cherubim, and restricted from access except to the High Priest once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and redemption. Consequently, the Sanctuary containing the Ark is succeeded in the ecclesia by the sanctuary of the holy altar (*Aghía Trápeza*), which is hidden behind a screen bearing icons of the saints (*ikonostásio*). Access here is also restricted (though less so than in the tabernacle), and only the priest may use the central, curtained doorway.

Likewise, the institutional resemblance between Orthodox and Jewish rites is borne by the annual *Afī tou Aghíou Fotós* (the Lighting of the Holy Light) in Jerusalem. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (a Christian “Holy of Holies”), access to the inner shrine is restricted (sealed by wax) except to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, who enters on Easter, the Christian day of atonement and redemption. As does the High Priest with the Ark of the Covenant (the physical presence of divinity on Earth), the Patriarch mediates between worshippers and God’s covenant to Christians, the tomb of Christ (divinity made flesh on earth). Thus, Jewish roots influenced the form and contents of Orthodoxy’s sacred spaces, as well as its holiest miracle—the manifestation of the *Ághio Fos* from the site of Christ’s entombment and resurrection.

That said, however, the *Ághio Fos* and the *moutzouroto stavró* observed in Gargaliánoi demonstrate a symbolic transformation that distinguishes Orthodox symbols of salvation from those of Judaism. On one hand, Jesus is characterized symbolically as the lamb that God sacrificed for the remission of sins, reproducing the Jewish symbol of the sacrificial lamb offered to God. This explains the traditional lamb roast during the Páschal feast and the *amnós* (lamb) on the stamp that marks the Eucharist bread (previous chapter). However, whereas the Pesach narrative focuses on the symbol of blood—the lamb’s blood that saved the Israelites from death—the narrative of Páscha stresses the symbol of light. The fact that Holy Light is used to mark the entryway of each home—a smudged cross on the door lintel—is a symbolic substitution of lamb’s blood. Christ’s

resurrection inverts the Jewish focus on bloody sacrifice (since Christ's blood is life-giving), adopting instead the trope of eternal light.⁵

Jesus, himself, states, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). Hagiographers depict this message in the icon of the Resurrection of our Lord, in which Christ, robed in white, emerges from the cavern of Hades, broken locks and chains at his feet, encompassed by a halo of light. The binary of Jesus as *both* sacrificial lamb and Holy Light characterizes his Orthodox status as the divine made flesh, as man and god simultaneously; a synthesis of Mosaic Judaism and messianic Christianity. The connection is also made clear in the hymn marking Holy Communion (Chrysostom 1986; Zerbos 1869) where seeing the True Light equates to partaking of the body and blood of Christ, receiving the Heavenly Spirit, and, in sum, worshipping as Orthodox Christians:

We have seen the True Light! We have
received the Heavenly Spirit! We have
found the True Faith! Worshiping the
Undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has
saved us.

Εἶδομεν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ἐλάβομεν
Πνεῦμα ἐπουράνιον, εὗρομεν Πίστιν
ἀληθῆ, ἀδιαίρετον Τριάδα
προσκυνοῦντες αὕτη γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἔσωσε.

Moreover, the significance of the lamb/light binary is evidenced in the binary of names that Messinians use to refer to Easter: Páscha and Lambrí. Where the former was adapted directly from Hebrew, the latter expresses distinctly Greek origins and sentiments, a nominalized form of the adjective (*lambr-ós*) and from which the name of the Paschal candle, *lampádha*, derives. It describes the quality of: (1) projecting light or brilliance, (2) bearing excellence or distinction, and (3) evidencing accord and confirmation of something proposed or under trial (Triantafyllidis 1998).⁶ I suggest that these three meanings, taken together, connote a nuance of 'self-evidence.' This seems especially compelling if we set 'brilliance' and 'distinction' in opposition to the 'darkness' and 'murkiness' that characterize metaphors of 'ignorance,' metaphors employed to describe a life devoid of God or truth (*alítheia*). Therefore, the lexical difference between Páscha

⁵ Roy Wagner suggests that the fourth state of matter, plasma, may be an equally useful trope for interpreting the *Aghio Fos* given their characteristic similarities (personal communication).

⁶ *Os éndheixi symfonías kai epidhokimasías gia kt. pou eipóthike í égine.*

and Lambri reflects a semiotic distinction between the significance of Passover versus the self-evidentiary meaning of Easter, confirmation that Christ is Savior.

In this way, the Holy Light of Páscha/Lambri signifies three things. First, it signifies the righteousness of Christ. This is indicated when, prior to performing the miracle of the Holy Light in Jerusalem, the Holy Sepulchre must be sealed if the miracle of spontaneous illumination is to be authenticated. This is also indicated in scripture when the stone that persecutors used to seal Christ's tomb to prevent his disciples from any fakery was miraculously removed, confirming the divine intervention in his Resurrection (Kausokalyvitis [n.d.]). In both of these scripts, the act of sealing authenticates the miracles of Easter, affirming the integrity of Orthodox doctrine.

The second thing that the Holy Light signifies is the integrity of the household's faith. It is an identification of faith, harkening to the Hebraic tradition. However, it goes one step further and links the marking of the Orthodox household to the marking of the Orthodox body. Crosses of light mark the faith of the household members the same way that crosses of olive oil in Chrismation place a seal (*sfrághisma*) on the Christian body. As with the initiation rite, it attests to the patronage of the divine and the family members who belong in his custody.

Correspondingly, just as the seal (*sfrághisma*) upon the body works to preserve its moral and physical integrity, so too does the Holy Light—a seal (*sfrághisma*) upon the *dwelling*—work to preserve the home's moral and physical integrity. Therefore, the third significance of the Holy Light concerns the moral and physical integrity of the household and its constituent members. All the more, then, if we consider how the custom of keeping the Holy Light burning in your home “is a blessing...It keeps you,” it is the medium of Christ's presence in the home, evidence of his eternal resurrection from the tomb. Thus, the imperative is to keep it illuminated until Pentecost, when Christ is said to have ascended to heaven after forty days on Earth. Indeed, the Light sanctifies and preserves the home so long as the household members preserve it too, the kind of domestic life that, according to Campbell, demonstrates an analogous relationship between the Greek family household and the Orthodox church in which both reproduce earthly versions of the divine family.

By associating The Father, The Son, and the Mother of God in a Holy archetype Family, the institutions and relationships of the Sarakatsan family, even the concept of honour and the duty to defend it, are given a categorical quality and a divine sanction; and by extension kindred and affinal bonds receive a similar validation. (Campbell 1964:354)

So prevalent is the theme of integrity that it even informs the traditional Easter game, the breaking of the Paschal eggs, where it is the solid, unbroken egg that signals victory. Though, some have suggested that the breaking of eggs symbolizes Christ's destruction of the tomb (cf. Rouvelas 1993). Yet, the fact that victory and luck are garnered by the egg that *doesn't* break, plus the fact that a loss means destroying an egg that, itself, symbolizes renewal and rebirth, strike me as counter to this interpretation. Either way, the rules of the game stress the wholeness of the egg and the righteousness of the eggshell's integrity, the household and body writ small.

In short, Messinían rituals of Páscha and the significance of Holy Light point to the imperative of integrity at the dwelling place, whether it is the dwelling of the Holy Light (sealed with wax in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), of the Holy Altar (shielded behind the *ikonostásio* screen), or of the Orthodox family (sheltered behind a doorway of smudged crosses). The archetype of the dwelling, like the church, has roots in the Old Testament tabernacle, a Hebrew word that translates to "dwelling place" or "residence," alluding to the Jews mobile camp while wandering the desert. Most importantly, however, the Messinían stress on the passageway of dwelling (religious and domestic) relates to that of the body, as discussed above. Before I explore the full significance of this relation, however, I would like to present a final episode that, rather than stress the passageways and integrity of the body, focuses instead on the body's violent 'dis-integrity.'

Consuming Judas in the flames in Easter effigy

At the kitchen sink, the platter of goat and crusty potato I helped serve were now being scrubbed from the platters while, in the backseat of my car, little Michális and Chrístos kicked and hooted eagerly as we approached the harbor where, to my revulsion, the silhouette of a lifeless, hanging body came into view. The body hung motionless, perfectly at odds with the black cape on its back, which luffed in the sea breeze. As we

approached on foot, its belly appeared bloated under a drab gray shirt. The arms were thick and oddly rigid, its legs splayed wide, and its head drooped heavily, disjointedly. Black hair, pale white at the tips, crowned a leathery and wrinkled forehead. Two bushy eyebrows frowned above hollow but rouge cheeks, and a bulbous red nose gave the face a countenance of grotesque inebriation. Suspended from a gallows above a floating raft that drifted back and forth from the wharf to the harbor's center among the fishing boats, the still body hovered before a crowd that pointed, stared, and laughed. The corpse had no eyes to stare back, but awaited its fate. This was Judas Iscariot.

The Burning of Judas (*to Kápsimo tou Ioúdhha*) is a common tradition throughout Greece on Easter Sunday, a tradition that reiterates the purificatory element of light in Easter, but in a ritual of violence that further points to connections between somatic and spiritual integrity. A mask and old clothes stuffed with straw or padding are assembled by organizers who then hoist the effigy from a tall gallows or, less commonly, mount it to a stake. Following the Agápe Vespers at church and sometimes waiting until nightfall to heighten the spectacle, organizers and attendees set the effigy ablaze, perhaps with the *Aghío Fos* or perhaps with a handy lighter, but always amidst chants, applause, and gleeful shouts of children setting off fire crackers. To young and old alike, as live flames engulf the figure of Judas, the effect is boisterous, graphic, and celebratory.

It is in Marathópolis, however, where the themes of moral and bodily integrity, or more precisely the *lack* of integrity, are dramatized graphically. What little Michális and Christos eagerly awaited was to see the new sensational way that Marathópolis had adopted for their annual destruction of Judas: the use of powder explosives from *inside* the effigy. Tethered by cables and detonated electronically from the safety of a moored boat, the effigy was, I was told, to be ceremoniously blown up in stages—feet first, then torso, and finally the head. In short, complete and systematic annihilation.

The New Testament depicts Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, as one of the twelve original apostles to Jesus Christ, whose biblical role was to aid Temple guards with Jesus' arrest, leading to his trial and execution. According to the Gospel, Jesus retires from the Last Supper to pray in Gethsemane ("Garden of Olives"), where Judas approaches and kisses him, revealing his identity to the Roman soldiers—the infamous Kiss of Judas. When asked to explain why *Ioúdhhas* (Judas) is hanging from the gallows,

young Christos readily states that “he betrayed Christ so he could take money (*leftá*), so they hanged him because he was bad.” Reiterating what he could recall from classroom lessons, Christos was expressing a key element of Greek narratives concerning the villainy of Ioúdhas: the betrayal of Christ in exchange for money. Indeed, Greeks elaborate on this theme by drawing on anti-Semitic stereotypes of greed and miserliness. The exaggerated nose of the effigy before me suggested as much, as did the casual attributions I heard many express: “he was a Jew” (*ítan Evraíos*) and the fact that “Jews crucified Christ” (*oi Evraíoi stávrosan to Christó*).⁷

However, this was not the end of my young informants’ treatise. “No!” Michális exclaimed, eager to impress me with his knowledge, “He took the money and *repented* (*metániose*) for betraying Christ and [so] he went and hanged himself.”⁸ Michális’s amendment echoes a second element of the Ioúdhas story as told and taught by Messinians: Ioúdhas’ repentance and self-inflicted hanging befit his moral treachery. According to some, because Judas expressed remorse (*metánoia*) and repented, the traditional Burning of Judas is a distasteful, even barbaric, custom. Voúla, who describes herself as devoutly religious (*thrískia*), declined to join us at the harbor, critiquing this and other Burnings as decadences (*paralysies*) that hark back to paganism (*idhololatría*). Violent revenge, she reasons, is what the Burning of Judas actually celebrates, contradicting Easter’s message about the absolution of sins and triumph over death. The Burning, therefore, does not agree with the values of Orthodox Christianity (*eínai antichristianikó*) precisely because Judas repented and was forgiven.

On the other hand, the villainy of Ioúdhas becomes short-hand for spiritual but also romantic infidelity in popular Greek culture. In musical references, for example, Ioúdhas personifies ‘the enemy’ and Golgotha (the site of Jesus’ crucifixion) as well as the themes of seduction, deception, and misplaced affection (see Appendix 8). As such, “he sells love cheaply” and “kisses beautifully” but he never “graced me with any

⁷ While enjoying our traditional Clean Monday picnic, two of my hosts agreed that even the Orthodox fast has been exploited, if not contrived, for profit by Jews since fasters resort to eating halvah and other Lenten/kosher foods from the Levant.

⁸ C- *Pródhose to Christó gia na párei leftá kai ton kremásane afoú ítan kakós.*

M- *Óchi! To metániose pou pródhose to Christó kai píge kai kremástike mónos tou.*

favors”⁹ and “he doesn’t fool me, he doesn’t trick me” because, categorically, he is “not *érotas*” (romantic love).

Upon closer inspection, one sees that the Ioúdhas archetype epitomizes two additional values related to sin and betrayal: worldliness and corruption. One particular song, the immensely popular laikó dance *Sometimes Buddha, Sometimes Koúdhas*, muses that the “game of life” is to be played by toggling between the spiritual and the worldly, where the spiritual is epitomized by the Buddha and Jesus Christ, and the worldly by Ioúdhas and Ghiórgchos Koúdhas, a veritable god in the pantheon of Greek soccer. Whereas the former represent archetypes of a moral, salvational ethos, the latter represent



Figure 6-6. The burning of Judas. (Left) Michális and Christos pose with Judas; **(right)** The effigy after the first explosion.

characters of a worldly, indulgent ethos—Koúdhas for his euphoric victories on the soccer field, and Ioúdhas for his unscrupulous, self-serving greed. The song’s subversive appeal, along with the musically “passionate” (*meraklídhiko*) tone of this genre of tsiftetéli music—a hugely popular belly dance with Anatolian roots—stems from leveling the moral hierarchy that these stark figures would otherwise occupy (for discussions on “anti-structure” in dance, music, and socializing, see Cowan 1990; Loizos and

⁹ The word *chatíri* (sing. tr. favor) is closely related to *chári* (sing. tr. grace), which connotes an act of kindness and love for someone’s benefit. This is further related to the beneficent and generous disposition of God in Christian theology, *Theía Chári* (Divine Grace).

Papataxiarches 1991a; Papataxiarches 1991). For cynical Greeks, all four characters are satirized as equally valid options in a world where ‘you’re damned if you do, and you’re damned if you don’t.’ We must bear in mind that the satire and subversion succeed only because the Ioúdhas archetype opposes spiritual work and honest love, but epitomizes worldly concern and self-indulgence.

One final example, a Greek top-forty rap song titled *I Can’t Endure*, likens “what Judas thought before he betrayed his Christ” to what a drug addict thinks before his mind “dives into stupefaction.” The rapper’s distinction between spiritual corruption and rational thought is clear: “What is your soul hiding, unbeknownst to your head?” Indeed, the voice of the speaker reveals itself to be the addict’s conscience, incorruptible and inexorably tied to the body (“you won’t exorcize me with any cheap substance, they call me conscience”). It is despite their conscience (*syneídhisi*)—“when [their] vision blurs [and their] nights darken”—that the addict yields to substance abuse and Ioúdhas yields to venality. Thus, the analogy equating the drug addict to Ioúdhas brings into play the binaries of body and soul, and integrity versus corruptibility. The one poisoned by drugs, the other by money, they both forsake morality and corrupt the self.

At the exegetical level, the burning (or explosion) of Judas is explained as showing contempt for his dishonorable betrayal against Christ, while celebrating Christ’s triumph over death. However, the unfolding drama rests on a symbolic system that ties moral corruption to somatic corruption. If Chrismation and Baptism exemplify how bodily and spiritual integrity go hand-in-hand, then the ritual annihilation of Judas dramatizes the inverse correspondence between corruption of the body and corruption of the soul.

The classroom narrative my young friends reiterated about Judas, money, and suicide explained how it came to be that this bloated straw man now dangled in front of us, but it did not wholly explain the sensational event that drew us there: to watch this hanged man, already symbolically dead, blown to smithereens. On one hand, Messiníans offered unreflective explanations that drew on folksiness, stating simply how “that is the custom,”¹⁰ “because that’s what they’ve been doing since olden days.”¹¹ Even Voúla,

¹⁰ *Aftó einai to éthimo.*

upon summarizing her initial critique, attributed an operational meaning to the ritual (Turner 1969), suggesting that it probably persisted as a cautionary tale of what becomes of traitors. On the other hand, Father Sérghios, while affirming that the Church dislikes the custom, relies on Orthodox doctrine to speculate that the Burning symbolically punishes Ioúdhās by achieving the body’s destruction precisely “so that he cannot be resurrected.”¹² By this, Father Sérghios draws on the theological maxim that, if a deceased body is to reunite with the soul at the Second Coming of Christ, it must be permitted to deteriorate naturally and not be adulterated (as with chemicals) or destroyed (as with cremation)(Bratsiotēs 1968; Danforth 1982). In short, its integrity must not be violated.

The theme of integrity and destruction is evidenced in a related Easter demonstration. As countless Marathiótes began to crowd the wharf in anticipation of blowing up Judas, elsewhere in Greece, streets were already littered with piles of broken jugs. Following the first Resurrection mass on the morning of Holy Saturday, townsfolk smash ceramic vessels to the ground, scattering shards left and right. The custom claims national fame on the island of Kérkyra where human-sized jugs made especially for the occasion are hurled from multiple stories, crashing onto the town square below to the sound of firecrackers, noisemakers, and marching bands. Every year in Gargaliánoi, Eléni waited for the church bells to peal joyfully so she could mark Jesus’ triumph over death, smashing a glass bottle on the pavement in her courtyard, exclaiming loudly, “so Judas might bust!” (*na skásei o Ioúdhās!*).¹³ In all these instances, destruction and commotion are key elements. As locals explain, the violence against sound and the vessel’s integrity is intended “to scare away the evil of death”¹⁴ (compare this to the Kalymniote use of dynamite described in Sutton 1998a). Likewise, burning Judas’ effigy at the stake, or

¹¹ *Giatí étsi kánane apó paliá.*

¹² *Gia na min anastitheí.*

¹³ Although her daughter, Voúla, recently forbade her from conducting the custom for religious reasons (it is paganistic), Eléni performed a tamer version for my benefit. Rather than smash a glass vessel and exclaim “So Ioúdhās might bust!” she let an already cracked plate drop to the ground and perfunctorily muttered, “*ánde, kai tou chrónou,*” a common benediction meaning “and to next year.”

¹⁴ *Na dhióxoun to kakó tou thanátou.*

exploding it to kingdom come, constitutes violence against the integrity of his form, exegetically reflected as an act of moral contempt and vindication.

In Marathópolis, the element of fire undergoes symbolic transformation. The fact that Marathiótes still refer to it as the “Burning” (*Kápsimo*) of Judas signals how the ritual, even this version of it, is defined by symbols of fire and consumption. Although the “Burning” is rendered virtually through pyrotechnics, its synesthetic presence is actually intensified on a greater visual, aural, and olfactory scale. First, plumes of vivid orange smoke spewed from smoke bombs—the kind used by rapturous soccer fans—and consumed the raft, tethered now in the harbor’s center at a safe distance. Second, an array of canisters under Ioúdhas’ feet erupted white fountains of sparkling light. With each flip of a switch from the control panel, new bursts and metallic-smelling puffs discharged around the limp body, making everyone around me visibly tense in anticipation of ‘the big one.’ Michális and Chrístos shared nervous grins and hunched over with their hands covering their ears expectantly. So blazing were the pyrotechnics that, if one didn’t know better, one would think fire was consuming Ioúdhas. But we all knew what would be his actual undoing.

We flinched as the first shockwave registered in our guts. “Whoah! I felt that in my stomach!”¹⁵ Chrístos bleated among the crowd’s hundreds of ejaculations. Looking up, heavy white smoke and bits of straw sank into the orange haze in slow motion...Judas had no legs. “They put gunpowder!”¹⁶ someone marveled out loud as I began to worry that the next blast might shatter my camera lens. What followed was equally jolting, perhaps more so. I nearly lost balance in my crouched position as my muscles tensed involuntarily. Another cloud of particles and smoke lingered in the air and stray chunks of thorax settled on the water’s surface. The portion remaining on the noose resembled a classical bust, but made of straw and latex instead of stone or plaster. Before there was nothing left, the last thing we saw was the lifeless face of Judas Iscariot awaiting his final degradation. Voúla told me she heard all three blasts two and half kilometers away.

¹⁵ *Po! To aisthánthika mes sto stomáchi mou!*

¹⁶ *Válane baroúti!*

The Burning of Judas at Marathópolis harbor comprises a morality tale, theological thesis, local novelty, and pyrotechnics show all in one. At the exegetical level, the burning (or explosion) of Judas is explained as showing contempt for his dishonorable betrayal against Christ, while celebrating Christ's triumph over death. The villainy of Judas registers as both a religious transgression (forsaking the Son of God) as well as a secular one (betrayal for profit). For many Marathiótes, the fact that he lynched himself out of shame is reason enough to dishonor his effigy every Easter. However, the unfolding drama around Judas' body fits into a larger picture regarding fire and integrity. If the *Ághio Fos* and Baptism/Chrismation exemplify how physical and spiritual integrity go hand in hand as an effect of moral welfare, then ritual annihilation of Judas dramatizes the inverse correspondence between corruption of the body and corruption of the soul.

The Greek word for corruption, *dhiafthorá*, refers to a systematic violation of ethical or legal rules in the performance of one's duties as employer or officer, as well as an unethical lifestyle (especially in the sexual sense)(Kriaras 1968; Triantafyllidis 1998). These are given deeper meaning if we consider that the word derives from the root – *fthorá*, connoting physical damage, corrosion, loss of prestige or reputation, and moral or intellectual impairment. Here we can translate *fthorá* as deterioration or wastage. Consequently, Judas epitomizes both senses of corruption (*dhiafthorá*), and the concomitant nuances of deterioration (*fthorá*), as one who sold his discipleship for profit and as one debased by greed. In contrast, the word for integrity (*akeraiótita*) connotes multiple things—the status or condition of the integral, completeness and wholeness, the general absence of physical injury or disability, and absolute honor (*entimótita*)(evidenced by honesty, good faith, and dignity)—all nuances that center on moral and physical flawlessness or unity (Kriaras 1968; Triantafyllidis 1998).

Whereas light and oil are used to reinforce somatic and spiritual integrity in the rituals of baptism and the sealing of the household doorway, the traditional element of fire is used here to destroy. Like Holy Light or water, it is an element of purification

(*exagnismós*),¹⁷ but unlike these, it purifies through destruction. Rather than by washing away or bathing in light, fire consumes, and in this case, it consumes the wretched thereby eliminating it (Graeber 2011; Wilk 2004). Explosives extend this logic one more degree. Herein, the Burning and Blowing Up of Judas becomes a graphic drama of spiritual and physical corruption. Judas, a man of no moral integrity is reduced to a man with no somatic integrity—his viscera and limbs become disintegrated bits of cloth and straw carried out to sea. It is the spectacular dis-integration of Judas's physical state, a rendering of corporeal dis-unity, that mirrors his spiritual and moral deterioration.

Conclusion: Integrated and Integral Bodies

This chapter presented a survey of three events centering on the theme of spiritual and somatic integrity. The first concerned the meanings of Baptism and Chrismation, which have sophisticated explanations within Church and lay narratives, but also demonstrate a preoccupation with establishing and fortifying purity by focusing on coverings. The second event concerned the Paschal vigil and the observances that occur in the home for Easter. While these are taken as symbolic representations of Christ's death and resurrection, they also reveal patterns focused on fortifying the integrity of dwelling places and entryways. The final event, the Burning (or Blowing Up) of Judas, depicts the dishonorable fall of a traitor, but also dramatizes the underlying relationship between moral and physical corruption. All three discussions delved into the symbolic particularities (of water, light, fire, etc.) necessary for piecing together the larger web of meaning in Messinían ritual. Messiníans consider all three of these events to bear religious significance (despite the Church's disavowal of the Burning of Judas), and it is primarily through religious narratives—their own and official doctrine—that these events have been analyzed.

All three events elicit a polar relationship between moral integrity and physical integrity. In the ritualistic annihilation of Judas, this dialectic registers as the punitive destruction of the body in response to moral corruption. In the case of the Orthodox initiation rite (Baptism and Chrismation), this dialectic registers as the relationship

¹⁷ of (*ex-*), cleansing (*-agnismos*). Sing. n.m.

between the soul and the body, whereas in the case of Páscha, it registers as that between the members belonging to a household (including the House of God) and the physical confines of that house. Given this, I conclude that a structural parallel exists between the human body and the family household. Indeed, the parallels are compelling: where holy oil places a seal (*sfrághisma*) on the body, the *moutzourotó stavró* is a seal (*sfrághisma*) on the house; where Baptismal water bathes and redeems the soul, the light of Resurrection bathes and redeems the household.

Spatially, too, the parallels ring true for the aspects of inner and outer divisions in the archetype of the dwelling space—the dwelling of the Holy Light (sealed with wax in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), of the Holy Altar (secured behind the *ikonostásio* screen), of the Orthodox family (sheltered behind a doorway of smudged crosses), and

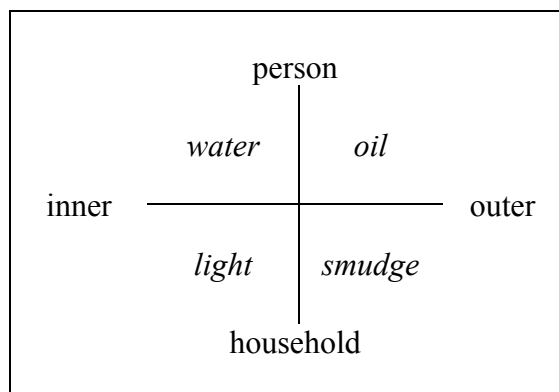


Figure 6-7: Axes and elements of integrity

the corporeal dwelling of the soul (shielded in a covering of oil). Because olive oil and its kin (water, light, fire) help us track the polar tensions between the spiritual and the somatic—the inner and the outer—I also conclude that the moral imperative in Orthodoxy hinges not on the struggle to preserve the integrity of both, but on the struggle to preserve the *integration* of both.

This distinction is significant. As discussed in the previous chapter, decisions and sentiments in everyday Messinía key into Orthodox morality to a certain degree. Although there is a categorical difference between the physical and the metaphysical, the mortal fight is to preserve both through fasting, feeding, and other religious pathways that traverse the two. In this chapter, the same applies except that the scales of this integration expand beyond the person to household units too.

Consequently, I extend the biblical trope of the “dwelling place” to the domain of the body. Simply put, I offer a theory equating the household and the person as units of dwelling that operate at different levels of scale: the body as dwelling of the soul, the household as dwelling of kin (for discussion on the church as the house of God, see Campbell 1964; Danforth 1982; Iossifides 1991; Sutton 1998a). This opens theoretical

space to integrate the domain of domesticity and the domain of personhood. Here, I use the religious figure of “dwelling,” although “container” and “vessel” are equally useful and denote the inner/outer aspects so important in understanding the anatomy of these rituals. In Chapter Five, however, I argue the centrality of the “house” (*oikos*) as an organizing principle in Messinian economic life and in patterns of kinship.

Before moving on, however, one last thing must be said concerning the structural parallel between the domain of the domestic and that of the body. In the realm of Orthodoxy, these blur conventional distinctions between persons and possessions. The domestic/body distinction, as constructed in the above rituals, prefigures a mode of patronage that underlies the hierarchical dynamic of Orthodoxy. This willful belonging is confirmed by an abstracted form of documentation (i.e., the *sfraghida* seal), which has direct roots in eleven centuries of Byzantine imperialism (Meneley 2008a; Psilakes and Psilake 2002). Indeed, the Holy Myrrh issued by the Ecumenical Patriarch and used to consecrate the complete inventory of material possessions in the Church’s ownership also marks the initiates submitting to its purview. Hence, religious membership covenants the believer (or initiate) to a hierarchy of encompassing patronage—godparent, minister, saint, all-holy Virgin Mary, Christ, God (Campbell 1964; Stewart 1991). The intimacy between the mortal and the greater power is that of willful *belonging* in the transitive sense—belonging *to* your godparent, to the household, to the Church, to God. In this respect, worshippers belonging *to* the Church belong in the same category as the treasures and material possessions in its custody.

So what constitutes “inheritance” (*klironomia*) in Orthodoxy? Is it the body, the church, the house? The faithful flocks? Or the glory and divinity of God? The analysis in this chapter offers that, as said by St. John Chrysostom in the opening of this chapter, it is the cosmological view of that encompasses all these things:

Lord our God, save Your people and bless Your inheritance; protect the whole body of Your Church; sanctify those who love the beauty of Your house; glorify them in return by Your divine power; and do not forsake us who hope in You.

ESSENTIAL (OIL)

Conclusion

From page one, this dissertation has assumed that oil is “good to think.” However, it should be clear from the stories presented here that, in the Messinían coastal plain of western Greece, olive oil is also good “to do.” From its cultivation in the groves and its extraction in the mills, to its incorporation in the church, and dinner table, olive culture perpetuates certain cultural logics that are fundamental to how my friends and acquaintances in Greece think about wealth and kinship. Oil is not merely an accessory in an integrated family and community life: it is itself the agent of that integration. The ways it achieves this—through ritual processes of production and culinary and religious consumption—reinforces symbolic dimensions of insider-ness and outsider-ness with respect to kinship and body.

The first half of this ethnography dissected the anatomical oneness of Messinían life and the life of oleiculture. They mutually constitute one another in an organized cycle of ritual transformations (the qualitative and simultaneous transformation of olive trees and gendered bodies), kept in lockstep by the changing of the seasons. This ritual process is tripartite—rites of separation, liminality, and incorporation—and converts symbolic states of olive oil (as from raw to refined) as well as familial relations (as from strangers to kin).

In the grove, this process entails a body ritual that is imagined as toilsome and “undoing” the body. It also entails an orectic ritual where the sensibilities of right and wrong—how one properly overcomes the natural parameters of alternate bearing to ensure plentiful food—are cultivated through an aesthetic praxis of tree shaping: not form following function, but form *as* function. Lastly, this process entails an exchange ritual wherein each repayment of debt presents the potential either to distance others through cash or to intensify relations through gifts of oil or reciprocal labor.

In the oil mill everything is in a state of liminal potentiality. From the physical states of matter that course through the mill’s arteries, to how social divisions get put aside via commensality, states of distinctiveness in the mill are momentarily precarious.

Distinctions are equally precarious with histories, knowledges, and precautions surrounding the birth of oil. Most importantly, at this threshold oil's status teeters between that of entering the household as a family substance or entering the global market as a food commodity.

In household rites of incorporation, oil is not merely a thing to be integrated in life by the by (of course, it is that too, as medicine, fuel, tool, and food). But when it comes to key social relationships, it *is* the thing that integrates. As food, it imprints memories of one's roots on the senses. As an aesthetic motif it structures landscapes that are "here" (localism) versus "here *and* there" (cosmopolitanism). As religious offering it substantiates the exchange between a household and the House of God.

On this last point, the second half of this ethnography delves deeper into the incorporation of bodies and kin relations in spirituality. First, among individuals, olive oil reinforces the integrity of the body, which is conceived as a container whose contents are subject to loss and penetration. Therefore, as demonstrated in Holy Communion, fasting, and exorcism, moral imperatives toward the body operate to maintain what I call an economy of containment. Oil, whether it is denied in fasting or used to draw the evil eye out from its victim, helps to restore this economy. Second, the body is valued within broader relationships through the values of integrity (*akeraiótita*) and inheritance (*klironomía*). Where the former is a moral assessment of the alignment between the body and soul (explored in the drama of Judas's effigy), the latter constitutes a mode of relatedness, bringing the body into the possession of God and into the possession of the Church. What is more, both of these idioms underlie a conceptual metaphor between the human body and the household—demonstrated in baptism, unction, and the Easter blessing of the home—with which Messinians emphasize the security of boundaries and what it means "to belong" to consanguineal kin, spiritual kin, and to divinity itself.

The two halves of this ethnography represent two discrete but complementary lines of thought. The first half examines the social, organizational life of olive oil, and establishes olive culture as an analytically useful way for examining Messinian life, and perhaps Greek life, more broadly. The second half initiates an inquiry into local models of the body, tracing olive oil and its cognates into the body's contours and functions. As such, the second half poses new questions on how the Greek notion of "body" might,

with great consequences for cross-cultural understanding, apply equally well across humans, households, and even the nation. Both threads, however, come together in larger questions about wealth and households, a question to which I return below. First, however, we must summarize what we have learned.

Trees, Genders, Bodies

From this ethnography a couple threads emerge. The first concerns gender. Gender roles performed in the service of olive culture demonstrate a clear division of labor based on complementarity. On one hand, men's work comprises labors of strength, emphasizes ingrained agricultural craft, focuses on high up spaces, and occurs out of doors. Women's work, on the other hand, comprises efforts of processing, emphasizes skills of application (e.g., medicine) and conversion (food, fuel), focuses on spaces of inner/outer (kitchen/dining room), and occurs in the home and its extensions (e.g. family burials, church). In short, men's work is that of production; women's that of reproduction. They transmit oil and extend its reach in ways that reiterate familial relations. They apply, divvy, ship, heal, store, share, feed, donate, pour, fuel, light, brine, and exchange. In this world, masculinity is measured by how much oil one makes. Femininity by how much one can do with it.

A second thread that emerges from these chapters concerns, on one hand, parallels conceived between the body and architecture, and between the body and tree cultivation on the other. Already I summarized how certain rituals, especially baptism and Easter, position the initiate and the household in very similar ways. In both rituals an illuminative element is used to dedicate the body of the initiate or the household to god, simultaneously sealing off thresholds and openings from metaphysical threat. Meanwhile, parallels exist between humans and trees as evidenced in shared anatomical and relational classifications (Table 8: Tree/Human Metaphors, pg. 111). Cross-references to somatic, mammary, or dermal arrangements and vocabularies that invoke concepts of alimentation or descent constitute a coherent folk science wherein both tree and human species are taken as possessing precise and comparable forms and functions. Further research can plumb the depths of this science, hypothesizing human/tree parallels in medicine (e.g., healthcare, healing, death) or relatedness (e.g., reproduction, grafts, hybrids).

Given the formal parallels between (1) humans and houses, and (2) humans and trees, an obvious question emerges: is there a cognitive parallel between houses and trees? In part, the question rests on a false equivalence between the two analogs since the human/house parallel occurs only in ritual contexts while the human/tree parallel occurs in semantics. Still, the extent to which houses and olive trees might be cognates can be found, I suggest, in the feminine role. Briefly, the figure of the woman finds its archetypal model in the Virgin Mary, whose monikers, the *Panaghía* (All Holy) and *Theotókos* (God-bearer), signify the encompassing nature of her role. It is understood that she devoutly protected her own body from sexual intrusion, thus making her worthy of bearing the son of God in a virgin birth, and creating his home on earth. Mary as the bearer or keeper of Jesus is rendered in Orthodox iconography as a body that physically encompasses Jesus: he is ensconced inside her figure. As a folk hero, *Panaghía* personifies the family-unit, shown to be of central importance in Greek pastoral communities (Campbell 1964; Du Boulay 1974; Dubisch 1986b; Friedl 1962).¹ As both mother *and* virgin, she produces and keeps the house of God.

As keepers of the house (Du Boulay 1986), Orthodox women must likewise emulate this sanctified role, both as spiritual guardians of the household, and as sources of wisdom, devotion, stability, and strength. According to Juliet Du Boulay, (1986), who worked among house-wives in an Euboean mountain village, the archetype of Mary, coupled with the weak-willed, sinful archetype of Eve, serve as heuristic poles on a cognitive spectrum of normative female gender and morality. In this rural community, women's life cycles were discursively mapped between the poles of danger/security, nature/culture, and shamefulness/honor. In everyday practice women's life cycles were also scheduled in accordance with these points, commencing in the shameful, undisciplined and id-like state of nature, and advancing ever closer to the socially mature, honored and self-cultivated matron—"While it is the nature of women to be Eves and to be vulnerable to the devil, it is their destiny to become figures in the image of the Mother

¹ Others also suggest that the Virgin Mary may derive much of her symbolic importance from associations to the ancient Greek virginal goddess, Athena Parthénos (Lacey 1916; Kaldellis 2009; Miller 1905; Ousterhout 2005).

of God” (Du Boulay 1986:167). In other words, the virtuous woman is the self-actualized woman.

So what relation has the Virgin Mary, and the feminine role, to olive culture? And what parallel do I propose between trees and women’s roles as of-the-house and as-the-house? Simply, a structuralist bridge of symbolic transformations. Already in the introduction we suggested some of the ways that olive trees are feminized. For instance, in the poem by Kostís Palamás (pg. 5), the blessedness of the olive tree is quite literally rooted in Jesus’ sacrifice, concluding: *His tear, a sacred dewiness, / on my root has been spilled. / I am the honored olive tree.* The poetic image of Christ slumped on the branch of an olive tree while his blood pools at its roots recalls, if vaguely, sculptural depictions of the grieving Mary cradling her dead son, Christ, in the Renaissance tradition of the pieta. More compelling, however, are the poem’s

lines. It is in the opening stanza, for instance, where the olive tree is *the daughter of the sun / the more caressed of all others*, relating the olive tree to the symbol of Athena, the virginal and wise goddess, not born in labor, but springing immaculately and in complete-adult form (*read* self-actualized). Her gift to humanity, the olive tree and the oil it produces, was valued for its

*Wherever I chance my home,
I am never without fruits;
until my deepest elderliness
I find in work no shame;
God has me forever blessed
And I am full of prosperity;
I am the honored olive tree.*

purity and powers of illumination—recollect that Jesus is also described as “the light.” Equally evocative is the poem’s third stanza, excerpted above, in which images are painted as to the tree’s procreation, life cycle, honorability, blessedness, and wealth.

All of this is fanciful symbolism, but there is also ethnographic evidence. First, the biology of the tree is feminized, as it is thought to have mammary and follicular anatomies. Second, unkempt olive trees are “fruitless” and “wild” until they mature into honorable, cultivated shapes in much the same way that women transform from wayward Eves into noble Panaghías. Third, the term *karpó* is used simultaneously to refer to the result of cultivation (fruit), and to the result of human procreation (off-spring), a parallelism evident even in the Orthodox prayer to the Virgin Mary—*Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast given birth to the*

Saviour of our souls—a prayer of intercession that invokes Mary in all the aspects that constitute her cult: dendritic (*fruit of thy womb*), feminine (*thou amongst women*), and reproductive (*thou hast given birth*). Ethnographically, then, olive trees are cognitively and discursively lumped with the feminine, conjuring images of maternity, goddessness, actualization, and honorability.

A question that remains unanswered—for now—is the masculine counterpart to the feminine tree: a counterpart which, I suspect, is to be found in Greek notions of “husbandry,” a concept that cannot be tidied up in a singular term as in English, but is rather nuanced depending on agricultural versus animal versus matrimonial husbandry.

An Economy of Relatedness

A popular proverb in Greek pop culture proclaims that “money is borrowed” (*ta leftá einai dhaneiká*). Money—in Greek, *leftá* (neut. plural)—fits what we would think of as cold, hard currency: impersonal, generic, vulgar, and motile. Whether as cash (*metritá*) or bank funds (*refstó*), money is a genre unto itself. Yet, as I have observed in Messinía, money is convertible and has its counterparts. “*And I am full of prosperity*,” the reader is reminded by the sentient tree in the penultimate line of the stanza above. Indeed, when olive farmers make decisions in the grove and perform rituals of transformation in the home, they answer a question first raised by Parry and Bloch on the practical mechanisms by which long-term and short-term economic concerns are theoretically linked—a linkage unimaginable if we restrict our medium of exchange to “money” in the capitalist (*read* modernist) ideological sense (1989:29). “Money” as a magical concept is inscribed within cultural contexts and transformational processes of value, as Jonathon Parry and Maurice Bloch put it (Parry and Bloch 1989:23). The variety of exchange models does not neatly change from one culture to another, but instead adhere as contrasts within many cultures.

What my farming friends and acquaintances show us is that the systemic organization of labor, reciprocity, and distribution all comprise the very mechanisms by which short-term and long-term transactions are linked. What is more—much more!—is the fact that long-term transactions within this system are necessarily those that make kinship (Figure 7-1 and Figure 7-2). When it comes to olive oil, short-term and long-term

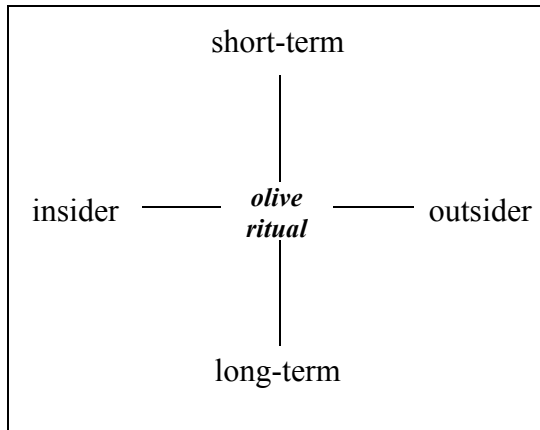


Figure 7-1: Axes of exchange and relatedness

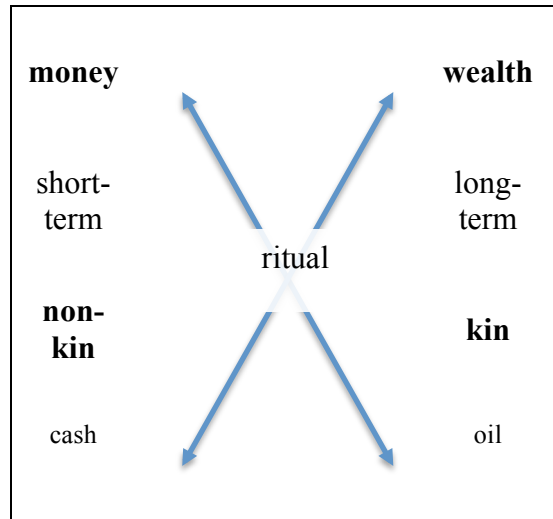


Figure 7-2: Economies of relatedness in Messinía.

strategies in Messinía align themselves differentially with the concerns of sustaining families (short-term), but also of expanding them (long-term). Whereas the alienation of family-made oil to the global commodity market occurs as a short-term strategy, the long-term focus internalizes oil so deep into the gender, body, memory, and spirit of persons that their relationality (and concomitant differentials of power or otherness) are naturalized (Franklin and McKinnon 2000; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995).

Furthermore, as has been elaborated by Janet Carsten concerning David Schneider's theory of kinship (Carsten 1995, 2000, 2004, 2011; Schneider 1980, 1984), any relatedness assumed between people is not founded *either* on claims to shared biological substance (through procreation or feeding) *or* on claims to social behavioral codes (like marriage or adoption), but is rather based on continual processes that modulate between such claims to substance and code. The implications of this are clear in the Messinían context: the potential for convertibility between insiderness and outsiderhood is paralleled with the potential convertibility of oil and money. In short, we have here a Messinían economy of relatedness.

In Messinía, olive oil generates relationships we would deem to be either economic (employer/laborer, seller/buyer, etc.) or kin-based (affine/agnate, biological/spiritual, etc.). The flow of olive oil, however, does not impose such arbitrary theoretical distinctions between these domains. Instead it only creates contours of insider-

ness and outsider-ness. When it comes to oil, economics are kin-based, and kinship is economic.

In one sense, olive oil is merely a way to feed one's family. And Messinians are the first to huff this glib truism when provoked by pesky ethnographers. Yet, from this core truth radiates a complex structure of economy and kinship both magnetic and invisible to persons embedded in it. Like electrons around a nucleus, containers of oil are charged with a particular energy that forms special bonds when they shift from one household to another. Money is also charged with symbolic energy when it passes (some would say *leaps*) from one hand into another. Yet, as explored throughout this dissertation, the valences of money and oil are drastically different in Messinía, Greece.

Essence and Péri-Essence

While this dissertation elucidates the connection between relatedness and Messinian distinctions of money versus oil, it leaves wide open the space for a new philosophical, empirical question. In Messinía, money is not to be confused with wealth. Money is fleeting and disposable, like the momentary relationships it holds. On the contrary, wealth, *periousía* (fem. singular), refers to the totality of a family's land properties and material possessions, its collective estate rather than its monetary stock. Thus, trees and tractors both constitute parts of wealth. Wealth is to be amassed and passed on in perpetuity to the next generation of family members. This poses several questions to be addressed in future reports, chief of which is how the distinction between money and wealth is reflected at the scale of nation.

Given the present climate, the issue of indebtedness is one worthy of its own ethnographic investigation, but one demanded especially by this dissertation's findings that the household is a key organizational unit in olive production, in exchanges between insiders and outsiders, and in the transmission of wealth. At the level of families, a study of how wealth (and debt) gets transmitted from older to younger generations would prove immensely enlightening especially now as the Greek government has introduced—and the public is still debating—legislation that would define real estate in ways that would affect (and some say curb) the inheritance of property. Meanwhile, at the national level, discussion of the country's debt is so never-ending in everyday politics that indebtedness

has become the new norm. Are there structural similarities of debt management between the family and national levels? And if so, do they show conceptual principles of a house society at different scales? Surely a study that surveys the terminologies of debt and wealth, and which (to coin a phrase) “follows the money” and material estates, would yield enough data to evaluate both of these hypotheses.

Another implication of wealth stemming from this dissertation concerns the global staying popularity of the Mediterranean Diet, which has propelled the commercialization of olive oil worldwide. To what extent does olive oil, a religious, familial, and economic substance for Messinians if not to all Greeks, help substantiate the Hellenic “nation” in the Greek imaginary? Locally, Greek merchants participate in the global marketing of olive oil through biomedical narratives that posit oil as a superfood with the power to (among other things) prevent heart disease, promote healthy skin and hair, and suppress cancer. As we saw in oil mills, nationwide museum exhibits, tourist literatures, and popular media portray olive oil as simultaneously traditional (a direct connection to Greek antiquity) and as a path to the future (a dietary fat with proven medicinal powers awaiting scientific explanation). Taken together, olive oil seems to be getting cast as not merely a substance symbolic of familial inheritance, but as part of authentic Greekness itself: a part of ethno-national patrimony on par with the Acropolis and Democracy in both its local claim and global fame. In this respect, is olive oil a form of national *wealth*?

This brings us to a grander question concerning ideas of “wealth” and “essence” among Greeks. By this I refer to a linguistic curiosity in which wealth and essence are implicated together: the word *periousía* (wealth), contains within it the root word *ousía* (essence). An *ousía* can refer to a pure material substance, like the essence of a lemon or an olive, but also to deep meaning, as the essence of a debate or of a story. A look in any Greek dictionary informs us that the prefix *-peri* means “around” or “about,” as suggested in the words perimeter (around + measure) or perinatal (about + birth). Thus,

the elemental breakdown of “wealth,” *periousía*, can be characterized as the stuff “around-essence.” The implications of this are enticing.²

Do we have ethnographic evidence of “wealth” *containing* or *encompassing* essence? Indeed one example in the Mediterranean is found in Carrie Douglass’s analysis of the Spanish verbs for “to be”—*ser* and *estar*—in which *ser* refers to an inner permanent, *essential* nature while *estar* connotes an outer *transitory* placement (Douglass 1997:57-58). And while the verb “to be” is not bifurcated into essential versus transitory aspects in the Greek language, the relation of a core and periphery, so important in the Spanish context, is important also in the very conceptualization of an inner essence (*ousía*) around which wealth (*péri-ousia*) exists. Very quickly we see that any hypothesis about the nature of wealth in Greece must also inquire about the nature of essence.

The implications for examining symbolic thought in Greece (and perhaps that of the Mediterranean in Spain and elsewhere) through a framework of inner/outer dimensions are too numerous to consider here. First, however, we should note that such a framework would be consistent with what this dissertation has already concluded regarding: (1) oil’s ability to generate relationships among insiders versus outsiders; (2) bodies and the economy of containment; and (3) spatial relations of core and periphery. Second, a paradigm of inner essence/outer wealth also seems, at least initially, to be consistent with long-standing paradigms in the anthropology of Greece, including that of: (1) inheritance patterns aligning the transmission of personality with transmission of property (e.g., Chock 1974; Herzfeld 1982; Sutton 1998b:118-48); and of (2) the honor/shame paradigm in which inner morality is reflected by outward signs of prestige both in Greece and further afield (Abu-Lughod 1986; Blok 1981; Campbell 1964; Delaney 1987; Douglass 1984; Gilmore 1987; Herzfeld 1984, 1985, 1987c; Loizos and Papataxiarches 1991a; Peristiany 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1955, 2012 [1977]). Obviously, more work is required to evaluate my claim that the principles of “essence” and “peri-essence” organize much of Greek cultural thought.

² Unending thanks go to Niki Tzeferoumenéou who, as we were sitting on the rocks of the Ionian Sea in reflection, commented that my project is *péri ousías* (about essence), inadvertently making the pun *periousías* (wealth, genitive case), rocketing me into a new constellation of questions.

If so, the political and ethical consequence is dire. When Hellenes take to the voting booths and the streets to protest austerity measures that break the economic backbone of the Greek countryside, they protest with a particular, ethnocentric notion of right and wrong: morals deemed wholly natural, wholly *essential*. As Greece teeters between European uncertainty and financial ruin, my dissertation demonstrates how, despite the best-laid capitalist reforms in national and international policy, the architecture of a kinship system and of a local economy can be (and frequently are!) built from the same blueprint. Where the bankers and the Germans (it's always the Germans!) are perceived as valuing money above lives and livelihoods (the effects of austerity prove this true), Greeks arduously resist on the grounds that such money-minded policies from outsiders threaten Greek prosperity and sovereignty—even Greekness itself—all of which can be phrased as a defense of essence and, perhaps, all the things *around* it (i.e., wealth).

Herein, perhaps, lays the essence of this very dissertation. Mine is not solely a project about how kinship-making and systems of exchange cross-reference each other, or about how these are organized within and by the cyclical, ritualized production and consumption of a basic food-staple. Although it can stand alone as an analysis of these theoretical propositions, I hope that this dissertation also stands as a harbinger of what anthropology can teach to the post-2008 world of the West and to the world of the post-Crisis Mediterranean. Mine is not a project to exoticize the customs I encountered in Messinía (a damned-near impossible task for a child of the Hellenic diaspora), nor is it to romanticize the people I worked with. Rather, it is merely to empathize with their situation and to begin to understand what is, to them, *of the essence*.

APPENDICES

**Appendix 1: List of demands from the Messinian Farmers
Struggle Movement, Committee of Gargaliánoi**

ΕΙΜΑΣΤΕ ΠΙΟ ΕΝΩΜΕΝΟΙ ΑΠΟ ΠΟΤΕ

ΖΗΤΑΜΕ

ΑΜΕΣΗ ΑΠΟΣΥΡΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΑΠΕΧΘΟΥΣ ΦΟΡΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΥ
ΝΟΜΟΣΧΕΔΙΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ ΑΠΟ ΜΗΔΕΝΙΚΗ ΒΑΣΗ

ΦΟΡΟΛΟΓΗΣΗ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΛΙΜΑΚΑ ΜΙΣΘΩΤΩΝ ΚΑΙ
ΣΥΝΤΑΞΙΟΥΧΩΝ ΟΠΩΣ ΕΙΜΑΣΤΕ ΜΕΧΡΙ ΣΗΜΕΡΑ

ΜΕΙΩΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΚΟΣΤΟΥΣ ΠΑΡΑΓΩΓΗΣ (ΕΤΗΣΙΑ ΑΥΞΗΣΗ
ΤΟΥΛΑΧΙΣΤΟΝ 10%)

ΝΑ ΤΙΜΟΛΟΓΕΙΤΕ ΤΟ ΠΡΟΙΟΝ ΣΤΟ ΧΩΡΑΦΙ

ΑΦΟΡΟΛΟΓΗΤΟ ΠΕΤΡΕΛΑΙΟ ΦΘΗΝΟ ΡΕΥΜΑ

ΜΕΙΩΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΨΑΛΙΔΑΣ ΠΑΡΑΓΩΓΟΥ - ΚΑΤΑΝΑΛΩΤΗ

ΙΣΧΥΡΟΠΟΙΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΔΙΑΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΕΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΘΕΣΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ
ΑΝΑΓΝΩΡΙΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΛΗΝΑ ΑΓΡΟΤΗ

ΠΑΓΩΜΑ ΤΩΝ ΔΑΝΕΙΩΝ ΟΣΟ ΔΙΑΡΚΕΙ Η ΚΡΙΣΗ

Η ΡΥΘΜΙΣΗ ΠΟΥ ΕΓΙΝΕ ΣΤΑ ΚΟΚΚΙΝΑ ΔΑΝΕΙΑ ΝΑ
ΣΥΜΠΕΡΙΛΑΜΒΑΝΕΙ ΤΟ ΠΟΣΟ ΠΟΥ ΕΧΕΙ ΠΛΗΡΩΣΕΙ Ο ΑΓΡΟΤΗΣ

ΧΑΜΗΛΟΤΟΚΑ ΚΑΛΛΙΕΡΓΗΤΙΚΑ ΔΑΝΕΙΑ

ΚΑΝΕΝΑ ΧΩΡΑΦΙ ΚΑΙ ΣΠΙΤΙ ΣΕ ΧΕΡΙΑ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΙΤΗ

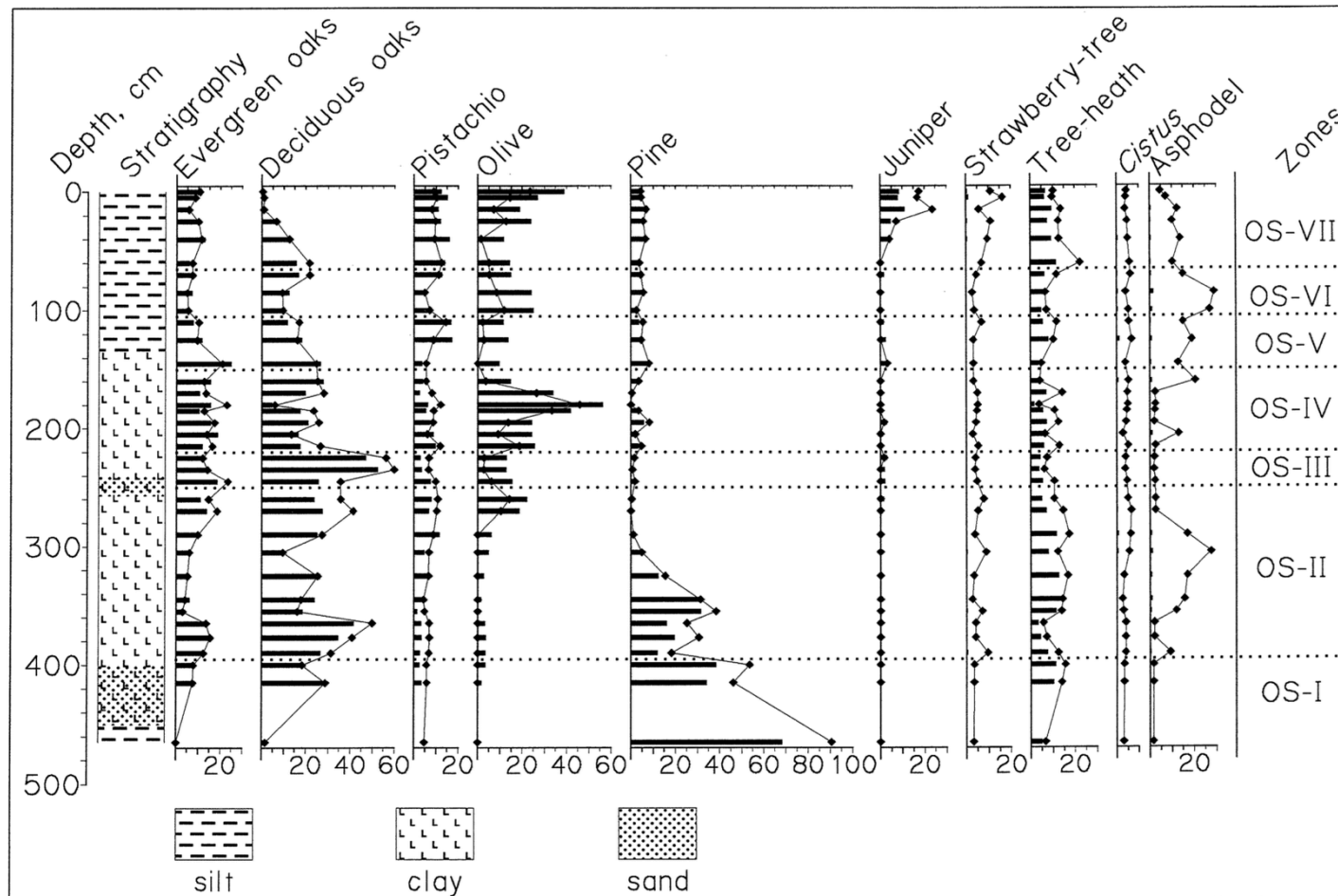
ΟΧΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΝΟΜΙΜΗ ΝΟΘΕΥΣΗ ΣΤΟ ΕΛΑΙΟΛΑΔΟ

ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ ΑΓΩΝΑ

ΓΑΡΓΑΛΙΑΝΩΝ

Leaflet of demands distributed at protest rally held at the Ministry of Finance, Internal Revenue Service building. Kalamata, Messinia. February 13, 2014. The final demand reads: *No to the legal adulteration of olive oil.*

Appendix 2: PRAP Palynology Profile of Pylos



Quantitative reconstruction of the vegetation around Osmanaga Lagoon, Navarino Bay. Source: Zangger, et al. (1997:: Fig. 26)

Appendix 3: Harvest Participation Schedule

Season	Location	# Days	# Trees
2012-2013			
• Mr. Leonídas	Ghefiráki	1	150
• Mrs. Dimákhi	Chochlastí	6	~1000
• Mítsos Kallíris	Mesochóri	4	89
• Psarópoulos Family	Kánaos	5	186
2013-2014			
• Tímos 1	Dhialiskári	2	97
• Tímos 2	Ag. Nikólaos	3	112
• Fánis Kallíris -	Pylos	8	179
• Mr. Dhamaskákis	Flóka	4	64

Appendix 4: Olive Varietals in Messinía

Common Name	Other Names	Scientific Varietal (<i>Olea europea</i> var.)	Harvest Period
<u>Table Use</u>			
<i>kalamón,</i> <i>konservoliá</i>	<i>kalamatiani</i> ¹ <i>chondroliá</i>	<i>ceraticarpa</i> <i>rotunda</i>	November-December November - February
<u>Oil Pressing</u>			
<i>koronéiki,</i> <i>tsounáti</i> <i>mavroliá</i>	<i>vátsiki</i> , <i>ladholia</i> <i>mastoeidhis</i> n/a	<i>mastoides</i> ² <i>mamilaris</i> (?)	October – January December-January December

* *Most popular name in bold*

¹ Known in the U.S. as “Kalamata”

² Also known as *microcarpa*

Appendix 5: ELAİS Factory Mural



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

The ELAİS factory mural, from left to right (cont'd). (g) an elderly couple eat picnic style in the grove; (h) a harvester takes a rest rests under an olive tree; (i) hauling a full sack of olives; (j) an obsolete ox powered mill crushes olives in the mill; (k) two workers extract oil using a turn-press; (l) the industrial ELAİS factory (on south wall).



(g)



(h)



(i)



(j)



(k)



(l)

The ELAİS factory mural, from left to right (cont'd). (g) an elderly couple eat picnic style in the grove; (h) a harvester takes a rest rests under an olive tree; (i) hauling a full sack of olives; (j) an obsolete ox powered mill crushes olives in the mill; (k) two workers extract oil using a turn-press; (l) the industrial ELAİS factory (on south wall).

Appendix 6: Selection of Texts Referring to *Dhaneikariés*

[Hospitable] treats and *dhaneikariés* are institutions of our society. Both derive from antiquity, pure Greek “patents”. It is also the imperative of the gospel: Freely you have received (?), freely you shall give! So in simple words, whatever they have treated you, treat to someone else. All this is the (semi)abolition of property and money. And it's like they create normal money [currency].

[...]

Only in the free state of Greece do we hate to go work for another or to make our friend a servant to us. That's why we invented the *dhaneikariés*. You go to another for free work, he puts down coffee and bread and cheese, and he will come too for help when you need him... When you work voluntarily you yield more, everyone together produces twice as much!

Antoniosantonopouloskyparissia, 2015.
kyparissiotis.blogspot.com.

In the years when our little Greece was very poor and when our grandfathers and fathers did not have the luxury of maintaining two animals in their stalls, but only one, they did *Sémprous* (*DHANEIKARIÉS*), with neighbors or some other villager. That is, they joined two animals (one plus one from each), formed a couple, and did the jobs of both families, without there being a need to be charged to rent a second horse.

Dhasopyrósvesi, 2010.
sygxronhellada.blogspot.com/

Τα κεράσματα και οι δανεικαριές είναι θεσμοί της κοινωνίας μας. Και τα δύο κρατούν από την αρχαιότητα, καθαρά ελληνικές ‘πατέντες’. Είναι και η επιταγή του ευαγγελίου: Δωρεάν ελάβατε(?), δωρεάν δώστε!. Δηλαδή με απλά λόγια, ό,τι σε κέρασαν, κέρνα και συ κάποιον άλλο. Όλα αυτά είναι (ημι)κατάργηση της ιδιοκτησίας και του χρήματος. Και είναι σαν να δημιουργούν κανονικά χρήμα.

[...]


Μόνο στην Ελλάδα των ελεύθερων πολιτών απεχθανόμαστε να πάμε για δουλειά στον άλλο ή και να κάνουμε το φίλο μας δούλο σε μας. Γι αυτό και εφεύραμε τις δανεικαριές. Πάς στον άλλο για δωρεάν δουλειά, αυτός βάζει το καφεδάκι και ψωμοτύρι, και θα έρθει κι αυτός για βοήθεια όταν τον χρειαστείς... Όταν δουλεύεις εθελοντικά, αποδίδεις περισσότερο, όλοι μαζί παράγουν διπλάσια!

antoniosantonopouloskyparissia.
kyparissiotis.blogspot.com/



Στα χρόνια που η Ελλαδίτσα μας ήταν πολύ φτωχή και που οι παππούδες και πατεράδες μας, δεν είχαν την πολυτέλεια να συντηρούν δυο ζώα στο παχνί τους, παρά μόνο ένα, έκαναν Σέμπρους (ΔΑΝΕΙΚΑΡΙΕΣ), με τους γείτονες η κάποιον άλλον συγχωριανό. Δηλαδή ένωσαν τα δυο ζώα, (ένα συν ένα του καθενός) σχημάτιζαν ζευγάρι και έκαναν τις δουλειές και των δυο οικογενειών, χωρίς να χρειαστεί να χρεωθούν, για να νοικιάσουν δεύτερο άλογο.

Δασοπυρόσβεση, 2010.
sygxronhellada.blogspot.com/

**ΦΥΛΛΟ
ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑΣ
1
ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑΣ**



**ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΙΚΗΣ
ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ ΚΑΛΑΜΑΤΑΣ**

ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ: ΕΛΙΑ & ΕΛΑΙΟΛΑΔΟ

ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑ

Θα είμαι
κι εγώ μαζί σας!
Ο Ελαιώνας μου
αρέσει πολύ!

**ΕΚΤΙΜΗΣΗ ΗΛΙΚΙΑΣ
ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑ (σε χρόνια)**

1-100	100-300	300-
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ

ΚΟΡΩΝΕΪΚΗ	<input type="checkbox"/>
ΝΥΧΑΤΗ ΚΑΛΑΜΩΝ	<input type="checkbox"/>
ΑΛΛΗ:	

ΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΗ ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑ

ΑΡΔΕΥΟΜΕΝΟΣ <input type="checkbox"/>	ΞΗΡΙΚΟΣ <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------	----------------------------------

**ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣΕΙΣ ΦΥΤΕΥΣΗΣ
(ΣΕ ΜΕΤΡΑ)**

Η πολύ πυκνή φύτευση
χρησιμοποιείται για μόνωση
εκμετάλλευσης του διαθέσιμου
αγρού, αλλά σταδιακά
όταν τα δέντρα αποκτήσουν
μεγάλο μέγεθος

<input type="checkbox"/> Αραιή (11X11 έως 9X9)	<input type="checkbox"/> Κανονική (9X8 ή 8X8 ή 8X7)
<input type="checkbox"/> Πυκνή (6X6 ή 6X5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Πολύ πυκνή (5X5)

ΑΝΑΠΤΥΞΗ ΔΕΝΤΡΩΝ

Καλή <input type="checkbox"/> (ζωηρά)	Μέτρια <input type="checkbox"/> (κανονικά)	Κακή <input type="checkbox"/> (καχεκτικά)
--	---	--

ΦΥΛΛΟ
ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑΣ
2
ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑΣ



ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΙΚΗΣ
ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ ΚΑΛΑΜΑΤΑΣ



ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ: ΕΛΙΑ & ΕΛΑΙΟΛΑΔΟ

ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΔΑΦΟΥΣ

ΚΛΙΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΔΑΦΟΥΣ

Επίπεδο Επικλινές Με αναβαθμίδες

☐
☐
☐

ΧΡΩΜΑ ΕΔΑΦΟΥΣ

Το χρώμα του εδάφους είναι ενδεικτικό του pH και της περιεκτικότητάς του σε οργανικές ουσίες και CaCO_3 . Τα σκουρόχρωμα εδάφη είναι γενικά πλούσια σε οργανική ύλη και έχουν μεγάλο pH. Τα ανοιχτόχρωμα είναι πλούσια σε CaCO_3 .



Μαύρο Καφέ Κόκκινο Γκρι Λευκό

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

ΤΙ ΣΥΜΠΕΡΑΣΜΑ ΒΓΑΖΕΤΕ
ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΚΤΙΜΗΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ;

.....

.....

.....

ΤΡΟΠΟΣ ΛΙΠΑΝΣΗΣ

Οργανική ☐
(κοπριές-φύλλα-στάχτη)

Χλωρή λίπανση ☐
(φυτά που ευνοούν την αζωτοδέσμευση: βίκος, λούπινα, αρακάς, κουκιά, φασόλια)

Συμβατική ☐
(βιομηχανοποιημένα λιπάσματα)

ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΑΝΑΠΤΥΞΗ ΤΩΝ ΦΥΤΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΕΔΑΦΟΥΣ

Πολύ ζωηρά Καχεκτικά Ξεραμένα

☐
☐
☐

ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ ΦΥΤΩΝ

ΣΗΜΕΙΩΣΤΕ ΤΑ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΦΥΤΩΝ ΠΟΥ ΥΠΑΡΧΟΥΝ ΣΤΟΝ ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑ

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ΜΕΤΡΗΣΕΙΣ

ΜΕΘΟΔΟΣ ΔΕΙΓΜΑΤΟΛΗΨΙΑΣ ΓΙΑ ΕΔΑΦΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΗ

- * Η δειγματοληψία γίνεται κάτω από την κόμη των δέντρων (2-3 δείγματα /στρέμμα)
- * Αφαιρούμε την επιφανειακή στρώση των φύλλων και φυτών
- * Ανοίγουμε λάκκο βάθους 30cm και παίρνουμε μια φέτα χώματος με φορά από κάτω προς τα πάνω
- * Το τοποθετούμε πάνω σε καθαρό πλαστικό και σπάζουμε τους σβόλους.

1. ΜΕΤΡΗΣΗ ΤΟΥ pH ΕΔΑΦΟΥΣ

Μια μικρή ποσότητα χώματος διαλύεται σε νερό, αναμειγνύεται καλά και αφήνεται να κατασταλάξει. Στο υπερκείμενο διάλυμα προσδιορίζεται το pH.

Το pH παίζει
σοβαρό ρόλο σε σχέση
με τη διαθεσιμότητα
των θρεπτικών
στοιχείων



ΤΙΜΗ pH.....

Τι επιπτώσεις μπορεί να έχει αυτή η τιμή pH;

2. ΠΡΟΣΔΙΟΡΙΣΜΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑΣ ΑΣΒΕΣΤΙΟΥ ΣΤΟ ΕΔΑΦΟΣ

Στο χώμα που πήρατε με τον παραπάνω τρόπο δειγματοληψίας, ρίξτε μια σταγόνα από ισχυρό οξύ και παρατηρήστε αν αφρίζει

Το CaCO_3 παίζει ρόλο
στην αύξηση του pH του εδάφους
ώστε τα θρεπτικά στοιχεία να είναι
εύκολα προσλήψιμα από τα δένδρα.
Επίσης το Ca είναι σημαντικό
ιχνοστοιχείο, που μπορεί να αυξάνει
την ελαιοπεριεκτικότητα
στον καρπό



3. ΠΟΙΑ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΤΑ ΣΥΜΠΕΡΑΣΜΑΤΑ ΣΑΣ ΣΧΕΤΙΚΑ ΜΕ ΤΗΝ ΕΔΑΦΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑ

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Appendix 8: Selection of Lyrics Referring to Judas from Various Genres

And an angel with a wound will appear
and he will say why did you hit me, why?
I am not your enemy.
And from behind the door, God will be heard
and he will ask, Judas where is your Lord,
your Lord?

*Old Eden, 1976. Sótia Tsótou,
New Wave ballad*

Και θα φανεί ένας άγγελος με μια πληγή
και θα μου πει γιατί με χτύπησες γιατί;
Δεν είμαι εχθρός σου.
Και θ' ακουστεί πίσω απ' την πόρτα ο Θεός
και θα ρωτά Ιούδα πού 'ναι ο Κύριός σου,
ο Κύριός σου;

*Η Παλιά Εδέμ, 1976. Σώτια Τσώτον,
Νέο Κύμα μπαλάντα*

Sometimes Buddha, sometimes Kouđhas,¹
sometimes Jesus and Judas,
I have already understood the game of my life.
I have already understood the game of my life.
Sometimes Buddha, sometimes Kouđa,
sometimes Jesus and Judas.

*Sometimes Buddha, sometimes
Kouđhas 1986. Manólis Rasouúlis,
tsiftetéli dance*

Πότε Βούδας, πότε Κούδας,
πότε Ιησούς κι Ιούδας.
Έχω καταλάβει ήδη της ζωής μου το παιχνίδι.
Έχω καταλάβει ήδη της ζωής μου το παιχνίδι.
Πότε Βούδας, πότε Κούδας,
πότε Ιησούς κι Ιούδας.

*Πότε Βούδας, πότε Κούδας, 1986.
Μανώλης Ρασούλης, τσιφτετέλι*

But he glances haughtily,
and sells love cheaply.
Like Judas he kisses beautifully,
but he doesn't fool me, he doesn't trick me.

*Judas Kissed Beautifully, 1999. Ilías
Katsouúlis, rebétiko*

Μα αυτός κοιτάει αγέρωχα,
και πουλάει φτηνά τον έρωτα.
Σαν Ιούδας φιλά υπέροχα,
μα δε με γελά, δε με ξεγελά.

*Ο Ιούδας Φιλούσε Υπέροχα, 1999.
Ηλίας Κατσούλης, ρεμπέτικο*

¹ Ghiórgchos Kouđhas, considered among the best of Greek soccer players, he was nicknamed “Alexander the Great” in a career spanning over twenty-five years.

I don't blame you for wanting to stay friends
and asking for it with the kiss of Judas.

Let me not drink, oh Lord, this glass
before it dawns, since you no longer love me.
You never did anything for my sake.²
You weren't love, you weren't love.
You weren't love, you were Golgotha.

*I Don't Blame You, 1997. Eléni
Ginnatsoulia, traditional hasápiko*

Δε σ'αδικώ που θες να μείνουμε δυο φίλοι
και το ζητάς με του Ιούδα το φιλί.

Να μην το πιω, Θέε μου, ετούτο το ποτήρι
πριν ξημερώσει, αφού πια δε μ'αγαπάς.
Ποτέ δε μου'κάνες κανένα μου χατίρι.
Δεν ήσουν έρωτας, δεν ήσουν έρωτας.
Δεν ήσουν έρωτας, εσύ ήσουν Γολγοθάς.

*Δε σ'αδικώ, 1997. Ελένη
Γιαννατσούλια, χασάπικο*

Who digs your pit, you or everyone else?
What is your soul hiding, unbeknownst to your
head?
Your vision blurs, your nights darken
it dives into stupefaction, like a cloud it sinks
to the bottom when it reaches it'll be like you
got away.
This is what Judas thought before he betrayed
his Christ.
Who am I don't ask, it doesn't matter
you won't exorcise me with any cheap
substance,
they call me conscience and if you want me to
let you go,
shout loudly so I can hear you and I will live.

*I Can't Endure, 2005. Nikos Vourliótis,
rap*

Το λάκκο σου ποιος σκάβει εσύ ή όλοι οι
άλλοι;
Τι κρύβει η ψυχή σου που δεν ξέρει το κεφάλι;
Θολώνει η ματιά σου τα βράδια σκοτεινιάζει
βουτάει στην μαστούρα σαν σύννεφο βουλιάζει
στον πάτο όταν φτασει θα είναι σαν να έχεις
γλιτώσει.
Έτσι νόμιζε ο Ιούδας τον Χριστό του πριν
προδώσει.
Ποιος είμαι μην ρωτάς δεν έχει σημασία
δε θα με ξορκίσεις με καμιά φθηνή ουσία,
συνείδηση με λένε και αν θέλεις να σ'αφήσω
φώναξε δυνατά να σ'ακούσω και θα ζήσω.

*Δεν Αντέχω, 2004. Νίκος Βουρλιώτης,
rap*

² *chatiri* (noun, sing.). Favor or grace, as in the satisfaction of one's desire. Like "grace," it also connotes bestowal or gifting. Its Turkish derivation (*hatir* "sake") implies a benefit or advantage to one's interest.

Appendix 9: The Nisteía Schedule and Commemoration³

Weekly Days

- Wednesdays (Betrayal of Christ by Judas)
- Fridays (Crucifixion of Christ)
- **Before Sacrament of Holy Communion**- one week, days, or midnight prior to

Annual Dates

- Eve of Theophánia (Epiphany)- Jan. 5
- Beheading of St. John the Forerunner (Aug. 29)
- Elevation of the Holy Cross (Sep. 14)
- Christmas Eve (Dec. 24)

Extended Periods

- **Megháli Sarakostí (Great Lent)**- 40 days preceding Easter, from Clean Monday to Palm Sunday, plus **Holy Week**
- Aghíon Apostólon (Apostles' Fast)- from Monday after All Saints (variable date) to feast of Ss. Peter and Paul (June 29)
- **Kimíseos tis Theotókou (Dormition of the Theotokos Fast)**- 2 weeks from Aug. 1- 14
- Christoughénnon (Nativity Fast)- 40 days from Nov. 15 to Dec. 25.

³ Most popular observances are bolded.

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