

## Evy Johanne Håland

Bergen, Norway  
evyhaa@online.no

# 15 August on the Aegean Island of Tinos

The most important festival on the island of Tinos, the "Dormition" of the *Panagia* (the Virgin Mary), is celebrated on 15 August. During the festival an official procession, carrying her *icon* (image) in its midst, is important, but also popular customs as the importance of fetching holy water and earth, having a long tradition within Greek religions. The article presents the festival on Tinos, thus exploring the relation between the official and popular religion, also related to gendered values.

### Key words:

Death-cult, Earth, Fertility-cult, Festivals, Greece, Healing, Icon, Official and popular religion, Saint, Water

The festival is an important means of communication, an offering or a gift, most often dedicated to a deceased guardian of society, for instance to the *Panagia* (the Virgin Mary).<sup>1</sup> In modern Greece, the festival dedicated to the "Dormition" of the Panagia, the Bearer or Mother of God (i.e. *Ē Koimēsis tēs Theotokou*), is celebrated on 15 August, marking the end of the fifteen-day fast in honour of the

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1983, I have had several periods of fieldwork in the Mediterranean, mainly in Greece and Italy where I have also been conducting research on religious festivals since 1987, cf. E. J. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values* (in Norwegian), Norwegian Academic Press, Kristiansand 2007. There, the topics discussed in the following article also are examined further. For short outlines of the Dormition festival, see also Håland, The ritual year as a woman's life: The festivals of the agricultural cycle, life-cycle passages of Mother Goddesses and fertility-cult, in Mifsud-Chircop, G. ed. *First International Conference of the SIEF working group on The Ritual Year. In association with The Department of Maltese University of Malta, Junior College, Msida, Malta, 2005: Proceedings*, PEG, Malta 2006: 303-326, The ritual Year of the Miraculous Icon on the Aegean sacred island of Tinos, *Folklore* (Tartu), forthcoming. Since 1990 I have carried out extensive fieldwork on Tinos.

Panagia. The feast of the Dormition began in the seventh century, and in Greek Orthodoxy it still retains the name.<sup>2</sup>

Generally, August is also considered the beginning of a new season in Greece, and since the festival dedicated to the “Dormition” takes place after harvest and the threshing of the grain, in a period of holiday and leisure, it also announces the passage from summer to winter and the new agricultural season. The cyclical perspective is central in connection with the festivals of the agricultural year, and the official ideological rituals are adapted to the agricultural calendar. The orthodox liturgical year is established through the Panagia’s biography. It begins around autumn, and several important moments in her life are celebrated during this period of the year, i.e. before and around sowing and during the germination and growth of the corn crops, when the “female”, wet and fertile period in the agricultural year’s cycle replaces the “male” and dry period, because the woman is looked upon as the productive partner in a relationship in the Mediterranean area.<sup>3</sup> The Dormition of the Panagia is celebrated during the dead period of the grains’ cycle. The festival marks a turning point towards autumn, by the end of the dog days, by the end of August, when the transitional period towards the “productive part” of the year is about to begin again,<sup>4</sup> and the 15 August cycle ends by the memorial service nine days after her death. In Greece, the transition to the fertile and healing period starts when the Panagia descends into the underworld, and consequently ensures the future fertility in agreement with the divine underworld.

15 August is celebrated with special reverence all over Greece, and on this day pilgrimages are made to the greatest shrine of Greek Orthodoxy, the Aegean island of Tinos. 15 August is the most important festival on Tinos today, and this fertility – and healing-festival dedicated to the Dormition of the Panagia is particularly important due to several reasons:

## The sanctuary on Tinos

In 1823, after several mystical visions of one of the islanders, a pious nun named Pelagia, they found the Miraculous holy *icon* (image) of the Annunciation (*Euangelistrias*) of the Panagia (*Megalochari*, *megalo*: great, *charē*: grace, i.e. the Blessed Virgin). According to the tradition, the nun Pelagia, saw repeatedly in her visions the Panagia, who ordered her to inform the elders to start excavations in order to find her icon, buried since many years ago in an uncultivated field, and to

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<sup>2</sup> There are also theological differences in the way in which Mary is viewed in the Orthodox and Catholic churches. In the Orthodox Church, Mary is not seen as immaculately conceived and bodily assumed into heaven. In Orthodoxy, the virgin remains a human intercessor and a Mother, see also *infra* for discussion of this aspect. Cf. J. Dubisch, *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine*, Princeton University Press 1995: 236.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique*, Minit, Paris 1980; E. J. Håland, Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece: A Comparative, Approach, *Cosmos* 17, 2005: 197-251, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also D. Loukatos, *Ta Kalokairina*, Laographia - Paradosē 3, Philippotē, Athens 1981.

build her “house” (i.e. her church) on that place. On 30 January 1823, the icon was unearthed in the field where it had remained for about 850 years, since the church built on the ruins of a pagan temple was destroyed and burned down in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Two years before the icon was found, the great Greek War of Independence (1821) broke out. The finding of the icon, the construction of the church of the Panagia, Euangelistrias, the enormous crowds of pilgrims and all the miracles worked by the icon, contributed to the act that in 1971, the island was declared a sacred island by governmental decree. Pelagia also became sanctified on 11 September.

Below the main church on Tinos are several minor churches or chapels. In the first chapel is a holy spring, where the pilgrims fetch water, which is believed to have fertile powers and to cure sickness. According to the tradition, the well was found during the excavations made in search of the icon, but the well was dry. On the day of the laying of the cornerstone of the Church, however, the formerly dry well became filled to the brim with water. The source is seen as a miracle, and according to the tradition it is one of the most important miracles of the Panagia of Tinos, and the chapel of holy water is called *Zōodochos Pēgē*, i.e. the “Life-giving Spring”. Since the discovery of water in this well, pilgrims regard it as sacred water. Accordingly, small or bigger bottles of this precious water are taken home by pilgrims from all over the world, and they keep it as a talisman.

The sanctuary is a great complex. “The Holy Foundation of the Annunciation of Tinos”, is a multifaceted institution of national and international dimensions, being the most important source of income at the island. The different parts of the sanctuary are gifts, such as doors and benches, and the names of the donors are always written on nameplates affixed to the dedications. Among the most famous gifts given as tokens of gratitude, is the marble fountain donated by a Moslem official who was cured of syphilis. Much of what is given to the church as offerings are retained, but much is also sold: Most of the jewellery is auctioned in Athens, and the livestock, olive oil, etc. are sold. The Church of the Annunciation as an organization is a powerful force in local politics, a philanthropic institution that controls a vast amount of wealth. It is an organization with considerable money, and it is an organization of priests. Generally, local people have an ambivalent attitude towards the Church of the Annunciation, it is a source of pride on the other hand it is “too rich”. People working in the church’s office, however, emphasize that the church is not engaged in “business”, but after the festival, along with the priests, they are counting the money the pilgrims have left, a task, which takes several hours. So, I would say that the health business on modern Tinos is illustrated in many ways, for example by the church sending talismans all over the world, on request from people who do not have the possibility to go to Tinos as pilgrims. The Holy icon is attributed to the apostle and evangelist Luke, who is believed to have painted it during Mary’s lifetime, thus, tying it to the origins of Christianity and the image directly to Mary herself. Today, the icon is covered with offerings of gold and precious stones,

and it is impossible to see what it portrays. The miracles worked by the icon have made Tinos a centre of Pan-Orthodox worship.<sup>5</sup>

### “A kilometre on my knees for Mary”

All the year, pilgrims are coming to Tinos, but the enormous crowd of devotees exceeds during the days around the August-festival, particularly after 1<sup>st</sup> August. They are coming to the shrine for their “*tama/ta*”, their pledge to the Panagia to help, mainly on people’s health problems. Many of the pilgrims are fulfilling a vow given after having a dream in which the Panagia has ordered them to go to Tinos bringing with them particular offerings to be cured. Before leaving for Tinos a mother may say: “Save my child, my Panagia, and I will creep on my knees, all the way towards your icon”. Childless couples also invoke the Panagia. People, mostly women, are making their way up to the church barefoot, on their bare and bleeding knees, or on their stomachs, and they are bringing with them various offerings, sometimes tied on their backs: candles as tall as the donor, icons, wax. They may also bring incense, silver candlesticks, censers, bread, wine, flowers, or sheep (the gypsies). The most common offering is a silver- or gold-plated ex-voto (*tama*) representing the person who has been miraculously cured by the icon, or the cured limb itself or the person or limb wanting to be cured, or a ship. The street, named Megalocharēs is leading directly from the harbour to the church. It is a wide avenue, lined with shops and booths. These are multiplied during August, since several sellers travel from festival to festival as do also several beggars. When the pilgrims disembark, they are assailed with the cries of the shopkeepers who stand outside their stores, hawking the items necessary for a successful pilgrimage.

At the top of the hill, arrived at the doorway of the church, the pilgrims offer their large candles. Afterwards, they are lining up on the steps at the Church of the Annunciation, waiting their turn to enter the main chapel, to *proskynēma*, i.e. to perform the set of devotions a pilgrim do upon entering the church, particularly the devotions in front of the miraculous icon, the most important being to kiss the icon itself. The black pilgrim-clothes are often left as dedications either to the icon or to the ruins of the foundations of the Byzantine Church, in the chapel dedicated to *Agia* (i.e. Saint) Pelagia, which is situated next to the “Life-giving Spring”. Most of the pilgrims stay for a service, but even during services many pilgrims continue to move around, engaging in their own rituals. Most pilgrims, however, confine their attentions to the main sanctuary and to the chapel of holy water below the church: “Where do we go for holy water (*agiasma*)?” pilgrims ask each other, and other pilgrims direct them downstairs, to the chapel beneath the main church where they will find the holy water front. Inside the first chapel they kiss the icons, before they take some earth from the hole where the miraculous icon was found. Afterwards, they are queuing up to obtain holy water in small bottles or they drink directly from

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. also E. A. Foskolos, *Perigraphē tēs Euresēōs tēs Thaumaturgou Agias Eikonas tēs Euangelistriās stēn Tēno kata to etos 1823. Skopoi kai drastēriotētes tou Ierou Idrymatos*, Panellēniou Ierou Idrymatos Euangelistriās Tēnou, 1996.

the tap. Many pilgrims are only carrying out the most important rituals and obtain the holy symbols before they return to the harbour.

### **Tinos, 15 August: the day the Greeks combine religion and patriotism**

In addition to the thousands of pilgrims coming to Tinos on their own, several pilgrimages are organised by representatives of the Orthodox Church, particularly in connection with the 15 August. Seriously handicapped persons in wheeled chairs also participate. The Dormition festival culminates through the *olonychia*, “the all-night-service”, between 14 and 15 August and the following procession. Many pilgrims sleep in the court. Many pilgrims also spend the night inside the church, while the priests and cantors sing invocations. Simultaneously, many are occupied by fetching earth and water in the chapel below, both seen as very powerful fertility- and healing-remedies, particularly when the Panagia is so close. Hence, many children are baptised in the baptistry in Holy water from the “Life-giving Spring.”

The Dormition of the Panagia is also an important ideological festival for the “New Greek nation-state of 1821”, combining the celebration of the Dormition with the day of the armed forces. It is illustrated through several ceremonies during the festival, particularly the procession when the icon is carried from the church to the harbour: On 15 August, Tinos becomes the centre of Greece. The service is followed by a solemn official procession when the icon is carried down the mainstreet. Top government cabinet members and the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, followed by the clergy and notables are present at the liturgy and particularly at the following procession. A military escort and lesser officials accompany them. Following the tradition, several celebrities are present, for example the last survivors of the crew of the Greek destroyer Elli, which was sank by a submerged Italian submarine as it was anchored off the Tinos harbour on 15 August 1940. A detachment of sailors marches at the tail of the procession; the national Hellenic Navy always sends warships to Tinos on 15 August, because the Panagia represents the intimate and hazardous relations of the Greeks towards the sea. So, the Hellenic Navy is honoured because it is “under the protection of the Virgin”, and the salvation of Greece always comes from the sea”. The national ideology is also manifested through the speeches given by the authorities, and by the posters hanging around in the town, announcing the festival: One poster shows the Panagia hovering over the national symbol, the Acropolis of Athens. Another poster may depict a mixing of modern and ancient symbols, or a jet flying over Tinos, or the front-page of a newspaper from 15 August 1940. The message is always the same: 15 August is proclaimed as the Day of Military Strength, and the symbols of the navy, the air force and the army are illustrated. We meet the double nature of the occasion as both a patriotic and a religious holiday, in agreement with the traditional close connection between the official Orthodox Church and the nation-state, in a patriotic sense.

Her icon is carried in procession, and also over the sick and women wanting to conceive. Several hours before the service is finished, a long queue of pilgrims lines up in the main street waiting for the icon to pass over them, and as the icon is carried down the street they stand bended in its path so that the icon may pass over them. It is important to touch and kiss the icon. In addition to the crowd of followers, thousands of onlookers watch the procession, several on their knees, some holding sticks of burning incense, incense burners or lighted candles. Several sick pilgrims lie down, as the custom was earlier, but today they are nearly trampled down. During the procession jets from the air force are regularly flying over the island, accompanied by the salutes fired by the warships and the cannon at the memorial in the harbour which was inaugurated in 2002. When the procession arrives at the harbour a service is followed by a speech given by the attending member of the Government, for example the Foreign Affairs Minister, in 1993. The ceremony officially ends when the clergy and the officials go aboard a warship carrying them half a mile outside the harbour to the point where Elli was sunk. Here, a service is held, and the priest and the new president (i.e. in 1995) throw laurel crowns on the watery tomb of the ship and its crew. Meanwhile, the ships are blowing their horns, the jets are passing over and people line across the coastline. “We came to pay honour to the Panagia, who helped us to beat the fascist”, said one of the survivors of the Elli crew in 1993. “We are once again faced with an hour of danger, as the clouds of war in the Balkans have increased and threaten to spread further”, said the Foreign Affairs Minister the same year.<sup>6</sup> The importance of the Panagia and the Greek nation is also emphasized during the service, and she is prayed to take care of the Greek nation as she has always done.

After the patriotic ceremony, the procession returns to the Church at 1 p.m. Mothers try to defy the police lines, to bring their sick children as close as possible to the icon. After lunch at the most fashionable hotel of the island, the helicopter of the president leaves for Athens. At 7.30 p.m. the battleships fire salutes, followed by fireworks, and the last battleship leaves at 22 p.m. The aim of the procession is that the miraculous icon may pass over the pilgrims, to purify them for another year, but the Greek nation is also purified. In short, 15 August is a special day for Hellenism, combining religion with patriotism, and the Dormition on Tinos is a profound social event.

## **Gendered times and values in Greece**

The festival is also an excellent occasion to study the relation between the female and male world, i.e. the differences between the female and male values (cf. Håland 2007), illustrating the various identities and statuses displayed in the festival. But, I want to emphasize that, as always when trying to classify different parts

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<sup>6</sup> In 1996 the crisis with the Turks on Cyprus was the main theme for the speech given to the crowd of pilgrims by the Minister of Defence, rousing the audience to thunderous applause. Thus, he was repeating the priests, praying the Panagia to resolve the relations on Cyprus.

or categories, the two opposing worlds and value-systems, the female and male, are nevertheless both complementary and interdependent.

Is the Greek nation's identity identical with a male identity as opposed to a female, domestic identity? Partly yes, partly no. Yes, because, the Greek nation and its identity belongs to a male, linear history according to an analysis based upon Julia Kristeva's and Jill Dubisch's<sup>7</sup> distinction between two kinds of time, female and male time, which I have developed into female and male values (Håland 2007). According to Kristeva (1986) men's time is linear time: time as project, teleology, linear and perspective unfolding: time as departure, progression, and arrival, in other words, the time of history. Women's time, by contrast, is, on the one hand, repetitive, that is cyclical, and on the other hand, beyond time in its ordinary sense. It is eternal, i.e. monumental time. Kristeva (1986: 191) also states that the most recent elaboration of the maternal cult is demonstrated by the body of the Virgin Mother, since her body does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via Dormition according to the Orthodox faith or via Assumption according to the Catholics. The female time is cyclical and monumental characterised by repetition and eternity.

On the other hand, we also meet a combination of a linear, male history and a cyclical and monumental female history characterized by repetition and eternity, since the Panagia announced the resurrection of Greekness to the nun in 1822. Hence, the Panagia is the first and most important saint of the New Greek nation-state. In many ways she represents Greece, and might be seen as embodying Greece in her eternal aspect. While embedded in history, the Panagia represents the never-dying spirit of nationhood (unearthed in a field), as contrasted to a specific political entity (the current state of Greece) existing in limited and delimited historical time. The account of the finding of the icon and the building of the church also represents women's time, because of the miracles and visions (forces generally excluded from official male history), embedded in men's historical time. The Panagia represents the domestic realm, but she also stands as a national and local political representation beyond the domestic realm (cf. Dubisch 1991, 1995).

## **Male world, values, identity and status**

Among all the orthodox icons the icons depicting the Panagia are most venerated, and the cult has been important since the early Byzantine period, when she, according to the legend, revealed herself, carrying a sword, on the walls of Constantinople and Athens and saved her cities. Since then, the vision about the Panagia has accompanied the armed forces of the Greeks in the same way as the ancient goddess Athena. The victory belongs to the Panagia as the commander-in-chief.

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<sup>7</sup> J. Kristeva, Women's Time, in Moi, T. ed. *The Kristeva Reader*, Blackwell 1986: 187-213; J. Dubisch, Men's Time and Women's Time: History, Myth, and Ritual at a Modern Greek Shrine, *Journal of Ritual Studies* 5/1: 1991: 1-26.

According to some the banner of Greek resistance was first raised on 25 March 1821, the day of the Annunciation. 25 March is now celebrated as a day of double import, the Greek Independence Day and the day of the angel's announcement to Mary that she would bear the Son of God. In other words, two rebirths, of humankind and of the Greeks are combined. This double rebirth is implicit in much of the shrine's iconography, ritual and history, for example the scene on the icon, and the name of the church housing the icon. The finding of the icon in 1823 was considered a divine sign, indicating the support of the fight and confirmation of the liberation of the country from the Turks. So the history of the icon is intimately bound to the history of Modern Greece. Accordingly, and as already indicated, high military, administrative and political dignitaries officially represent the Government at the celebration of the great feasts of the Church, thus making these days appropriate occasions for articulating the relationship between nationalism and religion and between church and state.

Below the main sanctuary of the church is a mausoleum commemoration the sinking of the Elli. Annually, the heroes of the Elli are wreathed, and a service is given in front of the mausoleum on 13 August. Different persons may stress different values in connection with the festival, and according to an islander, a young local man, the most important factor during the festival is the celebration of the heroes of the Elli, drawing high government representatives, etc. to Tinos. Other national ideas are also reflected in connection with the sanctuary. In front of the icon is a votive offering depicting Cyprus in gold, bearing witness of what many pilgrims ask the Panagia to receive back, or liberated from the Turks. This is also reflected by the pilgrim-ships from Cyprus, arriving once a week throughout the year, and up to twice a week during the summer season, particularly in August (cf. also n.6 supra). In the middle of the 1990s, I often witnessed a travelling teacher teaching the children from Bosnia: In 1994 and 1995 the Church invested several sums of money to help children from the devastated neighbouring area further north on the Balkans to a month's holiday on Tinos. One reason was to keep the children within the Christian faith.

So, the sanctuary on Tinos then, is both a religious pilgrimage centre and important national symbol, paralleling the resurrection of Greece, after "2000 years of sleep" (the ancient) or "850 years of burial" (the Byzantine). This is particularly demonstrated by the importance of showing ancient and Byzantine symbols, illustrated by a lion from the neighbouring ancient sacred pilgrimage island of Delos and the rests from the Byzantine church, once housing the icon. This church rested on the foundations of an ancient panhellenic temple of Dionysos, and marbles and columns from the ancient temples of Delos and Poseidon at Kionia, Tinos, were used in the construction of the church, according to the church pamphlets distributed to pilgrims (i.e. Fosklos 1996). These symbols also bear witness to the two, or double set of, Greek identities the ancient and the Byzantine, the "Hellenic" or out-



ward-facing and the “Romeic” or inward-facing, according to M. Herzfeld.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as already indicated, certain representations of the Church of the Annunciation seek to merge this “Romeic” past with classical “Hellenic” Greece. The church and its history assert an evolution from pagan traditions to Christianity. The church stands on and is built from the past, it transcends the past it does not reject it. The Greeks are neither Hellenes nor Byzantines. They are both.

So, instead of saying that political discourse makes use of religion and religious symbolism and finds opportunity for its expression in religious occasion such as those celebrated at Tinos on 15 August, I would rather suggest that there is a combination of the two, since religious discourse also makes use of politic and political symbolism, they are both complementary and interdependent. This intermingling is particularly manifested in the aforementioned posters announcing the festival on Tinos today, thus reflecting Byzantine manifestations as well as paintings and newspapers of the war period. It may for example be illustrated by a painting of a battleground filled with soldiers during the Greek-Italian war in 1940-1941. The Panagia and the child are hovering in the clouds overhead, accompanied by angels, one of which carries a Greek flag.<sup>9</sup> According to some, the church also dedicated the whole collection of votive offerings to assist the allied during the war, thus paralleling the Panagia’s participation as illustrated in several pictures from the period (cf. Mazarakēs-Ainian 1987). Despite of this maternal participation, all the official rituals performed by representatives of the nation state and the church may be classified as belonging to a male world, representing male values, identity and status. So what about the female?

## Female world, values, identity and status

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

The festival is dedicated to the most important mother, the Panagia. Further, in family life, women are the central performers of the ritual actions performed to secure the family’s life and health. Accordingly, on Tinos, we see a tension between the official priesthood and the representative of the individual family. Generally, women are connected with birth, nurturance and the care for the dead; they are nurturing mothers, and by their activities as care-takers they manage and control the

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<sup>8</sup> M. Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the making of Modern Greece*, Pella, New York 1986, *Anthropology through the looking-glass: Critical ethnography in the margins of Europe*, Cambridge Univ. Press 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. I. Mazarakēs-Ainian, *To Epos tou '40. Laikē eikonographia*, Athens, 1987: pl. (=Eik.) 11, see also pls. 4, 13, 48.

fundamental course of life. Many symbols and rituals in the festival illustrate this and are regarded as belonging to the female domain. By analysing some of their relevant aspects, it is possible to gain further insight into the meaning and importance of the customs and values related to fundamental principles within the “ideological entirety” that constitutes the festival. So, women are the guardians of their family’s spiritual health, which cannot be separated from physical health, given the role of prayers and vows in healing and protection (Dubisch 1995: 210 f.). Women are also the most frequent pilgrims arriving at Tinos. It is women who most often undertake the most difficult acts of pilgrimage, such as crawling to the church on their knees. This is also illustrated by the female bronze figure at the top of the hill. Therefore, one needs to see pilgrimage in the context of Greek gender roles, and particularly women come to a female divinity who dies annually on 15 August, is reborn and gives birth again, in the same way as Mother Earth and thus the (cyclical) agricultural year. Women’s time is non-linear and repeated, embodied in women who in the context of daily life give birth, raise children, prepare food and tend the dead in an endless cycle, and who come to the shrine as pilgrims to offer themselves that this cycle might continue. The divine female force we see through the Panagia makes, in this instance, history female, embodying cyclicity and resurrection. We meet this in the activities that most often are performed by female pilgrims, such as vows, prayers, and offerings, accompanied by oral sharing of stories of miracles. These are determined by, and conform to, the shape of events and problems of everyday lives and hence are both gendered, continuous and in a constant flux. Women’s tasks, roles and natures, supposedly, vary little through time (Dubisch 1991: 12). They are related to an eternal Mother Goddess, female domestic sphere and history. So, women come to the Panagia with prayers related to timeless or eternal issues of health, children, death and birth, because they pray and make offerings to conceive, to be healed for a sickness, or, most often, they make vows and requests on behalf of others, particularly children or perhaps one who just have died. These requests, which women make to the divine mother, are related to fertility, health and death. They belong to repetition, having a cyclical nature. Accordingly, in the festival, fertility – and healing rituals performed by women are of focal importance. Many also dedicate their handmade, often woven, offerings as well as bread, olive oil, flowers and other items produced by women as part of their domestic role, to the Panagia. Women also perform an important ritual through the crawling, which is central on Tinos to assure the well-being of the family.

Greek women have their own values in addition to, or running contrary to the male view, depending of how the male view suits their own thinking. Women display their *poetics of womanhood*, the point of which is to show how *to be good at being a woman* (Dubisch 1995: ch. 10, cf. Håland 2007), for example when performing fertility-rituals in agricultural or procreation contexts, using magic such as in healing contexts, nursing children, performing death-rituals. Several topics in the festival, such as the importance of and meanings related to the female body, motherhood, women’s general activities in the religious sphere are important ways of manifesting “a poetics of womanhood”.

The female body provides a significant source for social symbolism: It plays an important role in the “poetics of womanhood”, because bodies have social meanings that may be used in public performances. In Greece, the female body both creates and represents the family and social relations in a variety of contexts. By wearing black mourning clothes when a family member dies, women become highly visible symbols of mourning, thus of the kinship relations between the deceased and the living. Complaints about suffering are especially expressed by women lamenting their dead. They also suffer in pilgrimage. But we encounter the same complaints in relation to problems of everyday life, since they call attention to what women must endure in order to carry out their roles as wives and mothers. All these examples are part of the available “cultural material” upon which women may draw for the creation of the “poetics of womanhood”. Suffering as expressed through verbal complaint, the body, ritual actions, is an expression of social identity among women.

The idiom of suffering is particularly important in the context of women’s roles. For many women, the points of both tension and fulfilment centre around motherhood and familial responsibilities. Particularly for women, the body plays an important role in these expressions of suffering, whether it is through the many expressions of the ways women suffer in the process of bodily reproduction (Dubisch 1995: ch. 10). In contemporary Greece, a woman makes a public performance when crawling on her knees to the church with a sick child on her back in the hope of healing it, but the action takes validity through the sacrifice and suffering of the self on behalf of others. Through her maternal role, the mother’s own body is repeatedly offered as a sacrifice, and this sacrifice may be dramatized in women’s pilgrimage to the shrine dedicated to the Annunciation of the Panagia at Tinos.

In Greece, a suffering mother may give public performances of “being good at being a woman”. Her “public” audience are usually other women, who share her “public” space, interests and value-system, and therefore are interested in competing with her performance of “being good at being a woman”. A nursing mother demonstrates particularly how to “be good at being a woman”.

So, the festival is dedicated to the nurturing, healing and suffering Mother Goddess, the Panagia, the “All Holy One” (*Pan*: all/*Agia*: holy), the one who dominate all the others, the most holy. She is the most important Saint in the Orthodox Church. She is at the head of the entire church because she was the vessel of Christ. The mother’s two festivals, i.e. her Dormition and her Annunciation are the most important official festivals both religiously and politically. This is probably because of a mother’s important mediating position. The Panagia is also called *Mesitria*, the Mediator. She is essentially a human intercessor and a Mother, since her maternal role is emphasised within the Orthodox tradition, as well as her power within the heavenly and secular world.

There are several rituals, which women only can carry out. By focussing on the meaning of these rituals, we change focus from a man’s world to a woman’s world, considering values and cults, which are important to women. In a broader

perspective we realize that these cults also have importance for the official ideology.

According to Dubisch (1995: 246): “We must move away from such terms as ‘mother worship’, to which Marian devotion is sometimes reduced, and toward a more general exploration of issues both of political ritual and symbol and of the symbolism of the feminine.” Generally, Mary presents a dilemma for American and Western-European feminists, a fact Dubisch also recognises. However, I do not agree with her critique, since “mother worship” generally and the cult of the Panagia particularly does not seem to be a reduction. By this claim Dubisch contradicts herself and her magnificent analysis of the “poetics of womanhood” following up her analysis of time among Greek women, of which I am very indebted, since her analysis is an excellent way to demonstrate the importance of mother worship, the female and the female sphere within political rituals and symbolism. Unfortunately, her claim therefore demonstrates an androcentric position considering “mother worship” as subordinate to politics. Conversely, the point is that the official male political ideological ritual is dependent on the “mother worship” to manifest itself. Traditionally, the official political sphere has been the arena for male activity. Yet, by changing one’s approach from a male towards a female sphere, one realises that there have always been other arenas for power as well, and the social and political underpinnings of the society have traditionally been in the hands of the women, who are strong and active persons in their own right, thus paralleling the divine Panagia. Greek women are often strong personalities and active participants in social life. They are often stronger and more assured than women both Dubisch and I know from our own societies (cf. also Dubisch 1995). They run their households with a firm hand, and exhibit self-confidence. Several other female researchers have documented similar fieldwork experiences among Greek and other Mediterranean women.<sup>10</sup> I have discussed the historical dimension of this pattern in the Greek cultural area in other connections, drawing on ancient and modern material, demonstrating that the boundaries between a male and female sphere never have been static since women traditionally have intruded in the male sphere, on behalf of their own interests, if needed.<sup>11</sup> Other parallel representations of the Panagia are already mentioned.<sup>12</sup> Another parallel is the heroine during the Greek War of Independence, Bouboulina.

Apart from a brief comment on the similarity between the Panagia and the ancient goddess Athena, I have not discussed the parallels between modern and ancient festivals in this connection,<sup>13</sup> but as a final remark on the female dimension in the festival, I would like to mention that the festival on Tinos may illustrate that the

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<sup>10</sup> L. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, University of California Press 1988; C. N. Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*, The University of Chicago Press 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Håland 2007, also for the “female intruder” pattern (ch. 6).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. supra. See also Mazarakēs-Ainian 1987: pl. 16 where women and children are also assisting her, throwing stones.

<sup>13</sup> See however Håland 2007, cf. particularly 2006.

official political ideologies are adapted to deep-rooted rules or mentalities connected with the necessity of celebrating a festival dedicated to a Mother Goddess at the same time within the agricultural year, as in ancient Greece, when we also meet the same climatic imbalance of dry and wet.<sup>14</sup> It may indicate that the modern festival dedicated to a Mother Goddess has supplanted the role of one or more earlier goddesses. The similarities between the festival dedicated to the Panagia and the Panathenaia may have connection with the protecting city goddess' chthonic aspect as Virgin and foster-mother of the mythical king of Athens Erichthonios/Erechtheus. He was the divine child after whom the temple of Athena *Polias* (i.e. "of the city"), the Erechtheum is named. As already mentioned, the Panagia protects present-day's Greeks, since the Greek nation is celebrated on the "Day of Military Strength", coinciding with the Dormition. So, the cult of a protecting virginal Mother Goddess in relation to political-ideological festivals in the Greek cultural area might not be new (cf. also Håland 2006, 2007).

### Both male and female, or popular identities?

My account of female pilgrims does not mean that men do not crawl, they do, and more men have started to crawl lately, particularly younger men. A reason to this may be that the worlds of men and women become more and more intermingled. So, here we see a merging of female and male values, as we also see in the other instances. It should also be mentioned that the aforementioned tension between a female and official male world is paralleled by the tension we often see between an official and popular world, that nevertheless, most often is connected with women: The church authorities try to stop several popular rituals as the dedications of the black pilgrimage cloths to the stones from earlier sanctuaries. But the rituals continue anyway.

The tension between the female and male worlds also parallels the tension between the official society and a marginal group of people that is not small in Greek society, the gipsies. Therefore, a difficult, but important element connected to the festival, identities and statuses are the gipsies. In the early 1990's there were many of them. Today there are fewer. According to Dubisch,<sup>15</sup> they are welcomed but this is not correct. One reason that the church does not welcome them is that other Greeks started to arrive before or after the festival instead. The local Tinotes generally, have an ambivalent relation to the gipsies, describing them as "bad people" ("*kakos kosmos*"). On the one hand, "they are more religious than us", "but their religion is strange, since they only pay veneration towards the mother". Although the gipsies are marginalized in Greece as in the rest of Europe, they perform

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. C.B. Petropoulos, *Heat and Lust: Hesiod's Midsummer Festival Scene Revisited*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD 1994; Loukatos 1981: 88 f. See also Håland 2006, 2007, cf. 2005.

<sup>15</sup> J. Dubisch, Pilgrimage and Popular Religion at a Greek Holy Shrine, in Badone, E. ed. *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, Princeton University Press 1990: 113-139.

all the rituals in the same way as other pilgrims. On the one hand, the two different groups of pilgrims are united into one society during the rituals, particularly during the holy night between 14 and 15 August and during the procession. But, paradoxically, the gypsies are on the other hand, further marginalized by their daily tasks, their offerings, i.e. sheep, and clothing. Even if several of their activities are not approved, they are recognized for showing greater enthusiasm when carrying out the rituals, and are often admired for this, by the other Greeks.

### **Some general perspectives on the festival, its rituals, symbols and meanings**

In the festival of the Panagia, the religion unites both economic and religious activities. The festival demonstrates communication between several parts, and may be regarded as a ceremony that is performed to renew and confirm networks that constitute local village and national solidarity. This is illustrated by the general pilgrims who arrive the island, but also the Tinotes residing in Athens, USA or around the Mediterranean, coming home for summer. The festival expresses the relationship within the human world by emphasizing solidarity and symbolizing the relationship with local “ancestors” (the builders of the church, whose tombs are situated at the east side of the church in the courtyard), national (the heroes of the Elli) parallels and the history of the nation.

The cult of the Panagia that is manifested through the festival joins many functions and meanings in a complex cultural-personal metaphor that relates expressions of reciprocity as instances of the underlying form of the society. This is particularly illustrated through the votive offerings or gifts dedicated to the Panagia, and they have to be periodically renewed, also through an annual festival. The cult of the Panagia is the key element that joins all the other activities. The religious aspect of the cult is that around which all other activities circulate, and under the religious “umbrella” we find economic, social and political meanings. One may claim that the festival is important because of the wishes of a power-elite combining religious and political ideologies, but there are also basic factors in the cult that are important for people generally, having strong roots in traditional popular cult, for example popular customs related to the importance of fetching holy water as well as other symbols (such as earth, flower buds or pieces of candles after the liturgies). The festival demonstrates a blending of different factors for example political ideology and fertility.

One may wonder why people collect divine earth at Tinos. Is this because Greece became liberated, or is it because the earth from where the icon was found is believed to have curative properties? A genuine “social meaning” (the celebration of the Greek nation-state) does not exist independent of an implied social or individual meaning. Perhaps people believe that the earth purifies the Greek Nation symbolically? People relate many meanings to the festival, a fact that emphasises the different meanings of a symbol.

The festival is still celebrated during a period of holiday and leisure, after harvest and the threshing of the grain. It also commemorates an important life-cycle passage, the death or rather the sleep of the Panagia. Other life-cycle passages are also important in connection with the festival, such as the importance of being baptised. Women are the practical performers of the rituals that are of focal importance in connection with the life-cycle passages. Men are the performers of the public rituals, but the point is that these rituals cannot take place before the “women-dominated” rituals have finished: The official rituals where men are agents cannot be performed before women have done the preliminary work, and thus manifested their “poetics of womanhood”. Women have primary control of the processes of production and reproduction, and women enjoy relative independence from male performance in the basic life processes. Although, a male-dominated religious hierarchy controls the church, women most frequently attend church and domesticate its interior as seen through all their offerings and its regular ritual practice.

## Conclusion

So, how important is the popular aspect of the festival connected with fertility and healing for the manifestation of the national ideology, and who depends on whom? Do peoples’ beliefs and customs reflect one or several value-systems, and how do these relate to men and women? How are the value-systems expressed through the relationship between official religion and popular belief?

Women’s rituals connected with fertility-cult and healing plays an important role in the festival and accordingly within the official male and national value-system. This is the value-system, from which the festival and the society, which it reflects, traditionally have been considered. The absence of the female value-system leaves previous analyses one-sided and incomplete. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis requires the female point of view to be included. Hence, I have argued for the importance of changing our approach when working with the material. Taking account of the female sphere in Greece provides us with a basis for considering the female part of society. But, by so doing, the official male perspective, which is similar to the Western male perspective generally applied within Greek studies, has to be deconstructed. By analysing the festival, we may locate two contradictory views, one connected with the female sphere and the other connected with the male sphere. This means that there is not a one-way power or male dominance in the Greek cultural area, but rather competing powers, related to men and women and their respective spheres. The two opposing value-systems are nevertheless both complementary and interdependent. Hence, there are several meanings and values connected to the festival and its rituals, popular and official, female and male, since the pilgrimage site on Tinos presents an interrelationship of history, ritual and gender. Here, different interests - sacred and secular, local and national, personal and official - all come together - we meet an intersection of social, economic, religious and political life, learning that a political explanation can never entirely account for cultic arrangements.

(Translated by the author)

**Еви Јоана Халанд**

## **Празник Пресвете Богородице на егејском острву Тинос**

*Кључне речи:*

култ мртвих, Земља, култ плодности, фестивали, Грчка, исцељивање, икона, званична и популарна религија, свето, вода

Овај рад се базира на теренским испитивањима на Тиносу, спроведеним у више фаза од 1990, а у фокусу рада је фестивал посвећен Успењу Богородице. У савременој Грчкој, фестивал Успења Богородице се прославља 15. августа. Фестивал се одржава након жеталачких радова и означава прелазак од лета ка зими. На егејском острву Тинос, овај фестивал, повезан са плодношћу и исцељивањем нарочито је значајан. Црква Panagia Euangelistrias (Благовести) дугује своју славу чудотворној икони, ископаној 1821, која представља Благовести. Чуда која су се потом дешавала допринела су да Тинос постане центар свеукупне православне религије, са честим ходочашћима ка овоме центру у време фестивала Успења. Фестивал Успења Богородице је такође важан идеолошки фестивал за нову Грчку нацију, насталу 1821, што се може уочити у низу церемонија које чине саставни део овог фестивала, а где посебно место заузима процесација иконе, када се икона проноси од цркве према луци. Укратко, 15. август је сасвим посебан дан за Хеленизам, сједињујући у себи религију и патриотизам. Фестивал Успења је веома значајан друштвени догађај на Тиносу а представља и добру прилику за проучавање односа између мушког и женског света. Постоји неколико значења и вредности повезаних са фестивалом и пратећим ритуалима, популарна и званична значења, женска и мушка, јер место ходочашћа на Тиносу представља такође и спој историје, ритуала и пола. На овом месту сусрећу се различите сфере – световна и света, локална и национална, лична и званична, представљајући тако раскрсницу путева друштвеног, религијског и политичког живота.