Acts of Identification and the Politics of the “Greek Past”: Religion, Tradition, Self

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is about a series of operational acts of identification, such as interpretations, categorizations, representations, classifications, through which past materials have acquired their meaning and therefore identity. Furthermore, this meaning-making will be demonstrated always to be situational and relational in the sense that the meaning of past material is a historical product created by strategic historic agents through their contemporary acts of identification and, as situated historical products, they are always under scrutiny and constant re-fabrication by yet other historical agents who are on the scene with yet other goals.

It will also be evident throughout this study that meanings (identities) do not transcend time and space, and neither do they hide deep in the core of material artifacts awaiting to be discovered. The *Introduction* lays the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, situating its historiographical and sociological interests in the study of identities and the past, arguing for an approach that looks at the processes and techniques by which material and immaterial artifacts acquire their meaning.

In *Chapter 1* I look at scholarly interpretations as an operational act of identification; by the use of such anachronisms (which are inevitable when we study the past) as the term religion and the idea of the individual self, a certain widely-shared, and thoroughly modern understanding of Euripides' play *Hippolytus* was made possible. *Chapter 2* is concerned with the process of categorization, as another act of identification, which allows scholars to identify, and thereby describe (or better construct) the ancient Greek world by dividing it between what appeared to be naturally occurring private and

public zones, through the use of categories such as “mystery cults,” “voluntary associations,” and “mystery religions.”

Although *Chapter 3* is mainly on representations, it is evident that interpretations and categorizations are both effectively used in the restoration of a pitted iconography of a small church in Thessaloniki, Greece, which is often explained as an act of iconoclasm. Instead of focusing on the pitted iconography as an instance of iconoclasm, the chapter once again exemplifies the shift of this project by looking at how a new symbol was fabricated by commentators by means of the representation, interpretation and categorization of material from the archive of the fragmented past.

In *Chapter 4* it is made evident how all of the intersecting processes of the previous chapters are in place in the construction of “traditional villages” in Greece. Although classification has been an important operational act of identification, it would not be enough without the way with which representation, interpretation and categorization have been used by strategic social actors in order to constitute what counts as a “traditional village,” doing so for their own social, economic, and political needs and thus contemporary interests.

The *Epilogue* summarizes and exemplifies the shift of approach that the project is advocating by demonstrating how all of these operational acts, each of which have been identified in the previous chapters, are all working together in the construction of our view of the past and its relation to present interests.

PREFACE

This Thesis is an original work by Vaia Touna. Some of the research conducted for the thesis appeared in peer-reviewed publications by the same author.

Portions of Chapter 1 appear in Vaia Touna, "The Manageable Self in the Early Hellenistic Era," *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion,* Vol. 39, No 2 (2010): 34-37.

Portions of Chapter 2 appear in Vaia Touna, "Distinction, Domination, Privilege and the Role of Code Switching," in *Codes of Conduct: Code Switching and the Everyday Performance of Identity* (eds. Monica Miller and Merinda Simmons, Forthcoming with Equinox Publishers, UK).

Portions of Chapter 3 appear in Vaia Touna, "Re-describing Iconoclasm: Holey Frescoes and Identity Formation," in *Failure and Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion* (eds. William Arnal, Willi Braun, and Russell McCutcheon. Equinox Publishers, 2012), 218-227.

Portions of Chapter 4 appear in Vaia Touna, "What's New is Old Again: The Αναπαλαίωση of Tradition," in *Claiming Identity in the Study of Religion: Social and Rhetorical Techniques Examined* (ed. Monica Miller, Forthcoming with Equinox Publishers, UK).

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Introduction

A Complicated Affair

I. Reading the Past

In early June of 2006 while I was a master's student in religious studies at the Theological school of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, I participated in a conference for the inauguration of the Greek Society of Religious Studies organized by professor Panayotis Pachis. The four-day conference, which attracted many notable scholars of religion from across Europe and North America (both Canada and the U.S.A), included for the participants a day trip to nearby cities, such as Pella, Dion, Vergina, each of which is well known for their important archaeological sites.[1] One of these visits was to the Museum of the Royal Tombs in Vergina, a town 60km (40 miles) southwest from Thessaloniki. Known in antiquity as *Aigai*, Vergina was the first capital city of the ancient Macedonian kingdom and thus an important burial site, throughout antiquity, of ancient Macedonian royalty.

Vergina became well known in the 1970s when Manolis Andronikos (1919-1992), a distinguished Greek archaeologists and professor at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, excavated (in 1977) a tumulus—the finding was, at least according to the media of the time, considered to be "The Discovery of the Century."[2] What made the

[1] Pella was founded by king Archelaus I (413-399 BCE) and it became the capital of the Macedonian kingdom replacing the older palace-city of Aigai. Dion, which is located at the foothill of Mount Olympus, was a place dedicated, as its name suggests, to Zeus (Δίας) and his daughters, the Muses.

[2] Regarding the excavations in Vergina by M. Andronikos, see: Manolis Andronikos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and The Ancient City* (Athens, 1984); Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 125-168. Also R. J. Lane Fox (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Macedon: Studies*

excavation of this burial site "the discovery of the century" is that one of the tombs was thought to belong to Philip II (382-336 BCE), the father of Alexander the Great. Among the significant findings (apart from the tomb that is attributed, though not without contest, to Philip II, that is)[3] there is another tomb which is thought to belong to Alexander IV, son of Alexander the Great and Roxana; a *heroon* (i.e., a shrine dedicated to a hero); and another tomb important for a well preserved fresco depicting the abduction of Persephone.[4] Most of the artifacts from the excavations in the area, at the time it was discovered, were transferred for display at the Archaeological Museum of Thessalokini, until, that is, 1992 when the Vergina museum was built at the very site of the excavation and so the artifacts were returned there—a process that concluded, according to the official site of the museum, in 1997.[5]

Like many raised in that region, I had visited those archaeological sites many times in the past, especially the Vergina museum. Despite having been there before, I decided to go along with the visiting professors, happy to answer their questions related both to the museum and the history of the area.

What I always found fascinating about the museum is its very structure—its design and layout. What you see when you first reach the outside of the museum is a

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in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 Bc–300 Ad (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011): 1-35; Zosia Halina Archibald, *Ancient Economies of the Northern Aegean: Fifth to First Centuries B.C.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 32-35.

[3] On the on-going debate concerning the identification of the deceased as Philip II see: E. N. Borza, "The Royal Macedonian Tombs and the Paraphernalia of Alexander the Great" *Phoenix* 41, no. 2 (1987): 105-21. M.B. Hatzopoulos, "The Burial of the Dead (at Vergina) or the Unending Controversy on the Identity of the Occupants of Tomb II" *Tekmeria* 9 (2008): 91-118; Antonis Bartsiokas, "The Eye Injury of King Philip II and the Skeletal Evidence from the Royal Tomb II at Vergina," *Science* 288 (2000): 511-14.

[4] A myth that as we will see on chapter 2 is related to the goddess of agriculture Demeter and the Eleusinian Mysteries.

[5] The official site of the Vergina's museum gives a detailed account of the history of the excavations in the area since 1861: http://aigai.gr/en/history/overview-scientific-research [last retrieved on January 2015].

tumulus, a big mound covered in grass with two tunnels on the front side that serve as the entrance to and exit from the cylindrical, shaped museum. You enter the museum through one of the tunnels that effectively creates the impression of a descent to the darkened and cooled underworld, even of sliding through time and space. Once you are in the main area of the exhibitions it takes a couple of minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dim light that illuminates the exhibits, which begin and end with a series of grave stelae (tombstones) that the museum attributes to the ancient Macedonian citizens of Aigai. Upon entering the museum the grave stelae caught the attention of one of those visiting professors who asked me if I could read the inscriptions. Whether his intention was to test my knowledge of ancient Greek or not, that was how I perceived the invitation and in a proud exhibition of my knowledge of ancient Greek I immediately began reading the names of the deceased:

ΚΛΕΩΝΥΜΟΣ: ΑΚΥΛΟΥ: ΑΔΥΜΟΣ: ΚΛΕΩΝΥ
ΜΟΥ: ΠΕΥΚΟΛΑΟΣ: ΑΔΥΜΟΥ: ΚΡΙΝΩ: ΑΔΥΜΟΥ[6]

The reason I thought I was being tested was because I knew that there is the assumption that the modern Greek language is contested among historians and scholars as having little, or even nothing, to do with ancient Greek. On top of this was the ongoing issue of the dispute between the modern state of Greece and the recently founded Republic of Macedonia (one of the successor states of former Yugoslavia), a controversy that was

[6] Kleonymos son of Akylas, Adymos son of Kleonymos, Peukolaos son of Adymos, Krino wife of Adymos (all translations, unless otherwise noted, are original).

(and still is) over the use of the name Macedonia.[7] So, in hindsight one might say that reading in the dim light of the museum the inscription of the grave stelae became an important moment when a certain link was being made between me, the Greek reader in the present, and the ancient writer of the gravestone, an instance of what Bruce Lincoln describes as follows: "it is precisely through the repeated *evocation* of such sentiments via the invocation of select moments from the past that social identities are continually (re-)established and social formations (re-)constructed."[8] That is, it was not so much that because I was Greek I was able to read the grave stelae (and thus feel a certain kind of transcendent or ahistorical link happening), but, rather, it was in the very present moment of reading that inscription that both the reader in the present and the long dead ancient author became one, i.e., became (or better, [re-]became) Greeks with a presumable shared identity. For in the moment of reading, the two thousand years that separated us vanished, whatever his (presumably the ancient sculpture was a male) perception was of being Macedon. To me, the fact that I could read the grave stelae made us both Macedonians, made us Greeks, something that was further supported by the various statements that accompanied the exhibits and the museum's own narratives which drew attention to the Greekness of the kingdom of Macedon, as evidenced by the language of the inscription.[9]

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[7] Perhaps it is unnecessary to point out here that it is likely not a coincidence that the inauguration of the Vergina museum in 1992 coincided with the declaration of independence of the Republic of Macedonia (known in Greece as FYROM [Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia]) in 1993, and therefore the choice of the exhibits and the placement of the grave stelae in the entrance and exit of the museum can be seen in that same light.

[8] Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23.

[9] For example, Angeliki Kottaridi writing about the names on the grave stelae in a publication specifically for the museum and the Royal Tombs of Aigai, indicates that: "Names such as Adymos, Peukolaos, Kleonymos, Pierion, Drykalos, Antigonos, Alketas, Erebaios, Philotas, Herakleides, Philon, Menandros, Demainatos, Demetrios, Kleitos, Pankasta, Krino, Bereno, Phila, Dimeno, Kleio, certainly Greek and at the same time characteristically Macedonian, verify Hesiod and Herodotus, who consider the Macedonians kinsmen of the Magnesians of Thessaly

We shared a common language and thus history, we shared the same names, names that were different from our neighbors in the north who claimed the name Macedonia as something other than Greek.

Of course, prior to writing this dissertation, and rethinking the links between the past, identity, and contemporary social interests, none of this would likely occur to me as complicated and neither would I have entertained the identity of the ancient language writer as anything but Greek—and Greek here means an unbroken continuity of Greekness from the ancient to modern times. A naturalization was surely taking place as I read that inscription, one that, as will be evident later in this study, is neither self-evident nor without a tremendous amount of prior strategic investments from modern social actors with political and ideological interests. This sort of identification, between me in the present and the absent (because long dead) ancient writer of the grave stelae, created for me in the present a certain contemporary "we" versus a certain "them," an identification that, upon closer examination, will prove to be, as Theodore Schatzki states, in his 2002 book *The Site of the Social:* "a complicated affair."[10]

It is therefore the goal of this dissertation to untangle and examine, at a variety of practical sites (whether textual, social, or geographic) where notions of modern and ancient Greece intersect, these very complications. According to the social theorist Schatzki, the site of social life is a "mesh of orders and practices."[11] He understands social "orders" as arrangements of human and non-human beings (e.g., artifacts, other

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and the Dorians of southern Greece, and document irrefutably the affinity of the border tribe with the core population of Hellas" (*A Tour through the Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai* [Athens: Kapon Editions, 2011], 17).

[10]Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 48.

[11] Schatzki, *The Site of the Social,* xxii.

living organisms and things, etc.) "through and amid which social life transpires, in which these entities relate, occupy positions, and possess meanings."[12] Schatzki goes on to argue that:

> Identity is a subgenus of meaning, one that is accorded its own name in conformity with both the traditional distinction between what and who and the consignment of the latter status to persons. Every entity has meaning, that is, is something or other, although its meaning can be multiple, unstable, and constantly changing. Its meaning (and/or identity) is as much, moreover, a reflection of its relations as its relations reflect its meaning.[13]

People and things, according to Schatzki, then, have multiple meanings (i.e., identities), which are relational, and thus situational, constructs; and those meanings, as historical products, are always in flux, unlike how members of groups may experience them. In this scholarly tradition, identities, therefore, are multiple and unstable. To illustrate his point Schatzki looks at the medicinal herb business in the mid-1850s at the village of New Lebanon, New York, and the social orders (i.e., arrangements) that composed that industry. He begins by describing a Shakers' village, a network of communes called "families," and in which each Shaker possessed a chief identity as a participant in the medicinal herb business. More specifically, Schatzki offers the example of Alonzo Hollister, a worker in the medicinal herb business, who was seen by other Shakers as "an extractor, experimenter, repairman, wild herb picker, builder (of buildings and air pumps), and keeper of inventories, among other things," that is, a variety of identities that

[12] Schatzki, *The Site of the Social,* 22
[13] Schatzki, *The Site of the Social,* 19

each related to his occupation in the business. Schatzki goes on to argue, that, although Hollister may have perceived himself in the same way, those were not his only identities, for he was also a writer of theological texts, recorder of testimonials, brother, worshiper, dancer, etc. But, according to Schatzki, not all of these identities were "relevant or lived" while Hollister was working in the medicinal herb industry, though there may have been opportunities that they were, but when and how and why they were prominent (i.e., operationalized), Schatzki concludes, is "clearly a complicated affair."

Returning to my initial example of me reading an inscription at the museum in Vergina (and, as a first step toward complicating that episode), it is apparent that of the many identities that I then possessed—e.g., graduate student, female, sister, daughter, teacher of English language at a Greek private school, friend, writer, etc.—not all of them were relevant or operational in the moment when I was reading the grave stelae; that is, of the many identities only one was more prominent at that moment, and that was my national identity. How that "identity" was prominent and what made it possible is the complicated affair to which Schatzki referred and it involves a series of operations, arrangements, and relations, in other words, acts of identification, that were successfully working and which I explore in the main chapters of the dissertation.

II. Identity Politics

My interest in Greece and more specifically in ancient Greece—apart from the fact that I am Greek myself (or should I say, I and others attribute that identity to me?)—stems mainly from my earlier graduate training, though it was not until I left Greece (not an insignificant part of the narrative) to pursue a PhD in Canada that a shift of interest

occurred. An interest developed that involved not so much understanding better the ancient Greek world (whether through interpreting texts and artifacts) but in examining how the ancient Greek world was represented (if not constructed) in the various modern scholarly discourses through the interpretation of those texts and artifacts. Although, I am not suggesting that a study like that was impossible to pursue while in Greece, but as Bruce Lincoln wrote, in his much quoted "Theses on Method":

> Understanding the system of ideology that operates in one's own society is made difficult by two factors: a) one's consciousness is itself a product of that system, and b) the system's very success renders its operations invisible, since one is so consistently immersed in and bombarded by its products that one comes to mistake them (and the apparatus through which they are produced and disseminated) for nothing other than "nature."[14]

By studying in Canada and thereby distancing myself from the taken-for-granted of daily life in Greece, it was easier to start entertaining the naturalness of how one today handles or approaches texts and artifacts of the ancient Greek world, that is, as if they possess meanings that, with the right tools, one would be able to extract and therefore be able to talk about what really happened, thereby building a bridge between present reader and past writer.

Initially my frustration with how past material were approached by contemporary scholars began while I was reading the secondary literature on ancient Greek religion and seeing the ease with which scholars would read, and thereby find, "religion" and

[14] Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

"religious" in the ancient Greek material. Despite the critique voiced by many religious studies scholars, over the past decades (as will be more evident in chapters one and two), on the modern origins of those two concepts, and despite that even when scholars of the ancient world acknowledged that "religion" was not something distinct in the ancient world, they still proceeded with their research as if religion or things religious were all around the ancient Greek world, making the noun and its derivatives ontological realities naturally existing in the ancient world *even if the people at the time did not have them in their vocabularies*. This frustration urged me to begin making a methodological shift;[15] that is, instead of looking at secondary literature as a way to help me to understand more accurately the primary sources and their original context, I began to approach the secondary literature on the sources from antiquity as primary data itself, curious how certain readings of a text made the text meaningful in specific ways. But also, I begun to understand that a series of things were circulating whenever I was hearing or reading "Ancient Greece"—associations and assumptions that continually made and remade, all over again and always in a new light, "Greece." It therefore began to seem evident that signifying Greece constituted a good example where one could explore, through discursive analysis, what Jean-Francois Bayart calls, the "operational acts of identification," that, while carried about in discrete situations, make possible the appearance of primordial and enduring identities and meanings.

The following chapters, then, explore exactly that: those acts, carried out at specific sites, that render the system of ideology and identity invisible, operating in the background every time we in the present evoke past artifacts in a natural way, all in order

[15] This is a shift made, and thus modeled, by others in the discipline as well, working well outside the Hellenistic world; for example, see: Aaron W. Hughes, *Situating Islam: The Past and Future of an Academic Discipline* (London: Equinox, 2007), 2.

to authorize, legitimize and even construct the modern lives and worlds we are now living and the identities that populate those worlds.

Consider, for example, the following incident (an earlier analysis of this episode appeared as a blog post on the Culture on the Edge site[16]) that examines strategies of legitimacy and identification in a modern production of an ancient Greek play. In the summer of 2013 I happened to see at one of Thessaloniki's outdoor theatres a production of Euripides' *Backhae*. For many Greeks today, seeing our ancient literary heritage being performed in outdoor theatres, especially during summer festivals, is certainly seen as being a step closer to our past, a way to preserve our heritage similarly to the feeling one gets when entering the tunnel of the Vergina museum—and it is the ease of using the third person plural pronoun in that previous sentence that is our object of study here. Today, the most well-known festival in Greece is the one that takes place every summer (since 1955) in one of the best preserved ancient theatres (known also for its great acoustics),[17] the "sacred" (as you will hear it often referenced in Greece) theatre of Epidaurus.

Every actress/actor in Greece dreams of the day when she/he will be able to perform in Epidaurus. Troupes have to apply to the Festival's committee, which consists of seven members who will decide who will be able to perform each year. In the official site of the Festival where one can find its history,[18] there are references to how the

[16] Culture on the Edge is a research collaboration (involving a blog, books, and edited book series), of seven scholars of religion, dedicated to exploring operational acts of identification, see: Vaia Touna, "Double Standards," http://edge.ua.edu/vaia-touna/double-standards/
[17] There are numerous publications on the acoustics of the Epidauros theatre in Greece for example see: The Economist, "No Need to Shout," http://www.economist.com/node/8922477; Philip Ball, "Why Greeks Could Hear Plays from the Back Row," http://www.nature.com/news/2007/070319/full/news070319-16.html
[18] http://greekfestival.gr/en/content/page/history

political situations in Greece since 1955 have affected the criteria and, thus, the selection of the festival's various performances—often resulting in performances seen as being more conservative than progressive. And this is how the festival, today, describes its history and new purpose:

> *The Period of Recession*
>
> The sense of freedom that enveloped the country after the 1974 shift in the political climate,[19] the alternative approaches to artistic production that gradually emerged, and the general revolutionary atmosphere that prevailed (and even the misunderstandings that this atmosphere generated) had but little effect on the Athens Festival. Its placement under the bureaucratic control of the Ministry of Tourism coupled with the increasing intervention of arts agents in the selection of the programme saw the Athens Festival overcome by a certain self-centredness.
> The institution soon lost its sense of direction and purpose, becoming a mixed bag of events, with significant names and productions placed side-by-side with the insignificant, and all in the name of society life or fleeting fame – and at times the belated cashing in on former glories. A cultural recession also helped drive the Festival to an impasse that had been apparent for years.
>
> *The Challenge*
>
> A reversal of this state of affairs was clearly necessary—to pursue modernism once more, to systematically open up the Festival to cutting-

[19] It is a significant date in the Greek political life since it signals the end of a seven-year dictatorship (1967-1973).

> edge international productions, and to promote young Greek artists who have something to say to contemporary audiences. To spread the events of this arts festivals across the entire city, to seek out new and different audiences, and to cater for ever more arts lovers through the select events of a contemporary festival.
>
> A new identity—a festival that is inclusive, that reflects its host city, and that brings the livelier aspects of society back into play. This is the challenge to be met; work to this end began in earnest in 2006, and the wager has yet to be won.[20]

Of course you cannot be inclusive without being exclusive, so some criteria are needed to decide who will annually take part in the festival. There is nothing wrong with that, for not everyone can perform during the festival (which takes place on 8 weekends in July and August—scheduling constraints alone provide a practical reason to limit performances) but what attracted my interest that summer—and made me think about modern criteria of legitimacy and thus who gets to be authenticated in performing these plays in this specific, historic, national theatre—was that the application of the troupe that I happened to see in another venue (Thessaloniki's outdoor theatre), was declined. What was special about this troupe, was that its leading actor is a very well-known pop singer, Sakis Rouvas, who was sent twice to Eurovision—a very popular song contest all throughout Europe—to represent Greece (a representation based on country-wide voting).

It is of interest to know that the Eurovision song contest is a specifically popular (as in "pop") song contest open to any European singer/group who wishes to participate,

[20] From the official site of: Athens & Epidaurous Festival, "History," http://greekfestival.gr/en/content/page/history.

and which takes place every May in the European country (since 1956) that won the previous year's contest. Every country has individual competitions of its own prior to that, and committees, or the public, or both vote on which participant and thus song will represent their country each year. Singers and groups in Greece therefore apply annually to the public television broadcaster (ERT), which is responsible for the contest in Greece. The interesting thing is that since 1974 (when Greece joined the Eurovision contest) Rouvas is the only singer to represent Greece twice in the contest (in 2004 and 2009) and by direct appointment from the public television company (ERT), i.e., without competing against any other singers.

And although his participation in the Eurovision contest was highly acceptable to the Greek public, as noted above, it was not the case when he decided to perform in an ancient tragedy in an historic theatre. There have been various comments in the media—mostly critical—regarding a "pop singer's" participation in an ancient tragedy, concluding that it is unacceptable to perform in Epidaurus despite him being a young and widely popular artist and, more importantly perhaps, despite the need of the festival (as described on its site) to "seek out new and different audience." In fact, according to one journalist, the festival declined the application of the troupe *exactly because* Rouvas was a pop performer: "The people of the Greek Festival were hesitant fearing that the presence of a pop star will 'irritate' the most conservative of both artists and viewers and so backed away."[21]

Why I find this whole episode interesting, though, is not so much as to whether the committee rightly decided against Rouva's participation in the Epidaurous festival, but, rather, the way criteria of legitimation work, criteria that are themselves historical

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[21] Ελ. Γ., "Εκτός Επιδαύρου ο Ρουβάς," http://tospirto.net/theater/news/12476

products, and thus constantly changing, all depending who is on the committee. For I assume that there is in most Greeks a very clear idea/image of who *should* perform in that theatre, that is, a certain ideology is being translated and enacted by means of the criteria of legitimation that create a certain identity, both of the festival but also of how "our" past should be portrayed and thus by whom—thereby making "us" today into a certain sort of Greece. In other words, there is nothing self-evidently natural about who ought to be able to represent the so-called classics and, moreover, nothing self-evidently natural about what ancient text counts as a classic! On the contrary, unnoticed techniques or acts premised on contingent context—following Schatzki—are always in operation; they create, promote and authenticate an ideal by which actors and troupes are judged as to whether they correspond to that ideal. My interest, then, is to expose and examine the workings of those operations by answering a series of questions.

For instance, do practitioners (whether scholars in a particular discipline or everyday people) fabricate past material for their own purposes and, if so, how and why? What is it that we are doing by restaging an ancient Greek play, whether in a theatre (through a new translation) or in a university's classroom (through a new interpretation)? Or, what is entailed by beginning to tell the tale of the history of a discipline (say physics, historiography, psychology, theology, etc.), or of a concept (such as the etymology of psyche, religion, tradition, iconoclasm, etc.) by pointing to its origins in ancient Greece or Rome? In other words, why do we, today, habitually go to 'the past' to talk about ourselves, our nations, or even to solve today's problems? My starting point, which resulted from a shift in my understanding of how we approach discourses on the past, is that we need to acknowledge that *we* are discussing about *ourselves* in the here and now

when talking about such things from the ancient past as an inscription on a grave marker, and that we have to be critical about what we are doing in order to begin to understand the interactive relation we, today, have with those artifacts that we name "ancient."

III. Clarifications

As I indicated earlier, my interest in Greek identity and the ancient Greek past came about also because every time "Greece" is mentioned it seems that people mean (signify) different things by this identifier (i.e., signifier); a lot of ideas are therefore circulating when this identifier is used, ideas that are linked to identity, the past, authenticity, origins, tradition but ideas that do not necessarily agree or complement one another. To describe this circulation of things as discourses I will draw from several scholars whose work helps me to disentangle the complicating process of making and remaking of "identities," since their interest is not so much in the timeless essence of categories but in the historical conditions that are responsible for the making and remaking of them—in other words, in the ongoing fabrication of past materials. I use here the term fabricate purposefully, though in the main chapters I use it interchangeably with the verb construct. My starting presumption, then, is that old things do exist among us and certainly had their meanings (meanings that were situational and relational, which means that they were not fixed) but that any effort to retrieve their origins (as in their original or actual meaning) would be futile. I therefore understand old items as stuff, in they way Mary Douglas described dirt, that is, "matter out of place,"[22] that only later acquire meaning through context-specific interpretative and categorical acts of identification performed by

[22] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), 165.

historical agents (whether by scholars who study them or by practitioners who happen to use them). The status change from merely old stuff to ancient and thus valuable artifacts is therefore understood here as a discursive and situational fabrication that has implications for contemporary actors' identifications.

But, before I proceed there needs to be some clarification of other technical terms used and, more specifically, of the term "identity" itself and why I opt for the term "identification" instead.

Scholarly works, which can generally be divided into groups, impact differently the way not only "identity" is understood, but also the implications that the various approaches have in the study of and analysis of human practices (and by practices I mean identification techniques used by strategic and historical agents). Important to note is that by *strategic* I mean to signify the interests and motivations that drive those identification practices, while by historical I mean that those motivations and interests are contingent. Over the last few decades the use of the term "identity" has seen a significant rise in various disciplines within the humanities.[23] Consider, for example, the rise during the

[23] On the rise of identity discourses see David A. Hollinger, "The Disciplines and the Identity Debates, 1970-1995," *Daedalus* 126/1 (1997): 335-51. See also James Côté, "Identity Studies: How Close Are We to Developing a Social Science of Identity?—An Appraisal of the Field" *Identiy: An International Journal of Theory and Research* 6, no. 1 (2006), 3-25; Craig Calhoun, "Social Theory and the Politics of Identity," in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Blackwell 1994), 9-36; Shmeul N. Eisenstadt and Bernard Giesen, "The Construction of Collective Identity," *Archives Européenes de Sociologie* 36 (1995), 72-101; Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (3rd ed.; Cambridge: UK: Polity Press, 2014 [2001]); Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996); Kevin Robins, "Identity," in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed L. Grossberg, T. Bennett, and M. Morris (Boston, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 172-174; Martin Sökefeld, "Debating Self, Identity, and Culture in Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 40 (1999), 417-47; Margaret Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), 605-49; Peter Burke and Jan Stets, *Identity Theory* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); John R. Gillis, "Introduction. Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton

1960s and onwards, of various area studies in the university, where identity is a key category, such as Afro-American studies, gender studies, women's studies, queer studies, and the like. It is also the case, however, that the category of identity is, for many, a far too blunt analytical instrument or explanatory category, subject to a far too wide variety of meanings and theoretical presuppositions that are often at odds with each other.[24]

Although there is a wide spectrum of debates on the term "identity," preliminarily and for the purpose of situating my theoretical preference concerning the category, scholarly approaches to "identity" can be subsumed under two broad theoretical options: Essentialist and Constructivist. I recognize that the division maybe too general and even simplistic, since I am fully aware of the variations subsumed under both of these divisions, and how these variations affect the understanding of, for instance, the self (whether ancient and modern), the individual and the social, the personal and the collective. Also, there are now many variations within the constructivists camp, as pointed out by Karen Cerulo, i.e., identities are discussed as discursive, relational, constructed, narrated, practiced, as systems of meaning and in various subfields gender studies, race and ethnic studies.[25] I will nonetheless use this distinction as a rough way to distinguish what I understand to be two significantly different approaches to the problem that occupies me in the following pages.

University Press, 1994), 3-24; Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity,* ed. S. Hall and P. D. Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 1-17

[24] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,' " *Theory and Society* 29/1 (2000): 1-47. Take also for example the debates within women studies of the category "woman"; it means different things to different people. For a detailed analysis see: Leslie Dorough-Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women in America (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[25] See Karen Cerulo, "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 385-409.

IV. Essentialists

On the one end of the spectrum we have essentialist approaches that consider identity as the expression of a key trait that naturally occurs within the individual. That is, a person *has* an identity. This essential feature is considered to be stable across time and space, is somehow shared by a group of people, and therefore distinguishes the individual from other individuals and the group from other groups. For scholars who belong in this tradition "identity" bears some inner quality/essence that is then manifested in the various behaviors and beliefs of both individuals and groups.

Scholars during the 1950s and 1960s generally understood identity similarly, that is, as the manifestation of a coherent self, and tried to find this inner meaning/essence by describing and then comparing its various manifestations—in the search for a universally shared trait. Such scholarship therefore set about to find those inner qualities or quality that characterize us as individuals, unite us with some and distinguish us from others. This quest that resulted in a variety of discourses about the self, soul, and mind, all of which are posited as the very "thing" that possesses this distinct quality that is then manifested as a distinct thing which is called an identity. Generally, according to David Hollinger, scholars of this era are often critiqued by their successors as approaching "identity as a matter of individual psychology rather than of collective experience and consciousness."[26]

In agreement with Hollinger, Philip Gleason argues that this essentialist, and thus individualist approach has been for many years the way with which scholars tried to

[26] Hollinger, "The Disciplines and the Identity Debates, 1970-1995," 336.

study identity.[27] Drawing mainly from the work of psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Erik Erickson who understood identity as internal to the person's self and enduring through time, Gleason writes:

> For Erikson, the elements of interiority and continuity are indispensable. Working within the Freudian tradition, he affirms that identity is somehow 'located' in the deep psychic structure of the individual. Identity is shaped and modified by interaction between the individual and the surrounding social milieu, but, change and crisis notwithstanding, it is at bottom an 'accrued confidence' in the 'inner sameness and continuity' of one's own being.[28]

What is significant is that "identity," for scholars, who belong in this tradition, was a tool that merely *described* rather than *explained* the way in which individuals, groups or even things identify themselves as this or that. That trait was presumed simply to exist and, subsequently, be manifested in public; there was therefore little need to account for its existence in the first place—this approach is unhelpful to this present study. It should also be pointed out that even though essentialist approaches are now often considered as belonging to a past era, their ramifications are still evident within the humanities, not least in Religious Studies.[29] In fact, this essentialist understanding of "identity" is similar

[27] Philip Gleason, "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," *The Journal of American History* 6/4 (1983): 914-915.
[28] Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 918. The same goes for Margaret Wetherell, "Erikson was interested in how identity as a sense of personal coherence, manifested as an authentic and stable self, might develop across the life-cycle" ("The Field of Identity Studies," in *The SAGE Handbook of Identities*, ed. M. Wetherell, and C. T. Mohanty [London: SAGE, 2010], 6).
[29] See for example a recent publication on the journal of AAR in which the author, Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, concludes that: "Scholars sometimes deny that a real definition of religion can be provided while at the same time displaying strong opinions on what does and does not count as religion. I suggest that this is because they actually conceptualize religion along

to the understanding of "meaning" as merely residing in texts and material artifacts from the past that historians all to often try to extract and describe through a closer examination. But this approach isolates identity as a pre-social and ahistorical quality, a move counter to this study's aim to understand identity as a situationally and relationally specific act.

V. Constructivists

On the other end of the spectrum of theorizing identity are constructivists within various sociological schools of thought.[30] As suggested above, scholars belonging to this tradition fundamentally oppose presumptions of an essential feature that could be considered natural and thus existing within the individual. In the words of Karen Cerulo, a "social constructionist approach to identity rejects any category that sets forward essential or core features as the unique property of a collective's members."[31] Constructivists, rather than *describing,* tried, instead, to *explain* the various occurring identities (individual and collective) as being the result of social conventions and situations, which can be historically specifiable and which are always changing and reconstructed. For instance, since the 1970s an increasing number of scholars have, therefore, tried to explain "identity" as the result of a set of mechanisms that work towards the construction of a certain self-understanding of the individual or the group. Identity, for them, is thus not static but an ongoing process. Important among such scholars is Michel Foucault, who

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essentialist lines, even if they explicitly deny this, when theorizing on that matter. Fortunately, essentialist definitions are not to be feared. For the reasons provided in the present discussions, they are rather to be encouraged." ("On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 2 [2014]), 513.

[30] Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 910-931.

[31] Cerulo, "Identity Construction," 385-409.

tried "to sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves: economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology."[32] Foucault argues that a cluster of complexly interlinked techniques (what we would simply call discourses) play a significant role in determining how humans know themselves and others in the world.[33] Starting with Foucault, scholars increasingly focused their work on the ways with which power/knowledge, and domination work upon and thereby define individuals, as they have been cultivated in social institutions (such as for example the discipline of psychology, the clinic, the prison, etc.), creating a certain individual/subject. The result was a certain knowledge people eventually developed about themselves and others.

For example, in his book *Madness,* Foucault is not interested in writing a history of psychology but, instead, in looking at the specific, historical conditions that led to the emergence of psychology as a discipline, that is, as a body of knowledge that resulted in identifying "madness" in a very specific way and in various authorized settings/institutions.

> The recognition that enables one to say, 'This man is mad,' is neither simple nor an immediate act. It is based in fact on a number of earlier operations and above all on the dividing up of social space according to the lines of valuation and exclusion.[34]

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[32] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. H. Gutman, P. H. Hutton, and L. H. Martin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 17-18.

[33] On a commentary of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, see Theodore R. Schatzki, "Practiced Bodies: Subjects, Genders, and Minds," in *The Social and the Political Body*, ed. T. R. Schatzki and W. Natter (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1996), 50-58.

[34] Michel Foucault, *Madness: The Invention of an Idea* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1976), 129.

Therefore, his interest in writing a history is not one of linearity but of genealogy, that is, he is not interested in discovering the roots or origins of a given identity or in exploring an essential core that presumably lies deep within the human psyche, but as he explicitly discussed in his 1977 article, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History":

> The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.[35]

This dissertation is then committed not only to making visible some of those discontinuities that cross us but also to make visible some of the strategies and operations that smooth out those discontinuities to serve contemporary interests and purposes. To return to my opening anecdote at the museum, the immediate identification of me as modern reader and the ancient but absent writer of the grave stelae, that is, seeing both as Greek, was possible exactly because of a number of earlier operations that had smoothed out any of the possible discontinuities that occurred in the approximately 2,500 years that divided the interests of the reader from the intentions of the sculpture she imagined.

In his later work Foucault offered some greater specificity in how to examine this process by distinguishing between four technologies, which, together, constitute this process: production, sign systems, power, and the self. As he explains it: "these four types of technologies hardly ever function separately, although each one of them is

[35] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 162.

associated with a certain type of domination."[36] Therefore, identity (or the understanding people have of themselves and others) is the result of a subjugation made possible by a variety of intersecting social forces (powers). After all, in his work power/knowledge is often at the centre of the complex ways by which identities are constructed. David Hollinger, writing on Foucault's idea of power/knowledge, states that:

> Any piece of knowledge was for Foucault not only a construction, but the embodiment of a certain dispersion of power. He spoke not of knowledge in relation to power, but of a single formation, 'power/knowledge.' Intersubjective reason, long regarded as a means of human liberation, was, for Foucault, a frequent instrument of domination.[37]

It may go without saying, however, that one should be wary of some constructivist positions that over-emphasize the cultural base of identity construction, often working with an essentializing notion of "culture" itself, as if culture is a uniform exterior force that exerts influence on people, thereby causing them to do things or see the world in a certain way. It is a term that can therefore be no less problematic than that of identity. As pointed out by Jean-Francois Bayart in his 2005 book *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* who is critical exactly of that essentializing notion of "culture" by what he calls culturalist scholars:

> Whereas culturalist reasoning posits the existence of permanent inner core peculiar to each culture that confers on the latter its veridical nature and determines the present, analysis reveals a process of cultural elaboration in

[36] Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 18.
[37] Hollinger, "The Disciplines and the Identity Debates," 344; see also Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

> the areas of ideology and sensibility that speaks to us of the present by fabricating the past.[38]

Contrary to such essentialists, then, claims of identity for constructivists in the vein I just described are nothing else but the result of a multiplicity of institutionally specific identification processes carried out by situated agents. Thus we must always keep our eye on the complex interplay between intentional agency and the non-intentional structures in which agents live and work.

Another example of what Bayart characterizes as the social construction of identities[39] we find in the classic work of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.[40] Anderson was interested in the concept of national identities; he explained the rise of nationalism and the creation of nation states, what he terms as "imagined communities," as the result of the invention of print and its interaction with capitalism's profit-motive. On the decisive role that pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printmen have played in creating a sense of shared identity among people, and who eventually thought that they belonged in the same nation, we read:

> Liberalism and the Enlightenment clearly had a powerful impact, above all in providing and arsenal of ideological criticisms of imperial and *anciens régimes*. What I am proposing is that neither economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create *in themselves* the *kind*, or shape, of imagined community to be defended from these regimes'

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[38] Jean-Francois Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 83.
[39] See also Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), whose discussion on the invention of tradition will be particularly of interest to my fourth chapter.
[40] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 65.

> depredations; to put it another way, none provided the framework of a new consciousness—the scarcely-seen periphery of its vision—as opposed to centre-field objects of its admiration or disgust. In accomplishing *this* specific task, pilgrim creole functionaries and provincial creole printmen played the decisive historic role.[41]

Thus, in Anderson's work we see a useful example of how large-scale identities (i.e., national identities) resulted from small scale, decentralized, and thus discrete local practices, such as printing and distributing handbills in vernaculars.

In addition to Foucault and Anderson, Jean-Francois Bayart, interested in ethnic identities, critiques the idea that there are primordial (i.e., essential) identities with self-evident cultural "cores" that can be used as the basis for explaining difference and conflict or even behaviours.[42] This understanding, according to Bayart, often overlooks other factors that are in place (and which led to the assumption that a shared culture even exists) and, by doing so naturalizes what might instead be understood as a divergent "historical construct."[43] And so, if "[t]here is no natural identity capable of imposing itself on man by the very nature of things,"[44] as Bayart argues, then what is there? According to Bayart: "There are only strategies based on identity, rationally conducted by identifiable actors,"[45] strategies that involve the political imaginaire that is "the

[41] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 65.
[42] On the debate whether ethnic identities are primordial or cultivated see also Gleason, "Identifying Identity," 919.
[43] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, 71.
[44] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, ix.
[45] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, ix; 71.

dimension from which issues a continuous dialogue between heritage and innovation that characterizes political action in its cultural aspect."[46]

Important for the chapters that are to follow is also the work of Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, who argue that the term "identity" is not useful as an analytic category, and propose, instead, an approach that would go beyond the folk usage of this term. "Identity," according to Brubaker and Cooper, belongs to a group of words that are both "categories of social and political practice and categories of social analysis."[47] Their interest is mainly on how the term is used as an analytical category. What they find problematic is that its scholarly usage often coincides with that of social and political reifications commonly used by invested social actors, similar to other categories such as "nation" and "race":

> The problem is that "nation," "race," and "identity" are used analytically a good deal of the time more or less as they are used in practice, in an implicitly or explicitly reifying manner, in a manner that implies or asserts that "nations," "races," and "identities" "exist" as substantial entities and that people "have" a "nationality," or "race," or an "identity."[48]

Alternatively, they propose that analysts "should seek to account for this process of reification" instead of "reproducing or reinforcing such reification by uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis"[49] such as is also the case of the essentialist approaches to the study of identity. Having identified earlier the complications that the term identity and its meaning has, complications that in many

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[46] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, 137.
[47] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 4.
[48] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 6.
[49] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 5.

ways result from the term's inadequacy to serve as an analytical category they propose a cluster of words that will serve better as categories of analysis. The categories they propose are the following: identification and categorization; self-understanding and social location; commonality, connectedness and groupness. These clusters of terms—which focus on processes rather than their results—may prove to be important in the disentangling of the term "identity," avoiding at the same time the presuppositions that come with this term.[50] The chapters that follow are therefore an extended experiment with the gains that such a theoretically-inspired categorical switch can make.

VI. This Study

Following the work of these scholars and keeping also in mind how the category "identity" is loaded with a variety of meanings and usages that may render its very usage difficult or in need of serious re-description and re-evaluation, I understand any sort of identity claim (whether ethnic, gender, national, religious, or any other social identification, on the individual or collective level) as a rhetorical technique on the part of the social actors who use the term. It is a technique that is informed by a multiplicity of more or less well-established and often unnoticed structural and ideological apparatuses that are in place around the actor.[51] Contrary to how others may approach the topic, then,

[50] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 14-21.
[51] For example, Russell McCutcheon, in *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2003), describes self-perception and self-understanding as "the result of wider structural circumstances that, much like a language's grammar or house's frame, operate almost invisibly in the background, thus making a very specific meaning and experience possible" (6); see also McCutcheon, *Religion and the Domestication of Dissent: Or, How to Live in a Less than Perfect Nation* (London: Equinox, 2005), 52. Also, Louis Althusser, "Ideology and

"identities" do not have an origin that can be located along a linear line that moves unchanged over time or space. Neither are identities public manifestations of internal psychic ontologies. On the contrary, I will consider identities to be the result of a variety of always present contingencies which, in turn, result in an imposition of a variety of "identity" claims through multidimensional processes by means of a cluster of discursive (i.e., linguistic, behavioral, and symbolic) practices.[52]

A few more questions now arise that should help to specify more precisely what is entailed in the general theoretical stance outlined above. What are those wider structural circumstances that often go by unnoticed and how do they create meaning (or identity)? How are they responsible for the various identifications, self-understandings and group formations? And equally important, how is "identity" or "meaning making" made and remade in practice? These questions are at the forefront of the four chapters to come.

Having as my starting point that identities possess no ontological reality—other than the one imagined by its practitioners (it should be noted that imagined realities have consequences too, of course)—and that they are the result of a cluster of discursive techniques that interact and inform one another, my four chapters will explore the interrelated discourses of both primary sources (textual and ethnographic) as well as secondary sources (scholarly discourses) which are themselves the result of social mechanisms that create and maintain certain concepts as timeless, gendered,

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Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001): 85-126.

[52] Schatzki, "Practiced Bodies: Subjects, Genders, and Minds," 49-74. Also, Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike von Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001); Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Michele De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

individualistic, and of a certain nationality. In each one of my four main chapters I look at a specific example and a specific act of identification. It should be noted though that they ought not to be considered exhaustive of the techniques that are in place but rather as four sites out of many where we can observe the processes of or acts of identification. Further, the chapters will each, and as a group, demonstrate that this process is always carried out for present purposes, though by means of an often imagined linear past which plays a significant role in the process of authentication and identification.[53] I am therefore less interested in offering simply another equally plausible interpretation of some phenomenon or its origins. Rather, by juxtaposing in some cases an alternative, no less plausible reading, to those that appear to be a dominant reading of meaning or origins my reading aims at doing two things. My first aim is to make evident the plasticity of the past and its fragmentary nature—as I will argue the raw material of the archives of the past can be put to use in a variety of ways.[54] Second, to challenge cherished concepts and modern understandings—such as for example, the notion of individual, religion, and tradition—that have been considered by modern writers as transcendental and naturally occurring in the past, by means of their presumed timeless persistence, demonstrating their own historicity and context-specific nature.

VII. In Sum

In the four main chapters of this dissertation I intend to examine four acts of identification, namely interpretations, categorizations, representations, and classifications and how those acts fabricate past material as meaningful in specific ways. How those

[53] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[54] See Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins,* 14.

practices result in authentications, through the use of anachronisms, which are often portrayed by writers as self-evidently occurring in the past. Those very anachronisms therefore become our object of study, and it will be argued that they are put into use for present purposes and interests but which are portrayed as mere descriptions of the past. And lastly I intend to examine how those acts of identification relate in the construction and appropriation of "the past" (and more specifically the ancient Greek past) through discourses on religion, tradition and the individual self.[55]

Interested with identifying how contemporary circumstances are authenticated by being read backward onto prior eras, my *first chapter* looks at Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus* and the scholarly interpretations of the play in the 19th and 20th century. Modern notions such as personal religiosity and individual selfhood seem to play a significant role among certain scholars' reading of this Euripidean tragedy. This "personal," though, is often explained as being the result of an inner need that was only gradually being expressed throughout ancient Greek history, such as in the classic (and still, for some scholars, influential) work of André-Jean Festugiére.[56] Instead of seeing the self as stable, inner quality that is expressed, as Festugiére and others think, the starting point for this study is the assumption that texts, and the interpretations of them help to sustain certain modern ideologies. Modern interpretations through the uses of

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[55] This construction and appropriation of the past will be further shown to be a scholarly craft; as Willi Braun wrote: "Persuastive tinkering with the past, however is hardly imaginable as an easy activity that just anyone can do with equally forceful effect. It is a scholarly craft, for, once again, it demands not only familiarity with the contents of the cultural archives (myths, epic, wisdom, collections, etc.) but equal familiarity with exegetical skills and hermeneutic specialties with which to correlate the old and the new" ("The Schooling of a Galilean Jesus Association [the Sayings Gospel Q]," In *Redescribing Christian Origins*, ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004]), 55.
[56] André-Jean Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).

anachronisms, such as the individual or religious self, although portrayed as being about the past and more specifically about Euripides' time, as it will be evident throughout the chapter, are more about the present and how modern interpreters imagine the position of the individual within their worlds.

Having identified the process of interpretation through the use of anachronisms, as a way to authenticate contemporary interests or imaginings of the individual self, my *second chapter* looks at the late Hellenistic phenomenon of the rise of the so-called "private" or "voluntary" associations. As I argue, scholarly identification practices that are used to make sense of the past for present benefits are not limited to uses of anachronisms. Such benefits also happen through the way we classify and thereby organize and structure our understanding of the world and its different elements—including the ancient world. According to a common scholarly narrative, during and especially after the Peloponnesian war (431-411 BCE) there was an increasing interest in ancient Greece in private or personal concerns and a corresponding decrease in interest and involvement in public affairs. It is furthered argued that this state of affairs resulted in the increased role of so-called "voluntary associations," such as groups known as mystery cults, since they (unlike the requirements of the city-state) offered the possibility of individual choice and personal salvation, creating a new kind of bond between people that was different from that of the *phyle*, *oikos*, and *genos*.[57] Instead of agreeing with scholars that these associations provided a space for the expression of an increasing individuality, I argue that it is those very modern categorizations that fabricated, for us,

[57] Petra Pakkanen, *Interepreting Early Hellenistic Religion: A Study Based on the Mystery Cult of Demeter and the Cult of Isis* (Helsinki: Suomen Ateenan – Institutin Saatio, 1996), 112.

the impression of a past consisting of associations that the individual could freely choose from and which further could serve sustain modern understandings of the individual.

Consider, for example, a recent book edited by Michael Cosmopoulos on Greek mystery cults. In the preface of the book Cosmopoulos writes:

> As these cults had to do with the individual's inner self, privacy was necessary and was secured by an initiation ceremony, a personal ritual that brought the individual to a new spiritual level, a higher degree of awareness in relation to the gods. Once initiated, the individual was entitled to share the eternal truth, to catch a glimpse of the eternal reality.[58]

What makes this book even more interesting is the assumption by Cosmopoulos that a study of those ancient Greek "private mystery cults" will provide therapeutic lessons for modern readers whose "lives appear emptier" because they have lost their spirituality. In part his volume's aim is to urge "us" (modern readers) to "redefine our priorities to focus on our humanity, rather than our technology," because if we don't "we may never regain a deep connection with ourselves and with each other."[59] As argued in the chapter, the possibly blatant nature of this creation of a past that we find useful is more familiar, when we look at the scholarly literature on ancient voluntary associations, than we might at first realize.

In the *third chapter* this interest to study the ongoing constitution of the past through acts of identification in the present (and, more specifically, by means of techniques of representation), takes us to the central church of the 14th-century Vlatadon monastery in the upper, old city of Thessaloniki. Iconoclastic controversies are often

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[58] Michel B. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xii.
[59] Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries*, xiii.

explained as the result of religious disputes and religious differences, an approach that simply assumes the insiders' understanding of the icons as possessing some kind of inherent identity, i.e., sacredness. In this kind of explanation the focus is on the motives of the actors, whether the destroyers of icons or their defenders. I propose, instead, that the discourse on "iconoclasm"—or better, the discourses on authenticity and originality that are often associated with such an act—is a contemporary rhetorical technique that helps sustain a very specific notion of ethnic identity through the creation of the "Other." The church is therefore a site where discourses on modern Greek nationality are carried out with reference to the pitted interior iconography of the church.[60]

Carrying forward this focus on the modern, practical implications of representation, the *last chapter* is an analysis of the complexity of the concept of "tradition" within the context of re-creating "the traditional Greek village" in Modern Greece, as a way of displaying or performing modern Greekness (even European-ness) by means of an imagined, pristine past that is assumed to be firmly and directly linked to the present. The problem that this chapter will try to address, therefore, is that in trying to account for "tradition" and "traditional" by means of postulating some primordial past (tradition) that is transmitted across time to safeguard the continuity and the stability of a presumed identity, what is often overlooked are the ways by which those actions, assumptions, and institutions that we choose, collect, and then call traditions are made, change, and transform without necessarily possessing something that remains static and unchangeable.

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[60] Vaia Touna, "Redescribing Iconoclasm: Holey Frescoes and Identity Formation," in *Failure and Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion*, ed. W. Arnal, W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox), 218-227.

The focus in the last chapter is therefore not on “tradition” but, rather, on the process of traditionalization. This exemplifies even more the shift in attention that is evident across all the chapters—e.g., the overall interest, throughout the entire project, of moving from studies of identity and its expressions and meanings, to a historically rigorous and situationally specific examination of some of the discrete means of identification. In other words, the last chapter exemplifies a shift in attention towards the practices by which those things we call identities are made, reproduced, and naturalized.

CHAPTER 1

Gloria Patri: The Construction of The Modern Self

"[T]έλος δέ κάμψαιμ' ὥσπερ ἠρξάμην βίον."[1]

So ends the prayer of the main character in Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus*—also known as *Hippolytus Garland*—directed to his favorable goddess, Artemis, and which is said at the beginning of the play. Ironically, perhaps, Hippolytus' wish to remain the same until the end of his life was never granted to him neither by the end of the play nor by the endless interpretations that followed the production of the play more than two millennia ago. For what Hippolytus' character "really" represents has been the focus of attention for centuries, along with both an interest on the intentions of the author, that is, Euripides, in writing this tragedy and creating a character such as Hippolytus, and how the 5th-century BCE Athenian audience understood the play. Although, as it will be evident later in the chapter, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the meaning of the play and its characters, Hippolytus' "identity" has nonetheless been created and recreated with every reading and interpretation, suggesting that these readings themselves might attract our interest. For the interpretations of this Euripidean tragedy in scholarly works and theatrical productions may prove to be more useful in demonstrating the use of a set of discursive practices (i.e., strategies, identification techniques) in the construction of the modern self and its relation to the past than would yet another authorized reading of the play. In other words, in this chapter I intend to demonstrate how the act of interpretation through the uses of strategic anachronisms in understanding this ancient play is an act of

[1] "May my life come to an end just as it began" (unless otherwise noted, all translation from ancient Greek are my own). Euripides, *Hippolytus*, verse 87

identification performed by modern situated readers, making the play a device used in creating a very specific sort of contemporary moment. But before I get ahead of myself let me offer a brief summary of the play.

I. The Play: Euripides' *Hippolytus*

According to the *ὑπόθεσις* (synopsis) of the play—which is attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium, who lived more than two hundred years after the play was written (to whom I will return later in the chapter)—this tragedy was performed in Athens in 428 BCE, a few years after the start of the Peloponnesian War and a year after Pericles' death. The war lasted 27 years (431-404 BCE), and its ramifications had an impact on the Athenian life early on, for example, when Pericles decided to confine the Athenians within the city by building walls that would protect it from the Spartan invasions. This sequestering for the purpose of security had as a tragic result the plague that began in 429 BCE, which also resulted in the death of Pericles.[2] Relying on Aristophanes' dating, the play is believed to have been written and then first performed in the year following these events.

The story is about a young man, Hippolytus, the son of King Theseus and an Amazon, who believes that he can choose a life and an identity for himself different from the others and without regard for the social conventions and thus expectations and duties of his time. From the prologue of the play, delivered by the goddess Aphrodite (who is

[2] From Thucydides (460-395 BCE) we learn—in his history of the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BCE)—how the Athenians reacted to the plague. He says that they became more interested in saving themselves, i.e., they had started showing lack of concern not only for the city's affairs but also for the city's gods; "θεῶν δὲ φόβος ἤ ἀνθρώπων νόμος οὐδεὶς ἀπεῖργε, τὸ μὲν κρὶνοντες ἐν ὁμοίῳ καὶ σέβειν καὶ μὴ ἐκ τοῦ πάντας ὁρᾶν ἐν ἴσῳ ἀπολλυμένους, τῶν δὲ ἁμαρτημάτων οὐδεὶς ἐλπίζων μέχρι τοῦ δίκην γενέσθαι βιοὺς ἄν την τιμωρίαν ἀντιδοῦναι, πολὺ δὲ μείζω τὴν ἤδη κατεψηφισμένην σφῶν ἐπικρεμασθῆναι, ἥν πρὶν ἐμπεσεῖν εἰκὸς εἶναι τοῦ βίου τι ἀπολαῦσαι" (Thucydides, *History*, II, 53. 4).

apparently dissatisfied with Hippolytus' behavior towards her) we learn the following basic elements of the story (1-21):

> Theseus' son, Hippolytus, the offspring of the Amazon
> who was brought up by the pure Pittheus,
> alone of the citizens of this land of Trozen
> says that I am the vilest of divinities.
> He refuses the marital bed and denies marriage,
> he honors Apollo's sister Artemis, Zeus daughter,
> in the green wood, ever consort to the maiden goddess,
> he clears the land of wild beasts with his swift dogs
> and has gained a companionship greater than mortal.
> To this pair I feel no grudging ill will: why should I?
> Yet for his sins against me I shall punish Hippolytus this day.[3]

Hippolytus not only chooses Artemis (a goddess who is associated with hunting, virginity and youth) with whom he seems to have a special relationship—as Aphrodite informs us "a companionship greater than mortal"—but he also shows contempt towards Aphrodite. In a dialogue early on in the play Hippolytus is advised by his servant to pay respect

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[3] "ὁ γάρ με Θησέως παῖς, Ἀμαζόνος τόκος,
Ἱππόλυτος, ἁγνοῦ Πιτθέως παιδεύματα,
μόνος πολιτῶν τῆσδε γῆς Τροζηνίας
λέγει κακίστην δαιμόνων πεφυκέναι,
ἀναίνεται δὲ λέκτρα κοὐ ψαύει γάμων
Φοίβου δ᾽ἀδελφὴν Ἄρτεμιν, Διὸς κόρην,
τιμᾷ, μεγίστην δαιμόνων ἡγούμενος
χλωράν δ᾽ἀν᾽ὕλην παρθένῳ ξυνὼν ἀεὶ
κυσὶν ταχείαις θῆρας ἐξαιρεῖ χθονός,
μείζω βροτείας προσπεσὼν ὁμιλίας.
Τούτοισι μεν νυν οὐ φθονῶ τί γάρ με δεῖ;
ἅ δ᾽εἰς ἔμ᾽ἡμάρτηκε, τιμωρήσομαι
Ἱππόλυτον ἐν τῇδ᾽ἡμέρᾳ."

(προσεννέπεις) to Aphrodite to which he responds "οὐδείς μ᾽ἀρέσκει νυκτὶ θαυμαστὸς θεῶν" (106).[4] Because of this behavior Aphrodite devises a plan in order to take her revenge. She makes Phaedra, Theseus wife and thus Hippolytus stepmother, fall in love with her own stepson. As the plot of the play unfolds, we see Phaedra struggle in vain to overcome her passions. She confesses her passion for Hippolytus to her maiden, known in the plot as the Nurse, who in her attempt to save her mistress reveals Phaedra's secret passion to Hippolytus himself, in hopes that he can help. But instead, Hippolytus, in an infuriated speech that Phaedra overhears, condemns not only Phaedra but also all women in general. Phaedra, fearing for her own reputation and the future of her own biological children with Theseus, in case Hippolytus reveals her secret to his father, commits suicide. But before doing so, she leaves a letter (δέλτος) for Theseus, in which she accuses Hippolytus of what we today would call sexual assault. Theseus, upon hearing the news of her death and then reading the letter, demands explanations from Hippolytus, but given that Hippolytus had previously sworn an oath to the Nurse that he would not reveal anything she had told him, he is unable to defend himself against Phaedra's accusations, "ὦ θεοί, τί δῆτα τοὐμὸν οὐ λύω στόμα, ὅστις γ᾽ὑφ᾽ὑμῶν, οὓς σέβω, διόλλυμαι; οὐ δῆτα πάντως οὐ πίθοιμ᾽ἄν οὓς με δεῖ, μάτην δ᾽ἄν ὅρκους συγχέαιμ᾽οὓς ὤμοσα" (1060-63).[5] Theseus then curses Hippolytus and sends him into exile, at the same time asking his own father, the god Poseidon, to kill Hippolytus for having done such a terrible deed. While Hippolytus is driving away with his chariot, along the sea, a bull, sent by Poseidon, suddenly emerges from the water and crushes Hippolytus' chariot leaving him near death. Hippolytus is then brought back to his father and Artemis, as

[4] "I don't like any of the gods who are worshipped at night."

[5] "Oh gods, why don't I put an end to my silence, since I'm being destroyed by those I respect? I will not though convince those I must, and in vein I will betray the oaths I swore."

deus ex machina, appears at the end of the play and reveals to Theseus the truth that has now ruined his family and for which Artemis holds Aphrodite responsible. The play ends with Artemis establishing a ritual in honor of Hippolytus so that he will not be forgotten, while asking Hippolytus not to have bad feelings for his father, to which Hippolytus conforms saying: "λύω δὲ νεῖκος πατρὶ χρῃζούσης σέθεν καὶ γὰρ πάροιθε σοῖς ἐπειθόμην λόγοις" (1442-3).[6] And so, by the play's close, father and son are reconciled at Hippolytus' death.

II. Two Modern Theatrical Productions

My interest in the uses of the past in the construction of identities led me to revisit this well-known ancient play, since interpretations of myths and more specifically the deeds of heroes have been an enterprise undertaken both in the ancient as well as in the modern world. It is of no surprise therefore that the verb used, in what we today call the ancient Greek world, to denote the production of a play was *διδάσκω* (to teach), meaning both the act of teaching as well as the act of interpreting; it is a process similar in the production of knowledge in modern scholarship. This double process though has less to do with the thing being taught or interpreted, that is, its actual meaning, but with the audience to which the teaching and interpreting is aimed and the contemporary interests that drive those interpretations of past events or, in our case, this specific text.

Although this play has been staged many times since its production in 428 BCE (if we follow Aristophanes' date), both within and outside Greece, I would like to discuss two modern theatrical productions, both by the National Theatre of Greece, as a way to

[6] I end the hatred to my father at your wish because I always abide by your words (commands).

begin to explore what can be gained by entertaining an approach that focuses not on the text itself or its ancient meaning but, rather, on the situated reader.[7]

In 2004 Nikos Kourkoulos, well-known actor and artistic director of the Greek National Theatre at the time, opened the programme book for that year's performances in the famous open theatre of Epidaurous (a year which also marked the 50 years of the Epidaurus Festival), by writing as follows:

> In June 1954, the National Theatre returns, after 1937, to the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, presenting *Hippolytos* by Euripides, directed by Dimitris Rondiris, thus establishing the most important ancient drama festival in the world.
>
> 50 years later and after a continuous remarkable presence in the ancient drama, the National Theatre, honouring this recognized institution, presents *Hippolytos* once again (as well as *Lysistrata*, which with *Ecclesiazusae* are the first comedies performed in Epidaurus in 1957), in a new production which, however, uses the historical music composed by Dimitris Mitropoulos, which was first heard in the performance of 1954.[8]

Of interest in these two productions, mentioned by Kourkoulos, is the way the main character of the play (i.e., Hippolytus) has been represented. In 1937,[9] the National

[7] According to official cite of the National Theatre (http://www.n-t.gr/en/nationaltheatre/history/), the Theatre was founded in 1890 by King George I (with a fund from Kanelopoulos), known at the time as Royal Theatre, and operated until 1908 when it closed permanently—until, that is, 1930, when it was re-founded by Yorgos Papandreou. Although the site refers to the 1930 reopening as National Theatre, programs from the 1937 production of Euripides' Hippolytus refer to it as the Royal Theatre.

[8] National Theatre, Programme (Greek, English): *Euripides Hippolytus*, Summer 2004: 69.

[9] Kourkoulos in his brief note makes mention of the 1954 performance as it was indeed the one staged in Epidaurus but, and rightly so, he mainly refers to the 1937 production of the play since

Theatre (i.e., the Royal Theatre at the time and according to the programme's cover) staged Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus* in the outdoor theatre of the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, in Athens, under the direction of Dimitris Rontiris (1899-1981), using the translation of Dimitris Sarros ([1869-1937] teacher and translator of many ancient plays). The programme of the production, written by Sarros, includes a brief history of the play since its first production in 428 BCE, noting that "it was the year that the great Pericles died," while also making reference to the various productions that were inspired by the myth of Hippolytus, like that of Seneca (465), and during the Renaissance, such productions as Garnier's (1573), Pineliere's (1635), Gilbert's (1647) and others, which the author characterizes as mediocre productions, until, that is, we come to Racine's *Phaedra* (1677).

In this brief production note the author, apart from offering to the audience a summary of the plot of the play, also provides his reading of the character of Hippolytus. He writes:

> Euripides' Hippolytus is the ideal type of a 'good and benign' teenager, he is a real angel, as we would say today. He combines harmoniously all the bodily and spiritual qualities that the famous education (upbringing and learning) of the Athenians was asking. He is beautiful, gentle in character, modest, immaculate, perfect in gymnastics, in music, in education, and in all the outdoor exercises (υπαίθριες ασκήσεις). And above all what shines in him is his piety and his purity.... The purity of Hippolytus and his devotion, as well as that of his friends, towards the

the 1954 staging was basically that of 1937 (that is, using both the translation and the interpretation offered by Dimitris Sarros in the programme of 1937).

godess of virginity is very similar to the christian ideal of virginity, that the holy church fathers (πατέρες) have praised, such as Chrysostomus, Augustine, and Saint Ambrosius. There is none in world literature more chaste and more ideal than Hippolytus. And he is not only chaste and an apostle (απόστολος) of chastity, but also a martyr and a victim of this chastity.... But with the sorrow and the loss of his earthly life, Hippolytus not only enters eternity, but also apotheosis. So we can see his destruction as triumph.... And as others have noticed, Euripides seems to be saying: Whoever dedicates himself to the pure spiritual life, walks towards suffering and sacrifice. But if he is strong to win over the rebellious body, then he is elevated to the status of gods.[10]

Similar to that programme's understanding of Hippolytus as a gentle, pious soul, was his portrait by the newspapers of the time. To give but one example, G. Nazis, writing for the newspaper *Καθημερινή* (*Kathimerini)* and in the column *Θεατρικαί Πρώται (Theatrikai Protai)*, argues that the play is about the eternal battle between the "earthly body" and the

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[10] Dimitris Sarros, Programme of the production of Euripides' *Hippolytus* by the Royal Theatre, 1937: 4-5. (My own translation) The original Greek reads: "Ο Ιππόλυτος του Ευριπίδη είναι ο ιδανικός τύπος του 'καλού κ'αγαθού' εφήβου, είναι σωστός άγγελος, όπως θα λέγαμε σήμερα. Ενώνει αρμονικώτατα όλα τα σωματικά κια ψυχικά χαρίσματα που ζητούσε τότε να τα τελειοποιήση η περίφημη αγωγή (ανατροφή και μάθηση) των Αθηναίων. Είναι ωραίος, ευγενικός, σεμνότατος, άσπιλος, τέλειος στη γυμναστική, στη μουσική, στα γράμματα, και σε όλες τις υπαίθριες ασκήσεις. Κι' επάνω σ'αυτά όλα λάμπει η θεοσέβεια και η αγνεία του....Η αγνεία του Ιππολύτου και η λατρεία αυτού και των φίλων του προς τη θεά της παρθενίας ομοιάζει πολύ με τη χριστιανική παρθενία, που εξύμνησαν οι ιεροί πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, όπως ο Χροσόστομος, ο Αυγουστίνος, ο Άγιος Αμβρόσιος. Δεν υπάρχει αγνότερος και ιδανικώτερος τύπος στην παγκόσμια λογοτεχνία απο τον Ιππόλυτο. Και δεν είναι μόνον αγνός και απόστολος της αγνείας, αλλά και μάρτυρας της, και θύμα της. Μετά το θάνατο του όμως τον στεφανώνει η αιώνια λάμψη των αρετών του και αποθεώνεται... Αλλά με τη θλίψη και με το χαμό της επίγειας ζωής του ο Ιππόλυτος μπαίνει στην αθανασία, και μάλιστα στην αποθέωση. Έτσι την καταστροφή του μπορούμε να την πούμε θρίαμβο.... Κι' όπως παρατηρούν κι' άλλοι, ο Ευριπίδης φαίνεται ότι θέλει να πη: Όποιος αφοσιώνεται στην καθαρή πνευματική ζωή, βαδίζει προς την οδύνη και τη θυσία. Αλλά αν είναι δυνατός διά να νικήσει το ανυπότακτο σώμα, τότε υψώνεται στην τάξη των θεών."

"imperishable (άφθαρτο) and immaterial (άυλο) spirit," going on to characterize Hippolytus as caught between these two forces:

> There stands before our eyes, the most ideal of all, the pure and brawny Hippolytus, the perfect human specimen of teenager of the most perfect time in the world, loser and winner of the hard struggle against these two powers.[11]

However, fifty years later, in 2004, *Hippolytus* was to be restaged, this time under the direction of Vassilis Nikolaidis, with a new translation from Stratis Paschalis.[12] In the programme of the 2004 production there is a note from the director who gives his own, rather different, interpretation of the play:

> I believe that Aphrodite is right to seek revenge, since Hippolytus disregards her and is hostile towards her; and how could a mortal (θνητός) disregard the most powerful of gods, that is, nature itself, which gives only one basic order: that of procreation. The primordial instincts that derive from her, the need for food, safety, and sex cannot be suppressed (Freud also said it—his basic principle). That's why Hippolytus dies, eternal example to be avoided (παράδειγμα προς αποφυγήν). Euripides, I

[11]"Σ'αυτήν εκεί τη θέση ο ιδανικότερος απ' όλους, ο αγνός και ρωμαλέος Ιππόλυτος, το τέλειο ανθρώπινο υπόδειγμα εφήβου της τελειότερης εποχής του κόσμου, βγαίνει μπροστά στα μάτια μας νικημένος και νικητής του σκληρού αγώνα προς τις δυο αντίμαχες αυτές εξουσίες." (Kathimerini 7/7/1973).

[12] During the fifty years though Euripides' *Hippolytus* had been staged by the National Theatre several other times: In 1954 and 1955 (director Dimitris Rontiris, translator Dimitris Sarros); in 1973 (director Spyros Evaggelatos, translator Costas Varnalis [whose translation first used in the 1965 staging of the play by the newly formed National Theatre of Northern Greece [ΚΘΒΕ] in Thessaloniki under the direction of Socratis Karantinos, and with an analysis by professor of Classics at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Nicos Chourmouziadis]); in 1984 (director Nikos Perelis, translator Costas Varnalis); and in 1989 (director Giannis Chouvardas, translation Dimitris Dimitriadis).

believe, considers absolutely legitimate his death and until the last minute, until the time of his death, he sees his hero critically, since he puts words in his mouth that show his ignorance, his obsession, but also his arrogance: "What have I done…, I'm chaste…, I'm perfect." [13]

And a few lines later Nikolaidis writes: "Hippolytus is a 'wordly-monk' (κοσμοκαλόγερος) that doesn't allow anyone to come close to him, much less to fall in love with him."

What should be evident from comparing these two readings of Hippolytus—an innocent unjustly disciplined versus an impious rightly condemned young man—is that since the 1937 production there has been gradual shift in the way Hippolytus was perceived by the directors and the audience in Greece,[14] for by 2004 he explicitly deserves to die; he is no longer a victim caught between powerful forces, but he is now arrogant towards a goddess and deserves to die, making him not a model for humans but, as the director writes in 2004, "an example to be avoided." But how are we to account for these two diametrically opposed readings of Hippolytus' character? What is at stake in these two readings—interpretations that, as will be evident later in the chapter, are not unique to Greek commentators?

To answer these questions posed after juxtaposing just two modern readings, separated by 50 years, we must examine some of the more influential and much quoted

[13] National Theatre, Programme (Greek, English): *Euripides Hippolytus*, 13 (My translation). It should be noted that the words put on Hippolytus mouth by Euripides as the director suggests comes not from Euripides play itself but from Paschalis translation.

[14] See n.12

commentaries on Hippolytus from the 20th century—the time when a more positive stance toward Euripides' work became more prominent.[15]

III. Scholarly Readings of the *Hippolytus*

Although there is a long bibliography on both Euripides as well as the *Hippolytus*[16] for the purpose of this chapter I have chosen the modern commentaries that are most referenced and have been most influential in contemporary understandings of the play.

Important to recognize is that Euripides' tragedy is believed to have been part of a trilogy and a satire drama. In ancient Greece, during the theatrical agons (i.e., competitions), each poet staged three plays (a trilogy) and a satire drama. We do not

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[15] On how Euripides was viewed in the 19th and 20th centuries see the work of Ann Noris Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 3-51.

[16] Douglas L. Cairns, "The Meadow of Artemis and the Character of the Euripidean 'Hippolytus'," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 57, no. 3 (1997), 51-75; Elizabeth M. Craik, "Αιδως in Euripides's Hippolytos 373-430: Review and Reinterpretation," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993), 45-59; Lester G. Crocker, "On Interpreting Hippolytus," *Philologus* 101 (1957), 238-46; George Devereux, *The Character of the Euripidean Hippolytos: An Ethno-Psychoanalytical Study* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985); Robert Davis, "Is Mr. Euripides a Communist? The Federal Theatre Project's 1938 'Trojan Incident'," *Comparative Drama* 44/45 (2010), 457-76; John F. Dobson, "A New Reading of the Hippolytus," *The Classical Review* 23 (1909), 75-76; Jerker Blomqvst, "Human and Divine Action in Euripides' Hippolytus," *Hermes* 110 (1982): 398-414; Christopher Gill, "The Articulation of the Self in Euripides Hippolytus," in *Euripides, Woman and Sexuality*, ed. Anton Powel (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 76-107; David Grene, "The Interpretation of the Hippolytus of Euripides," *Classical Philology* 34 (1939), 45-58; Michael R. Halleran, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1995); Richard Hunter, "The Garland of Hippolytus," *Trends in Classics* 1 (2009), 18-35; David Kovacs, "Euripides Hippolytus 100 and the Meaning of the Prologue," *Classical Philology* 75 (1980), 130-37; D. W. Lucas, "Hippolytus," *Classical Quarterly* 40, no. 3/4 (1946), 65-69; C. A. E. Luschnig, "The Value of Ignorance in the Hippolytus," *American Journal of Philology* 104 (1983), 115-23; Donald J. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Sophie Milles, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (London: Duckworth, 2002); J. A. S, "The Art of Euripides in the Hippolytus," *Classical Review* 33, no. 1/2 (1919), 9-15; A. W. Verrall, "Aphrodite Pandemos and the Hippolytus of Euripides," *Classical Review* 15 (1901), 449-51; Froma Zeitlin, "The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the Hippolytus," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism: A Collection of Essays*, ed. P. Burian (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 52-111.

know which other plays comprised Euripides' trilogy but we do know that he won first place in the City Dionysia's agons. That this specific tragedy (i.e., *Hippolytus*) was awarded first prize comes from a synopsis of the play, as I previously mentioned, that was written by Aristophanes of Byzantium (2nd century BCE). From Aristophanes we also learn that the play was produced in 428 BCE, and that this was the second version of the play that Euripides wrote. Aristophanes writes:[17]

> The scene of the drama takes place in ?Thebes?. It was taught (produced) under the archonship of Epameinonos in the fourth year of the 87th Olympiad. First was Euripides, second Iophon, third Ion. This was the second Hippolytus, also known as Garland. It seems that it was written later, for what was indecent (ἀπρεπὲς) and worthy of condemnation (κατηγορίας ἄξιον) has been corrected in this drama. The drama is among the first." [18]

According to Aristophanes, making evident his own (contemporary) moral views (a point to which I shall return), the second version was better since what was *ἀπρεπὲς* (indecent) and *κατηγορίας ἄξιον* (worthy of condemnation) has been corrected. Whether or not Aristophanes is right in his assertion, it seems that the majority of modern scholars have agreed that the extant play that has survived to this day is indeed the second and superior

[17] William S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1964): 96.
[18] Ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ δράματος ὑπόκειται ἐν †θήβαις†. Ἐδιδάχθη ἐπὶ Ἐπαμείνονος ἄρχοντος ὀλυμπιάδι πζ ἔτει δ. Πρῶτος Εὐριπίδης, δεύτερος Ἰοφῶν, τρίτος Ἴων. Ἔστι δὲ οὗτος Ἱππόλυτος δεύτερος, ὁ καὶ στεφανίας προσαγορευόμενος. Ἐμφαίνεται δὲ ὕστερος γεγραμμένος τὸ γὰρ ἀπρεπὲς καὶ κατηγορίας ἄξιον ἐν τούτῳ διώρθωται τῷ δράματι. Τὸ δὲ δρᾶμα τῶν πρώτων.

version.[19] The first version has only survived in fragments and it is thought to have been met with public dissatisfaction.[20]

Whether or not that was the reason for Euripides to write a second version of the same play, it is often portrayed in scholarship that the second version was highly regarded by the Athenians for they awarded the play in the city's theatrical competition, at least according to Aristophanes' commentary. But we should also keep in mind that the award Euripides received was not just for this one play but for his trilogy, which, as I mentioned earlier, included two other unknown tragedies.

That the play has been favored, not only by ancient Athenians themselves, but throughout the centuries may be evident also from the fact that it came down to us in multiple editions and versions. William Barrett, in his own commentary on the play, gives a very interesting overview of the history of the text, in which he states:

> [O]f copies produced in this period [1st century CE] for private reading we can say little that is not surmise; doubtless they were produced both commercially and privately, some of them good texts and some of them bad. Doubtless also the innovations of the actors would find their way by one route or another into many of the reading copies; for the public at large the criterion of a text would not be authenticity but popular taste.[21]

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[19] John C. Gibert suggests that the evidence that scholars rely on to consider the extant play as secondary are unreliable, concluding that: "Any theory will have at least two components: a guess as to which play came first, and a narrative to motivate the poet's rewording of the material" ("Euripides Hippolytus Plays: Which Hippolytus Came First?," *Classical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 [1997]), 96.

[20] Regarding the fragments that have survived from the first Hippolytus also known as veiled (which consist of about 60 lines), and according to which scholars argue Phaedra's character is more bold, see: Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus*, 10-45; Michael R. Halleran, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1995): 25-37.

[21] Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus*, 46.

The play has therefore been the focus of attention for many centuries and the multiple copies and commentaries about it suggest that it attracted a wide array of scholars who have been vying over Euripides' purposes and intentions, the meaning of the characters (both divine and human), all the while trying to definitively determine which character is more tragic than the other and, of course, whether Hippolytus deserved his fate. Despite their efforts to contextualize the text in its original (or, as Barrett insinuates "authentic") time, space and thus meaning, as it will become evident these scholars have tried to find the universal and timeless values in the play. But, as I will argue, these values are not so much universal as they are contemporary to the situation of each reading, reflecting or authenticating the interests of the scholar in his or her own time. Much like Aristophanes' value judgment about the first version's indecent elements, modern scholars have tried to offer readings that satisfy their own time's "popular taste"—perhaps not unlike what any author, including Euripides himself, tries to do with whatever material they work.

To begin this survey of 20th-century readings of the play, consider an interpretation from 1914, which also marks the year of a war that was later to be named World War I, when Ivan Linforth (well known for his 1941 book *The Arts of Orpheus*) offered a reading of the play, and its character Hippolytus in an article entitled "Hippolytus and Humanism,"[22] in order to understand, as he writes: "the orthodox Greek view of life."[23] Linforth argues that what makes this play important is the "sin" and punishment of Hippolytus.[24] But this sin itself "is not immediately recognizable to the

[22] Ivan M. Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism" *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 45 (1914): 5-16.
[23] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 6
[24] That Hippolytus has been considered a sinner for his offence to Aphrodite and that his punishment is deserved can be seen in other readings of the time most notably: U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides, Hippolytus, griechisch und deutch* (Berlin 1891); G. C. M.

modern reader"[25] because, according to the author, modern readers have been so immersed since the time when Euripides first wrote the play in, what he characterizes, as philosophical knowledge, in Christian teaching, and also in the discoveries of the natural world, that "one may not without patience and trance-like reflection recover the conceptions and beliefs of a remote past."[26]

For Linforth the key to understanding Hippolytus is this notion of sin, and the key to understanding his sins lies in what Aphrodite stands for; she is not merely a jealous and capricious goddess, he argues, but "a necessary element in human life, the element of sexual love, without which human life is impossible; and Hippolytus' hostility was directed not against the willful commands of an irresponsible divinity, but against a law which changeth not though the heaven fall."[27] This law is imposed upon humanity, in the opinion of Linforth, by powers stronger than humanity itself, and which go by such names "god, providence, necessity, the eternal flux"; Hippolytus, despite the nobility of his nature and his pursuits, failed to recognize this power, this law. Furthermore, again as stated by Linforth, this law was very familiar to Euripides' audience and it was exactly this knowledge that Hippolytus lacked, that is: "A man shall recognize and observe the requirements and restrictions which are imposed upon the freedom of humanity and he

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Smith, "On the Significance of Some Echoed Phrases in Euripides' Hippolytus," *Classical Review* 4, no. 4 (1890), 149-50. Smith understands the scene between Hippolytus and the servant as "a door of escape…But Hippolytus in his blindness rejects his opportunity, and this in striking words (113), *τὴν σὴν δὲ Κύπριν πόλλ᾽ἐγὼ χαίρειν λέγω.* He has formulated his sin, he has consciously proclaimed that he adheres to it, and he leaves the stage. Without doubt those last words lingered in the mind of the audience, as the summing up of Hippolytus' offence, and the knell of his approaching doom" (149). J. A. Spranger, "The Meaning of the 'Hippolytus' of Euripides," *Classical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1927): 18-29, argues that the theme of the play is moderation in all things, something that Hippolytus lacks. Eric Dodds, "The ΑΙΔΩΣ of Phaedra and the Meaning of the Hippolytus," *Classical Review* 39, no. 5/6 (1925): 102-04.

[25] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 9.

[26] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 10.

[27] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 10-11.

shall not seek to overstep theses restrictions or to shrink these requirements. Knowledge of these requirements and restrictions was entirely empirical."[28] This law, which Linforth argues, was to the ancient Athenians a "real ethical system," had nothing do with "mysticism," or "asceticism," or even "spiritual perfection" but, rather, its "ideal was the perfection of real man in a real world, and the standard of perfection was found in man himself."[29] For Linforth this ancient ethical system, which we find so difficult to see in the play today, was none other than what he calls "Humanism."

Although Linforth recognizes that Humanism has been used mainly in reference to "certain men of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,"[30] he nevertheless argues that this "ethical humanism" that he sees among ancient Greeks helps to explain better the Renaissance and the Enlightenment which came long after them, because what the latter two shared with the Greeks is, as claimed by Linforth, "the eagerness to question all laws which seem to be founded not upon the real nature of men, but upon the hereditary prescriptions of religion."[31]

It is important to note here that the concept of "Humanism" to describe 14th-and 15th-century thinkers, artists, etc., is very modern in its origins; the term was first coined by 18th-century German scholars and it was initially used to denote classical education, while later it came to describe the achievements of 14th-and 15th-century men. From Germany the word spread throughout Europe, having various meanings, and understandings.[32] Linforth anachronistically projects this modern idea of Humanism

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[28] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 13
[29] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 13.
[30] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 14
[31] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 14.
[32] On the history of the term and its various meanings see: Vito R. Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 2 (1985): 167-95.

backwards in time, while it is understood by him to have agency in the past, inasmuch as it "led men to examine their own human powers and human limitations."[33] Furthermore, Linforth argues that this idea of humanism is neither "theist or atheist" since it can be seen in both those who believe in gods as well as those who, "in the spirit of the modern scientist, saw the universe moved and controlled by blind and senseless laws of cause and effect."[34] And this is what makes Euripides a very interesting example for him, because this ancient author combines both ways of thinking, for example, in his treatment of Artemis and Aphrodite, who are both gods in the traditional sense yet also "the executors of the universal law."[35] This humanism, Linforth concludes, was very common among Greeks and, of course, embraced by Euripides himself, so "there was nothing new in his conception of the sin of Hippolytus. It was the nature of the superhuman power which limits and defines the freedom of humanity."[36] Given how common this law was among the Greeks it was also obvious, as Linforth goes on to argue, that the Athenian audience would immediately understand that "Hippolytus chose to live in open defiance of an obvious law." [37]

The limitations imposed on humanity by external forces which the Greeks knew about, a knowledge that Linforth describes as an ethical system that he names "Humanism," is not an uncommon reading among modern scholars as will be evident later in the chapter. In fact, it is this very distinction between human and non-human that seems to drive most of these readings, though whether Hippolytus deserved his fate or was a heroic victim of those same forces is something that is worth examining. There is

[33] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 14
[34] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 14
[35] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 14
[36] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 15
[37] Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 16.

no doubt that in Linforth's reading Hippolytus was not a heroic victim, for he lacked the wisdom, "*Σοφία,*" and thus the ability to know and follow this "ethical law" that others in his time knew about.

Much like the common focus on the distinction between human and divine actors in the play, the understanding of "Humanism" that is so central to Linforth's reading was also not uncommon before World War II,[38] after which such other modern notions as the enduring human spirit, expressions of personal religiosity and the attainment of individual selfhood seem to play a more significant role in some scholars' reading of this Euripidean tragedy. As might be expected if we are concerned with identifying how contemporary circumstances are authenticated by being read backward onto prior eras (as in the case of Linforth's Humanism), this notion of the "personal" is often conceptualized as being the result of an inner need, desire, or irresistible force that, though widely assumed to exist today, was only then being gradually manifested or expressed throughout this period of ancient Greek history.

Bernard Knox's influential 1952 reading of the play is characteristic of this approach.[39] Knox admits that the analysis of the Hippolytus "far from arriving at a generally accepted line of interpretation, has produced nothing but disagreement,"[40] especially in terms of deciding precisely who is the tragic hero of the play. For Knox there is no one character any more tragic than the other, so he recommends looking instead at the relationship into which the four characters are placed—a situation which, as

[38] Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism'," 174-183.
[39] Appeared first in *Yale Classical Studies* 13 (1952): 3-31; repr. in Erich Segal (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983): 311-331.
[40] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 3.

stated by Knox, "imposes a choice between the same alternatives, silence and speech."[41] Despite the characters seeming to be freely choosing between silence and speech,[42] the irony, at least according to Knox, is that in reality "the humans beings of the world of the *Hippolytus* live out their lives in the darkness of total ignorance of the nature of the universe and of the powers which govern it";[43] those external powers are symbolized for him by Artemis but mainly by Aphrodite, who not only predicts from the outset what will happen but also, according to Knox, determines the events which further proves "the nonexistence of the human free will, the futility of the moral choice."[44] Regarding the character of Hippolytus and his position in the play (and somewhat reminiscent of other readings that focus much attention on the distinction between gods and mortals in the play), Knox has this to say:

> It is a religious position which is intellectual as well as mystic. His reverence for the gods manifests itself mainly in the worship of one goddess, Artemis; and he completely rejects another, Aphrodite. The position is logical; on the intellectual plane the worship of Artemis is clearly incompatible with the worship of Aphrodite, and acceptance of the one does constitute rejection of the other. The mass of humanity can ignore the contradiction, as the old servant does in the opening scene, just as most Christians manage to serve Mammon as well as God, but for the man who has dedicated his life to God, or to a

[41] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 4.
[42] Knox's idea regarding the choice between "silence and speech" as key elements in the understanding of the play has been further argued by Barbara E. Goff, *The Noose of Words: Readings of Desire, Violence and Language in Euripides' Hippolytos* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[43] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 17.
[44] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 6.

> goddess, there can be no compromise. Hippolytus must choose one or the other.[45]

But, as it turns out, his choice is inadequate, for he dies "not a man to be envied but a pitiful victim," caught between external inhuman forces; "these two goddesses are powers locked in an eternal war, a war in which the human tragedy we have just witnessed is merely one engagement."[46] But there is something that is essentially human according to Knox, and which makes Hippolytus someone to be admired, despite his fate, of which we learn more at the end of his article:

> The play ends with a human act which is at last a free and meaningful choice, a choice made for the first time in full knowledge of the nature of human life and divine government, an act which does not frustrate its purpose. It is an act of forgiveness, something possible only for human beings, not for gods but for their tragic victims. It is man's noblest declaration of independence, and it is made possible by man's tragic position in the world. Hippolytus' forgiveness of his father is an affirmation of purely human values in an inhuman universe.[47]

Knox definitely echoes the times when he writes, that is, coming after WWII and during the period when the United States, through the Marshall plan (1948-1952), tried to help the European countries recover from the war. Knox, as a British soldier, fought during the war after which he went to Yale to get a PhD and eventually became an American citizen. It therefore seems that his reading of Hippolytus not only echoes the times in which he was writing—a time when the recovery of agency and thus meaning in a context of

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[45] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 22.
[46] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 25.
[47] Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," 31.

structural violence and despair was understandably a prominent concern—but also his own ideas about the nature of human life. Furthermore, the justification he provides as to why it is all too natural for Hippolytus to choose exclusively Artemis is an indication of a very modern understanding of religion, to which I will come back later.

In addition to Linforth and Knox, the classic, early to mid-20th-century work of the French scholar André-Jean Festugiére, who entered the Dominican order and eventually ordained priest, presents us with another influential reading of the play.[48]

Festugiére in his 1954 book *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, was among the first to consider Hippolytus' intimacy with Artemis as a sign of a newly developing "personal religiosity"[49] among the ancient Greeks. Even though, according to Festugiére, scholars often pay little or no attention to this part of religion, by emphasizing instead religion's civic and therefore public or ritual/institutional aspect, he writes:

> There is no true religion except that which is personal. True religion is, first of all, closeness to God. Every religious ceremony is but empty make-believe if the faithful who participate in it do not feel the thirst for the Absolute, that anxious desire to enter into personal contact with the mysterious Being who is hidden behind appearances.[50]

It is obvious that, according to Festugiére, this personal and thus private and experiential religiosity is the more authentic form of religion, being superior to the civic religion of

[48] André-Jean Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).
[49] On the idea of personal religiosity see also Gilbert Norwood, *Essays on Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), who, regarding Hippolytus, writes: "He is the Athenian ideal of an aristocrat. The difference lies in his vivid personal religion" (75) and his spiritual pride is characteristic of his youth but "the human spirit must struggle alone with an uncomprehended universe" (85).
[50]Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 1.

the city-state (or even the modern nation), which, as he characterizes it, is just "a social phenomenon, a thing which concerns the state." To make his point (that the civic religion, which was public, had a private and more "genuine" origin), he uses the Eleusinian mysteries as an example. They were, in many respects, ancient Athens' most important rituals with priests (archon-magistrate), assigned by the city itself, supervising the rituals. Festugiére writes the following about the Eleusinian mysteries: "it would be absurd to suppose that all those who participated in the Eleusinian mysteries saw in them only a kind of external gesture or act which mechanically assured happiness here below and after death."[51] Clearly, apart from the "external" there was also an "internal," meaningful, and motive force, an unseen aspect that, according to Festugiére, is what he identifies as personal religiosity. This personal aspect of religion, he goes on to argue, was manifested both in "popular devotion" as well as in "reflective piety," which, again according to Festugiére, is characteristic of the most cultivated of Greeks, such as philosophers and poets (among them, the tragedians, such as Euripides), "who had reflected on the great problems of life and had arrived at a purer concept of the Divinity."[52]

It is therefore evident for Festugiére that Euripides created a character, Hippolytus, in order for his audience and readers alike to have "a glimpse of certain aspects of the Athenian character which, without him, would have remained hidden from us."[53] And that "aspect of the Athenian character," for Festugiére, is the inner piety of Hippolytus. Festugiére therefore goes on to write that the hero of the tragedy—for he is indeed heroic in his reading and thus understanding of his cruel fate—is the embodiment

[51] Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 7.
[52] Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 5.
[53] Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 18.

of modesty and his essential quality is innocent purity. He thus understandably critiques those who, like Wilamowitz,[54] consider Hippolytus as "a proud man, a pure egoist, sufficient into himself."[55] For "[i]f," as Festugiére asks rhetorically, "there were nothing admirable about Hippolytus, how could Phaedra, upon a mere glance, have been seized with such passionate love for him?"[56] In the opinion of Festugiére, then, Hippolytus has all the qualities of a truly pious young man. He is modest and pure just like any other eighteen year old boy and, "like many boys of his years, he has at the same time a fear, even a certain physical horror, and a scorn, of womankind. There is nothing morbid in his case. He is perfectly normal."[57] Hippolytus in this reading is a flawless young man who has a mystical union with Artemis. The fact that such a character "exists" is thus a sign, for such scholars, that the personal religiosity we take for granted today (inasmuch as faith is often described as only later being expressed in ritual and institution), a sentiment free of the oppressive structures of the city-state's expectations, was not something unfamiliar in ancient Athens.

But what might have caused Hippolytus' downfall, if this is our reading of the play? Although Festugiére does not discuss the role of Aphrodite in the play in relation to Hippolytus' death, he hints, I think, toward reading Hippolytus' demise as a form of martyrdom: "[t]he intensely religious man is wont to withdraw from the world in order to contemplate at leisure. He appears therefore to be solitary, odd, unsociable. And nothing was more odious in classical Athens than unsociability."[58] That ascetic unsociability, which is the expression of an "intensely religious man," was, in his reading, the reason

[54] See n. 23.
[55] Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 11.
[56] Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 11.
[57] Festugiére, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 13.
[58] Festugiere, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, 17.

for Hippolytus being misunderstood and mistreated by his society—a misunderstanding that stretches even to later scholars with whom Festugière disagrees. That is, according to Festugière, Hippolytus likely suffered for, and was victimized because of, his "personal" choice and individual devotion.

Although Reginald Winnington-Ingram's 1960s article "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation"[59] is interested in the ways "heredity and environment," each understood as essential factors, play an important role in bringing about the tragedy of both Phaedra and Hippolytus, aspects of Festugière's "personal religiosity" are prominent in his work as well. For according to Winnington-Ingram, both "have heredity backgrounds relevant to their character and behavior" which are referenced throughout the play, but it is their environmental factors, "the moral standards of society and class to which we belong,"[60] that are more important to understand the death of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Regarding Phaedra, we learn that her ideals conformed more to the social standards and expectations that she was trying to meet publicly (that is, she was interested in her reputation), which, he goes on to argue, is unlike Hippolytus, whose ideals were more private. For example, Winnington-Ingram argues: "when Hippolytus speaks of an Αἰδώς which waters his sacred meadow, the abstraction must symbolize an innate quality,"[61] but according to Winnington-Ingram, despite maintaining that "nature and convention—innate characteristics and social influences—both make their contribution to the virtues and disasters of both Hippolytus and Phaedra," for some reason he also goes on to say that "we must not deny the moral failure of Phaedra, the moral triumph of Hippolytus." The

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[59] Reginald P. Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Euripides*, ed. Judith Mossman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 201-17. Which appeared first in *Entretiens Hardt* 6 (1960): 169-191.
[60] Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 206.
[61] Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 211.

reason for this is, as Winnington-Ingram argues, that Phaedra tries to make her virtue known, that is, she reveals her struggles against her passion to the Nurse and that has disastrous consequences, whereas Hippolytus, despite being accused for something he has not done, keeps faithful to his principals and retains the information privately by keeping his oath. It is for this reason that at the end he receives his honour; "looked at in this light, Hippolytus does indeed emerge with greater moral credit than Phaedra"[62]—although Winnington-Ingram does not mention that Hippolytus does admit that even if he was to reveal the truth to his father he knows that it would be in vein, which shows that it was not so much that he tried to remain faithful to his principal, as Winnington-Ingram reads his silence, but an acceptance, on Hippolytus' part, that he would not be trusted by his own father. But that's not all that Winnington-Ingram has to say about Hippolytus. For when it comes to Hippolytus' relationship with Artemis and his life in the idyllic meadow, Winnington-Ingram admits that it is difficult to judge Hippolytus; following Festugiére's portrait of the pious hero he writes:

> [T]hat critic would indeed be deaf to poetry who could deny the beauty of the life of Hippolytus, as Euripides has depicted it: he would be insensitive, if he did not see that in the devotion of Hippolytus to Artemis there was something of the stuff of true religion. If the beauty and the religion are not felt, then the pathos and irony go for nothing, when the beauty is crudely destroyed and the man of religion is brought low by the operation of divinities. It is of the essence of the life and religion of Hippolytus that they are limited and narrowly enclosed. His

[62] Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 213.

> religion cuts him off, for good or ill, from a large part of mature human experience…for these limitations he receives a rich reward.[63]

Despite the fact that Winnington-Ingram argues that in Hippolytus' behavior "Euripides suggest[s] that there was some element of self-contemplation and self-worship in the devotee of Artemis," his downfall was not caused by a pre-occupation with his self. This, however, strikes me as a justification that is based on an all too modern understanding of religion, an understanding which is premised on such modern distinction as private/public, faith/institution, and experience/expression,[64] that are anachronistically projected backwards in time by such readers but which allows Winnington-Ingram not only to find in Hippolytus' devotion "something of the stuff of true religion" but also the reason for his "rich reward" which is the establishment of the ritual by Artemis. What actually caused his destruction, then, at least according to Winnington-Ingram, was "his tirade against women which Phaedra hears…and by turning Phaedra's love to hate it helps to bring about his death."[65]

Furthermore, in this reading, both Phaedra's and Hippolytus' way of living is an escape from the realities of life, "in pursuit of an ideal," and the two goddesses are to be understood "not only as the major instinctive forces operating in the tragedy, but as proper and artistically satisfying representatives of the realities which condition human life." [66] But, echoing Knox's focus on forgiveness, Winnington-Ingram also concludes that "the end of the play belongs to Theseus and Hippolytus. With the reconciliation

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[63] Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 213.
[64] William E. Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of "Religion,"* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[65] Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 214.
[66] Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 215.

between them a gleam of light irradiates the tragedy. Human beings can at least forgive one another, even if the gods cannot forgive."[67]

Returning to Barrett, and his classic 1964 commentary on Euripides' tragedy (whom I cited earlier concerning the existence of a variety of texts of the play), Hippolytus in his reading is portrayed as a puritan: "this intense and intolerant young man has built into his cult of the virgin Art[emis] a strange and exclusive puritanism of his own."[68] Even though Barrett, unlike the previous scholars I have mentioned, does not describe Hippolytus in terms of a certain kind of personal religiosity, he still explains his behavior through the very modern individualistic concept of "puritanism," a term that describes a religious movement of the 16th and 17th centuries of English Protestants, who tried to "purify" the "Church of England" from any remnants of the Catholic church and who sought close relationship with god. Barrett, not only anachronistically projects this concept backwards in history in his attempt to explain Hippolytus behavior, but also Euripides' intentions in writing this play: "Euripides is not concerned to pass allusive judgment on any particular beliefs of his own day: his theme is not contemporary but timeless, and his purpose is simply to delineate in its beauty and inadequacy alike the puritan austerity of which Hippolytus is the type."[69]

Charles Segal, another prolific classist, between 1965 and 1980 wrote several articles on the *Hippolytus*,[70] all of which are not unrelated to earlier studies on the

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67 Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," 215.
68 Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus*, 172.
69 Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus*, 173.
70 Charles Segal "The Tragedy of the Hippolytus: The Waters of Ocean and Untouched Meadow," *Harvard Studies Classic Philology* 70 (1965): 117-69; C. Segal "Shame and Purity in Euripides' Hippolytus," *Hermes* 98 (1970): 278-99; C. Segal, "Pentheus and Hippolytus on the Couch and on the Grid: Psychoanalytic and Structuralist Readings of Greek Tragedy," *The Classical World* 72, no. 3 (1978): 129-48; C. Segal, "Solar Imagery and Tragic Heroism in

Humanism of the ancient Greeks, inasmuch as his reading deals with the idea of the "human nature" as is it being portrayed in the characters of the play and (most notably on Hippolytus). A common theme among his four articles on the play is the clash thesis—common to all of the above scholars—that is, the conflict between individual human will and divine power. The tragedy, according to Segal is:

> On the one hand, a psychological tragedy, the result of man's futile attempt to suppress a basic part of his nature; and, on the other hand, a tragedy of human helplessness before divine power. In other terms, the tragedy juxtaposes man as a part of nature, a creature among creatures, and man as a sentient being with a will and an inner life. [71]

It is this distinction between man as part of nature and man as a sentient being that I find of interest, a rather modern distinction that is based on 18th-century philosophers who used the concept to distinguish between "reason" and "sentience." But it is exactly this distinction, this clash of what is portrayed as external and internal, essential forces that allows scholars, and more specifically here Segal to see Hippolytus as the model for an autonomous individual, who exists separate from the social or the natural world. Hippolytus may be ignorant of the forces he is up against but, as read by Segal, "his life is a pure expression of the masculine desire to re-form his world, to make himself as free as possible."[72] Furthermore, according to Segal, "his freedom is ultimately the spiritual

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Euripides' Hippolytus," in *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies to B. M. W. Knox on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. W. Burkert, G. W. Bowersock, and M. C. Putnam (Berlin and New York: W. De Gruyter, 1979), 151-61; Charles Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

[71] Segal "The Tragedy of the Hippolytus," 119.

[72] Segal "The Tragedy of the Hippolytus," 160

freedom men have always sought, and the search cannot be but tragic."[73] Hippolytus represents, for Segal, humanity at its best, in its most free and pure form, striving against inhuman forces and situations, trying its best to repress such forces of sexuality and chastity (each represented in the play by the goddesses Aphrodite and Artemis, respectively) which, lamentably perhaps, prove to be stronger than he—but not all hope is lost. For in Segal's understanding, as we have already seen with Knox, it is the moment of forgiveness at the play's close that ought to attract our attention, because "with his humanity and compassion he [i.e., Hippolytus] triumphs, as a man, over the wilderness of the sea"[74] (and the "sea" is a symbolism that Segal sees throughout the play and this symbolism represents the external forces that suppress human agency). This triumph, which according to Segal derives from Hippolytus' compassion in forgiving his father, is exactly what is commemorated, in Segal's reading, in the rituals established by Artemis in the play's final scene. This is a point that is further elaborated by Segal in his 1980 article, where he notes that Hippolytus "relinquishes immortality on the one hand, but on the other hand gains a revered place in a society or community's memory,"[75] since "his suffering will become part of the rituals of his city." Thus we see that Segal's understanding of Hippolytus is that he is an example not necessarily to be avoided but, rather, a hero who aspired to "reach the skies" that is, to reach divinity, to attain "spiritual freedom," and to reach immortality even though he has failed, because, according to Segal, humans can only go so far, and Euripides' tragedy wanted to show the limits of humanity, while at the same time, through the establishment of the ritual by

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[73] Segal "The Tragedy of the Hippolytus," 160
[74] Segal "The Tragedy of the Hippolytus," 161.
[75] Segal, "Solar Imagery and Tragic Heroism in Euripides' Hippolytus," 159.

Artemis, to make evident that the hero's efforts were acknowledged, valued, and celebrated by the city.

In 1987 yet another commentator, David Kovacs, tackled the play in his book *The Heroic Muse*, after cautioning us against anachronistic readings of the play, he argues (not unlike prior commentators) that both Hippolytus and Phaedra are best understood as "heroic figures who were destroyed by a powerful goddess who uses their strength against them."[76] Kovacs is right to observe that already from the prologue of the play it seems that Hippolytus is doomed. This is evident also in Hippolytus' dialogue with the servant (as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), in which he explicitly rejects Aphrodite, saying "I do not like any of the gods who are worshipped at night," only to be told by his servant in reply (someone who seems to be wiser and more humble, than his master): "my son, to honor the gods is only just." The question, though, for Kovacs (not unlike his predecessors who have focused on this play) is "whether we are intended to regard his death as deserved."[77] In the conclusion of his book chapter on the *Hippolytus*, he answers this question when he writes:

> The Hippolytus depicts the defeat of two noble characters at the hands of a malign divinity who uses their very excellences against them. The defeat, however, is not total, for they maintained their integrity against her, and in the end Artemis restores to Hippolytus and to Phaedra the good name their actions deserve. Thus when the heroes have done their heroic best, the gods ratify what they have done.[78]

[76] David Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse: Studies in the Hippolytus and Hecuba of Euripides* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 31.
[77] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 32.
[78] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 117.

Of course for Kovacs, unlike Festugiére, there is nothing in their behaviors that is at odds with 5th century Athens. They are both timeless, heroic figures in that they stand for what they have chosen. In fact, according to Kovacs, “it is only when Hippolytus is judged by the Christian demand for charity and Phaedra by the Christian prohibition of vengeance that they are at fault.”[79] In light of this heroism Kovacs understands the early dialogue between Hippolytus and the servant as a demonstration of Hippolytus heroism: “there is another pattern in which the hero rejects prudential advice from a sensible underling because he is a hero and cares for some things more than prudence.”[80]

Clearly there is a certain kind of individualism in Kovacs’s reading of the play, one that is not too different from the other scholars’ reading. This is supported by a curious distinction Kovacs makes between private and public. “Aphrodite rules over the public,” Kovacs informs us, while Hippolytus chooses the private realm of the meadow, “he has a natural affinity with an unseen world, and it is appropriate that the poet chooses a visit to Eleusis as the motive for the trip to Athens.”[81] Kovacs does not offer any more details or explanations as to why this visit is “appropriate,” unless of course we assume, as do many scholars—as we will also see in the second chapter, when I further explore how often this modern concept is relied upon to make sense of ancient material—that Eleusis represents the private, personal, and experiential aspect of the city’s public cult, an assumption that echoes many of the previously mentioned scholars’ understanding either of the Eleusinian mysteries (perhaps best exemplified in the work of Festugiére), or Hippolytus’ relation to the meadow. This common, anachronistic reading of individualism, agency, and choice is further evidenced by the widely shared modern idea

[79] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 60.
[80] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 36.
[81] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 36.

that there was individual choice in joining them (i.e., the mysteries), unlike what is portrayed as one's participation in the public cults, which was dictated by one's birth. In much the same way, then, Hippolytus has, according to Kovacs, also made a personal choice to have a closer link to the divine, evident in his speech to the servant, in which he is portrayed as choosing Artemis over Aphrodite. In Kovacs's words "Hippolytus' separation from the rest of men and from all things 'under the sun,' links him closely to the divine."[82]

Euripides purpose, according to Kovacs's interpretation, is therefore to show the tragedy of human existence and the limitation of human knowledge when it confronts such larger forces. This tragedy is also defined by the gods' interventions, whether for good or ill. "Thanks to them," Kovacs concludes, "we have the possibility of moral superiority when in defeat, of being true and loyal and merciful even in the face of a universe which does not reward such things and of gods who do not themselves possess these qualities."[83] Although Kovacs constantly refers to Euripides' purposes in writing the tragedy, and often speculates how a 5th-century Athenian audience may have perceived the play, it is curious that he draws such universal conclusions about the human condition—note the use of the personal pronoun "we" in the opening of his sentence—given also his initial caution against the uses of anachronisms in reading the play and his suggestion that "if we want to recover his [Euripides] meaning, the meaning he expected his contemporaries to understand, we must adjust our lens for this fact. Otherwise we shall draw a picture of him that looks suspiciously like our own eyeball."[84] And although, as I have already indicated, he cautions scholars to avoid anachronisms in reading

[82] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 36.
[83] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 77.
[84] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 122.

Euripides, such a position seems at odds with him also saying that "it is traditional theology of the Greeks that made and continues to make the Hippolytus such a beautiful play."[85] For despite his apparent attention to being historically specific, this notion of "traditional theology of the Greeks" that Kovacs sees driving the play, and which apparently has universal meaning (which is nothing other than the human condition which, that, as he argues, has always been tragic in relation to the divine), strikes me as a reading of the play that, to borrow his own words, looks suspiciously like our own eyeball. For despite Kovacs's cautions on anachronisms, his ideal of the "heroic," of the lone and noble individual who stands against all and takes no advice from anyone, and of which Hippolytus is but an example, is suspiciously familiar to a thoroughly modern understanding of heroism.

IV. An Alternative Reading

Even though the various scholarly interpretations of the play that I have described above may appear, in places, at odds with one another, I would argue that they nonetheless share a remarkable similarity in that they all assume that the play must be read in terms of the perils experienced by the individual self, which heroically defends its own choices against forces larger than itself. Marginality here, which equals for those scholars the notion of privacy and purity, which is further represented by the set-apart realm of Artemis meadow, play a significant role in all of these scholars' understandings of the character of Hippolytus. Even though some of them caution against anachronisms in reading the play, or even though they describe the difficulty of understanding the play in

[85] Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 60.

its proper historical context, concepts such as “individuality,” “private/public,” “religion,” or even “the human spirit”—all thoroughly modern concepts—are regularly drawn upon to read the play and thereby arrive at the supposedly universal meanings it is said to contain, meanings that, predictably perhaps, further support the individualistic human condition they read back onto it. For in this private realm Hippolytus is understood to be his own “self”: in Festugiére’s interpretation this self is linked to the idea of “personal religiosity”; in Kovacs understanding it is the ideal of the “heroic” individual; in Knox it is the idea of the individual’s choice to forgive, familiar also in Winnington-Ingram’s commentary. In all those scholars I find readings that are in support of a set of assumptions central to each scholar’s own world, such as how the modern individual ought to relate to the group—assumptions authorized by apparently being found in ancient documents as well. But what if we saw marginality and therefore privacy not in opposition to the center and the public, as those scholars have done, but rather as co-constitutive in the creation of Hippolytus’ identity? That is, if, unlike the scholars I surveyed, we approached the play with a different set of assumptions regarding the individual and its relation to the group, how could we then interpret Hippolytus behavior and the play in general?

Being in agreement with Kovacs’s concern over the need to be keenly aware of the use of anachronisms when it comes to making sense of the ancient past, I could oppose the above readings by proposing a reading of my own, arguing, for example, that ancient Greek tragedies are not about universal meanings or transcendental themes that float above the particularities of time and space. Instead, they had a very historically specific audience and were taking place within a very specific institution of the ancient

city-state, that is, in its theatre. In other words, studying a tragedy might be a way of thinking about the ideology of the city and the identity (i.e., roles and relations) of its citizens, for in her interpretation of Hippolytus, Goff writes: "both ritual and tragedy, then, can offer their society a place in which to speak of its deepest anxieties."[86] I could then further argue that tragedy and the plasticity of the past become a place for modern readers and interpreters to speak of contemporary anxieties and modern interests, and through the interpretation we manage or offer solutions to those current anxieties. Given this reading, conflicts over readings will not be settled by appeals to what the text actually says, but, instead, interpretations will differ depending on the reader/interpreter and the interests that drive those interpretations. The contest, then, is not between reader and the text but, rather between multiple interpreters and their varied contemporary interests.[87]

Instead of seeing the self as a stable, inner quality, and therefore the individual as something autonomous and demarcated from the society, as most of the scholars surveyed here have assumed, the starting point for such an alternative reading is the assumption that the individual is an integral part of the cosmos which he/she happens to inhabit. Because of this assumption, we can further suggest, that the individual is subject to the ideologies of his/hers historical period, an agent of the interpretations and histories that help to sustain those ideologies (whether ancient or modern). As we have seen in the scholars I have examined in this chapter, whether it is the religious self or the bold

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[86] Goff, *The Noose of Words*, 118

[87] During the 1990s there where scholars who tried to understand the play through feminist theories, see: Nancy S. Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic of Women* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993). She writes: "The trick for the feminist reader, then, is to problematize the assumptions, revealing potential female strength, even if it is not left standing at the play's conclusion" (169). Hanna R. Roisman, *Nothing Is as It Seems: The Tragedy of the Implicit in Euripides' Hippolytus* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

individual who stands alone against all, what their readings share and seem to authenticate is an all too modern concept of the autonomous individual self to which we today have become very accustomed. It is a reading projected not only on the title character of the play but also key to certain understandings of Euripides as an author, given that he is often considered by those same scholars as the radical among the tragedians of his time, as the bold individual who resisted social expectations, by claiming that he was against the norms of his society, and that he rejected the notion of an anthropomorphic "religion."[88]

But what if, listening to Kovacs' encouragement to "refocus our lenses," we begin to see the various interpretations of the play as ways to authorize certain behaviors and modern ideals of the individual self that is crucial to the worlds of its various contemporary readers? The genre of tragedy, then, whether it is performed in the ancient city's institution (i.e., the theatre, itself an ideological state apparatus [after all even Athenians both citizens, women, children and slaves were highly encouraged to participate in it]), or is interpreted in scholarly works, can now be understood as one site where a certain self is being constructed and then either managed or authorized. For the scholars here surveyed, it is a site where "the past" is negotiated, re-constructed, and re-produced for the contemporary purpose of legitimizing how we have come to view ourselves today.

If this was our starting point—focusing not on the play's universal themes but, rather, on our effort to find universal themes—then Euripides' character Hippolytus could be viewed not in isolation, as struggling against forces great than himself, but as part of a whole, that is part of a family, which is itself an elemental part of the city-state. For his

[88]Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, 118-119; Linforth, "Hippolytus and Humanism," 15.

behavior is the creation of his family, for as Aphrodite right from the start informs readers the one responsible for Hippolytus' upbringing was "the pure Pittheus" (his grandfather). And the fact that he is Artemis' devotee does not make him an exception, since all young men and women where then under Artemis', shall we say, supervision.[89] Therefore the life that he was living, and the identity that he perceived himself to have, can be understood as due to the society in which he was brought up. Until, that is, the moment when his reluctance to pass from his adolescent condition to adulthood is seen as a threat to the family and thus the city, for now he has failed to meet the expectations of his society as an adult—expectations that he previously met as a child. Euripides' version of Hippolytus' myth thus presents us with an anomaly: Hippolytus refuses to grow, to get married, and to be involved in the city's affairs. Even his obsession with Artemis can be understood as an anomaly since with his unwillingness to transition from adolescence to adulthood, he basically denies one of the most essential roles of Artemis that is to help adolescents make that transition after which Aphrodite takes over.

As the plot of the play unfolds we begin to see that his attempts to remain as he is—as he was as a child—not only fail, but they also cause harm to society's well being. Hippolytus is allowed a life in a meadow in which no other human could lay foot, but only up to the moment when his behavior is seen as a threat to the city's welfare. The marginality that he thinks he chose for himself has basically expired. What is more, this marginality was an allowance by the society that placed children and adolescents there until they can, as adults be accepted in the centre of the society and play an active role in

[89] For the role of Artemis as a protector of youth in ancient Greece see: Henri Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courétes* (New York, 1975); Zaidman, Louis Bruit, *Les Grecs et leurs dieux. Pratiques et représentations religieuses dans la cité a l'époque classique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), 155-157; Angelo Brelich, *Gli Eroi Greci: Un Problema Storico-Religioso* (Roma: Adelphi Edizioni, 1978), 130-138.

its affairs (as parent, as soldier, etc.). In other words, Hippolytus refuses to become a "proper" member of his society and thereby threatens its continuity and even its survival.[90] Furthermore, we cannot forget that this is the time when the two famous Delphic maxims, *Μηδέν ἄγαν* (Nothing in Excess) and *Γνῶθι σαυτὸν* (Know thyself)[91] constituted the basis of the city-state's ideology. In relation to these two maxims it seems that Hippolytus lacks both. And so, contrary to Festugiére's reading, he can be seen as neither pious nor humble. The attitude that keeps him in the meadow and off the battlefield as well as out of his wedding bed is far from having *Μηδέν ἄγαν,* that is, the quality of moderation. The story also demonstrates that, in relation to the maxim *Γνῶθι σαυτὸν,* he does not know himself either. For, to be moderate, in relation to *knowing oneself* does not (as the scholars cited above would surely assume) refer to an inner knowledge that one has of oneself but, instead, a recognition of one's position in society, the network of relations in which one is placed and thus one's obligations towards gods and mortals. Hippolytus, in this reading, is far from a pure, pious, and innocent man.

As was described earlier, at the end of the play, as Hippolytus lays dying in this father's arms, Artemis as *deus ex machina* intervenes to reconcile father and son. Once this is accomplished, Artemis establishes a ritual in honor of Hippolytus—i.e., girls would have to offer their hair to Hippolytus' memory before their marriage—this constitutes the moment of *catharsis*, the moment when his unruly behavior was managed and things are brought back to normal (back in order). Because with this ritual Hippolytus

[90] For a similar treatment of the character see: Robin Mitchell-Boyask, "Euripides' Hippolytus and the Trials of Manhood (the Ephebia?)." In *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece: Literature, Religion, Society*, ed. Mark W. Padilla (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 42-66

[91] According to *Suda* a 10th CE century encyclopedia the proverb is attributed to Chilon of Sparta (one of the ancient Greek sages) and refers to someone who overly boasts about oneself "Γνῶθι σαυτόν: ἀπόφθεγμα Χίλωνος. Τάττεται δὲ ἡ παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ὅ εἰσι κομπαζόντων."

is now forever involved with the one thing that he denied for himself, that is, service to the demos through marriage and procreation, but more importantly he also seems to have made the transition from adolescence to adulthood (something that explains why Hippolytus' shrine in Trozen is within Aphrodite's temple and not Artemis); he "returns" in a way from the "margins" to the "centre," as a proper member of the city from which he was earlier sent away.[92]

V. Conclusion

But recall that, a few pages earlier, I wrote: "I could oppose the above readings by proposing a reading of my own…"; what may be evident now is that despite my attempts to offer a better understanding of the text, one that is closer to its time and place, something curious going on in offering such an alternative reading. For how is this alternative reading any better than those of the scholars mentioned earlier in the chapter? Was this new interpretation somehow any closer to Euripides's time? Did it offer any better insights into the text? Or is "the past," that is, the actual meaning of the play, even the actual context of either its composition or initial performance, just as illusive as before. For what was different in this other reading of the play was not its closeness to an origin but, rather, a different understanding of "religion," seeing it not as something private and set apart from the society but as something to do with proper relations between mortals within the society and the way they should behave towards their gods. My proposed reading then illustrates yet a new set of interests on the past of a new reader

[92] Many interpreters, for example Winnington-Ingram, see in the establishment of the ritual an "irony" given that women, which Hippolytus was avoiding, will be the ones to honor him. But it is an "irony" insofar as we consider that there was nothing in Hippolytus behavior that could be of threat to the city.

by providing an alternative way to think about, for example, the role of individual within the group, seeing them not in binary terms, that is, as separate from the group, but as co-constitutive. While also providing a viewpoint different from those scholars who understand the play as expressing a certain type of individualism, constituted by personal choices and private realms, as opposed to external forces, and spiritual freedoms. If the proposed reading is but one among others it at least stands apart as illustrative of a specific set of interests, a particular situation of a reader that differs from those that have come before. This suggests, then, that their universal claims about the human condition ought to be read as being no less situation-specific than my own interest in the constitution of the self.

Yet, some questions concerning the past are now more pressing than before.

For instance, starting with the idea that "the past" is subject to constant interpretations—not any different to J.Z Smith's famous line: "'Map is not territory'—but maps are all we possess"[93]—some of which are in competition, all depending on situated readers and their interests (like the ones we have seen in the previous pages, myself included), we may begin to understand how those scholarly discourses construct each of their readings of the text, for what reasons, and perhaps to what effect. In other words, even though interpretations of the past may not mirror "the actual past," interpretations are all we possess and in fact interpretations, through the uses of anachronisms and classifications, may now be understood to make the past.

To elaborate on this point, consider Keith Jenkins, writing as follows in his book *Why History?*:

[93] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 309.

> Of course, the past per se is not imagined in the sense that "it" didn't actually occur. It did occur, and in exactly the way it did. But it is an imaginary with respect to the historical meanings and understandings, the significances and purposes it has been deemed to have for us, both as a whole and in its parts. For no matter how much we may have "imagined" that such meanings and significances—both general and particular—have been found by us in the past, in fact the current generation of interpreters, like previous ones, constitutes the only semantic authorities there are: it is we who do the dictating in history. Put simply, we are the source of whatever the past means for us.[94]

We do care about the past, or what we perceive to have been the actual past, because it is through our claims about the past that we can authenticate ourselves in the present. We therefore invest time and energy in its understanding and preservation. We make our own interpretations of past material, whether texts, or material artifacts, in order to learn and to make sense not only of the world we inhabit or study but ourselves as well—how we came to be, to whom are we related, to whom do we owe our attention? In other words, interpretations, like mapping of the territory, are acts of identification.

So if, following a scholar such as Jean-Francois Bayart, we try to make the shift from studying identity to studying what he terms "operational acts of identification"[95]—aiming always to study the historical, social process and not the seemingly autonomous products they produce—then perhaps interpretations are all we possess; actually, understood in this way, interpretations make and continually remake the past; even more

[94] Keith Jenkins, *Why History?: Ethics and Postmodernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 14

[95] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identiy,* 92.

so when the past is so far away from us that there is no authority present to contest our interpretations (though competing interests of different readers in the present do as much, of course—something evident in this very chapter). For no matter how much we try to "go to the sources" to have a closer reading and therefore better understanding of the so-called primary sources, we are bound to read translations and other histories or commentaries (that is, other authoritative interpretations, the so-called secondary sources) that will help us to contextualize and understand those past material. In other words, quoting once again from Jenkins,

> [T]he past as constituted by its still existing traces is always apprehended and appropriated textually through the sedimented layers of previous interpretative work(s), and through the reading habits and the categories/concepts of our previous/current methodological practices and our previous/current ideological desires.[96]

Therefore, in the previous section I turned my attention to scholarly discourses in order to trace and identify those "categories/concepts" and those "ideological desires" that have driven the interpretation of this tragedy across the twentieth century, mainly focusing on one of its characters, Hippolytus. Yet the difference then in the two approaches—those of the scholars surveyed as opposed to my alternative proposal—lies in two competing, very modern understandings of the concept of "religion." On the one hand we saw scholars who based their reading of Hippolytus in what Russell McCutcheon has called "the rhetoric of privacy" as something that is "contained in the discourse of religion, whereby zones of possible public discontent are individualized and spiritualized, and thus contained within safe zones of non-substantial and ethereal

[96] Jenkins, *Why History?*, 14.

‘experience,’ ‘faith,’ and ‘belief.’”[97] This “rhetoric of privacy” is what allowed scholars such as Knox, Festugiére, Winnington-Ingram to understand Hippolytus’ choice to honor exclusively Artemis as something natural and in some ways to be praised for but also a choice to be considered as the reason of his martyred ending. When, on the other hand “religion” is not considered as something private and separate from the social system of the polis but as something that has to do with proper social relations and behaviours between mortals and immortals, then Hippolytus (as in my reading or even the 2004 theatrical production cited at the outset of this chapter), is an example not only to be avoided but also an example of an anomalous situation to be managed.

To go back then to my initial question: “What is at stake in these two ways of reading Hippolytus and eventually the way we understand the play as a whole”? The answer, I think, lies in modernity and not in the past. It is to be found not in a closer reading of the text but in an analysis of these two competing and contesting ways of imagining the self, either as an autonomous individual (whether repressed by social norms or external forces and thus heroically making a stand against them), or as an integral part of a social group (whose actions affects the group and are in turn affected by it). In other words, for all of the above situated-readers, including myself, the distant, ancient past becomes the place where we can imagine for our own purposes, even experiment with alternative imaginings of the individual and its relation to the society. This “imaginaire” is projected anachronistically into the “ancient text” and constructs multiple historically specific meanings through our interpretations which operate as authenticating acts of contemporary identification, giving life to the interests and

[97] McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric*, 263.

ideological desires of the situated-readers—or as McCutcheon wrote, in reply to a much earlier version of my own interpretation:

> I predict that the majority of her modern, scholarly sources…will be doing precisely what Bagg did in his translation and commentary: using ancient materials to make arguments about the place of the private person in society, doing so by naturalizing (i.e., authorizing) contemporary and thus contingent positions by concluding that, if we can find them in our society's so-called classics, then they must have always been, and will always be, present in the human heart—which amounts to a scholarly version of the Christian doxological Gloria Patri: "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."[98]

[98] Russell McCutcheon, "As it Was in the Beginning…: The Modern Problem of the Ancient Self," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 39/2 (2011), 38.

CHAPTER 2

Matters of Classification: The case of "*Mysteries*"

As argued in the previous chapter, the use of anachronisms in interpreting an ancient Greek text, by modern situated readers, is an act of contemporary identification on the part of readers; that is, the meaning of a text is not something that is naturally or self-evidently there awaiting our careful scholarly descriptions but rather, meaning is subject to our disciplinary techniques and interests and is therefore created and re-created with every reading, with every act of interpretation, through the uses of such techniques as anachronism. Projecting current assumptions backward in time thus help to authenticate contemporary interests or imaginings of, in the case of the previous chapter's example, the individual self; for inasmuch as those anachronisms are seen as transcending time and space (i.e., inasmuch as we assume the modern, rational subject is a natural state of being human) they authorize not just our scholarly technical language and vocabulary but the modern situations and presumptions that drive and benefit from their use.

Identification practices, though, are not limited to uses of anachronism; instead, it is but one among several techniques used to make sense of the past in a way that benefits the present. As will be argued in this chapter, such benefits also happen through the way we classify and thereby organize and structure our understandings of the world and its different elements—including the ancient world.

I. A Matter of Classification

Nowhere are the implications of classifications more evident than in the way modern writers have tried to make sense of a phenomenon that seems to be quite widespread in the ancient Greco-Roman world. According to scholars, along with what we know as the so-called official religion of the city-states, there were also the so-called "mystery cults," or what are also called, "private" or "voluntary associations" that were dedicated to the worship of a god or goddess. These ancient institutions involved initiation of members and most of them are believed to have been open to people who would otherwise be marginalized from the dominant culture of their time; for example, women, children, foreigners, and even slaves might attain membership—that is, people with limited access to what is, in turn, characterized as the official religion of the city-state. As part of their initiation rituals those cults are understood to have demanded secrecy from their members, a word that in ancient Greek is *μυείν* (*myein* meaning, to close), from which we derive the English word mystery. Based on this term, scholars today have come to refer to those groups as "mystery cults," in distinction from the religion of the polis.

Mystery cults, in general, are considered by scholars of the ancient world to have been an optional choice (hence they are sometimes also known as "voluntary associations") along with one's expected or mandatory participation in the official religion of the city-state, and thus they were not a competing alternative, as these so-called cults had mainly to do with the promise of a better life after death and/or even an improved present life.[1] The members who were initiated into such a private, voluntary

[1] Such as we see in the text known as *The Golden Ass* written by Apuleius sometime in the late second century of this era, a Roman novel in which the main character is initiated to the cult of the goddess Isis and promised not only a better after-life but also has benefits in his present life.

cult of a god or goddess are considered by historians to have had a more intimate, personal relationship with the divinity of the cult. Among the most well-known mystery cults are those of the *Eleusinian mysteries* in Athens, but of course there were others. For example the *Samothracian mysteries* of which not much is known today about the gods with whom they once were associated. The *Bacchic mysteries* were associated with Dionysus (or later known as Bacchus), the *cult of Mithras*, and the *mysteries of Isis*, of course.[2] Even though these are today some of the better known Greco-Roman mysteries there were innumerable other groups such as thiasoi, eranoi, orgeones, etc., all with much the same characteristics—that is, they were open to marginal social groups within the wider culture (maybe with the exception of the cult of Mithras, which, as far as we know, was mainly joined by soldiers). They had initiation rituals, secrecy, and promised a better present and after-life.[3]

Although in the ancient Greek literature there are many terms used to describe those groups such as "mysteria," or "orgia," interest in them by modern scholars, who investigate their origins and attempt to explain their functionality in the ancient Greek and Roman World, has resulted in the development of a variety of terms, with each

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Apuleius, *Metamorphoses, or, The Golden Ass,* introd. and trans. Regine May (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013).

[2] Interestingly enough we have five "great mysteries" in the ancient world as we have five mainstream religions or "world religions" today (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism). That itself might be an indication on how scholars (or at least an earlier generation of scholars) project backwards in time their own classifications and distinctions not only to make sense of the ancient world but to create familiar comparisons that will help them to make sense of the world in the here and now. Later on, when discussing Hugh Bowden's understanding of the ancient mysteries (but also in Michael Cosmopoulos's introduction to his edited book) this will be even more evident.

[3] Fritz Graf, in "Lesser Mysteries—not Less Mysterious," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London and New York: Routledge, 2002): 241-262, makes the point that what he terms "lesser mysteries" in relation to those five "great mysteries" were as important in the ancient world, and critiques scholars who focus mainly on the later five.

categorization trying in its own way to group together a uniquely related set of activities in order, to classify them as alike and then explain their meaning. So we have such general terms, as already mentioned, like “mystery religions,” or “mystery cults,” as well as “religious,” “private,” and “voluntary” associations or even clubs. What is common in all of these categories is the assumption by modern scholars that this phenomenon is a demonstration of an increasing shift, both in ancient Greeks’ self-understanding as well as in modern scholarship, moving from the person conceived as a citizen (with responsibilities to a state), to a personal or private understanding of the self (as being distinct from the state). The very use of terms such as “private” or “voluntary” makes evident that for many scholars who study this material this shift is believed to have been taking place in the ancient world. For example, in his 1990 book Peter Green argues, in a chapter entitled “Foreign and Mystery Cults, Oracles, Magic,” that in the flourishing of what he terms private religious clubs “one senses a desperate reaching out after identity and community: those who can no longer be meaningfully involved with their society can at least strive for oneness with God.”[4] And elsewhere we read: “Cities and empires had become too vast and heterogeneous to give adequate psychological support to inheritors of the old local polis tradition: their society was no longer either integrated or manageable. The individual was thrown back on himself.”[5] Thus the birth of the modern individual can be seen to be contemporary to the existence of such ancient associations—or so scholars today presume.

The essentially religious dimension of these mystery cults is also prominent or at least stressed in all those modern scholarly categories, which are used to describe and

[4] Peter Green, *From Alexander to Actium: The Hellenistic Age* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 589.
[5] Green, *From Alexander to Actium,* 587.

explain those phenomena even though many scholars today would agree that (as indicated in the previous chapter) the term “religion” itself is a modern invention.[6] They would therefore urge that the term “religion,” if used at all with reference to the Ancient Greek world, should be used in a cautious and qualified way. For example Brent Nongbri in his book *Before Religion*, in which he demonstrated the modern origins of the term “religion,” writes:

> Intentionally or not, when we bring this vocabulary to ancient sources, baggage comes along with it. Religion is a modern category; it may be able to shed light on some aspects of the ancient world when applied in certain strategic ways, but we have to be honest about the category’s origins and not to pretend that it somehow organically and magically arises from our sources. If we fail to make this reflexive move, we turn our ancient sources into well-polished mirrors that show us only ourselves and our own institutions.[7]

Since, in the ancient world, what we today single out from all other social institutions as religion was not a distinct site, and therefore those items of the ancient world that we today name as religion (e.g., the systematically related beliefs about gods, rituals, myths, etc.) were then likely very much integrated within the complex and wider social world of the polis. For there was no equivalent word or concept in the ancient Greco-Roman literature that matches with the modern understanding of the word “religion”—even the Latin word *religio* from which the word “religion” originates, had a very different

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[6] See, for example, Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).
[7] Nongbri, *Before Religion,* 153.

meaning.[8]

With this critique in mind, how are we then to make sense of modern scholars who conceive of what the ancients called *μυστήρια* (mysteries) as if it was a socially and politically distinct site where a certain thing they now term "religious experience," thought to be a unique possession of the lone individual, took place? For "mystery cults" are often explained today in terms of a personal experience they allowed, nurtured, or afforded,[9] which was set apart from the public life of the ancient world. It was the site, or so it is claimed by scholars, where individuals who were alienated from the declining institutions of the state would seek to find a more intimate connection with the divine.

But before I go into more detail let us first take a closer look at one of those so-called "mystery cults," and more specifically the Eleusinian mysteries.

II. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter and the Great Mysteries

As already mentioned one of the best known "mystery cults" in the ancient Greek world were the so-called Eleusinian mysteries,[10] which were one of the most prestigious

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[8] See Russell T. McCutcheon, *Studying Religion. An Introduction* (London: Equinox, 2007); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991 [1963]), 23-58. For an alternative approach to the category religion, see Willi Braun, "Religion," in *Guide to the Study of Relgion*, ed. W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (London and New York: CASSELL, 2000), 3-18. Even the Greek word ευσέβεια ("eusebia" i.e., piety [derived from the later Latin *pietas*]) that is often used as an equivalent to the word religion had to do mostly with proper relations and behaviors both between and among humans and gods, that is to know your place and therefore how to behave accordingly in various situations (see McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion*, 17-18).

[9] As we saw in chapter 1, p. 55, 65.

[10] For an overview on the festivities and rituals involved in the Eleusinian mysteries see: Paul François Foucart, *Les Mystèries d' Éleusis* (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1914; repr. New York: Arno Press. 1975); Thomas Taylor, *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, 3rd ed. (San Diego: Wizards Bookshelf, 1980); George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 26-48; Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 73-76; Luther H. Martin, *Hellenistic*

festivals of the city of Athens. They were held once a year both at the Eleusinium in Athens and at the Sanctuary of Demeter in Eleusis, a city near Athens—which Athens seized control of sometime in the 6th century BCE.[11] The mysteries of Eleusis were connected with the goddess of agriculture Demeter and her daughter Persephone, also known as *Kore*. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*[12]—written between the 7th and 6th century BCE—Persephone was abducted by the god of the underworld, Hades. Demeter, upset at the loss of her daughter, caused a terrible draught and wandered in search for her. During this search, she came to the palace of Celeus, King of Eleusis, asking for shelter and taught one of the kings, Triptolemos, the secrets of agriculture and asked that a sanctuary be built in her honour. According to the Homeric Hymn, we read:

> [270] But now, let all the people (πᾶς δῆμος) build me a great temple and an altar below it and beneath the city and its sheer wall upon a rising

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Religions an Introduction (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 60-72; On the Greek mysteries in general see: Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1987); Michael B. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). For a detailed account and commentary on the "First Fruit decree," a text that involves the offering of ἀπαρχὴ (the first portion of a harvest) to the Eleusinian goddesses, see Maureen B. Cavanough, *Eleusis and Athens: Documents in Finance, Religion and Politics in the Fifth Century B.C.* (Atlanta, Georgia: The American Philological Association, 1996). It is important though to note that most of the information we have of the mysteries in general and the Eleusinian mysteries in particular comes from early Christian apologists, most notably Clement of Alexandria (who was the first to speak of "the great" and the "lesser" mysteries in his *Stromata* 5.70.7-71.1), Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian, Asterios; see Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 287-316. See also Phillip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson, ed., *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[11] Although there is a debate whether Eleusis was ever an independent city, see Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Festival and Mysteries: Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 26.

[12] For a commentary on the hymn, see N. J. Richardson (ed.), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Helene P. Foley (ed.), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

> hillock above Callichorus. And I myself will teach my rites (*ὄργια*[13]), that hereafter you may reverently perform them and so win the favour of my heart/mind (νόον).[14]

Eventually Zeus intervened and allowed Persephone to spend a few months each year with her mother and a few months with Hades. And thus we have the foundational story of the Eleusinian mysteries.

We know from various sources that the festivities in honour of Demeter and her daughter, were known at the time as τα μυστήρια (the Mysteries),[15] lasted for several days. Initially heralds were sent to Greek-speaking cities to announce a truce so that people could safely travel to Athens to participate in the festival, whether as initiates or spectators.[16] The festivities started with a procession from the sanctuary of Eleusis to the Athenian sanctuary, the city's *Eleusinion* (a route known as the *ἱερὰ ὁδός*, i.e., the sacred way). The procession involved the transportation of the *ἱερὰ* ("sacred objects").[17] In Athens a series of preparations also took place. These were supervised by the Basileus

[13] It is interesting to note the ease with which the Greek "orgia" is being translated in various ways here, by means of subsequently developed Latin terms adopted into English, such as "sacred rites," "religious rites," etc. The connection, or lack of, between the ancient word and the modern translations and interpretations is relevant to the thesis being argued in this chapter.

[14] ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε μοι νηόν τε μέγαν καὶ βωμὸν ὑπ᾽ αὐτῷ
τευχόντων πᾶς δῆμος ὑπαὶ πόλιν αἰπύ τε τεῖχος
Καλλιχόρου καθύπερθεν ἐπὶ προὔχοντι κολωνῷ.
ὄργια δ᾽αὐτὴ ἐγὼν ὑποθήσομαι, ὡς ἂν ἔπειτα
εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες ἐμὸν νόον ἱλάσκοισθε. (270-24)
Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 16-17.

[15] There was also a preliminary initiation that took place in the so-called "Lesser Mysteries." Their role and their relation to the so-called "Great mysteries" will be furthered investigated below.

[16] Kevin Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 50-78.

[17] Noel D. Robertson, "The Two Processions to Eleusis and the Program of the Mysteries," *American Journal of Philology* 119, 4 (1998), 547-75.

(the King Archon), who was appointed by the city,[18] and these preparations included such requirements as offerings and sacrifices made by the city's various officials and those who wished to be initiated. By the time of Pisistratus (6th century BCE) everyone was allowed to be an initiate including women, children and even slaves (so long as they spoke Greek and had not committed a murder). Next, two processions went back from Athens to Eleusis, one with the priests carrying back to the sanctuary the sacred objects (*ta hiera*) and the other consisting of those who wished to gain the status of *mystes* and the *epoptes* (*mystes* was the title of those who were initiated for the first time and *epoptes* referred to those who underwent the initiation the year before[19]). When the festivities ended ὁ βασιλεὺς (the Archon King), who had supervised the entire festival, returned to the Eleusinion in Athens to give a report.[20] What sort of rituals took place inside the sanctuary at Eleusis in order for someone to be a mystes is not known, but scholars often refer that they involved three elements: *ta dromena* (things done), *ta deiknemena* (things shown) and *ta legomena* (things said). For example, Hugh Bowden writes:

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[18] Andocides (J.K. Maidment [ed. and translator], *Minor Attic Orators in two volumes 1, Antiphon, Andocides* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968]), *On the Mysteries*, writes: "It was on our return to Eleusis, after the information had already lodged against me. The Basileus (ὁ βασιλεὺς) appeared before the Prytaneus to give the usual (ὥσπερ ἔθος ἐστίν) report on all that had occurred during the performance (κατὰ τὴν τελετήν). The Prytanes said that they would bring him before the Council, and told him to give Cephisus and myself notice to attend at the Eleusinium, as it was there that the Council was to sit in comformity with a law of Solon's which lays down that a sitting shall be held in the Eleusinium on the day after the Mysteries (κατὰ τὸν Σόλωνος νόμον, ὅς κελεύει τῇ ὑστεραίᾳ τῶν μυστηρίων ἕδρα ποιεῖν ἐν τῷ ῞Ελευσινίῳ)" (111). Also on the role of the Basileus and his Paredroi see: Paul François Foucart, *Les Mystèries d' Éleusis* (New York: Arno Press, 1914; repr., 1975), 231-46. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 229, 250-251, 280.

[19] Clinton, *Stages of Initiation*, 51.

[20] Michael Edwards, ed. *Greek Orators IV: Andocides* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1995), 11. Also, Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 280. See also, Herbert W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 55-72. See also above n.18.

> What precisely took place in the sanctuary has been a matter of fascination from the time of the Mysteries onwards. Various comments in the writings of ancient authors may indicate something of what went on. We have reference to *ta dromena, ta deiknumena and ta legomena,* 'things done, things shown and things said' as making up the Mysteries.[21]

Although it is now very common to refer to the various elements of the Eleusinian rites with these three terms, the distinction is fairly modern. Luther Martin in his book *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction*, rightly observes that:

> These three categories, however, like the modern categories of myth, ritual, and symbol, are merely academic conventions that provide a convenient if nontechnical framework for discussion of the Mysteries.[22]

The first to make this distinction and create this ancient Greek vocabulary was Foucart. The ancient sources that both Foucart and who is later followed by Mylonas[23] cite (who both Martin and Bowden actually reference) in their respective books are simply people claiming that they have seen, heard and done things during the festivals, something that it is not all that surprising, as any kind of festival would involve these processes. What should be stressed here though as very interesting is Foucart's usage of Ancient Greek instead of French to name the various elements of the Eleusinian rites, who by creating this modern technical ancient Greek vocabulary not only naturalizes the concepts as self-evidently existing in the past, but he also privileges the ancient Greek language as being

[21] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World*, 38.
[22] Martin, *Hellenistic Religions an Introduction*, 61.
[23] Foucart, *Les Mystèries d' Éleusis*, 418-425; Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 261-274.

more authentic to express what was going on in the mysteries; a curious language switch that further authorizes his own writing.

III. Switching Between Codes

To explore the practical implications of such issues of language usage as well as issues of self-beneficial classification, let me offer a modern example in classification, from a different time and a different part of the world.

In April of 2014 I participated in a workshop organized by Professor Monica Miller at the Program of Africana Studies at the Lehigh University, in Pennsylvania, US. The workshop was organized around the concept of "code-switching" which, as described by the official site of the workshop, "refers to the actions of a particular person and/or group that is assumed to break from their own 'natural' practices to perform codes 'not their own' for the purposes of fitting in, acquiring capital, and accessing spaces not easily afforded."[24] Although the term is often used in contemporary US scholarship to signify the sometimes overlooked social work carried out by African American speakers, who may move between what could be characterized as variants of the English language based on their situation and with whom they are interacting.[25] One of the conference's goals was to investigate if the term "code-switching" had utility for investigating how

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[24] aas.cas2.lehigh.edu/content/code-switching-workshop (accessed on March 15, 2015). This workshop also resulted in the following publication: Monica Miller and Merinda Simmons, eds, *Codes of Conduct: Code Switching and the Everyday Performance of Identity* (Forthcoming with Equinox Publishers, UK).

[25] See for example: Nathaniel Norment (ed.), *Readings in African American Language: Aspects, Features, and Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); also, Edward Warner, *A Black Classroom Culture: Student Code-Switching in an Inner City Secondary School* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2007); Charles DeBose, "Codeswitching: Black English and Standard English in the African-American Linguistic Repertoire," in *Codeswitching*, ed. C.M. Eastman (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1992), 157-168.

members of other groups—perhaps members of all groups—use adaptations of language to navigate place and identity in continually changing (i.e., historical) circumstances.

With that goal of workshop in mind, consider the following incident. Although this may sound odd, I should preface this by noting that as a native Greek speaker, the words in English that can be most troublesome are those that are derived from Greek words—especially evident when I find myself at academic conferences or lectures in North America that involve, in some way or another, the use of Ancient Greek terminology. For I admit that I cannot resist the temptation of correction, for example, whenever I hear a native English speaker say *Thucydides* (pronounced: Thu-si-di-dees) instead of *Θουκυδίδης* (pronounced: Thu-ky-theē̄-thees) or when someone tells me that the first letter of my own name, *Βαΐα*, is a, as English speakers say it, "Beta" and not, as we, in Greece say our own alphabet, "Veeta." But I once found myself in the curious position where a new context made a familiar text if not unrecognizable then certainly irrelevant.

It was 2009 and I was attending the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) annual conference that was held that year in New Orleans. One day, after attending various panels and while we were walking through the French Quarter on our way to the hotel from the convention centre, all amidst discussions on the study of religion, a friend suddenly looked up and pointed at a store's sign and invited me to read it. Without much ado I read it out loud "hoi polloi" (pronounced: hoy po-loy) and, as it made no sense to me whatsoever, I asked what it meant. But before I even received an answer back, and knowing that my friend's pointing was likely for a good reason, I looked again at the sign and suddenly said, "Oh wait! That is Greek!?!" and laughed—I suppose out of

embarrassment for not being able to "see" the store's sign *as* Greek. What's even more interesting is that, upon first seeing it, I didn't even read it as I "should" have, i.e., as we would in Greece, that is, "οι πολλοί" ("ee polleē")—an ancient term also commonly used in English today to signify the masses or the common people.

But the question that concerns me here is why did I laugh or, better phrased, why I did feel embarrassed? To answer this, I think, we need to recognize that we have well been taught that the meanings of signs (whether they are texts, monuments, or hanging outside stores) are universal, are in a direct correspondence to that which signifies them, and therefore transcend time and space. Despite this commonsense approach to signification, as this little example from the New Orleans demonstrates, the familiar can very easily become strange, such as when the context (i.e., in the English writing and not written in the Greek, alphabet or appearing on a store's sign in what was, for me, a new US city, all suggesting to me that, as a reader, I follow the English rules of pronunciation) made it unexpected and undecipherable. I could not "see" the sign as Greek even though I always "see" the Greek origins of many English words.

Based on this incident I concluded that, despite thinking that I approached signification as an always historical process I was perhaps no better than Mr. Portokalos, a main character in the well-known movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" (2002), who prides himself on easily determining the Greek root of *any* word. In one scene, while driving with his twelve year old daughter and two of her young friends, he confidently tells them how *every* word comes from Greek; for example, he says "arachnophobia" (αραχνοφοβία) comes from the Greek word arachni (αράχνη which means spider) and the Greek word phobia (φοβία [phovia] which means fear) and then he challenges the girls to

give him a word, any word, and he will show them how it is rooted in Greek. At this point his daughter's friend silly asks: "How about Kimono?" He thinks for a bit:

> Kimono, kimono…, aha of course. Kimono comes from the Greek word *Chimonas* (Χειμώνας), which means winter, and what do you wear in the winter? A robe; so, there you have it.

Now, of course, the reason I open this chapter with this brief anecdote,[26] is because, when discussions on how scholars use the term code switching started (initially involving Russell McCutcheon, Monica Miller and Merinda Simmons),[27] I was immediately reminded of my own earlier post on that incident in New Orleans, and so I started wondering whether it constituted (what we might call a failed[28] attempt at) code switching. When reading the sign did I or I did not "correctly" make the switch—that is, did I correctly pronounce "hoi polloi," as an English speaker would, having already switched to English from the rules of my own native Greek? Or, instead, had I failed to switch first from Greek to English and then back to Greek again—i.e., seeing Greek as the master or referent code—by not reading it as "οι πολλοί"? But, according to the literature I began reading in preparation for the Lehigh conference, it is more than likely that some scholars would argue that this is *not* a case of a failed attempt at code switching but something else entirely, i.e., perhaps simply an inevitable problem of what is termed

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[26] This opening anecdote is based on a blog post: "Hoi Polloi" (http://edge.ua.edu/vaia-touna/hoi-polloi/ [accessed on March 29, 2015]). The blog features the work of Culture on the Edge, a seven member international scholarly working group devoted to a more dynamic understanding of identity formation. The collaboration also entails periodic working meetings and conferences (such as the Lehigh conference on code switching), and two book series with Equinox Publishers, UK.

[27] See the blog post at *Culture on the Edge*'s site: "Behind the Scenes: A Conversation on 'Code Switching'" (http://edge.ua.edu/russell-mccutcheon/a-conversation-on-code-switching/ [accessed on March 29, 2015]).

[28] By "failed attempt" I mean only because I happen to be Greek and I could (or perhaps should?) therefore have judged myself as not successfully making the switch.

bilingualism.

So the question is what constitutes a code and what constitutes a switch? As noted by the scholar of religion Jonathan Z. Smith: "Difference is rarely something simply to be noted; it is, most often, something in which one has a stake."[29] In this light, then, which differences strike us being different enough and thus prompting us to name something *as* a code from which one can switch *or* merely a case of bilingualism and why? When do we speak of different "languages" or instead, simply of different "dialects" or just "slang" of the same language?[30] An important point to entertain when beginning an examination of these judgments of differences and gaps is that we are all talking and enacting multiple codes all of the time—from being concerned with whether to employ a first person pronoun anecdote in a piece of academic writing to how one dresses or even greets a

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[29] Jonathan Z. Smith, "What Difference a Difference Makes," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 252.

[30] It is important to define those terms. According to the OED (Oxford English Dictionary): *Language* is "[t]he system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure"; *Dialect* is "[a] form or variety of a language which is peculiar to a specific region, *esp.* one which differs from the standard or literary form of the language in respect of vocabulary, pronunciation, idiom, etc.; (as a mass noun) provincial or rustic speech. Also more generally: a particular language considered in terms of its relationship with the family of languages to which it belongs"; *Slang* is "[t]he special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character; language of a low and vulgar type." These definitions and classifications of the various systems of communication are not to be understood as self-evidently describing those systems of communications but instead should be understood as ways of organizing and managing those forms of communications. Furthermore it may be obvious that there is not only an underlying system of rank in the classification of those various systems of communications but also depending on which system of communication we classify as "language" we immediately naturalize that system and we place it on a higher rank against which all other systems will be judged, authorizing therefore a "language" as natural, authentic, or even original. And while of course *Bilingualism* is the "[a]bility to speak two languages; the habitual use of two languages colloquially," the term bilingualism would, therefore, not be used to refer to people moving between dialects or a dialect and the so-called standard language, as dialects are considered to be subtypes of the same system of communication, such a move is more than likely to be seen as a case of code-switching; even though code-switching maybe used to refer to bilinguals as well—though as switching between a dominant language and a marginal or foreign one.

friend versus a social superior. So why call just some of these signifying moves “a code switch”? There are in Greece, as I am sure in other parts of the world as well, various dialects, but would someone moving between them—say, arriving in the big city from a small village, or addressing their parents rather than their teenage friends—be considered “a code switcher”? Was I a code switcher in New Orleans or was I just bilingual? What’s more, am I not, as the author of this very text, occupying two different spaces, that of the person who found herself not being able to “see” the Greek sign and also the scholarly analyst trying to offer an explanation concerning that past incident, moving right now, right in front of readers, between these two distinct systems—or should I say, two codes? For example, it is evident that I have written some words in the Greek alphabet and some in the English, to try to ensure that readers keep in mind the differences between these two systems and thus imagine that what seems to be one word can be said and thus signify two very different things. Or, as seems to be the case in some of the literature on code switching,[31] do we reserve this designation—the very term code switch—for just some of the codes and some of the switches that only some of us regularly move between?

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[31] Peter Auer, *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Penelope Gardner-Choros, *Code-Switching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Monica Heller (ed.), *Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988); Ludmila Isurin, Donald Winford, Kees de Bot (eds.), *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Code-Switching* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Bejamins Publishing, 2009); Pieter Muysken, *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code Mixing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); on the implications of naming a system of communication as “dialect” or “language” see: Geoffrey K. Pullum, "African American Vernacular English Is Not Standard English with Mistakes," in *The Workings of Language*, ed. Rebecca S. Wheeler (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 39-58; on the rise of codeswitching as a research topic see Carol Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa* (Oxford: Claredon, 1993), 45-74; Lesley Milroy, Pieter Muysken (eds), *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

If, as entertained in the previous chapter, we begin from the position that meaning is in the eye of the beholder, the agent working within structures (i.e., readers using a grammar, syntax, vocabulary that they were taught), then to answer such questions we need not look more closely at the sign in the French Quarter but, instead, at the ones making distinctions and using taxonomies to bring order to their world, for this is the situation in which one makes the world meaningful according to, in my case as sign reader, her own positionality. Thus, not just our pronunciations of store signs but even our classifications of something *as* "code-switching" are contingent, tactical, and relative to the world that we happen to inhabit at a specific time and place. Much like the rules and categories that a social actor follows and uses in making their world—which are, as the University of Chicago scholar J. Z. Smith, famously said of the category "religion," of their own making,[32]—categories that scholars employ to read the signs that they regularly read, such as an ancient text, can also be evidence of social actors making sense of their own worlds by finding relevance elsewhere for distinctions with which they are already intimately familiar.

IV. Mystery Cults and Religious Experience

As suggested earlier, modern scholars explain the appearance and then popularity of "mysteria"—that is, rituals that involved the initiation of the members, in general, and the Eleusinian mysteries, in particular—under the rubric of "experience." For example, Martin P. Nilsson in his book *Greek Folk Religion,* suggested that "participation in the

[32] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi. It should be noted that I take seriously the plural pronoun here, for these are not inventions of the lone individual but, instead collective constructs we are taught and which we revise but doing so within socially expected parameters.

mystery rites was still a religious experience, which had the power of conferring happiness on man and of helping him through life. For it was an experience that was rooted in the deepest feelings of man and spoke to his heart, although its language changed with the changing ages." [33] Although Nilsson's once classic approach may today be considered by some to be outdated (as his book was initially published in 1940 under the title *Greek Popular Religion*), it is nevertheless characteristic of a still present school of thought for which the category "experience" refers to some "internal state of dispositions" that are understood to be central to, even the essence of, "religion."[34] But as will become evident in the following pages the theme of the individual quest for personal salvation as well as the transforming "experience" that initiates supposedly felt deeply, is still very prominent among many scholars who are engaged in studying ancient sources, and who are thereby trying to make sense of signs from the Hellenistic world.

For instance, consider that in his very influential book, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, Walter Burkert examines five mystery cults: the mysteries of Eleusis, the Dionysiac or Bacchic mysteries, the mysteries of Meter, as well as those of Isis and also Mithras. Burkert is critical of the term "mystery religions" inasmuch as he argues that it is inadequate to name the phenomenon that unites these practices[35] and he opts, instead, for the general term "mystery cults" under which term he also classifies thiasos, orgeon,

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[33] Martin P. Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion* (New York: Harper, 1961), 64.
[34] Craig Martin and Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *Religious Experience. A Reader* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2012), 2; Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms in Religious Studies,* ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94-116; Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California 2005); Timothy Fitzgerald, "Experience," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 125-39.
[35] Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 3-4.

koinon, etc. seeing all as occupying a common subdivision of the mysteries that had to do with "identities."[36] Despite the diversity that Burkert sees among these mysteries, and even though he admits that those mysteries are separated from each other both in time and space,[37] he still considers them to be representations of a continuous tradition. It seems that even for him the unifying factor that links them together is the "extraordinary experience" that the initiates underwent during their participation in those institutions. For, in the introduction of his book Burkert concludes: "Mysteries were initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal, and secret character that aimed at *a change of mind through experience of the sacred*" (emphasis added).[38] As in the case of many scholars who opt for such terminology, this "experience of the sacred," however, is never really explained or contextualized. Rather, it is assumed to be something that was deeply felt by the individual participants.

The lack of attention to context in such scholarly studies of the ancient world (akin to failing to entertain the larger social and linguistic rules and conventions that enabled me to not see that New Orleans store sign *as* Greek) is particularly relevant if we consider that the Eleusinian mysteries were one of the major public festivals of Athens with, as mention earlier in the chapter, the *basileus*—who was appointed to this position by the city itself—overseeing it. Yet for scholars this obvious social and political role and context of the festival does not seem to imply anything of importance about the role and function of the mysteries in the public life of the city. Instead, despite what I would characterize as their obvious political context, they are uniformly seen by modern scholars as somehow operating outside of the politics of the polis. They are essentially, in

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[36] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 30-53.
[37] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 4.
[38] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults,* 11.

Burkert's words, "a special form of worship in the larger context of religious practices."[39] As already demonstrated, this so-called special form of worship has to do with a certain kind of experience, one that cannot be described or understood (hence, the notion of being initiated into a mystery). Based on a passage from Proclus (who was head of the Academy in the 5th-century CE), and who talks about the Eleusinian mysteries, Burkert writes "what he [Proclus] writes about mysteries should be taken seriously as containing authentic tradition"[40] concluding that: "Being ignorant of the ritual and unable to reproduce it, we cannot recreate the experience but we may acknowledge that it was there."[41] Elsewhere Burkert writes: "the unsettling experience has the effect of shaking the foundations of personality and making it ready to accept new identities."[42] Yet we never learn what these new identities were that the initiates were apparently so ready to accept. I think that without a kind of modern individualism in place (that we have seen earlier in Green and who explicitly argues for it), and without a thoroughly modern understanding of religion, or even its derivate religious, as a set-apart, apolitical, and experiential human universal—the two key ingredients for modern writers to confidently assert that "we may acknowledge that it [i.e., an experience] was there"—scholars such as Nilsson and Burkert would not be able to (i) collect such historically and socially divergent ancient institutions together, and then (ii) make sense of them.

Take, as another example, an even newer book, edited by Michael Cosmopoulos in 2002 on the topic of Greek mystery cults. In the preface Cosmopoulos writes:

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[39] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 10.
[40] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 114.
[41] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 114.
[42] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 102.

> As these cults had to do with the individual's inner self, privacy was necessary and was secured by an initiation ceremony, a personal ritual that brought the individual to a new spiritual level, a higher degree of awareness in relation to the gods. Once initiated, the individual was entitled to share the eternal truth, to catch a glimpse of the eternal reality.[43]

Apart from reproducing the same assumptions that we have seen in Nilsson and Burkert, what makes this book even more interesting is Cosmopoulos's presumption that a study of those ancient Greek "private mystery cults" will provide lessons for modern readers whose "lives appear emptier" because they have lost their spirituality. In part, his volume's aim is to urge "us" (i.e., his modern readers) to "redefine our priorities to focus on our humanity, rather than our technology," because if we do not "we may never regain a deep connection with ourselves and with each other."[44] Although such an explicitly therapeutic thesis is certainly not explicitly argued by either Nilsson or Burkert, one should not be distracted by this difference and thereby fail to see that what unites such contemporary commentators is their assumption that the key to unlocking the meaning and purpose of the ancient material is our modern sense of the individual as an isolated, experiential centre that exists separate from, and thus being potentially alienated by, that collection of institutions we call the state. This is an assumption even more clearly articulated by Hugh Bowden in his recent book, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World*. He

[43] Cosmopoulos, ed., *Greek Mysteries*, xii.
[44] Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries*, xiii.

writes: "[t]his book is about these ecstatic experiences—where and when they took place, what they involved, and what they meant to those who underwent them."[45]

It is worth examining Bowden's work in more detail; however, before we look at how he describes the Eleusinian mysteries it is interesting to see how Bowden understands "religion." For him, religion in the ancient world was very different from what we today understand it to be. The main difference, as he portrays it, is that there were no institutions or sacred texts in the ancient world, just *beliefs* about gods and *rituals* to which people in the ancient world would respond *emotionally.* As he writes:

> The emotional power of these beliefs and rituals is evident from the fact that even in [early] Christian societies, in particular in the Mediterranean world, there are widespread local cult practices, including offerings at shrines, the wearing of amulets, and rituals for warding off the evil eye, which carry on sometimes with, but often without, the support of the Church hierarchies. These practices are sometimes referred to as folk religion, or less politely as superstition, but they have proved impossible to suppress: their durability is evidence of the strong emotional rather than intellectual drive behind them.[46]

This distinction between the emotional versus the intellectual, mirrored in his distinction between folk and Church hierarchy, is further supported in Bowden's book by another binary common to all of the scholars so far surveyed, that of public and private. In looking specifically at the Eleusinian mysteries, he concludes:

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[45] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World*, 6.
[46] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World,* 8.

> At one level the Eleusinian Mysteries were an occasion on which the city of Athens honoured the goddesses who guaranteed the harvests and the grain that the city needed in order to survive: sending out heralds to advertise the graciousness of the goddesses to the other Greek cities and putting on sacrifices and processions in their names. But in the middle of these *public festivities* was a sequence of events in which the *personal experience of individuals* was central. Behind the walls of the sanctuary at Eleusis they met the goddess and experienced her grace and power at first hand. [47] (Emphasis added)

It is evident from the above that the Eleusinian mysteries are therefore thought to have had two aspects one that was public, and likely had to do with what Bowden identifies as the elite, intellectual aspect, and the other that was personal and which had to do with the emotional responses of the common people participating in the mysteries.[48] Further, this personal non-rational (i.e., emotive) experience, according to Bowden, is now difficult to explain not only because we lack information but because even the people who participated in those rituals themselves would not have been able to explain their own experience. The reason Bowden offers is that because, unlike today, the ancient world's lack of institutions and sacred texts meant that people were incapable of any explanation even about the gods themselves. Therefore, if we have ignorance today of what the mysteries where all about it is because of the

[47] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World,* 48.
[48] This is a distinction that we saw previously in the chapter, but also in the first chapter, where it was quite prominent among an earlier generation of scholars studying Hippolytus, such as Nilsson, Festugiere, etc. but which is still prominent in the field today.

> ignorance of the Greeks themselves about the gods they were worshiping. And since they did not know much about whom they were worshipping, and could not therefore tell stories about them, it is difficult to see how they could have developed theological explanations for their mysteries. Rather, as with Eleusis, we should consider that *it was the experience of being initiated itself* that was fundamental to these cults"[49] (Emphasis added).

Throughout his book this deeply felt "experience" hovers over the mysteries not so much as an explanation but, I would argue, as an underlying presumption that allows the historian's writing about something which, as everyone readily acknowledges, we know very little if anything at all. As the historian, Joan Wallach Scott, has pointed out, references by historians to experience as a casual source for actions functions strategically for such writers since "[i]t operates within an ideological construction that not only makes individuals the starting point of knowledge, but also naturalizes categories such as man, woman, black, white, heterosexual, and homosexual by treating them as given characteristics of individuals."[50] In our case what ends up being naturalized—i.e., anachronistically portrayed as universal and ahistorical—is the isolated, apolitical "religious self," one that has a personal, intimate relationship with "the sacred," that is obviously set-apart and thus exists prior to and outside of social institutions, as well as the category "mystery cults," all of which is evident in readings like Bowden's that such institutions became the space where the experience of the sacred could be felt.

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[49] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World,* 67.
[50] Joan Wallace Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 782.

For example, in the last chapter of his book, Bowden compares mysteries cults to modern Appalachian snake-handling churches in the US southeast. The chapter, and thus the book, therefore ends with the self-report of one snake-handling participant, who describes his deeply felt experience thus:

> I turned to face the congregation and lifted the rattlesnake up toward the light. It was moving like it wanted to get up even higher, to climb out of that church and into the air. And it was exactly as the handlers had told me. I felt no fear. The snake seemed an extension of myself. And suddenly there seemed to be nothing in the room but me and the snake. Everything else had disappeared. Carl, the congregation, Jim—all gone, all faded to white. And I could hear the earsplitting music. The air was silent and still, and filled with that strong, even light. And I realized that I, too, was fading into white. I was losing myself by degrees, like the incredible shrinking man. The snake would be the last to go, and all I could see was the way the scales shimmered one last time in the light, and the way the head moved from side to side, searching for a way out. I knew then why the handlers took up serpents. There is power in the act of disappearing; there is victory in the loss of self. It must be close to our conception of paradise, and it's like before you're born or after your die.[51]

Seeing no difficulty to the historical and thus social gap between the two behaviours that he compares, this report is portrayed by Bowden as self-evidently—i.e., it does not require further explanation—the same as what the ancient "experiences" must have felt

[51] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World,* 221.

and how they must have self-understood these supposed experiences. He writes: "[The snake handler's] account can stand at the end of this book to show that what the fictional Lucius experienced when he was initiated into the cult of Isis can still be felt today."[52] The undefined experience, or better, what Robert Sharf has characterized as an empty signifier that "experience" stands for in his work, allows Bowden to conclude that it uniformly persists through time.[53] Even though the rituals have changed and one has to be a member of a specific time and community to participate in the mysteries as opposed to joining in on Appalachian snake-handling, the core of those rituals, so widely separated in space and time, is apparently this deeply felt experience, one that seems to transcend time and space. It is an experience, though, that is framed and whose study is made possible, by the very manner in which scholars such as Bowden go about their comparative work, labors that include not only assumptions about the universal individual but also their acts of selecting discrete elements from the historical record and then structuring their relations with contemporary items that are equally part of the scholar's choosing, resulting now in an "obvious" similarity between ancient "mystery cults" and these Appalachian snake-handling "churches." This approach is not any different from Nilsson's understanding who writes: "For it was an experience that was rooted in the deepest feelings of man and spoke to his heart, although its language changed with the changing ages."[54]

This sort of approach, which I have demonstrated to be present in all of the above literature, one that proposes the existence of an indescribable yet transcendental experience that is shared by all participants and which scholars then use to explain the

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[52] Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World,* 221.
[53] Sharf, "Experience," 94-116.
[54] Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion,* 64.

"mysteries," is the result of a certain kind of classification which tries to identify their *sine qua non*, that is, a way of categorizing and thereby understanding them without which the so-called mysteries would not have been understood as set apart from other social realities of their time and therefore without which they could not be understood as the expression of a certain type of universal religiosity. Furthermore, as my analysis suggests, "experience" and "personal religiosity" (as we have seen in the previous chapter as well) are not historical emblems of bygone debates but, instead, anachronisms of use to modern scholars in naturalizing key elements of their own social world.[55]

To press this case further, consider two recent conferences where these categorizations, and thus understandings are present and thought to represent groundbreaking research in the study of the ancient world. Both conferences are sponsored by *The Society of Ancient Mediterranean Religion* (SAMR); the first was entitled, "Practice and Personal Experience in Ancient Religion," which took place in January of 2015 in New Orleans. According to its call for papers the conference was described as follows:

> In recent years, the religious experience of individuals in the ancient world, which for many years had taken a back seat to studies emphasizing state religion, has come to the fore. Instead of either despairing or entirely disregarding questions on issues such as subjective experience or personal

[55] For example Robert Parker a professor of Ancient History at the University of Oxford, in his recent book *On Greek Religion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), dedicates two chapters on the religious experience of the ancient cults and whose titles are indicative of the issue: Chapter 6 is entitled "The Experience of Festivals" and Chapter 7 is entitled "The Varieties of Greek Religious Experience."

> religiosity, scholars have begun to explore the world of individuals' lived experiences and practices.[56]

Although his work in the early to mid-20th century seems, on first glance, to be dated, what has changed from the time of Festugiére? Of course the vocabulary is obviously different, that is, what was once known as "personal religiosity" is now understood as the "individuals' lived experiences," yet despite the name change the classification is doing the same work of projecting modern conceptions backward in an attempt to make sense of an alien historical and social world—one that ends up looking suspiciously like our own.

The second conference is to be held in August of 2015, in conjunction with the World Congress of the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR) in Erfurt Germany. The theme of this SAMR meeting is "Religions on the Ground"; on the conference site they write:

> A major development in the study of ancient religion over the past few decades has been the growing emphasis on the social, material, and experiential realities of non-elites. This development has affected both the sorts of questions scholars are asking, and the sorts of data on which they draw to formulate their answers. Rather than focusing on the philosophical or theological concerns of elite texts, scholars have sought to bring a wider body of evidence to bear on understanding and interpreting the lived experience of religion.[57]

[56] http://samreligions.org/2013/10/15/cfp-practice-and-personal-experience-in-ancient-religion/ [accessed on March 29, 2015].
[57] http://samreligions.org/2015/02/02/religion-on-the-ground/ [accessed on March 29, 2015].

Despite portraying this shift to examining (or should we say recovering?) the experiential world of so-called common or non-elite ancient people as "a major development" in the study of religion, as it has been evident throughout this chapter this approach has been around for quite a while.[58] For, just as with "personal religiosity" and "ecstatic experiences" said to have taken place in so-called voluntary associations, here too the idea of "lived experience" and of the "experiential realities of non-elites" are doing significant work; for instead of complicating or problematizing the category "religion" and our contemporary assumptions for how our own social world works those ideas are props of naturalizing a very modern concept and understanding that is understood to have been in the ancient world all along and from which it then came down to us.

V. Why Distinction and Classification Matters

What may be most interesting about the so called "mystery cults," however, is the very term that is used by scholars to distinguish them, as a related group, from the so-called state or official religion and therefore the device that allows some today to talk about them as constituting a distinct phenomenon—an approach that, when examined more carefully proves problematic inasmuch as these institutions can be argued to be not all that distinct or separate from much of the rest of social life in ancient Greece.

Paul Foucart (1836-1926) was among the first to talk about "religious associations" in his book *Des associations religieuses chez les Grecs* (1873); there he understands such groups as the thiasoi, eranoi, and orgeones as operating on the margins of the city-states, of being, oriental and ecstatic in their origins, and therefore different from that of the official religion of the city-state (i.e., "Le culte de l'Etat"). He writes:

[58] See previously mentioned on page 12, Nilsson's *Greek Folk Religion*.

"their legends, their symbols, their ceremonies were the same as in the oriental religions; also, even when their cult was tolerated in Greece, these barbaric divinities always remained outside of the city and the public religion."[59] He concludes that it was the orgiastic nature of those groups, something characteristic of the "oriental religions,"[60] that attracted their members; in fact, they eventually became more popular in relation to the Hellenic religion. In light of the tradition of scholars critiqued throughout this chapter—who distinguish folk from elite, periphery from centre, emotive from intellectual, etc.—he somewhat characteristically concludes:

> The crowd, that is to say, low spirits, superstitious, people with bad passions, were much more attracted by the disordered ceremonies of the thiasoi than by the regulated cult of the State; the gross deities, and most sensual of the East, have promised their followers far more lively enjoyments than the gods, to a certain extent spiritualists, of Greece; superstitious practices, that the Hellenic religion moderated without abolishing, were characteristic in these oriental religions which multiplied the sacrifices and the purifications. Here is what were the true causes of the success of the thiasoi. It can be said that, far from having been a huge progress for humanity, their development, on the contrary,

[59] "…leurs legendes, leurs symboles, leurs ceremonies etaient les memes que dans les religions orientales; aussi, lors meme que leur cult fut tolere dans la Grece, ces divinites barbares resterent toujours en dehors de la cite et de la religion publique" (Paul François Foucart, *Des Associations religieuses chez les Grecs: Thiases, Éranes, Orgéons* [New York: Arno Press, 1975; originally published in 1873. Paris: Klincksieck]), 55.

[60] In the introduction of his book he writes that his interest is to show how those associations have introduced to Greece the divinities of Thrace, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt and to demonstrate that those cults have retained their oriental character. Foucart, *Des Associations religieuses chez les Grecs,* xiii.

made it take a step back.[61]

Of course we see in Foucart a rather different valuation of these practices, while he nonetheless distinguishes them in the same manner as other who have focused on them, for in the work of this late-nineteenth-century scholar's work we see classically Orientalist assumptions concerning what might as well just be termed the uncivilized primitives. However, despite this difference in value placed on the practices, the shared manner of making them stand out as being in need of analysis is what attracts our attention here.

But if the ancient phenomenon can be understood as a creation of current scholarly sensibilities and assumptions, then one might expect that different modern scholars, with idiosyncrasies and interests of their own, might see the ancient data somewhat different in places, electing to group different things together in order to comprise the group. Characteristic of this modern effort to identify and name the so-called mystery cults as being a distinct aspect of ancient life is how a scholar such as John Kloppenborg, of the University of Toronto (in his important article "Collegia and Thiasoi" [1996]), describes the difficulty in understanding what, as I noted earlier, is often termed in modern scholarship as an "association."[62] For under this term "association," much like a scientific classification system, we have various subdivisions, such as "mystery cults." Kloppenborg writes:

> It is especially difficult to arrive at a clear taxonomy of associations in the Hellenistic and imperial periods. This is due in part to a rather bewildering

[61] Foucart, *Des associations religieuses chez les Grecs,* 186.

[62] It is important to note that his description is not the exception, so I use it here as but an example of a style of scholarship we ought to rethink—a style that fails to take seriously how its own classifications may create the phenomenon under study.

> array of terms used in both Greek and Latin to designate these organizations, coupled with a striking lack of consistency on the part of ancient authors in the use of the terms.[63]

Is the problem that the past is ambiguous and inconsistent, as Kloppenborg suggests, or, instead, is it that our modern interests, terms, and efforts to name and order that past, thereby making sense of it, are bound to fail if we assume that they somehow tell us exclusively about the ancient world and therefore describe it accurately? Does the difficulty reside in the material, as Kloppenborg suggests, or in the inconsistencies of modern interests and how we work with the archive of the past?

Yet another example of a modern attempt to manage the information from the past, dedicated to this ancient phenomenon, derives from Angelos Chaniotis[64] in his article on "Religious Organizations and Bodies in Greece." He opens that article as follows:

> The organization of private and public cult in ancient Greece is as multifaceted and diverse a phenomenon as the Greek communities themselves. In addition to the community of the citizens, which can be conceived of as a community of worshipers, and in addition to the extended family that presents the framework for private worship and for life-cycle rituals, as early as the archaic period one can discern

[63] John S. Kloppenborg, "Collegia and Thiasoi," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 19.

[64] Angelos Chaniotis, "Religious Organizations and Bodies: Greece," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 319-321.

> organizational forms that cut across, divide, or transcend the boundaries of these groups. Various subdivisions of the citizen body were primarily concerned with cultic activities, and to a certain extent they can be conceived of as religious groups; they often owned exclusive cult places and altars or elected their sacred officials. Voluntary cult associations of various kinds and varying degrees of exclusivity and doctrinal uniformity make their first appearance in the 6th century BCE and develop into one of the most influential venues of worship during the Hellenistic period.[65]

And a few paragraphs later he writes:

> The notion of a 'cult association' is modern; it designates private voluntary groups, usually of mixed membership (men and women, citizens and foreigners, free persons and slaves), whose main, but not necessarily sole, aim was the worship of a particular deity or a group of deities…When we speak of cult associations in a narrower sense we mean voluntary corporate bodies, whose primary activity was religious worship and the observance of customary rituals.[66]

Despite his important concluding admission that our terminology is indeed our own, the question that arises here is: Is the notion of "cult association" the only modern one in this description? What about other descriptors that may turn out to be modern inventions that we anachronistically project backward in time, as if they were always there in the data, such as the distinction between "private vs. public," the idea of a "voluntary" choice (which presupposes a specific model of the individual agent), or the very notion of

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[65] Chaniotis, "Religious Organizations and Bodies in Greece," 319.
[66] Chaniotis, "Religious Organizations and Bodies in Greece," 319.

"religious worship" itself? What I am looking for, here, as suggested above, are the possible ways in which those who are making these distinctions, in order to make sense of the past, may be the ones who are creating the phenomenon that they think they are merely discovering in the archive and then describing.

But as I mentioned earlier in the chapter many scholars today would agree that the very term "religion"—denoting a system of belief or faith, secondarily expressed in action, that is somehow distinguishable from all other aspects of social life—is itself a modern invention. They would therefore urge that the term "religion," if used at all with reference to the Ancient Greek world, should be used in a cautious and qualified way.[67] Whether or not people then had cognitive states that allowed them to believe powerful, invisible beings existed or lived atop Mt. Olympus is not the point of the critique; instead, it argues that what we call "religion" was not understood as a distinct site outside European modernity.

Despite the above understanding of the ancient world, that is, as lacking a distinct sphere that could be set apart and named "religious" or even "religion," the case of the so-called "mystery cults" or "mystery religions" or "religious associations" should be of particular interest to anyone concerned with the consequences of scholarly classifications. The various names used is indicative, I have argued, not of ambiguity in the data but of the disagreement among scholars concerning the definition of the "phenomenon."[68] For "mystery cults" is a term that comes to us not from the ancient world but, as already noted, from 19th century scholarship, which (as was evident in Festugiére in the previous chapter and, I would argue, Foucart above) was mainly interested in showing the

[67] See previously mentioned on page 15.
[68] This is a disagreement that emerges by the persistence of scholars to distinguish and set apart as private *a phenomenon* (emphasis added as per its singularity) that was very public and multiple.

superiority of us over them, e.g., Christianity's "church" over and against those emotional and so-called pagan or heathen "mystery cults." Later on, during the 20th century, and as the scholarly interest shifted, we predictably find other terms being developed, such as "voluntary associations" which accomplished rather different sort of work than what someone like Foucart was interested in doing just a few generations before. For once scholars started using the classifier "voluntary association" to name both so-called mystery cults *and* early Christianity, it allowed them to create new boundaries, thereby constituting new phenomena to study, which in turn allowed the study of earliest Christianity alongside other types of "voluntary associations" at the same time (thereby undermining claims of Christian uniqueness that were often found in other work on its origins). The scholarly effort was now to understand Christian origins not as a miraculous big bang, as the theologians understood it, but as an historical event within a wider social context. Sensibly, scholars with such alternative aims went looking for ancient analogues and found them in the voluntary associations.[69]

Of great interest though is to consider, for example, how Aristotle defined "koinoniai" (from the word *koinon* = common, shared), a word that we today translate routinely as associations or societies, with the full implication of them being private groups set apart from the official, public religion. But Aristotle's own definition seems not to satisfy the needs of modern scholarship at all; for as he writes in his *Nichomachean Ethics*:

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[69] For a recent, characteristic example of this sort of scholarly work, see Phillip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*; Phillip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009). In his 2003 book, for example, Harland, after listing under the category associations koina, synodoi, thiasoi, mystai, phratores, synergasiai, collegia, writes: "Associations gathered together regularly to socialize, share communal meals, and honor both their earthly and their divine benefactors" (Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 2).

> (4) But all *koinoniai* resemble parts of the *koinonia* of the polis. They go together (or coexist) for some advantage and to secure some of the necessities of life. And the *koinonia* of the polis, too, it seems, was originally formed and continues to endure for the sake of advantage. For it is this that lawmakers take their aim; and they say that justice is the common good. (5) Now, the other *koinoniai* aim at some part of this common good: for example, sailors at what is advantageous in warfare, whether money or victory or the seizure of a city; and likewise phyletai and demotai. And some *koinoniai* seem to come into existence for the sake of pleasure, that is, the *koinoniai* of thiasotai and eranistai; for these (are organized) for the sake of sacrifice and social intercourse; and all these *koinoniai* seem to subordinate to the *koinonia* of the polis; for the *koinonia* of the polis aims, not at the immediate advantage but (at the advantage) for the whole of life (people) holding sacrifices and gatherings centering on them, bestowing honors on the gods and providing for themselves leisure activities (combined) with pleasure (kai autois anapauseis porizontes meth' idonis)….(6) So all the *koinoniai* seem to be parts of the polis and the friendships of such kind will correspond to *koinoniai* of such kind.[70]

It is important to see that this definition concerns a hierarchical order that comprises the diversity of the koinoniai, an order that has nothing to do with our modern preoccupation with private vs. public or religious vs. non-religious or even voluntary vs. mandated. Instead, it seems that Aristotle's interest is in the polis itself as the ultimate koinonia which aims for what he portrayed as the common good (*koinon sympheron*), to which all

[70] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* 8.9.4-6 (1160a).

the other koinoniai are just part, each one of them as well aiming for the general, common good. So translating "koinonia" as "association," with the full modern implication of this term, fails as a description (for I have just offered a no less plausible reading of the text that could itself claim status as a mere description of this ancient author's words) but—and this is the important part—operates quite well *as a way of constituting a particular sort of ancient past, one made very much in our own modern image*.

Therefore, to me, at least, the difficulty of arriving at a clear, consistent, and correct "taxonomy," and thus a proper definition to identify "mystery cults" as distinctly separate from other items in the daily life of the ancient world, does not lie, as Kloppenborg argued, in what he called the "bewildering array" of Greek and Latin terms, and neither can it be found in the supposed "inconsistency" on the part of ancient authors and how they used their own terms—for obviously those authors and their intended audience had no problem understanding their own resourceful and rich vocabulary to describe their own world. Rather, the difficulty is to be found in the lack of realization on the part of these contemporary scholars that our modern concepts, our taxonomic categories, do not necessarily mirror or describe accurately a past reality, for neither match exactly ancient conceptual tools or the long past social interests that directed their use. Furthermore, as I suggested earlier, it seems that once those modern categories are put in use with the archive of the past, they create the very object of study these scholars think they are merely describing. The question, then, is what these distinctions, classifications, and systems of organization allow scholars to do when talking about so-called mystery cults or religious associations.

VI. Conclusion

To begin to answer this it is important to see that so-called mystery cults or religious associations are understood by these scholars as operating alongside, but in distinction from, what they call the official religion of the city-states—that is, what they eventually characterize as *private* religious associations result from this very distinction, where members could potentially perform rituals that were more ecstatic in nature than those of what scholars now describe as the *public* official religion.[71]

This distinction of public from private (related to such other common distinctions as elite from common, intellectual from ecstatic, and expected from freely chosen), which I have argued is mainly due to modern scholarly interests and approaches, is based on this now common notion of private vs. public—a notion that further supports the contemporary religious vs. spiritual (or individualistic) binary that is so common not only in the study of the ancient world but also in how countless social actors today identify themselves in distinction from others (with whom they nonetheless share a tremendous amount). Therefore, scholars who use those signifiers do so in order to privilege, implicitly or explicitly, a certain kind of modern self and thus a more authentic and original expression of religiosity: that of the individual or the "personal." This kind of

[71] Though these distinction do not come without problems, for example Philip Harland writes: "My definition of associations here seeks to distinguish these rather informal (or 'private') groups from official 'institutions' of the cities and provinces, from official 'boards' in charge of administering temples or other smaller institutions, and from age-based 'organizations' connected with the gymnasia (e.g., ephebes, elders), for instance. I should mention, however, that the evidence is sometimes ambiguous, and it is not always easy to clearly identify whether a particular group is a board of cultic functionaries within the god's temple rather than a less formal group of devotees of a god. A further complication is that associations frequently designated themselves using corporate terminology shared within broader civic and imperial contexts (e.g., koinon, synedrion, speira), which sometimes makes a group sound more official or public than it actual was" in, Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians*, 27-28.

religiosity, along with the idea of "voluntary associations," in turn justifies the contemporary idea (shared by many scholars who study Christian origins, as previously mentioned) of early Christianity being a type of "voluntary association" itself, within the Roman Empire—an idea that is more similar to modern understandings of Christianity, as being one among many options in the current and sometimes hectic religious marketplace, than it is a mere description of its ancient beginnings.

What I'm trying to get at, though, is that those classifications used by modern scholars, such as "voluntary associations," "religious associations," and so on, would not be possible without fundamentally distinguishing between private vs. public, voluntary vs. non-voluntary, religious vs. profane, all in an effort to create identities by drawing boundaries and creating limits, which is an activity that brings to mind Pierre Bourdieu's comments on distinction. He wrote:

> Here the limits are frontiers to be attacked or defended with all one's strength, and the classificatory systems which fix them are not so much means of knowledge as means of power, harnessed to social functions and overtly or covertly aimed at satisfying the interests of a group.[72]

And in this case the group in question is modern scholarship itself, our understanding of ourselves here in modernity, and how we legitimize that situation. Of course it would be wise to assume that the ancient writers we read (or therefore people of the ancient world) had their own distinctions and classifications which they used to support their own interests (and, likely, contest those of others). But we must not lose sight of the gap between theirs and our own, for that is why they appear to us as confusing or inconsistent

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[72] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 477.

today; for those interests and the tools they used to realize them are not that appealing to modern scholars who come with interests and tools of their own.

To return to my example of the problems inherent in classification and situation: is this not the same with that linguistic phenomenon that we commonly know as code switching, that is, we can ask here also about the practical implications that result from calling something "a code switching" or, instead, from calling it an instance of bilingualism instead. What is at stake, always in the present, in naming something *as* a language or just as a dialect or just slang? How different does it have to be in order to count as its own language? Although mere distinctions, founded on arbitrary differences, do not necessarily point to a certain kind of hierarchy or rank, having Aristotle's definition in mind (in which he provides a hierarchical order of *koinoniai* all in support to the ultimate *koinonia,* that of the "*polis*") makes me wonder if the various distinctions concerning language (e.g., a distinct language vs. a mere dialect[73]) point toward a certain kind of hierarchy as well. Does the "privilege" of having various dialects, that is, through a system of distinction, create at the same time a system of rank that authorizes and valorizes the dominant language against which any other is measured as variant, as deviation, as derivate, as difference?[74] If so, then, what kind of management takes effect by calling something by one name and not something else—for example, me reading that

[73] Consider how in Greece the now spoken official Greek language known as "demodic" (of the people) fifty years ago was not considered "proper" and therefore another variant known as "kathareousa" (clean) was used in official documents, schools, universities, etc. It took a change of the political system of Greece, after the fall of the dictatorship (1967-1973), for the "demotic" (of the people) to become the proper and official language of the country.
[74] Here I also have in mind J.Z. Smith's claim: "Difference is not a matter of comparison between entities judged to be equivalent, rather difference most frequently entails a hierarchy of prestige and ranking. Such distinctions are found to be drawn most sharply between 'near neighbors,' with respect to what has been termed the 'proximate other'" (Smith, "What Difference a Difference Makes," 258).

store's sign in New Orleans—naming this linguistic action a "code switch" or that social institution "voluntary" or "private"? Could the term itself, much as I think we see with scholars identifying voluntary associations in the ancient world, be evidence of people, like those very scholars, who occupy a rather privileged position themselves, who come with specific interests for how the world ought to be known, divided, and related, those who are actively constituting that world through their studies, and not simply describing an already existing phenomenon? I think that with the so-called "voluntary associations," or "mystery cults," or "mystery religions," etc. the effort of early Christian scholars to create a comparative phenomenon in order to study so-called early Christian groups was, on the one hand, indeed successful in showing that those groups were not different as a long scholarly tradition had previously suggested, that is, of Christianity being unique and *sui generis* but rather early Christian groups functioned just as another alternative among others. On the other hand, though, and this is were to my understanding lies an irony similar to adopting the "code-switching" categorization—which despite appearing as an effort to empower the language of marginal groups eventually ends up authorizing the language of dominant groups—is that the modern distinctions (private vs. public, religious vs. profane) upon which these, maybe well-intended, concepts ("voluntary associations," "mystery cults," etc.) rest, are seen as ontological realities functioning in pretty much the same way then as they are today. Eventually, then, these categories (voluntary, religious, etc.) whether intended or not by the scholars who use them seem to legitimize and naturalize "religion" (despite their critique of the term) in the ancient world, for without this category operating in the background of their descriptions which comes with the subtle idea "official religion," "voluntary associations" as private centres

of an alternative religious experience would not be able to exist.

To return to a previously mentioned quote by Nilsson who, in talking about experience, states that:

> For it was an experience that was rooted in the deepest feelings of man and spoke to his heart, although its language changed with the changing ages.[75]

It is this very idea of transcendence, of something hidden deep down in the human spirit and which never changes whether scholars speak of experience, or mystery cults, or religious or voluntary associations or even language itself (for we speak of national languages in the same way), that is at the heart of those categories. The language changes, that is, the technical language changes but scholars assume that their technical terms even though they are modern are still able to describe, classify, the essence of the original, which is always elusive but for ever present and thereby organize things old and ancient in a way that allows them to, as mentioned in the opening of this chapter, authorize modern situations and presumptions that drive and benefit from the use of those terms.

[75] Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion*, 64.

CHAPTER 3

Representations of the Ruined Past: Making Self and Other

Inspector Martland: And is the legend true?
Mordecai: Does it matter? The truth is nice,
but a rumor is priceless.[1]

In the previous chapter I looked at how, through the use of classificatory processes, understood as an act of identification, scholars create categories by which they organize the past for their own disciplinary and present interests. I concluded there that, because of such acts, the past becomes either the familiar or exotic foreign other. If the former, then we, in the present, understand ourselves as its natural result inasmuch as we fabricate traces of a linear succession that leads up to us. However, if the latter, then the past is understood as the foreign other against which we, today, can measure ourselves as to what we are not, the progress we have made, etc. More often than not we venerate the first and, sometimes, if we can ignore the latter, we destroy it.

But what is it about the past that we hold on to it, either as an origin from which we have developed or an alien world against which we continue to define ourselves? This is a question that drives much of this book's thesis but it may be a misleading question because, phrased in this way, it forces us to look at some kind of self-evident meaningfulness inherent in the past. But, contrary to this model, in the previous two chapters I tried to demonstrate that there is nothing inherently meaningful in the texts and the phenomena scholars try to explain but, rather, it is our scholarly interests in the present that drive those explanations and the meanings created by those interpretations. It

[1] From the movie *Mortdecai* on the legend of a lost Goya.

is therefore in the present that we should be looking for answers to questions that are usually addressed to the past, since, as I would argue, it is not the past that demands explanations but, instead, present needs that drive our desire for answers. In the discourse over past things, whether they are venerated or destroyed, commemorated or denied, we can therefore observe what Bruce Lincoln termed acts of estrangement and affinity—always in the present—in other words, to study the past, or better put, the ongoing constitution of the past, is to study acts of identification in the present. Determining which use of the past legitimates whom in the present is therefore the question worth pursuing. And that pursuit takes us to a small church in Greece's second largest city.

I. Holey Frescoes

In 2008 and again in 2009 I was the local coordinator for a study abroad trip made by students from the University of Alabama to Thessaloniki, Greece. During the trips we visited many museums and sites of archaeological interest; one such site was a Byzantine church, which is dedicated to the Transformation of the Saviour, dating to the 14th century CE, located within the old city's walls in the upper part of Thessaloniki. When the students entered the church, the first thing that seemed to attract their amazed attention were the pitted frescoes that cover the interior of the church's walls. The interior of the church—which used to be part of a monastic complex and is therefore known to the locals also as Moni Vlatadon (The Monastery of Vlatades) but also by the name Tsaous monastery—is covered with paintings (frescoes), some of them dating from the 14th and 15th centuries, with images of Christ and scenes from his life (such as the birth and baptism, the crucifixion, resurrection, and transformation), images of the Virgin

Mary, of Saints, Angels and Prophets, as well as scenes from the Old Testament (such as the three children in the furnace). But as I mentioned previously, what would, understandably, attract a visitor's first attention would not be an appreciation or even awe for the artistic Byzantine style of the frescoes but, rather, the many pitted holes the size of a walnut—that is, between 20 to 30mm—that cover most of the surface of the frescoes, making them, in some cases indiscernible. The students' primary (and urgent) question was who had damaged the frescoes, and, more importantly, why. For me, nearly a lifelong resident of the city and someone who had visited this church on many past occasions, the church's pitted iconography had become so familiar that I no longer even pondered the damage, and only when prompted by the students' curiosity did I come to realize that a whole discourse was up and running about the holes in that small church at the top of my city. And so I learned firsthand, in trying to answer their questions, what Emile Durkheim wrote: "Habit easily puts curiosity to sleep and we no longer even imagine querying ourselves. To shake off that torpor, practical needs, or at least very pressing theoretical interest, must attract our attention and turn it in that direction."[2] And if practical needs (i.e., to answer the students' questions) were what first returned the pitted frescoes to my attention, it was theoretical interests that prompted me most emphatically "to shake off that torpor."

If our question concerns which use of the past legitimates whom in the present then one place to begin to answer those students' questions would be with the people who make use of this church on a weekly, sometimes, daily, basis.

[2] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]), 54

For the people who attend this church there is no question that the icons painted onto the walls were damaged during the Ottoman occupation (begun in the 15th century CE and lasting four centuries, ending, in successive phases across Greece, in the late 19th and early 20th century), during which time the church (originally built in the 14th century) had, like so many Greek Orthodox churches during this period, been turned into a mosque, with the addition of a minaret, and during which time the building is said to have suffered considerable damage. It is therefore obvious that we have here a clear case of what we might call iconoclasm, i.e., the intentional act of destroying images, especially religious representations. But we must not forget that, as has been argued throughout the previous chapters, claims in the present about the past ought themselves to be the curious object of study; therefore, it is important to recognize that the characterization of the source of the damage done to the frescoes as iconoclasm is an interpretation and explanation derived entirely from current insider descriptions and classifications. Too often, such participant descriptions/classifications are an easy fall-back for the scholar of religion, and come to be absorbed into his/her theorizing as if such participant self-reports are natural, self-evident and transhistorical. As Don Wiebe reminds us, however, it is precisely at the level of theorization that the scholar qua outsider must be willing to diverge from the insider's characterization of the data.[3] To adequately address the phenomenon of the pitted walls and the purported iconoclasm behind them, therefore, a critical approach must, as Russell McCutcheon insists, investigate the *uses* to which classificatory systems are put, who they authorize, what kind of world they presuppose.[4] I

[3] Donald Wiebe, "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13 (1984), 422.
[4] McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion*, 260.

see this as very much in keeping with Bruce Lincoln's advice in his 4th "Theses on Method," in which he writes:

> The same destabilizing and irreverent questions one might ask of any speech act ought to be posed of religious discourse. The first of these is Who speaks here?—that is, what person, group, or institution is responsible for a text, whatever its putative and broader context? Through what system of mediations? With what interests? And further, Of what would the speaker(s) persuade the audience? What are the consequences if this project of persuasion should happen to succeed? Who wins what, and how much? Who, conversely, loses?[5]

So, taking claims of iconoclasm as our object of study, rather than seeing them as neutral descriptions of stable facts, means we should begin with the category itself (along with the root term icon), which as with every category has its own history, one that is seldom addressed by historians, who too often take both the entity so classified and the way we understand the (either witnessed or imagined) act that results in the destruction as natural and obvious.

II. A Brief History of Words

As with all language, the meanings of both the words icon and iconoclasm have changed over time, and in different periods they have served different interests. For those who see such descriptors as neutrally representing a quality in the things named these changes might seem unimportant but to those interested in studying how a variety of pasts are created by means of different techniques of representation it might be worth asking why

[5] Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars*, 1.

the terms icon and iconoclasm, and the ideas they may happen to represent now are retrojected into the past with such ease, as if a linkage to something "sacred" were a consistent and timeless aspect of images and attitudes thereto.

The word "icon," for instance, has a definite and relatively recent history in the English language. It derives from the earlier Greek word *εἰκών* (eikōn), and, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, first appears in English in 1572 with the meaning of an image, figure or representation, found mainly in books of natural history.[6] By 1577 it also comes to refer to an image in the solid, such as a monumental figure or a statue, and, as of 1579, it signifies a realistic representation or description in writing.[7] The more familiar, modern use of the word (to refer to a representation of some sacred personage in painting, bas-relief or mosaic) is linked to the Eastern Church and is much more recent, first appearing in 1833.[8]

"Iconoclasm" (from the words *eikōn* and *klasma*, which means to break), by contrast, had "religious" connotations from the start, first appearing in English in 1797 and describing "the breaking or destroying of images; esp. the destruction of images and pictures set up as objects of veneration (see iconoclast I); *transf.* and *fig*. the attacking or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs, regarded as fallacious or superstitious."[9] Another (but now infrequently used) term that is synonymous with

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[6] *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED] 1971: 12.
[7] *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED] 1971: 12.
[8] For the various usages in ancient Greek see Jan N. Bremmer, "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm, Notes Towards a Genealogy," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008), 2-3.
[9] *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED] 1971: 13. An interesting review on the words especially icon and iconoclasm and their fairly recent history, especially the latter, in describing what we now call the "iconoclastic controversy" is done by Jan N. Bremmer. In his article "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes Towards a Genealogy," regarding the use of the word "iconoclasm" he writes: "The term first appears in 1797 as used by the polyglot and political radical William Taylor (1765–1835), that is, during the French Revolution, a time that is also

iconoclasm is “iconomachy,” defined as “a war against images; hostility or opposition to images, esp. to their use in connexion to worship,”[10] and which appears in English in 1581.

The doer of such deeds, what comes to be termed the “iconoclast,” appears in English much earlier, in 1596, and is specifically linked to ecclesiastical history: “one who took part in or supported the movement in the 8th and 9th centuries, to put down the use of images or pictures in religious worship in Christian churches of the East; hence, applied analogously to those Protestants of the 16th and 17th C. who practiced or countenanced a similar destruction of images in the churches”[11]; another term that is a

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characterized by iconoclasm of, especially, church objects, even though Taylor uses the term in the context of the Protestant resistance to images. It fits this date that in French the term ‘iconoclasme’ does not occur in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* nor in the fourth edition of 1762 of the *Dictionnaire de L’3Académie française*, but appears in 1832. In the titles of articles, ‘iconoclasm’ makes its first appearance in 1846, but in the title of books it does not show before 1885 in its general sense and, with regard to the Byzantine controversy, only in 1973” (Jan N. Bremmer, "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes Towards a Genealogy," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 [2008], 13). Of further interest is that Bremmer points out that the English historian Edward Gibbon—who wrote on Byzantium in his 1781 book *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (note also that Gibbon does not refer to that historical period as Byzantine since the term was first coined by the German historian Hieronymus Wolf in his 1557 book *Corpus Historiae Byzantinae* and does not appear in English until 1857 with the work of George Finlay *History of the Byzantine Empire from 716 to 1057*)—“did not yet know the term and consequently did not study the eighth and ninth centuries of Byzantine history from an iconoclastic perspective” (ibid. 13-14).

[10] *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED] 1971: 13.

[11] *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED] 1971: 13. Regarding the Greek term iconoclast, i.e., eikonokastes, according to Bremmer: “[I]t does not seem that the term was very popular in Byzantium, as it is mentioned only very intermittently, except for the Acts of the Council of Nicaea II, which decided the favour of the restoration and venarations of images. After the end of the iconoclastic struggle, which was won by the iconodules, the term is found mainly in connection with heretics, such as the Manicheans and Paulicians. In fact, the term is so rare that it is not to be found in the great Greek and Byzantine dictionaries from before the twentieth century, those of Stephanus, Ducange, and Sophokles” (Bremmer, "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm," 8-9).

synonym to iconoclast is "iconomach" (from the words *eikōn* and *machos*, which means fighting), one who is hostile to images. This last appears in English in 1552.[12]

In connection to icons we also have the terms "iconodule" (from *eikōn* and *doulos*, which means slave), someone who worships or venerates images; "iconophile" (from the words *eikōn* and *philos*, which means friend), a connoisseur of pictures, engravings, book illustrations and the like (in Greek the term has the meaning of someone who worships or venerates images) but which later came to describe those we were in favour of the veneration or worship of icons. Attention could also be given to the terms iconomachos/iconoclast and iconodoulos/iconophilos—for instance, it should be noted that the terms iconoclast and iconodoulos are defined as pejorative and ideologically-charged terms used to characterize the iconomachos and iconophilos accordingly.[13]

What this brief survey shows is that, at least when it comes to the various uses of the term icon, "sacredness" (i.e., denoting a specific sub-species of images) is not inherent in the term but was later imputed to it. Posing some of Lincoln's irreverent questions therefore prompts us to ask by whom and when such a quality was attributed to the cluster of ideas initially broadly associated with "images." Was the attribution of "sacred" qualities associated with the defense or justification of specific historical activities or interests?

Despite the varied uses of such terms and their development over time, for many historians the terms are today used so naturally—a naturalization that seems to transcend time and space—that the same conceptions are applied with ease to radically different

[12] *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED] 1971: 13.

[13] See for example Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era C. 680-850: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

historical periods (what is otherwise known as the problem of anachronism),[14] i.e., from the 7th and 8th century "iconoclastic controversy" in the so called Byzantium,[15] to the Muslim world,[16] to the Reformation in the 16th and 17th century Europe.[17] In all three cases, past incidents are spiritualized by modern interpreters, i.e., viewed and explained today in terms of ancient people's beliefs about and attitudes toward the so-called icon that is seen as a symbol that represents some inner religious quality or supposedly spiritual concept. Iconoclasm, in this reading, emerges as a transhistorical essence that slowly unfolds over time.

Although this chapter is not about any one of those so called "iconoclastic controversies" to further examine the history of the terms usage it is worth looking into

[14] This is a problem that we have seen in the first chapter with scholarly interpretations of Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus*.
[15] See for example Leslie Bernard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background to the Iconoclastic Constroversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Byzantine Studies University of Birmingham, 1975); Edward James Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (New York: AMS Press, 1978 [1930]); Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986 [1972]), 149-180; Patricia Karlin-Hayter, "Iconoclasm," in *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, ed. Cyril Mango (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153-68; Leslie Brubaker, "Icons and Iconomachy," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing 2010), 323-37; Alexander Avenarius, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon: On the Problem of Eastern European Symbolism* (Bratislava Academic Electronic Press, 2005); Patrick Henry, "What Was the Iconoclastic Controversy About?" *Church History* 45 (1976): 16-31; For a brief overview of the controversy see Charles Barber, "Iconoclasm: Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Tradition," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 4289-91. Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era C. 680-850: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[16] See for example: G. R. D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 2 (1985), 267-77; Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59-95; Marshall Hodgson, "Islam and Image," *History of Religions* 3 [1964]), 220-60; Oleg Grabar, "Islam and Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1975), 45-52. For a different understanding of the idea of representation in the Arab world, see Leslie Brubaker, "Representation C. 800: Arab, Byzantine, Carolingian," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009): 37-55.
[17] See for example: Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

some detail at the so-called "iconoclastic controversies" of the 7th and 8th centuries in the east—a time prior to our current use of the term to name attacks directed toward seemingly sacred objects, yet, nonetheless, it is used as a common originary point of the idea of "iconoclasm" in modern scholarship. In this way past events are explained today as being the result of theological debates.[18]

Historians today commonly identify two phases in the so-called iconoclastic controversies, one that starts around 726 CE with the reign of Leo III (685-741). For instance, writing in 2005, Alexander Avenarius describes the events as follows:

> After the introductory ideological preparation for the iconoclastic movement, it broke out vigorously and openly in 730. The first practical act was the removal of the icon of Christ from the bronze gate of the imperial palace in Chalke (one of the quarters of Constantinople) by order of the Emperor Leo III. This was done by soldiers, who actively supported and approved of the emperor's decision. They were opposed by the population of Constantinople, evidently especially the common people, who attempted to prevent the implementation of this degree.[19]

This particular story is used by many historians as a vivid indication of the sort of destructions that took place during the controversy by the so-called iconoclasts. Leo III was succeeded by his son, Constantine V, who, again according to historians, followed his father's iconoclastic tendencies. During Constantine's reign there was in 754 a council known as the Council of Hieria. Although, the Acts of that council have not survived historians have inferred its main points from the writings of those who later

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[18] See n. 14 on page 8.
[19] Avenarius, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon*, 31.

condemned them (that is later apologists);[20] today we therefore generally assume that, according to the Acts of the 754 council, iconoclasm prevailed.[21] This first phase ended with the seventh ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787, when empress Irene decided, under the pressure of iconophiles, to restore the icons.[22] What we commonly now refer to as the second phase starts in 813, with the rein of Leo V, and ends in 843 when another empress, Theodora (who is considered by some historians to have been secretly venerating icons against the wishes of her husband, Theophilos), called a council, which decided on the restoration of the icons .[23]

Citing Alexander Avenarius once again, from his 2005 book, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon,* we find a rather vivid description of the debate:

> The protagonists of this struggle were the Byzantine iconodules or venerators of images and their opponents the Byzantine iconoclasts, that is breakers of images. The subject of the dispute between the two sides was the icon as a holy image, its purpose, function and role in Byzantine society, the Church and especially in the liturgy. It was not a new problem. Its roots reach back to the patristic and early Christian periods, and the Church had to deal with it practically from the beginning of its existence.[24]

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[20] "The position adopted by the imperial church was summed up in its *Horos*, or definition, which can be reconstructed from the writings of those who later condemned it, both in the Acts of the seventh Council of 787, and in other writings, for example, those of the patriarch Nikephoros I" (Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era C. 680-85),* 190). See also Paul J. Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (Horos)," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953), 35-66.
[21] Brubaker, "Icons and Iconomachy," 330-331.
[22] Brubaker, "Icons and Iconomachy," 332-334; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era C. 680-850,* 260-286.
[23] Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era C. 680-850,* 447-452.
[24] Avenarius, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon,* 8.

The problem, however, with Avenarious description—as with most historians—and his focus on the theological debates over the image (which for him continued in one way or another until the 20th century in Eastern Europe[25]) is that he not only leaves political and social factors on the side by portraying them as "a less serious, but undoubtedly existing level or background to this struggle,"[26] but also takes as natural descriptors both the term "icon," understood as a "holy image," and the terms "iconodules" and "iconoclasts." The problem is that, as noted earlier, those descriptors are hardly neutral descriptors for they were applied by later apologists who tried to defend their positions over and against their adversaries, thereby creating both the impression of a depoliticized symbol (i.e., the icon) and its internal meaning. Many scholars have pointed out that both terms have not been in usage during the period but that they were later attributed to them: "the Byzantines themselves rarely used the words: 'iconoclast' is occasionally found as a pejorative term from the early eighth century onwards, but 'iconoclasm,' which is a Greek compound meaning 'image (icon) breaking (clasm),' is a sixteenth-century invention that has only became firmly attached to the Byzantine image debates since the 1950s."[27]

It is worth mentioning a recent study on the so-called iconoclastic controversies by Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, in which the authors paint a rather different and more nuanced picture of this historical period.[28] In it they demonstrate that the sources on which historians and theologians have based their studies are not only scarce (something that many others have pointed out) but they mostly come from those who defended the

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[25] Avenarius, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon,* 166-167.
[26] Avenarius, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon,* 175.
[27] Brubaker, "Icons and Iconomachy," 323; Also, Bremmer, "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm," 8-9.
[28] Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era C. 680-850: A History*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

veneration of images after the end of the controversy in the 9th century;[29] whatever we know today about the positions of the so-called iconoclasts therefore comes from those we were opposed to them, and even those sources have been tampered with:

> [T]he Iconoclast controversy, as it is known in modern scholarship, is only one of a number of elements relevant to the evolution of Byzantine culture and society in the eighth and ninth centuries. Nevertheless, it has attracted an inordinate degree of attention for the simple reason that the ninth-century "victors" in the conflict moulded the historical perception of their past in such a way as to make it the dominant issue for later generations of Byzantines, and in consequence for modern historians, who are dependent in the first on the impression they gather from their written documents of what was significant or important for the people who inhabited the cultural world they study.[30]

Furthermore, and equally important, is that despite the ease with which historians and theologians refer to the period as one that shows the destruction of icons, Brubaker and Haldon demonstrate that on the level of the "icon," the dispute was more about the representation of images and less about acts of violence toward icons. To top that, they

[29] "There are only four documents contemporary with the first years of iconoclasm and, of these, one is problematic in both its authorship and its dating. All the remaining evidence is derived either from later Byzantine sources, in particular the *Chronographia* of Theophanes and the *Brief History* of the patriarch Nikephoros, the former compiled c. 810-14, the latter somewhat earlier in c. 780, perhaps a little later, and hagiographical works such as the *Life* of Stephen the Younger, written in the ninth century and later interpolated and emended, or the fictional accounts of the first martyrs of iconoclasm in 726, similarly of much later date […] But key documents such as letters supposedly written by these popes to Leo have not survived, being referred to only briefly in later documents (quoted, for example, at Roman synods in the later part of the eighth century), so that is difficult to know how much faith to place in their testimony" (Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era)*, 89-90.

[30] Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era,* 9.

further argue that there is little evidence to support that there was an actual breaking, and destroying. Even the famous scene depicting Leo III's soldiers removing the icon of Christ from the Chalke door, which I previously mentioned and which is to be found in most books that make reference to the Byzantine Iconoclasm, lately has been disputed by scholars.[31] The so-called iconoclastic controversy as one related mainly to the representation and destruction of images gets even more complicated if one takes under consideration a few more parameters. For example, the emperors of Constantinople at the time had to deal with the so-called Arab threat (but also Persian wars, Slavonic, Bulgar and Avar attacks and invasions), and sought to use the financial resources at such times of crisis that the monasteries, which are supposed to be iconophilic, had in their possession. For example, Peter Charanis in an article concerning the monastic properties in Byzantium notes that:

> [A]t the end of the seventh century about one third of the usable land of the empire was in the possession of the church and the monasteries. The iconoclastic movement had checked the expansion of monasticism and confiscated much of the property of the monasteries, but this was only temporary.[32]

One could suggest, then, that the controversy was political and over material resources rather than about ideas and theological principals as some scholars have suggested. And even when other factors are acknowledged they are considered to downplay the essence of the debate. For example, Barber Charles in a brief summary of the iconoclastic

[31] See Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era,* 128-134; 199-211.
[32] For the power of monasticism see Peter Charanis, *Social, Economic and Political Life in the Byzantine Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1973), I, 54. Also, Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era,* 650-664.

controversy in Byzantium notes, that, “the influence of Islam and Judaism as well as imperial adventurism, social and cultural crises, and military failure have all been cited as potential causes for the onset of iconoclasm. These have tended to downplay the internal theological questions that drove and continued to drive the terms of the debate within the Orthodox Church itself.”[33]

Of interest is also that Brubaker and Haldon suggest that the 9th-century writers tried not to just re-write the past but, more than that to make it relevant to the people of their time.

> We have seen how a careful scrutiny and interrogation of the texts which provide us with most of our information about the iconoclast controversy and the iconoclast emperors highlight the extent to which anti-iconoclast theologians and others in the later eighth and ninth centuries rationalised the past in constructing their narratives of what happened. It is less the fact that iconophiles tampered with “the facts,” or that they deliberately manipulated “the truth,” than that they made sense of what they knew, or believed must have happened, through the prism of their own common-sense assumptions about the past and about the values and morality of their culture. [34]

It is exactly this scarcity of sources—much like the lack of documentation on the source of those holes in the frescoes, in that little church in Thessaloniki, that allow people to use them for their own benefit by filling the historical and narrative gaps with their own situational narratives. Even Brubaker and Haldon are not exempt from this sort of re-

[33] Barber, "Iconoclasm: Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Tradition," 4289.
[34] Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era,* 798.

writing for the title of their book is, after all, about the "iconoclastic era." That is, despite the numerous references throughout the book to the fact that the term is modern and was not used at the time of the debates which Brubaker and Haldon try to describe and analyze, the fact that they still use the terminology—i.e., referring to the two opposing groups as iconoclasts and iconophiles despite also the fact (at least as those two scholars maintain) that there have not been any clashes, or even deliberate destructions of icons at least to the extend it has been presented by the 9th-century writers and an earlier generation of scholars in the 19th and 20th century[35]—is indicative of their intended audience (i.e., those who understand history by means of the assumptions that drive the use of these terms). It also indicates that they portray the debate as politico-religious, that is, between emperors and the church (a classification/distinction that is also entirely modern), all of which suggests to me that just as those 9th century writers, who tried to re-write their past (as mentioned above by Brubaker and Haldon), so too modern interpreters are equally re-writing the past in order to make sense of it in the present through modern re-interpretations both of the primary and secondary sources but also through the use of modern anachronistic categorizations in the service of their own situational interests. In that way the objects named as icons, much like the texts we read from the past, are constantly under the same re-writing and re-interpreting processes, and those discourses that are generated from these processes tell us more about the tellers and their situations than about the things they claim to be describing. In agreement, though, with Brubaker and Haldon that there is not necessarily an intention in the altering or the rewriting, I would further say that there is a sincere effort from scholars and people to talk about the past as it is, to preserve it as such, to restore its original, but it should be acknowledged

[35] Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era,* 69-155; 642

that they (we) are historical too (something I fear we tend to forget as if history stops with us, or that we are somehow outside of history itself). In that sense, then, our understandings of the past and therefore our acts of interpretations, preservations, and restorations should be understood as being firmly linked to the period in which we are living and to the interests that drive those acts. Our histories (like the maps I mentioned in Chapter 1), then, are cultural artifacts of our situated present, indicative of the way we imagine the past, an imaginaire that can be used in authenticating our present.

The reason that I spent a fair bit of time in the so-called iconoclastic controversies of the 6th and 7th centuries is not only because they are taken, by most commentators as the first instance of "iconoclasm" but also to show that there are many gaps due to the scarcity, and in some case unreliability, of the sources, and that there can therefore be many different narratives. The question though remains as to why this ancient controversy was idealized as if it was about ideas and theological principles when, as demonstrated above, it could have simply been about ownership of natural resources. This idealization is indicative also in the approach of "iconoclasm" in general.

Consider, for example, Alain Besancon's approach to images and iconoclasm in his 2009 book *The Forbidden Image*,[36] in which he traces what he characterizes as a common philosophical disposition towards the absolute. His history of iconoclasm begins

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[36] Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Similarly, David Freedberg, in his book *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), is trying to identify and authenticate an innate human responsiveness to the image. Also, Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992).

in ancient Greece with Plato as the father of both iconoclasm and iconophilia[37] and with the rise of what he calls religious philosophy.

> In the beginning, there was Greece, and a condition of innocence. Like Egypt and Mesopotamia before it, Greece gave a form to its gods. Yet even while Greek religious art was asserting itself, developing, and moving toward its perfection, one faction of Hellenism—philosophy, which was also a religious faction—was beginning to reflect on representation, to access its agreement or disagreement with the civic notion of the divine and the accepted forms of representing it. With philosophy, then, a cycle opened that would subsequently be called "iconoclastic."[38]

According to Besançon, philosophy exhibited an inherent iconoclastic tendency and was in tension with civil theology, which, of course, is understood as being essentially concerned with the representation of the "sacred," and thereby making it iconophilic: "from the sixth century to the early fourth century (until the Peloponnesian War), a combined religious and civic life allowed the representation of living gods, of gods to whom citizens felt the need to give praise to express their gratitude."[39] Moving chronologically through the history of both "paganism" (itself a problematic term that

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[37] For example: "Thus, the nature of the divine makes the image of the divine impossible. Art has an upper limit: it is confined to the earthly zone, where it performs a propaedeutic, educational, civic function. It prepares for its own dissolution. The lover of beauty relies on art in taking his first steps, then abandons it. In that sense, it is accurate to say that Plato is the father of iconoclasm. Sooner or later, all enemies of the image will employ Platonic arguments. … At the same time, however, Plato is the father of iconophilia, since he completely justifies man's desire to contemplate divine beauty. In the religious ascension that leads man toward the divine, reverential piety and the search for the beautiful are not separated, practically or theoretically" (Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 36).
[38] Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 1.
[39] Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 15.

Besançon employs without irony or elaboration) and Christianity, these two opposed systems of thought—in terms of their approach to iconic and aniconic representations—have, according to Besançon, been in constant conflict. For within Christianity, which, like many others, he sees as being influenced by Greek philosophy, there were also iconoclastic inclinations, but the iconophiles' theology prevailed and it did so because, contrary to those who might see "icon" as itself being an historical signifier, that was used by social actors in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. It is clear that Besançon, like so many others, sees the concept of iconoclasm as naming a reaction to a stable inner quality objects are thought to possess. Consider for example how he describes this quality:

> The artist cannot represent things, even in the most naturalistic way—that is, by photographing them—without the emergence of a surplus, which leads to admiration and praise, even though it is not altogether clear whether that surplus comes from things, from the artist, or from God. That is why, when religious art lost strength, the sacred found refuge in profane art, and orthodoxy found its vindication in the painters who least thought about it, but who knew how to look properly at the 'phenomenon.'[40]

This in turn allows him to draw historical lines all the way from the ancient Greeks to the present: "when Kant is placed after Calvin and Pascal, we seem able to see more clearly a few of the lasting motifs of modern iconoclasm. The three writers stand at the confluence of an intellectual movement, a social current, and a religious attitude."[41] In all of the discussion, the focus of analysis is on the sacralization or desacralization of the object

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[40] Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 379-380.
[41] Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 201.

and the theological debates of those concerned either to interpret it properly or disparage it.

Like Besançon and his presumption of a uniform inner meaning that requires correct understanding, consider the article on iconoclasm in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Diane Apostolos-Cappadova's "Iconoclasm: An Overview,"[42] starts with the following definition: "Iconoclasm can be defined as the intentional desecration or destruction of works of art, especially those containing human figuration, on religious principles and belief." (4279). Despite the deceiving "can be" that might suggested to readers that she is going to provide an alternative definition or recommend a different approach, the rest of the article supports her rather traditional introductory definition. That is, acts of classified as iconoclasm is here too explained as the result of some undefined universal human creativity that motivates people in the destruction of art and which is somehow elicited by the "power of images."[43] She further argues, again much as does Besançon, that "any investigation of either the historical events or the concept of iconoclasm raises questions regarding valuing and meaning of imagery, particularly sacred art and ecclesiastical doctrines."[44] Apostolos-Cappadova's philosophically idealist approach to iconoclasm is evident, an approach that, as with many writers on this topic, prioritizes meaning, religion, an inner impulse known as human creativity, along with belief—there are all—keys in understanding iconoclastic tendencies. The earlier suggestion that practical contests over ownership and natural resources is, predictably perhaps, not entertained in her article.

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[42] Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 4279-89.
[43] Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," 4280.
[44] Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," 4279.

One of the problems she does identify early on in her article is that “the primary reference for iconoclasm has been religion, and in particular, Western monotheism.”[45] The problem with this, according to Apostolos-Cappadova, is that such a reference “raises critical issues in any discussion of the meaning of iconoclasm in world religions. Foremost among these issues is the role of religious belief in the formation of cultural and individual identity”;[46] this is an issue because, as she goes on to write, “if iconoclasm is limited to the preconceived categories of Western monotheism, then is it independent of the otherwise universal relationship between art and cultural memory and religious traditions?” Over the next pages of her article she attempts to demonstrate exactly how iconoclasm is *not* something that can be limited to western monotheism but that it is rather a universal phenomenon, one that is linked to, as she puts it, “human creativity,” impulses and religious beliefs that are manifested in those iconoclastic moments. The irony, perhaps, of her cross-cultural interest is that this supposedly limiting “western monotheism” is exactly the basis upon which Apostolos-Cappadova relies to make her seemingly universal claims about iconoclasm. Telling are the finishing lines of the article: “The basic nature of the iconoclastic impulse is clarified by detailed comparison of the singularity of the Western model in and against the global evidence for iconoclasm as value larger than the limitation of Western monotheism.”[47]

As a result of focusing merely on ideological disagreements over the supposedly essential meanings of objects, such modern approaches to the study of iconoclasm have as their main object the attempt to retrieve the *meaning of the icon*, both for those who are destroying images, and for those who adore, respect or venerate them. By means of

[45] Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," 4279.
[46] Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," 4279.
[47] Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," 4287.

such an approach human actors are portrayed rather conservatively as passive agents, merely reacting or responding to a stable, external stimuli: the icon and its meaning. This approach, exemplified by the scholars so far surveyed, is therefore no different than the equally conservative effort to retrieve the correct meaning of a text. Although one does not necessarily have to go so far as to agree with those literary critics who have proclaimed that the author (and thus the correct meaning of a text) is dead,[48] one might still argue that in such works sufficient attention is not being given to the effects of the discourses that surround such interpretative activity, including the contemporary discourse on iconoclasm itself. But also enough attention has not being given in the way such a discourse not only prompts us to understand agents as responding to a timeless value interior to an object but also leads to efforts to interpret that meaning "correctly" in light of its ahistorical origin, i.e., akin to reading a text in light of what the author intended. In both the reading of texts as well as the reading of artifacts this return to origins impels a real or imaginative interest in *restorations*, including both the active renovation of the object to its "original" state and the process of creating a narrative to account for the loss of that "original" state. But given the scarcity of our sources and the gaps in the historical record, not to mention the absence of the term itself during some of the prior times we study, this interest in the origin should attract some of our attention.

III. Holes in the Narrative

[48] See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Aspen Magazine* (1968); Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.

And it is with this now common, but problematic nonetheless, popular and scholarly effort to study an artifact in light of its original meaning that I return, then, not just to the holey frescoes found in the small church (referred to as the *katholikon*, i.e., the central church of a monastery complex) of the Vlatadon Monastery in the old city of Thessaloniki, but to the common understanding of them as resulting from the acts of past iconoclasts.

A. Dating

With gaps in the narrative in mind, we should begin by noting that we don't know exactly when the *katholikon* and the monastery was actually built. According to a book published by the monastery itself (*The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon*, 1999), there has continuously been a Christian church on this site from the earliest times. Citing "unbroken oral tradition"—itself a rather problematic basis for claims, at least from the viewpoint of a more rigorous history of representation—the book asserts—a key word when it comes to anachronistic modes of history-writing—that it was here that the Apostle Paul preached to the Thessalonians during his second missionary journey in 51 CE.[49] Another indication in the dating of the monastery where the church lies is its very name, Monastery of Vlatadon. It is said that the monastery owes its name to its founders, the brothers Dorotheos and Markos Vlattis. In fact, there is an

[49] "Finally, some old remains of architectural features, which are now located in the Monastery museum and in the courtyard, are evidence that the site on which the Monastery stands was a place of worship even before its foundation by the Vlatades brothers. It is likely that there was a Christian church on this site from very early times. Indeed, according to unbroken oral tradition, it was here that the Apostle Paul preached to the Thessalonians, during his second journey (51 AD)." The Monastery of Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon* (Thessaloniki: The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stravopegic Monastery of Vlatadon, 1999), 7-8. Also regarding a reference to the brothers Mark

inscription in the church that states that Markos and Theodoros Vlatis (therefore the name Moni Vlatadon) are the founders of the church. The inscription, though, dates to the 1800s when the church was "erected for a second time."[50] The oldest document that makes reference to the monastery by this name is a codex that ends with a dedication to the "respected Monasteri of Pantokratoros of the Vlatadon."[51] The date of the codex (listed in the monastery as codex 92) is, as Georgios Stogioglou mentions in his book, not known. Possible dates suggested by other scholars place it in the 14th and 13th century while Stogioglou himself writes, that, "it is possible that the codex is older than even the 13th century."[52]

It is generally accepted, however, that the monastery complex and especially the paintings of the *katholikon*, as judged by art historians belong to the Paleologian period (a period that spans from 1260 to 1453 CE). According to the Monastery's book the most accepted date is 1351 when Markos and Theodoros Vlatis came to Thessaloniki from Constantinople after the end of the hesychast controversy.[53] Before proceeding it is worth considering the context of this historical period.

B. The Hesychast Controversy and the Zealots' Uprising in Thessaloniki

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[50] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 18.

[51] Γεωργίου Α. Στογιόγλου, *Η Εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή Των Βλατάδων* (*[the Patriarchical Monasteri of Vlatadon in Thessaloniki]* Θεσσαλονίκη: Πατριαρχικόν Ίδρυμα Πατερικών Μελετών, 1971), 68. (ibid. n.3, 68)

[52] Στογιόγλου, *Η Εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή Των Βλατάδων,* n. 3: 68

[53] "There were, indeed, two priest-monks known at the time who bore the name "Vlat(t)is," Dorotheos and Markos. They were friends and disciples of Saint Gregory Palamas, whom they followed to Constantinople when he was called to appear before a synod which was to deal with the hesychast controversy and his theological differences with Barlaam the Calabrian. Having witnessed and shared the tribulations of Saint Gregory Palamas during the years 1341-1350, Dorotheos came with him to Thessaloniki and took up permanent residence in the city… he [i.e., Markos his brother], also, then came to Thessaloniki to be with his brother, in 1351." Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 19.

Although not immediately related to the history of the monastery, it is worth mentioning briefly the hesychast controversy[54] and the uprising of the so called zealots,[55] because it can further complicate both the dating of the church's iconography but also suggest an alternative story regarding the covering of the frescoes. The hesychast controversy initially involved Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) and Barlaam of Calabria (1290-1348). It started around 1336 when it is said that Barlaam, a philosopher and clergyman from Calabria, initially came to Constantinople and later settled in Thessaloniki, from where he started preaching against a certain monastic method/prayer known in the literature as the "Jesus Prayer" which was practiced in the monasteries of Mt. Athos and by which monks claimed they could acquire knowledge of god. Against Barlaam, who held the position that god is unknowable, a monk named Palamas wrote his treatise *Apodictic Treatises* (around 1335) making the distinction between essence and energies of god. That is, Palamas claimed that although god's essence is unknowable, he is known through his energies as are attested in various episodes in the bible, for example, the burning bush in the book of Exodus 3:1-22 and the light the disciples of Jesus saw on Mt. Tabor (an episode known as the transfiguration of Jesus), which is described in the synoptic gospels Mathew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36 and in 2 Peter 1:16-18. The controversy took such dimensions that it soon became necessary to be resolved by a synod in Constantinople in 1341, led by emperor Andronikos III and which was in favour of the

[54] See: Βενιζέλος Χριστοφορίδης, *Οι Ησυχαστικές Έριδες Κατά Το Ιδ' Αιώνα*. (Θεσσαλονίκη: Παρατηρητής, 1993); John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Thelogical and Social Problems* (London: Variorum Reprints 1974).
[55] See: John W. Barker, "Late Byzantine Thessalonike: A Second City's Challenges and Responses," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 57 (2003), 5-33; Peter Charanis, *Social, Economic and Political Life in the Byzantine Empire*, 113-114; Peter Charanis, "Internal Strife in Byzantium During the Fourteenth Century," *Byzantion* 15 (1940-41), 208-30.

teachings of Palamas. Following the death of Andronikos III (later in 1341) there was a civil war over the imperial throne between Ioannis Kantakouzinos, on the one hand, who was declared emperor by the army and who seemed to have the support of not only of aristocrats but of monastic circles as well). And, on the other, Ioannis V Palaiologos the underage son of Andronikos III, who was declared emperor by Patriarch Kalekas. In this controversy Palamas openly sided with Kantakouzinos when he was asked by Patriarch Kalekas to take sides.

The civil war ended, however, in 1347 when Kantakouzinos and Ioannis V became co-emperors. Kantakouzinos, upon taking the imperial throne in Constantinople, changed the Patriarch of Constantinople and also elected 32 more bishops in various churches in the empire, among which Palamas was elected bishop of Thessaloniki.[56]

Meanwhile, in Thessaloniki, there was a social upheaval in which the guild of mariners (known also as the zealots) seized control of the city (between 1345-1349) and it is attested that they slaughtered members of the aristocracy while confiscating their fortunes, taking also property that belonged to monasteries.[57] Given the relation Palamas had with Kantakouzinos, as well as with the aristocracy, he is reported to have been denied entry to the city in 1347, when he went to Thessaloniki to take his position as a bishop. It was only after 1350, when Kantakouzinos took over Thessaloniki from the zealots, that Palamas was able to take his position.[58]

Knowing something of this story helps us to understand why the monastery's book on the church asserts that "the monastery must have been founded immediately after

[56] Χριστοφορίδης, *Οι Ησυχαστικές Έριδες Κατά Το Ιδ' Αιώνα*, 78-79.
[57] Charanis, *Social, Economic and Political Life in the Byzantine Empire, VI 213-230;* Barker, "Late Byzantine Thessalonike,"19.
[58] Barker, "Late Byzantine Thessalonike,"17. Also, Χριστοφορίδης, *Οι Ησυχαστικές Έριδες Κατά Το Ιδ' Αιώνα*, 81-82.

the enthronement of Saint Gregory Palamas, once the brothers had taken up residence in the town, perhaps in 1351, or even a little later."[59] And this is also why, according to the monastery's book, the katholikon of the monastery was dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Savior "whose uncreated light was for them [i.e., the Vlatadon brothers], their teacher Saint Gregory and the hesychasts, the center of their theological thought and life."[60] Despite the certainty of this story, there seems, however, to be much uncertainty about the actual date of the founding of the monastery and also, as we will see later, about the actual date when the Ottomans (also known simply as Turks) turned the church into a mosque and, according to now popular oral tradition, plastered the walls and thereby covering (i.e., destroying?) the frescoes. Based on the evidence, however, one could credibly claim that the monastery, and its church, was in existence prior to the controversy. That the image of Palamas among the frescoes of the katholikon suggests that the frescoes were painted after the 1341 synod and either covered or damaged during the zealot uprising who, as pointed out above, not only confiscated monastic property (such as this church) but who also had little sympathy for Palamas (either given the latter's good relations with Kantakouzinos or with the aristocracy).

Of interest is to note that not only does this counter-narrative provide a credible account that the plastering possibly predated the arrival of the Ottomans and it involved disputes among local Christians but, also, what the monastery's book says about Palama's painting on the interior wall of the church:

> Of great interest is the depiction of Saint Gregory Palamas…The saint is portrayed facing towards the west, and holding in his hands an open

[59] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 18.
[60] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 18.

scroll. He is wearing episcopal vestments and has a halo. This wall-painting was subjected to blows from hammers *during the Turkish period*. The portrayal has very marked facial characteristics (long, wide beard, dark curly hair and a rather aquiline nose) and differs from the well-known depictions of the saint in wall paintings and icons of the beginning of the 15th century and later. His portrayal in the church witnesses to his relation to the place and constitutes a historical clue for the dating of the murals (emphasis added).[61]

One is left wondering, even if we are to believe that the frescoes were covered with plaster right after the first seizure of Thessaloniki in 1387, how is it that in the beginning of 1400 Palamas's paintings differ so radically from this one.

C. Names and Rumors

As mentioned earlier, apart from being known as Vlatadon, the monastery is also given other names. As evidenced in the title of the book cited above the Monastery is called "royal, patriarchal and stavropegic." Royal because it was established by a grant from Empress Anna Palaiologina (Anna of Savoy), probably in 1354, according to the book; Patriarchal and stavropegic (from the words stavros=cross and pignimi=to put down) because it belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople[62]:

The Monastery is called royal because it was established by a grant from Anna Palaeologina and through a royal chrysobull [an official imperial

[61] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 32.

[62] Regarding the status of monasteries but also how they functioned under Ottoman law see: Tom Papademetriou, *Render Unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 88-101.

document that had the royal golden (chryso) seal (bulla)], which has not survived, but which must have been issued in 1354, in the name of the Emperor Ioannes Kantakouzenos and the Empress Anna Palaeologina, during the term as patriarch of Philotheos, who was friend of the founder. It is also called patriarchal and stavropegic because a patriarchal sigillium was issued for it, shortly afterwards, by the Ecumenical Patriarch Neilos, and the cross from the Patriarch was placed there.[63]

Both sigillia (from the Latin word *sigillum,* meaning a seal and which referred to official imperial documents) have been lost as already stated. However, another name for the monastery that was used during the period of Ottoman rule (and still by many Thessalonians today), is *Tsaous Monastir* (i.e., "the commander's monastery"). According to the monastery's book this nomenclature likely dates back to the first Ottoman capture of Thessaloniki in 1387, at which time a guard-post may have been established in the upper old city, at the monastery. The commander of the guard-post, known as a *tsaus* ("commander" in Turkish) was thus linked to the monastery's name.[64] According to Stogioglou's book, though, it seems that the name was given to the monastery because of another rumor (and for which Stogioglou goes to great lengths to

[63] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 19.
[64] "The most likely explanation for this name is that at some time a unit of Turkish troops was billeted there, with a Tsaus or sergeant in command. When the Turks captured the city of Thessaloniki for the first time in 1387, they established a garrison in the acropolis, with a fortified guard-post outside the south wall on the flat platform of the Monastery, in order to guard the water cistern of the city which was on its premises, and to watch the two military postern-gates which were in the walls near that point. At that time, the Monastery church was also taken over and converted into a mosque to meet the needs of the soldiers. After the second capture of Thessaloniki (1430), a guard-post must again have been established there for the same reasons. Thus, the commander of the post, a "tsaus," is the origin of this name for the Monastery. The grave of one of the these commanders is to be seen in front of the south door of the Katholikon." Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vlatadon,* 19-20.

prove it wrong).[65] That is, according to a document published in the 16th century, during the first seizure of Thessaloniki, the monks offered help to the Ottomans and because of their assistance the Turks were able to capture the city. And this is why they were given a special treatment during the Ottoman period.[66]

The point of this excursion into the various names of the church, and the various narratives (i.e., rumors) that support each name, is to demonstrate that what, as, I think, Lincoln rightly, observed, when he talked about the rumors concerning the cholera epidemic in Madrid in 1834 being caused by monks: "whether possessing any facticity or not, are best understood as metaphors in which popular opinion found graphic expression."[67] Therefore, the reason that I found them of particular interest is because they indicate the possible understandings people had of the monastery and its church during the years—opinions that seem to have been in flux and dependent on changing circumstances and interests.

D. Renovations

The small church building, in which those students from Alabama first saw the heavily pitted frescoes, is a domed cruciform with peristyle, i.e., the shape of the cross is inscribed in a square, while the dome is supported on four columns. This architectural style belongs to the period when monasticism was flourishing in Thessaloniki (10th -14th c.), and the church is in fact the only one of the monastery's buildings that has survived (albeit with certain later alterations) from the Byzantine era and from the monastery's original structure, which is believed to date, as already mentioned, to around 1350.

[65] Στογιόγλου, *Η Εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή Των Βλατάδων,* 69-80.
[66] Στογιόγλου, *Η Εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή Των Βλατάδων,* 70.
[67] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 113.

Alterations are understood to have occurred since then, however; renovations to the church are said to have first took place at the time of the first capture of Thessaloniki by the Ottomans (1387), when it was, like many Christian churches in lands taken over by Muslims, converted into a mosque. With the pitted frescoes in mind it is worth quoting in full how the monastery's own history describes the alterations made to the church at this time:

> Two modifications were slight from a technical point of view: a) the hollowing out of a shallow recess in the center of the arch of the sanctuary to show the direction of Mecca (i.e., a *mihrab*); b) the creation of a pointed arch at the edge of the eastern vault, above the iconostas; c) one modification was significant: all the interior walls were covered with plaster which meant that the wall paintings were badly damaged with hammer blows which served to roughen the walls so the plaster would stick.[68]

Of these three alterations, the book draws special attention to the hammered frescoes and how they were badly damaged and covered with plaster. We are not told, however, why this took place—was it driven by ideological motivations that could be understood today in terms of what some might describe as Muslim/Christian animosities, or perhaps, as per the counter-narrative above, explained by appeal to pre-Ottoman contests within the eastern Church, or, instead, might this be better understood by, say, construction engineers or anyone familiar with the work necessary to renovate a structure that contains plastered interior walls? Apart from the ease with which subsequent historians (much as

[68] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stravopegic Monastery of Vlatadon*, 28

we saw with those who study iconoclasm in general) might theologize the motives of those early renovations, it is noteworthy that the icons, for some reason, were subsequently left covered with plaster despite the fact that in 1401 (just fourteen years later, when memory surely would contain evidence of what lay behind the plaster) the Ottomans cancelled the sequestration of the monastery because it had been proclaimed Patriarchal (rather than exclusively royal), and thus it was returned to the Ecumenical Partriarchate of Constantinople (i.e., was now under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Church itself).[69] We are told by the monastery's book that after the battle of Ankara (in 1402) and thus after the treaty that was signed, the emperor of Constantinople was able to regain control of the city,[70] that is until 1430 when Thessaloniki was captured for the second time—a nearly thirty year period in which the walls could have been uncovered (had the people at the time, much as some modern commentators do, seen the hammering and plastering as an iconoclastic act?). And it was after the second capture that most of the city's churches were turned into mosques, with first being the church of Acheiropoietos at the center of Thessaloniki in 1430.[71] It should be noted that most of Thessaloniki's churches turned into mosques during the 15th and 16th century.[72]

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[69] According to the Ottoman law at the time, whatever belonged to the former king after the capture of a city became the property of the Sultan unless it was patriarchal which will be respected. See: Tom Papademetriou, *Render Unto the Sultan,* 88-101.
[70] George T. Dennis, "The Byzantino-Turkish Treaty of 1403," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* XXXIII (1967): 72-8.
[71] Alessandro Taddei, "The Conversion of Byzantine Buildings in Early Ottoman Thessaloniki: The Prodromos Monastery and the Acheiropoietos Church," in *Études en l'honneur de Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont,* ed. Michele Bernardini and Alessandro Taddei (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino, 2010), 201-14.
[72] Vryonis, Speros Jr. "The Ottoman Conquest of Thessaloniki in 1430," in *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society: Papers Given at a Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks in May 1982*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Heath Lowr (Birmingham and Washington, D.C.: University of Birmingham Press, 1986), 313-320.

The monastery's own book also records that over the years the church has been "renovated" a total of three subsequent times. The first was in 1801, probably because parts of the exterior walls on the north and west sides collapsed; in this renovation, according to an inscription still found inside the church, the building is characterized as "erected for a second time." According to Stogioglou the renovations involved only the three exonarthex (i.e., the outer narthex of a church), the esonarthex and the north wing of the church, leaving the central part of the church, its dome and altar intact.[73] We have no indication whether those responsible for the renovation were aware of the covered frescoes.

A second renovation took place in 1907, as also recorded by an inscription on a marble plaque located above the west door of the *katholikon*. Meanwhile at the southern-chapel of the monastery (known as the chapel of Paul) parts of the plaster fell revealing some paintings. Basileios Mystakidis, writing in 1899 for a journal published in Istanbul by the *Greek Philological Association of Constantinople,* writes: "three years ago some beautiful icons have been revealed from the plaster in the west wing of the altar,"[74] (which is where the chapel of Paul is located)[75]. Mystakidis, it should be noted, makes no

[73] "[…] ἐν ἔτει 1801 ἔγιναν ἐργασίαι ἐπὶ τῶν τριῶν ἐξωναρθήκων, τοῦ ἀνατολικοῦ ἐσωνάρθηκος καὶ τῆς βορείας πτέρυγος αὐτοῦ, ὥστε ἐκ τοῦ ἀρχικοῦ ναοῦ διετηρήθησαν ὡς εἶχον ὅλον τό κέντρον τοῦ ναοῦ μετὰ τοῦ θόλου καὶ τοῦ 'Αγίου Βήματος.'" Στογιόγλου, *Η Εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή Των Βλατάδων,* 84.
[74] Μυστακίδης, Βασίλειος Α. "Η Μονή Των Βλατάδων Και Τα Εν Αυτή Έγγραφα, Μητροπολίται Θεσσαλονίκης, Επισκοπαί, Κτλ. (the Monastery of Vlatadon and Its Documents, Bishops of Thessaloniki and Dioceses, Etc.)" (*Ο Εν Κωσταντινούπολει Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος, The Greek Philological Association in Constantinople* no. Τ. 27 Συλλογικά Έτη ΛΕ, ΛΣΤ, ΛΖ, ΛΗ [1895-1899]): 370.
[75] This chapel, which is located on the south side of the church, according to Stogioglou has initially been dedicated to St. Demetrious but after the 1801 renovation it has been re-dedicated to Apostles Peter and Paul, but now, according the book published by the monastery, it is simply referred to as the chapel of Paul, with a sign that says: "This is where Paul have preached to the Thessalonians."

further mention of the paintings or even hints anything regarding their covering.[76] But this silence may makes sense since, as noted by Virgil Candea, "the scientific study of icons began in the latter half of the nineteenth century as part of the new discipline of Byzantology." Furthermore, we should not forget that Mystakidis writes from Istanbul during a time when Thessaloniki is still part of the Ottoman empire. If he was aware of the terminology of "iconomachia" or "iconoclasm" from his studies in Tubingen it is unlike that he would have applied them here since those terms were mainly used at the time, as noted earlier in the chapter, for the 6th and 7th century controversies in Byzantium.

Regarding the paintings in the chapel of Paul, in 1971 Stogioglou writes, that the window in the chapel "has been widened in the past…in order to lighten the interior of the chapel, resulting in an irretrievable destruction of the frescoes in that area." It can be hypothesized, then, that the falling of the plaster and the accidental appearance of the frescoes of which Mystakidis writes was due to the widening of the window. Also of interest is that among the alterations that Stogioglou lists and which happened during its 1907 renovation this one is of interest: "the frescoes that were accidentally revealed in the south chapel in honor of Peter and Paul they have been repaired and restored by the invited for this reason specialized painter."[77]

The third renovation, of equal interest for this chapter, took place in 1982, in response to the effects of a large earthquake that struck Thessaloniki in 1978. It was during this third renovation that the pitted frescoes in the central part of the church were

[76] Virgil Candea, "Icons," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 1987), 4354.
[77] Στογιόγλου, *Η Εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή Των Βλατάδων,* 92.

discovered.[78] According to the Byzantologist Chrysanthe Marvorpoulou Tsiume, who studied the wall paintings of the *Katholikon* after the careful removal of what we might now designate as the Ottoman plaster, the paintings date to the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries CE, and thus had been covered for several centuries. Again, according to the book:

> Apart from the purely technical measures which were taken and which were aimed at strengthening the walls of the church, the Department of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki attempted partially to restore it to its former state. Thus, the lime plaster on the outside surfaces of the interior north and west sides was removed, while the south wall was restored to its original form. The old elegance of the church is not yet evident, of course, but it is hinted at in a satisfactory manner by the wall-paintings.[79]

As suggested above, and judging by the way local people talk about the church's damaged wall paintings today, there is no doubt that here we have an act of iconoclasm, much as it is described by the *Encyclopedia of Religion*: "The intentional desecration or destruction of works of art, especially those containing human figuration, on religious principles or beliefs."[80] According to such an understanding, the religious disputes/differences between "us" (Greeks, Orthodox Christians), and "them" (Turks, Muslims or the heterodox) was the cause of this act of desecration, and was therefore what motivated the ancient, hammer-wielding Ottoman iconoclasts. Such an approach, in keeping with much scholarship on iconoclasm, reasserts the primordial status of the icons

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[78] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stravopegic Monastery of Vlatadon*, 19.
[79] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stravopegic Monastery of Vlatadon*, 30
[80] Apostolos-Cappadona, "Iconoclasm: An Overview," 4279.

as sacred, explains why they were only “partially” restored once they were discovered (in order to preserve, or at least not tamper inordinately with, their prior sacredness) yet, problematically, merely duplicates and thereby repeats insiders’ own understanding of the icons as not just a link between their modern identity and that of past Greeks but also an emblem of their estrangement from those known simply as “the Turks.”

The trouble with scholars adopting such an approach, however, is that it does little more than reproduce, and thereby reauthorize, the claims of the insiders: for now ancient iconoclasm is the result of what is today seen as ongoing social conflict and an intentional act against symbols now understood as religious, as evidence of perpetually conflicting religious beliefs, and, finally as evidence of other people’s aims to strip the icons of their sacred value (understood as an attack on “us” and our values/property). Such a perspective does not recognize that an act against what is now seen as a collective symbol might have had no religious motivation/intention whatsoever and, moreover, fails to see that items so valued today may have been seen rather differently several centuries before, prior to it even being classed by anyone as a so-called sacred icon.

For example, if we remove ourselves from supporting a local description and, instead, carefully compare the two discourses on the holes in those walls that I have so far described—the common folk discourse on the holes, offered by the people who today attend the church, and then also the more technical folk discourse, from the monastery’s own book—we will notice that there is a curious gap between the two, and that they contradict one another, at least partly. It is this contradiction that attracts our attention if, instead of aiming to recover the original meaning of the relic we are interested in both the effects of representation and also representation’s historical situation, and thus the

possibility of finding disagreement and contest instead of harmony and uniform identity. For the people who attend this church, the hammer holes in the plaster walls are clearly the product of the intentionality of long past "infidels," while the monastery's book describes the act's origins in a surprisingly mundane way: "to roughen the walls so the plaster would stick."[81] Could it be, then, that the holes were simply made for the purely pragmatic purpose of holding plaster more securely to the walls, as part of a renovation carried out for who knows what practical purpose, and thus reflect *no* iconoclastic (i.e., ideological or theological) intentionality? Yet even if one was unwilling to entertain the possibility, it seems not at all unreasonable to admit that even if there was some specific motivation or symbolic intent behind the damage done to the pitted frescoes, it has long been lost to historical research (as evidenced by the assertion, speculation, and outright silences in the historical record). Therefore, taking seriously this gap in accounts means that to try to explain the holes in terms of their "origins" and "intentionality" (as do scholars of iconoclasm) would be in vain—especially considering how problematic the term "intentionality" is among scholars of literature.[82]

IV. Riders of the Past

Perhaps, however, trying to grasp the intention of the doer (whether ancient or contemporary) is not the only way to look at the issue: instead of tracing the various historical narrative so far surveyed in this chapter, we might shift our attention from the thing itself (i.e., the inherent meaning or cause of the icon or relic) to its function and

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[81] Vlatadon, *The Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stravopegic Monastery of Vlatadon*, 28

[82] But lest one think that the case of that little church is unique, consider a far more recent example of how origins and intentionality are invoked in representations of damage, i.e., the swift media response to the manner in which members of ISIS or ISL have damaged ancient artifacts that are highly prized by Europeans and North Americans.

effect for those who today use the pitted walls symbolically and strategically (i.e., those who tell tales about it, and therefore those who signify the holes). For contrary to how many scholars approach the topic, Bruce Lincoln in his book, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, provides us with a different framework for what can be gained by this shift of perspective; so consider, his chapter devoted to the exhumations that occurred in Spain in July of 1936 by the leftish party as a response to the right wing's attempts in "deconstructing the republican state and replacing it with a more authoritarian one."[83] Lincoln states that he was frustrated with how such actions in Spain were understood by other scholars, that is, depending on whether historians were sympathetic or unsympathetic to the Republic, they would see these actions as something that "ought to be deplored and forgiven or ferociously requited."[84] This is not unlike the approaches we saw earlier and also to the more recent ones regarding the destructions occurred by IS in Iraq and in Syria. In order to see these actions not as an aberration from the normal human realm but, rather, as evidence for how human contest matters of significance to them, Lincoln instead tried "to place them within a specific historical context, to locate phenomenological analogues to them, and to speculate on what may have been expressed in, and accomplished through, these dramatic and chilling acts."[85]

In discussing these acts of exhumation as an instance of what can be broadly considered an act of iconoclasm Lincoln takes a stand rather different from some already surveying by arguing that:

> [N]o act of iconoclasm is ever carried out with the intent of destroying an icon's sacred power, for iconoclasts—who are regularly estranged from

[83] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 104.
[84] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 109.
[85] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 109.

> their adversaries on lines of class, politics, or national origin as well as those of religion—act with the assurance either that the specific image under attack has no such power or the more radical conviction that there is no such thing as sacred power. It is their intent to demonstrate dramatically and in public the *powerlessness* of the image and thereby to inflict a double disgrace on its champions, first by exposing the bankruptcy of their vaunted symbols and, second, their impotence in the face of attack.[86]

While in agreement that settling the issue of intentionality is a distraction for scholarship, I contend, however, that the public display Lincoln refers to is useful for *both* parties in the conflict (those carrying out damage, as Lincoln studies, but also those who make representations concerning the intentions of social actors whose actions are seen as damaging, i.e., the very portrait of them as intending to damage), and can be applied to narratives at the core of *both* groups' identity—the communal identity that is so closely intertwined with the writing of history. In other words, the "origins" of the pitted icons and the theological disputes over orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy that we draw upon in decoding their meaning today would not be under discussion if they did not serve some discursive interests today. Instead of asking, as many scholars would, about the motives behind iconoclasm's damage or instead of seeing a restoration as recovering a lost or obscured origin, my interest, rather, focuses on what those constructive activities we call restorations *create*. To rephrase, do restorations try to restore the church to its "original form," as the monastery's book claims? For if so, then which of its many pasts is its original form: the state of the church in 1350, or in 1801 when it was "erected for the

[86] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of* Society, 120.

second time”? While I would argue that these questions of originality and authenticity are best left to the theologians, studying the manner in which social actors in the present continually choose (and often compete over choosing) which past will be seen as originary and exemplary, are issues that fall within the domain of the social theorist and the more careful historian.

To return once again to Lincoln and following his hypothesis “that in some measure society is constructed (and continually reconstructed) through the exercise of symbolic discourse,” we can return to the pitted iconography of the church in Thessaloniki. But this time instead of trying to find the meaning of the icons *per se*, or look at the icons from the perspective of the doer, we can shift our attention to the people who visit the church and see their narratives and restorations, i.e., their symbolic discourse, as a way to construct new social identities through the fabrication of new symbols by using old material from the archive of the fragmented past.

As established above, the history of the icons on the interior walls of the church stopped abruptly sometime around 14th century CE, when, for whatever original reason, they were hammered and covered with plaster; for more than five centuries the iconography literally did not exist. Thus the meaning the iconography might once have had, or what people’s perception of the frescoes might once have been while attending a ceremony in the pre-plastered phase, has been equally lost—especially if one considers that “religion” in the Paleologian era when the church was assumed to have been built was not separated from politics. Monastic circles, for example, seem to have been highly involved in the politics of the time, with emperors acquiring power by claiming the support of monasteries and their leaders. And recall that the zealots’ uprising in

Thessaloniki, as I mentioned earlier, was indeed aimed not only against the elites but also against monasteries—which had close relationships with the elites—even to the point that when Gregory Palamas was assigned as archbishop of Thessaloniki he was denied access to the city by the zealots' leaders. We can entertain, then, the possibility that the fresco of Palamas found in the church functioned, at that time, as part of an entirely different discourse for the people of the church. So in 1982, when the archaeologists and art restorers carefully removed the rest of the plaster, they discovered—or better, we might now consider that they *created*—these holey icons. For not only did the restorers literally clean the plaster out of each hole, thereby creating the hole in the wall, they also manufactured a totally new and contemporary symbol system to make sense of what they had found, a symbol system around which, or upon which, a new discourse was made possible concerning their own group's past, lineage, and thus modern identity. For this was now a group of modern citizens of Greece, freed from Ottoman rule, and for whom this freedom had been purchased only a few generations before.[87] Furthermore the latest "restorations" of the church, according to the monastery's official book, "partially restored" both its interior and exterior walls. It seems therefore that sometimes restorations must work only up to a certain point, a point where it would still be allowable for members of a contemporary group, in this case Greek Christians, to claim continuity over time while not losing sight (literally) of the antiquity of the walls. The restorers, therefore, needed to leave enough traces (i.e. the holey icons/holes, partially "restored" walls yet a thick layer of plaster still in plain sight) in order to allow members of the group to develop a narrative that could, in the words of Mary Douglas, "impose system

[87] That is, the north of modern Greece was regained from the Ottomans in 1912 at the start of the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars.

on an inherently untidy experience."[88] In this case, the systematization made possible by the now apparent holey icons, faded and weathered as they are, but with easily "seen" traces of people malevolently wielding hammers, serves a discourse on origins, authenticity, and identity for modern Greeks.

In particular, we could understand this new symbol system (i.e. the "restored" holey icons) as a part of a contemporary discourse on social "trauma"—an experience that puts a person or a group in a state of extreme confusion and prompts insecurity about identity, place, and future, such as a natural disaster (when familiar landmarks are no longer apparent) or a foreign invasion or occupation. Long after the source of the confusion is gone, its traces and effects are still on public display—prompting modes of commemoration to both signify the event but also to place it within a new, ordered frame, so as to manage it, triumph over it, file it into the archive of the past as a useful reference point. Thus the past, yes, but recurring trauma, made possible in part by the continually present discourse on the holey icons, can be understood as the occasion for members of a group to—as Durkheim might have said—ritually reunite and redefine themselves by inhabiting a space, such as that little church, that allows them to share the same memories, re-experience the same authorized historical and emotional reference points, thereby seeing their group's identity (i.e., their own identity) as both united with some past social actors while also different from, and thus opposed by, some "other," and thus as distinctive. Moreover, pressing our Durkheimian analysis, the discourse on the holey icons is a way for groups that are inevitably and always on the brink of breaking up to represent and thereby experience collective agreement and social coherence, for the

[88] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 5.

displayed "trauma" is both a reminder of victory but also of how things could be different today.

Thus in contrast to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*'s approach to iconoclasm, the symbol in and of itself does not have an enduring substance, nor a meaning that transcends time or is equally understood by all parties (with their disagreement simply being what to do with this obviously holy artifact). Instead, as with the word icon itself, the item's meaning is historically conditioned, and changes over time according to the way people understand themselves and engage with the symbol—for there are times when the symbol is plastered over and, quite literally, forgotten, thus making it no longer a symbol at all. Similar to texts, symbols (whatever form they have) have no meaning that transcends time and space. Their meaning is the result of continual, (re)-signification, which is co-constitutive, situational, and relational to the people who use and re-use them. What's more, folk discourses about the holey icons portray for the group how "they" have suffered—a representation that constitutes those who tell the tale as a they. In other words, the discourse on the damaged wall paintings is nothing other than the discourse on modern Greek identity, for which Christian Orthodoxy has played an important role. Though the Church does not have official political power, it can claim to understand and represent national interests in some cases even better than the state, and in this way to gain popular allegiance.[89] The holey icons are therefore a useful tool, one that allows the Church to portray itself as the site where traces of Greek heritage and thus national identity can be found.

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[89] See for examples the debates over the use of the Rotonda of Galerius in Thessaloniki: Charles Stewart, "Who Owns the Rotonda?: Church Vs. State in Greece," *Anthropology Today* 14, no. 5 (1998): 3-9.

To press this point a little bit further, one might say that, seen in this light, the holey icons function just like any other tragic memorial, whether a war memorial or some other symbol that bears scars around which groups may construct a common sympathy and unified front. Take for example another of Thessaloniki's contemporary landmarks, the so-called "White Tower," a cylindrical building on the seafront that is 23 meters (75 feet) in diameter with a height of 27 meters (89 feet), on top of which is a turret 12 meters (39 feet) in diameter and 6 meters (20 feet) high. Originally constructed by the Ottomans to fortify the city's harbor, it became a notorious prison and scene of mass executions of Greeks during the long period of Ottoman rule—understandably perhaps, it was known at the time by locals as the "Red Tower." Continuing the symbolism of color, when Greece gained control of the city in 1912, the structure was renamed the "White Tower." Although it may seem too tragic a symbol to serve as a landmark (and groups, like ISIS, do make decisions on these matters, periodically destroying that which they decide cannot be resignified), today it is very much a visual synecdoche of the city, and provides an occasion to strengthen the collective sense of common identity by means of a present discourse on past traumas—just like the holey icons. And because meanings are constantly changing, overlapping previous meanings much like the plaster layers on top of the icons, the White Tower today has also become a symbol around which football (i.e., soccer) fans routinely gather to celebrate their teams' victory against their adversaries!

To conclude, we may now begin to understand both the usefulness and the limits of drawing upon iconoclasm as a way to study those hammered icons that struck the students on the study abroad trip as so curious. For, to return once again to Lincoln, "in

and of itself, iconoclasm has no specific political content, although it has always a political dimension."[90] That is, if we step back we will see in the holey icons not an expression of an exemplary and thus stable past but a new symbol system that is being continually re-created. A symbol that could be understood as a social "trauma" comparable to other tragic memorials upon which a common memory is re-constructed strongly enough to unite the members of a group and allow them to make claims of authenticity, originality and identity, all in order to create the impression of a linear link between their present and their imagined past.

[90] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 118.

CHAPTER 4

Traditioning Acts of Identification: The Case of Greek "Traditional" Villages

"The history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function is to do so"[1]

The words tradition or traditional belong to a set of words that have troubled scholars during the last fifty years. Curiously enough there is not a significant amount of bibliography that tries to address the problem or answer the question "What is tradition?" in a manner that does not draw heavily from the common understanding of the word. There is, on the other hand, an abundance of references to "tradition" or its derivative "traditional" as a way to explain phenomena that otherwise would be difficult to understand—or so it is thought. The problem of tradition is thus that scholars too easily grant or accept people's claims of linear succession over time and then use those claims to explain historical situations rather than treating those claims themselves as the curious object of study—as ways that speakers and writers make their present meaningful by understanding the past as necessarily leading to it.

Raymond Williams, in his important work *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* summarizes the various meanings that "tradition" has had over the years as following:

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[1] Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, 13.

> Tradition in its most general modern sense is a particularly difficult word. It came to English in C14 from the fw tradicion, oF, traditionem, L, from rw tradere, L—to hand over or deliver. The Latin noun had the sense of (i) delivery, (ii) handing down knowledge, (iii) passing on a doctrine, (iv) surrender or betrayal. The general sense (i) was in English in mC16, and sense (iv), especially of betrayal, from lC15 to mC17. But the main development was in senses (ii) and (iii). (318)

Broadly speaking, and following Williams, scholars who tried to account for the notion of tradition, that is what it consists of, its persistence, and its mode of transmission can be divided into two camps. On the one hand, we have those who understand traditions as things (whether beliefs, concepts, material things) "handed over," and therefore persisting through time and space. The task of scholarship is therefore to try to give an account for the properties that make these things called traditions special or salient through time and what their mode of transmission is.[2] On the other hand, we have those who understand traditions as invented to serve or respond to contemporary needs and interests. They therefore see their task as illustrating the processes by which traditions come into being.[3] Whereas the first approach focuses on the nature of the item being delivered, the second examines, instead, the delivery process itself and, more specifically, the choices made by

[2] Representative of this approach would be: Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, 68; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Josef Pieper, "The Concept of Tradition," *Review of Politics* 20 (1956), 465-91; Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Edward Shils, "Tradition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1971), 122-59); Jacobs Struan, "Edward Shils' Theory of Tradition," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 37 (2007, 139-62; Paul Valliere, "Tradition," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 4279-89;

[3] Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*.

social actors in deciding what to preserve, repeat, and thus deliver. Even though the latters' work has been very influential, tradition's common sense usage still persists. That is, traditions are thought to name something that possess an essence that is transmitted or handed down like a material object from generation to generation.

This common understanding persists in other forms as well. Mark Salber Phillips, for example, rightly observes that:

> Instead of 'tradition'—a term possessing great historical depth—we have adopted a host of more specialized vocabularies that appear to be free of the stigma of traditionalism. 'Discourse,' 'canonicity,' 'memory,' 'diaspora,' 'hybridity,' 'the history of concepts,'—these and similar terms in use across a variety of disciplines have become our most recent tools for talking about tradition's domain.[4]

Despite a change of technical terminology, some of those terms that Phillips identifies as doing the work of tradition, they are, to my understanding, equally problematic in that they preserve a notion of nostalgia[5] for origins and authenticity, notions that are inherent in the concept of "tradition," as will become evident in this chapter. In contrast to this common understanding of tradition as something that is handed down from generation to generation, I am not interested in maintaining the conventions of such terms. Rather, I am

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[4] Mark Salber Philips, "What is Tradition When It Is Not 'Invented'? A Historiographical Introduction," in *Questions of Tradition,* eds. Salber and Schochet (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2004): 4.

[5] For the problem of nostalgia see Vaia Touna (ed.), *The Problem of Nostalgia in the Study of Identity: Towards a Dynamic Theory of People and Place* (Forthcoming with Equinox Publishers).

more curious about who is involved in defining and classifying something as a “tradition” or “traditional.” By what means? And what modern interests drive that very definition? But before I go into more detail on this alternative approach, let me take you first to a village that is located in Pieria, a regional unit in Central Macedonia, Greece, to begin to illustrate the complexity of this thing we call tradition once our ethnographies of tradition become a little richer and more detailed.

The name Pieria may not be very familiar to many outside Greece but it is an area of significant historical importance, not only to Greeks but also to anyone who visits the northern part of Greece. This is where Mt Olympus is located. Nearby is the ancient city of Dion, an archaeological site dating from the 5th-century BCE dedicated to the cult of Zeus and the area is said to be the home of Orpheus and the Muses, daughters of Zeus. In the southern part of Pieria, up on the slopes of lower Mt Olympus, there is a mountain village called Old Panteleimonas (Παλιός Παντελεήμονας), a village that, upon visiting it, gives you the sense that it is trapped in time, about two hundred years ago. It is, in a word, *a traditional village*.

Old Panteleimonas is surrounded by forests of chestnut, oak and arbutus trees, and as you approach it, driving up the mountain, the only thing that you can discern are red-tiled rooftops on a sliding scale looking out over the Aegean Sea and the Thermaic Gulf of Thessaloniki. As you walk into the village—cars are not allowed to enter—you will likely be impressed by the harmony of the buildings’ architecture, known to locals as Epeirotiko or Macedonian style, that is, two-story buildings built tightly together against one another, with white and green or gray tiled walls, with wooden doors, windows and rooftops. Although some of those buildings bear the obvious marks of time, others are

surprisingly well preserved. Walking through the narrow, cobbled alleys you eventually find yourself in the village's central square, common to all Greek villages, where the inhabitants along with tourists socialize under the shade of a big oak tree. Prominent in the square is a church dedicated to St. Panteleimonas—the village's namesake—along with taverns with excellent food, cafés providing homemade or traditional pastries and Greek coffee, little stores selling all sorts of memorabilia, all of which make the village a favorite destination for a weekend away from the noisy cities.

According to the people in Old Panteleimonas, the village was built in 1803, during the Ottoman period, by people trying to find a safer settlement. But a deadly disease was threatening their community and it is said—again according to locals—that a man came to them with an icon of St. Panteleimonas,[6] which miraculously saved the inhabitants and who, in return, built a church dedicated to the saint and named their settlement after him. Although this older church doesn't exist anymore near its location a new church was built in 1914, which over the years has been restored many times due to various natural destructions and even a fire.

Old Panteleimonas is a village that has been characterized, since 1978, as "traditional" by a Greek Presidential enactment (to which I will come back later) and also a place that is protected by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) as a site of "world heritage." "Tradition" and "traditional" are therefore commonly used to describe not only its architecture but also a way of life that it is believed not to have changed too much—a belief shared not only among the residents living there, on the top of that small mountain, but also by those who visit the village.

[6] Whose name Παντελεήμων means "to all (πάντων) charitable (ελεήμων)," a saint and martyr, said to have lived in the 3rd-century CE in Nicomedia, who according to his life biography, studied medicine and was known for his healing abilities.

My interest in how people use the discourse of tradition brought me again to the mountain in September of 2013 to do some research, knowing that the village was famous for its traditional architecture and lifestyle.[7] Since I was there during a weekday in October of 2013 and finding a place to stay would be easy—given also that the tourist season was also almost over—I decided to spend the night in one of those quaint traditional houses located at the heart of the old village square, where the owner had turned the second floor above the tavern into very comfortable accommodations with private bathrooms. After I browsed around the narrow streets that are filled with taverns, cafes and small souvenir stores, I went to the owner of the hotel to ask what time breakfast would be served only to find myself a little surprised to learn that even 8 a.m. might be a little bit early for him to open the cafe—surprised only because of my previous assumptions that to live in a village, means the day starts very early. Soon those assumptions completely faded away, for I was told that most owners and employees leave Old Panteleimonas after closing their stores at the end of each day. Later that night I could gradually hear silence falling as the tourists were leaving and the owners, each closing their stores, taverns and cafés, began commuting back down to their homes, located about 6 kilometers south, near the base of the mountain, in the village of New Panteleimonas (Νέος Παντελεήμονας).

This daily movement of people up and down that mountain, even the seeming coincidence of these two villages names, is something that, most likely, goes unnoticed if we travel like visitors and not as analytical scholars, if we visit as people who *simply* want to experience the beauty and uniqueness of the traditional village of Old

[7] To which I have been many times over the years, taking friends who would want to experience a different Greece (different from that of the city, that is).

Panteleimonas which has survived for two hundred years holding onto its traditions and traditional aura. Consider for example how a guide to traditional settlements, in Greece, describes the phenomenon:

> Marks unfaded by the passing of people through the course of History, traditional [παραδοσιακοί] settlements in Greece are, today, among the most important sites of our country. A visit to one of those is a unique experience: it will travel (ταξιδέψει) you back in time, will reveal the harmony of human works with the natural habitat, will initiate you to a way of living more warming. Here nostalgia, pleasure, and relaxation seem to coexist almost ideally. [8]

If this is how we visit Old Panteleimonas, expecting to travel back in time, then what goes unnoticed is the work done by anachronism in the discourse of tradition, a discourse which manages and bridges the distance between the top and the bottom of the mountain, between past and present, traditional and modern, old and new. How do we account for this movement? How do we approach the notion of "traditional" that we have so many times encountered walking through the cobbled alleys of the village? What is that tradition that people speak of and which is in many ways represented in their "traditional" architecture of their buildings or way of life? For as will become evident, despite its

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[8] Ανδρέας Λαμπρόπουλος, "Οι Παροδοσιακοί Οικισμοί στο Χώρο και στο Χρόνο" (Traditional Settlements in Space and Time), in *Παραδοσιακοί Οικισμοί: Ένας Πλήρης Ταξιδιωτικός Οδηγός* (Traditional Settlements: A Detailed Tour Guide), ed. Αριστείδης Μιχαλόπουλος (Αθήνα: Explorer, 2003).

governmental classification as traditional Old Panteleimonas, is in many ways *far newer than New Panteleimonas*.

To better understand not only this irony but also this process of strategic anachronism we need to look at the history of these two villages within the wider social world in which they are situated.

I. Coming Down the Mountain

After WWII and the civil world that followed it, what was then known as Panteleimonas, like most villages, was affected as Greece was gradually transformed from a rural, agricultural economy to a metropolitan, industrial-based economy. By the end of 1940s, large parts of the population moved away from Greece's many small, rural villages, including mainly males between the ages of 20 and 35, in search of better working opportunities and thus better living conditions in big city centers. According to ELSTAT (Hellenic Statistic Authority),[9] despite the population increase during the 1950s due to the post-war baby boom, amid economic and political instability, many rural areas continued to decline in population, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

Between 1961 and 1971 9.8% (almost 1,000,000 people) of the total population of Greece emigrated to Western Europe, North America and Australia. These emigrants were mainly farmers coming from rural areas. Apart from migration abroad, during the same period, interior migration was not uncommon, especially towards the major Greek urban centers such as Athens and Thessaloniki. For example, between 1951 and 1971, these two urban centers were the only areas to record high increases in population while

[9] All the statistic numbers were retrieved from ELSTAT (Hellenic Statistic Authority), on October of 2013.

rural areas (i.e., villages) and islands were continuously losing population. In 1961 Athens contained 22% of the total population of Greece and Thessaloniki 5.7%, by the end of the 1970s Athens consisted of 31% of the total population and Thessaloniki 8.10%.

II. Village Life in Filmography

This interior migration, so apparent in daily life in Greece, was a common theme in the Greek imagination of the time, exemplified in the films and theatrical plays produced by Finos Films (1943-1977)—one of the most popular, even today, film production companies in Greece. From the 187 movies that Finos Films produced during this time, only a few were set in a contemporary village; instead, most of them were set in Athens. In addition, most of them concerned with the problem of interior migration, the adventures and struggles of people who were fleeing towards Athens to find a better life there. The migrants were typically represented as out of place, naïve, uneducated and in most cases as tricksters. A few comedy movies were set in a village or sometimes on an island.[10] Those films are characteristic of the village life at the time, inasmuch as they portrayed a way of living that was rough, with no household comforts that were expected in the city, and with no indoor plumbing (in some cases people would have to go and get water from a nearby fountain or a fountain spring that was usually located at the yard). Rural people were portrayed as struggling with those difficulties but also were seen as genuine and hospitable even though they lacked what the moviegoers likely understood as essentials. Furthermore, apart from the economic difficulties the people were facing,

[10] For the record, drama movies produced at the time were more likely to be set in a village and emigration abroad would certainly be a common theme.

we see that in many cases there were no hospitals and sometimes even doctors were a luxury, so it was common to suspect some people turning into charlatans and healers. High rates of what was then portrayed as superstition were a commonality as can be seen in the popular 1958 film entitled *Η Κυρά μας η Μαμή* (Our Mrs the Midwife), directed by Alekos Sakellarios, in which a practitioner (played by Orestis Makris) from Athens, having retired, decides to go with his family to his wife's village to practice medicine only to be faced with the superstition of the villagers who trusted the charlatanisms of the local Midwife (played by Georgia Vasileiadou) more than the scientific knowledge of the newly arrived doctor. The film, which to these days retains its popularity, is characteristic of representation of village life from that time, a representation that was not ideal, at least as portrayed and seen by the people who lived in the cities, those who made and watched these movies.

Another example of how village life was represented is a political satire, a 1965 film entitled *Υπάρχει και Φιλότιμο* (A Matter of Pride), directed again by Alekos Sakellarios. The movie is about a minister of the Greek government, Andreas Mavroyialouros (played by Labros Konstandaras), who visits a small village (basically, his constituency) for the inauguration of a maternity hospital that had been built under the minister's authority. As the plot unfolds he realizes that his associates have been fooling him over the years by using state funding for their own benefit. Many scenes in the film portray not only the rough life in small villages but also the perception that city people, at the time, had of villages and the people living there. For instance, in one scene, a day before his trip, the politician is trying to find someone to join him on his trip, asking his wife, daughter, a colleague, and his colleague's wife, none of whom show any kind of

interest in visiting the village. They all admit that neither the village life nor its people are appealing to them. On his way to the village where the inauguration was going to take place (joined eventually on his trip by his daughter), and after a car accident, the politician is forced to spend a few of hours at a near by village—an eye opener for him—where we learn, along with the politician (who hides his real identity), the difficulties these people are facing, with no hospitalization, no doctors, and with economic challenges derived mainly from the government's lack of agricultural policies. Both he and his daughter are shocked when a villager tries to cure his daughter's freshly injured knee by placing on the wound tobacco to stop the bleeding. We also see his daughter shocked by having to use an outdoor bathroom, that she can't take a hot bath or that the nearest phone is about half an hour walk away at another village's local police station.

The reason I've used these two characteristic examples of popular portraits of village life is because we do not see in any of them the so-called appealing "traditional" lifestyle of the village for so many assume today (consider, for example, the way the Guide to traditional settlements, that I discussed on early in the chapter, idealizes the village life), [11] neither is there any kind of nostalgia in these images or romanticized view of a simpler, purer, or more authentic rural life that is closer to the land, one that someone from the city would happily want, desiring to stay there permanently or at least have a vacation. Contrary to today's notion of "traditional," these movie images of backward, poor rural life were once the typical examples of village life and also, in a way, explanatory of the reasons people to migrated into cities or went abroad. The village was then a place to escape. Of course, the village that we today call Old Panteleimonas was, at that time, no exception.

[11] See, page 172.

III. Panteleimonas

In the mid-twentieth century, Panteleimonas suffered the same economic challenges that faced all rural life in Greece. Agricultural life could no longer support anymore the remaining inhabitants of the village, as it once did, and living conditions were rough, as they were of course in most villages at the time. In the table below we can see the gradual decline in population—but in the 1971 census we curiously see the sudden appearance of another village with the same name, a dramatic decline in the population of Panteleimonas, and its renaming.

Census	Population (Panteleimonas)	Population (New Panteleimonas)
1940	1,158	
1951	997	
1961	929	
1971	77 (Old Panteleimonas)	544
1981	4 (Old Panteleimonas)	848

It turns out that, 1965, the remaining inhabitants of the village petitioned the government to allow them to relocate further south, down the hill, to a newly established village to be called New Panteleimonas—with the excuse that after rainfalls the many landslides were affecting the old village. The new location, far closer to the sea, was also hoped to boost tourism and provide new job opportunities for the locals. A number of modern hotels,

restaurants and cafés along the coast were then created so as to offer an ideal vacation destination for tourists.

Old Panteleimonas was, understandably, abandoned and left to deteriorate—prompting one to wonder how that quaint traditional house came to be my home for the night in September of 2013. Also having in mind the way village life was commonly portrayed in contemporary films from earlier times, the question is what has happened during the 1970s that has altered, romanticized and in many ways idealized the village life? Or we could say traditionalized the village? How, over that forty or fifty year period did the term traditional come to change its meaning so dramatically? Answering such a query necessitates more context.

IV. Going up the Mountain

As early as the 1900s there had been interest in the architectural style of the Greek village house as a mark of a distinct Greek identity, an identity that was not only distinct from neighboring countries but also one that stretched back in time. Aristotle Zachos (1871-1939),[12] who was born and raised in a village in what in Greece today is called FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and studies in various universities in Germany—was a prominent architect specializing in popular architecture, and who published an article that contained a rhetoric that has been used ever since implicitly or

[12] He also worked along with another Greek architect Kostantinos Kitsikis with the French architect and archaeologist Ernest Hébrard (1875 – 1933) in the reconstruction of Thessaloniki's city centre after the Great Fire of 1917 during which renovation many Ottoman and medieval features have been ignored while preserving Byzantine and Greco-Roman architecture, transforming the centre into a European-styled city. See: Alexander Yerolympos, "Thessaloniki Before and After Ernest Hébrard" (Thessaloniki, 2007). Retrieved from http://www.lpth.gr/en/ (the city's history).

explicitly to support the distinctiveness of the Greek architecture style. Among other things we read:

> If we look at a Greek village house of today and try to compare it directly with an ancient house, from both an aesthetic and a practical point of view, we will see that at first sight there is no resemblance. However, if we compare the modern Greek village house with its immediate historical predecessor – if we compare the house of today with a house representing the final phase of Byzantine art – we will see that there is little difference and that the Turkish conquest brought no change, because the conquerors were a purely military nation bringing with them no culture capable of exerting an influence; on the contrary, they used Greek monumental buildings such as churches, palaces and the mansions of the rich for their own purposes, and so they never felt the need to develop their own architecture except in a few cases; and even then they usually employed Greek artisans.
>
> Having thus demonstrated the connection between contemporary popular architecture and Byzantine art, it is obvious that by continuing backwards through history we arrive at ancient Greek art. Numerous examples of the authentic Greek village house of the northern region survive in a large area around Mount Olympus and the Pindos range, in other words in the very area where authentic Greek popular poetry flourished and the national traditions lived on most strongly. If we would like to have a really genuine contemporary Greek style of architecture with

> a purely Greek aesthetic, what we should study is precisely that type of Greek house in all its forms. Because the architecture we are now in the habit of calling Neohellenic, that is the houses we see in Athens, is nothing other than Italian Renaissance architecture, an interloper in our midst. It is artificial, laying false claim to a so-called ancient Greek style not derived from our feeling for life (way of living) and thus not connected with our national traditions.[13]

From the above excerpt it is evident that the rhetoric of tradition works because the things that are identified as enduring and timeless, such as the Greek village house, are found so far in the distant past that there is no actual evidence for the claims. That is, the evidence that does remain is itself vague and general, such as the so-called Byzantine style. So the further back we go to find the enduring identity of what is said to be an authentic traditional village in northern Greece is indicative of the empirical differences that a group's rhetoric has to distract us away from. For example, other architectural styles that are no less found in Greece, according to Zachos at least, for example the neoclassicism of Athens and the Ottoman architecture (though not mentioned) are two such examples and which are not indicative to be characterized as "authentically" Greek. Furthermore, for this rhetoric of unique but enduring identity to work, the Greek village house of this text had to be disconnected from any associations it might have had with the Ottoman empire's long presence and influences in the region, and it should, instead, be linked to an even further removed past of a glorious era, that is, the Byzantine period, since that

[13] Retrieved from a bilingual (Greek, English) publication of the Benaki Museum entitled *Epirus – Thessaly – Macedonia: Through the Lens of Aristotle Zachos: 1915-1931.* Benaki Musuem, 2007.

would provide the enduring existence of Greeks in the area, despite the occasional (and sometimes enduring) presence of others.

Even though the use of the term tradition is seen by many scholars as an unreflective habit, at least in the way insiders of various traditions understand it, when we pay closer attention then we may see that a lot of work has been done not only to establish what we call a tradition (or something to be regarded as traditional) but also a great effort to maintain it as such. And the effort to "traditionalize" something does not necessarily refer to the efforts of previous generations and our desire to preserve them and their choices but with regard to continually changing interests in the present. That is, although Zachos writes about the "authentic" Greek village house in early1900s in general terms, he does not identify a specific style, but simply juxtaposes it to that of the Ottoman empire, thereby defining identity by what something is not. This is understandable in that he writes at a time when the interest of the newly emerged nation-states in Europe (recall that he had studied in Germany) was to create, through various means (e.g., public ceremonies, flags, literature, music, styles of dress, and of course architecture) the impression of national distinctiveness and homogeneity. In the successive years various names have been used to identify this unique "village house" architecture, such as "popular," "anonymous," "vernacular," each one doing slightly different work. By the 1970s, even though there is specialization of the various vernacular architectural styles that can by identified in various regions of Greece, and despite their differences in style, the common denominator that is said to justify their Greekness lies in the remote past. Architects are drawing inspiration either from what they identify as Byzantine architecture or ancient Greek.

Recognizing, but nonetheless minimizing upon, the ambiguity among styles, a very well known Greek architect, Nikos Moustopoulos (born in 1927 in Athens[14]), specialized in the Macedonian Architecture that can be found in the north part of Greece, writes: "The vernacular architecture of a region does not present itself with clear boundaries and readily apparent roots. In the Macedonian vernacular architecture, in its most developed form, we can detect, with caution, two roots each with different origins."[15] According to Moutsopoulos, then, one point of common origin is the ancient Greek style and the other the Byzantine. He therefore goes on to say that: "The Macedonian architecture owes most of its characteristics to the Byzantine tradition, to the Byzantine house, which, as we know, in most cases was multistory."[16] Even though architecture, as a discipline, showed an interest in village houses as far back as the early 1900s and especially after the 1940s (following similar trends in Europe[17]), the term "traditional" was widely used only after the above mentioned 1978 Presidential Enactment (entitled "Characterization of Housing Estates as Traditional"). Soon after, it became evident that in order for the enactment to take effect in the consciousness of the

[14] He studied architecture at the National Technical University of Athens, he also holds a degree from the Theological School of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in which he later taught a course in Christian Archaeology and Art. Since 1958 he has been professor at the Polytechnic School of Aristotle University.

[15] "Η λαϊκή αρχιτεκτονική ενός τόπου δεν εμφανίζει πάντοτε όρια σαφή και ρίζες ευκολοδιάκριτες. Στη μακεδονική λαϊκή αρχιτεκτονική, στην πιο εξελιγμένη της μορφή, μπορούμε με επιφύλαξι να αναγνωρίσουμε δυο δρόμους, με ολοωσδιόλου διαφορετική καταγωγή τον καθένα..." Νικος Κ. Μουτσόπουλος, *Μακεδονική Αρχιτεκτονική: Συμβολή Εις Την Μελέτην Της Ελληνικής Οικίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη: [χ.ε.], 1971), 28.

[16] "Τα περισσότερα όμως στοιχεία η μακεδονική αρχιτεκτονική οφείλει στη βυζαντινή παράδοση, στο βυζαντινό σπίτι, που όμως γνωρίζουμε, συχνά ήταν πολυόροφο." Μουτσόπουλος, *Μακεδονική Αρχιτεκτονική,* 33.

[17] See for example the Athens Charter of 1931, Venice Charter of 1964, which resulted in the foundation of I.CO.MO.S (International Council on Monuments and Sites) a UNESCO brand that dealt mainly with the preservation and protection of historical settlements all across Europe (for more information on I.CO.MO.S see http://www.icomos.org/en/about-icomos/mission-and-vision/history).

people of Greece the public had to be sensitized, and, so, the term "traditional" was used to do the heavy lifting. It is likely no coincidence, then, that in 1980 we have the publication of an eight-volume work (completed in the beginning of 1990) entitled "Traditional Architecture," which catalogued the various regions of Greece and identified their diverse (but shared) architecture. In the introduction of the first volume we learn that one of the main reasons for the project was not just to inform specialists in the field, but that it was mainly intended to educate the public, "to promote researches around the traditional (παραδοσιακή) architecture, offering *for the first time* (my emphasis) a complete and systematic overview—as much as that was possible—of the architecture of the main prefectures of our country."[18] Of course that the term "παραδοσιακή" was used and known so widely among Greeks, from the mid-1970s onward, was the result of various other political and social conditions as well. Thus to understand, as some scholars do, "tradition" or "traditional" as something that self-evidently exists in the world and then moves unchanged through time therefore misses entirely the point and, instead of examining actually legitimizes the social processes that create the very phenomena classified under those categories. A process that, when not examined critically, amounts to a lot of energy and a great deal of investment that help to create an individual's and a group's sense of enduring, unchanging identity.[19]

But in order to understand how those categories were put to use and the worlds they made possible we need to place them not only in the Greek context that followed the

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[18] "Να προωθήσει τις έρευνες γύρω απο την παραδοσιακή αρχιτεκτονική, με το να δώσει για πρώτη φορά μια όσο το δυνατό πλήρη και συστηματική εικόνα της αρχιτεκτονικής των κυριότερων διαμερισμάτων της χώρας." Δημήτριος Φιλιππίδης (επιμ. έκδοσης), *Ανατολικό Αιγαίο-Σποράδες-Επτάνησα*. Vol. Τόμος 1, (Αθήνα: Μέλισσα, 1982), 3.

[19] While at the same time we have to keep in mind that "nothing springs from the ground fully formed" (McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion*, xi)

Second World War, as we have done, but also into the wider, surrounding context, that is, the setting of post-War Europe. For, ever since the end of the Second World War there had been movements and discussions towards the formation of a European Unity. The Declaration of European Identity[20] in 1973, for example, is among the first documents to consider an initiative towards a common European identity. According to this Declaration, among the three things that would define European identity was "reviewing the common heritage" of the nine countries initially involved in the constitution of the Union. During the same decade a European initiative provided funding for reconstructions and development and thus motivation for European countries to begin to look at their cultural artifacts. Those in support of a common European Union were therefore trying to find the common denominator that could unite the otherwise diverse countries that were to become part of this new social movement. The search for a suitable, common past is one such site that helps to legitimate present needs.[21] It is therefore significant that 1975 was declared by the European Council "European Year of Architectural Heritage," with the motto (notice the plural possessive pronoun): "One Future for our Past." In the charter—which consists of ten resolutions—that was drawn in regards to the year of "Architectural Heritage" we read:

> 2. *The past as embodied in the architectural heritage provides the sort of environment indispensable to a balanced and complete life.*
>
> In the face of a rapidly changing civilization, in which brilliant successes are accompanied by grave perils, people today have an instinctive feeling

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[20] Declaration of European Identity, in *Bulletin of the European Communities*. December 1973, No. 12: 118-122.

[21] Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions," *Past and Present* 55 (1972), 3-17.

for the value of this heritage.

> This heritage should be passed on to future generations in its authentic state and in all its variety as an essential part of the memory of the human race. Otherwise, part of man's awareness of his own continuity will be destroyed. [22]

Here we have an example of a search for a simpler, shared past that could serve as the site of nostalgia in the present, for the authenticity and beauty of a certain type of life and identity, one which that was closer to nature; it is a romanticized past which, or so the document asserts, has been eliminated or distorted by quickly changing modernity and industrialization (i.e., "rapidly changing civilization"). This assertion (dare I say creation?) of a common nostalgia that could unite the otherwise differing European countries eventually—and with criteria that had to be strictly followed by the countries involved, each with their own interests and agendas, of course—was found its materialization (i.e., embodiment) in those sometimes decaying rural villages.

Efforts, of course, for the protection and preservation of heritage (the name by which the discourse on tradition went in this document) were on-going and involved various institutions. For instance, in 1972 the General Conference of UNESCO met in Paris to decided on a convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The first article of the convention defines "cultural heritage" as:

> ***monuments****:* architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding

[22] http://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/170-european-charter-of-the-architectural-heritage (Retrieved September 2, 2014)

> universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; ***groups of buildings****:* groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; ***sites****:* works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.

UNESCO also set criteria for those countries, whose members which could apply for funds under this act in order to preserve and restore those monuments, groups of buildings, and sites that were now classified as "cultural heritage." Criteria for naming something as Heritage or Traditional were set both by the UNESCO program and the EU but also by the various countries, including Greece.

As indicated above, at the same time, Greece was trying to acquire a distinct sense of its own identity within what was then the newly emerging commonality of the EU, doing so with reference to its glorious ancient past and its collective continuity with it. Between the 1960s and especially after the fall of the Greek dictatorship (1967-1973)—which exhibited a particular admiration for anything Classical and leaned towards Neoclassicism like most dictatorships in Europe—the "village" and the idea of being traditional was gradually resignified and it became the site of a new identification, that of authentic Greekness. What the traditional villages represents is the authentic and genuine Greek identity and its struggles during the Ottoman rule. For example, in the ninth issue of the architectural journal *Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα* ("Architectural Issues"), a yearly

journal that dedicated its 1975 issue to "The Preservation of Architectural Heritage," Panagiotis Komilis argues that between the 16th-and 18th-centuries there has been a significant population movement from the valleys to mountainous and semi-mountainous areas as well as islands that according to the author: "[s]uch movement is attributed to a) the need for protection from military operations and attacks and b) the desire to avoid the burdens and oppressing exploitation from the Ottoman landowners in a feudalistic system."[23] A romanticized idea that is still very prominent among Greeks today.[24]

But which villages in Greece, of all the rural villages, represented this "authentic and genuine Greek identity" was something that had to be determined. So, in the same issue of the periodical there is an extensive article concerning the results of a study commissioned at the beginning of 1960s by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and that involved ten architectural offices—each one of those was assigned a region of Greece—in order to suggest villages whose historic value was worthy of state protection. The study states that according to ELSTAT (the Hellenistic Statistic Authority), in 1975 there where 11,400 settlements in Greece, 2000 of which the study proposed as worthy of state protection under three categories: 1. ΒΠ1 (complete protection), 2. ΒΠ2 (significant protection), 3. ΒΠ3 (limited protection). The criteria (which, the study admits, received different interpretations from the various offices that were assigned the project) for the evaluation of the settlements where the following three:

1. The value of the settlement: historic value (an important role that the settlement played in a specific historic period, representative settlement of a specific time

[23] Panagiotis Komilis, "The Preservation of Traditional Settlements Within the Regional Planning Context" (Περιφερειακή ανάπτυξη και διατήρηση των παραδοσιακών οικισμών), in *Αρχιτεκτονικά θέματα*, 9 (1975), 92.
[24] And it may not be coincidental that during the 1970s there has been a big production of folklore movies, that is movies of village life during the Ottoman rule.

period), aesthetic value (harmony of the settlement with the natural environment, homogeneity of the elements that comprise the whole, human scale, characteristic expression of an era, of a way of life, etc.) cultural value (the social educational role of the settlement, promotion of its Greek character on the international level, etc.)

2. Potential development and profit: the benefits that are expected from the protection could be: 1) of national interest (promotion and stimulation of Hellenism, especially in the boarders) 2. of cultural benefit (stimulation of the spiritual and cultural level of Greeks with their information for their cultural heritage, etc) 3. of social value (improvement of the natural habitat and the way of life of the residents of the settlement), and 4. of economic pay-off (economic profit of the protected settlements, e.g., their touristic exploitation)
3. Possibility of their protection: considered here is the degree of the preservation or distortion or the possibility of reinstatement in their original form and the possibility of preservation and continuous protection. Those possibilities should be considered simultaneously from both technical and economic perspective.[25]

Of interest is that the office that was assigned the region of East Macedonia and Thrace exempted from the study the settlements associated with Turks and Pomacs of the region for the following reasoning:

> The measures that we propose above concern Greek Christian settlements. The Turks and the Pomacs must be left completely free to build their houses in their own way. It is the best protection that can be offered, because not only the old (houses) but also the new follow the

[25] *Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα*, τεύχος 9 (1975), 114.

> same spirit. Only for a few is suggested ΒΠ1 and ΒΠ2 and only to the best settlement of each group, so that it is preserved intact for historical reasons.[26]

It may be of no surprise that such a policy of exclusion was proposed. Those settlements were and still serve as the foreign Other in ones midst, the measure against which the "Greek Christian settlements" could be identified as unified inasmuch as they were all seen to be different and distinct from this Other. And all this, to paraphrase Jean-Francois Bayart, "amounts to conferring the anachronistic meaning" through the rhetoric of tradition, on buildings made centuries ago and with a set of criteria that were "recruiting them for battles that were then unimaginable."[27]

What followed the results of this study was the 1978 Presidential Enactment (PE) which was the first to provide a list of 300 villages—out of the 2000 that were initially identified by the study—that were characterized as "traditional." Also and more interesting for our purposes, the Enactment gave detailed instructions on what could be restored, and how, always under the supervision and approval of the "Commission Exercising Architectural Verification" (*Επιτροπή Ενασκήσεως Αρχιτεκτονικού Ελέγχου*). This was the first time in Greece that "traditional" was used to distinguish between various types and statuses of villages, at least in official government documents. But after the 1978 Enactment the term, which was used sparingly in the discipline of architecture up to that point, gained ground and books that previously would have titles such

[26] *Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα*, τεύχος 9 (1975), 156.
[27] Bayart. *The Illusion of Cultural Identiy*, 75.

"anonymous" or "vernacular"[28] architecture more consistently started using the term "traditional" (such as the 1980 volume that was mentioned previously). Of course as the cultural and the aesthetic sensitivities change so does the list of the 1978 PE, which was followed by others (e.g., 1979, 1985, 1986, 1989, 1999, 2000, 2002) and the list of authorized traditional villages is now ever growing.

Despite the economic benefits that a village would gain by its characterization as traditional, public sensibility concerning the importance of preservation—of what the state and the European Union characterized as "cultural heritage"—was not immediate. There were occasions when people asked their village to be de-classified as "traditional" so that the villages would not be restrained in the way that they wanted to restore or rebuilt their houses.[29]

The need to sensitize the public and educate them on the importance of their culture therefore became a main concern during the 1970s. The Greek state supported private associations that were interested in the preservation of folklore life, either by granting them financial support or allowing them to exhibit their collections in buildings deemed to be of historic value and which were under state protection. Most if not all folklore museums in Greece are thus fairly recent, founded between 1975-1980, and serve "to teach the urban public about the indigenous folk sources of their culture and to generate support (financial or otherwise) for folklore research."[30]

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[28] For example, Γλαύκος Μ. Μαρκόπουλος, *Η Λαϊκή μας Αρχιτεκτονική* (Our Vernacular Architecture) (Αθήνα: Αρχαίος Εκδοτικός Οίκος. 1975); A.N. Τομπάζης, "Ανώνυμη Ελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική"(Anonymous Hellenic Architecture) (Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα 3 [1969]), 17-74.
[29] *Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα*, τεύχος 9 (1975): 143.
[30] Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin. "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious?" *Journal of American Folklore* 97 (1984): 279.

Gradually, interest in the "culture heritage" of the country gained ground but the state's efforts to sensitize its citizens in matters of folklore coincided with another factor. People who left their villages during the 1950s and 60s, seeking a better life in the urban centers began to develop a nostalgia for their villages, a nostalgia that was transferred to their children who also developed a romanticized view of their families' past in the village.[31] And it was mainly the emigrants from the villages who then started to form groups and societies in order to "preserve" the history and traditions of their homeland's[32] (i.e., village's) music, dances, cooking, etc.—that is, their traditions. Eventually the economic benefits (funded both by the EU and the Greek state)—such as low interest loans to fund authorized renovations—which were given to people whose villages or houses could be characterized as "traditional" resulted in an archival quest by people, for there was now a need to find historical evidence of the significance of a village or a house.

Accordingly, villages that were closer to the set of assumptions that city people had concerning authentic rural life, or what for the European community would count as traditional, as well as those fitting the criteria set by the state, saw a growth in their population and an increase in their economy as people began to restore their ancestral village houses in the now appropriate architectural styles in order to attract more

[31] To this day many metropolitan Greeks retain close ties with their familial village, traveling there for holidays, burials, etc.).
[32] Of interest and of no coincidence is that the "Folklore and Ethnological Museum of Macedonia and Thrace" in Thessaloniki was initiated in 1957 (and eventually became a public corporation [ΝΠΔΔ] in 1970) by members of the Macedonian Educational Brotherhood (ΜΦΑ [Μακεδονική Φιλεκπεδευτική Αδελφότητα]) of Istanbul who after the exchange of population in 1922 relocated in Thessaloniki.

tourists[33]—at which point our story returns to that abandoned village at the top of the hill, near Mt. Olympus.

Old Panteleimonas was one among the 300 villages that made it to the 1978 Presidential Enactment's list of "Characterization of Housing Estates as Traditional" and its entire region, as indicated above, is now under the protection of UNESCO. To be sure, interest by its current residents to restore and renovate what is, for them, their parents' village (for a generation had by now passed) was not immediate, for only as recently as 1990, during the nearby Yugoslavian war from 1991-1999 (which negatively affected their hopes for an increase in seaside tourism), did the people of New Panteleimonas start to show interest in their ancestors' decaying village at the top of their hill, seeing it now as an alternative tourist destination, but this time mainly for Greek vacationers from the city. And so, the residents of New Panteleimonas began applying for funding to restore (αναπαλαιώνω = to make old again) their long abandoned houses at the top of the hill, on many occasions turning them into quaint hotel-styled accommodations or opening souvenir stores, restaurants and cafés that would offer visitors a taste of "authentic Greek traditions." And it was in one of these that I found myself that evening in September of 2013, when the village did not reopen until sometime after 8 o'clock each morning.

V. Conclusion

What we may now begin to understand about claims of tradition from this tale of these two villages that share the same name but rather different histories—one that closes at night and where no one really lives—is how strategic social actors construct their

[33] Dorothy Noyes, "Tradition: Three Traditions," *Journal of Folklore Research* 46 (2009): 246-250.

representations of the past to suit their present social, economic, political needs, and how they authorize their present by linking it to a past *that suits these practical interests*. What should also be evident is that when it comes to studying people's traditions and the stuff of which they are made, scholars should not simply reproduce people's own claims about tradition, that is, portraying it as something handed down to them from the past and for their safe keeping. For as was evident from the above example, the construction of "traditional villages" is far more complicated than asserting, as do the people whom we study, that traditions are static and delivered to them from the past. Instead, what one might call tradition was and is the continuous working result at various social sites, institutions within and outside Greece, invoking their very modern criteria for what gets to count as "traditional." Tradition is the result of entrepreneurial social actors who try to fit into their new recreation of the "old" (i.e., in their *αναπαλαίωση* which means exactly to make old again) village the assumptions and expectations of the tourists. Tradition is now seen to be the outcome of a kind of instant-aging process, a recreation (αναπαλαίωση) that has to provide not only a certain imaginaire of how the past ought to look based on the criteria set by the state but also to provide the comforts, standards, and safety of the modern living.

When I visited Greece the summer of 2013 to conduct research at the office of *Architecture and Traditional Settlements* of the Ministry of YPEKA (Ministry of Environment Energy & Climate Change), I was told that there is an ongoing specialization and study of the settlements of the various prefectures with new criteria and new morphologic rules, since there might be deviation from what is considered "traditional." Although the official representatives of the state speak of deviation we, as

scholars, should instead have in mind what Bayart wrote about the concept of authenticity: "Authenticity is not established by the immanent properties of the phenomenon or object under consideration. It results from the perspective, full of desire and judgments, that is brought to bear on the past, in the eminently contemporary context in which one is situated."[34]

In recent years, as the aesthetic values have changed, it has become clear that the traditional villages were becoming too "authentic," that is, they were too homogeneous or in some cases too touristy, something that, according to the architects and the state officials, was weathering and withering the essence of those villages. In order to deal with these effects the state promoted especially after the 1990s the idea of agritourism.[35] It is a trend that had already spread in other European countries and which was supported by the European Union with economic programs such as LEADER I, II, PLUS. Programs with which the European Union aimed at finding effective ways to help local economies especially in countries such as Greece, Spain, Italy, and Portugal.[36]

How has that most recent innovation impacted the village of Old Panteleimonas? A few years ago the Greek government issued a decision for Old Panteleimonas that it would not issue any more permits for the opening of cafes, restaurants, and hotels. Instead, the decision was to encourage people to turn to alternative forms of businesses, preferably a return to agriculture (and therefore agritourism) that would promote or enhance the traditional way of living. So the people of New Panteleimonas, who already had their businesses in Old Panteleimonas, were encouraged to such things as cultivate

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[34] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identiy*, 78.
[35] On the importance of tourism for the European Union visit: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/background/index_en.htm
[36] Council Regulation (EEC) No 797/85 of 12 March 1985 on improving the efficiency of agricultural structures.

silk, something that their ancestors did years ago. This, however, brought new problems. There were no local experts left to tell them how to cultivate silk. This required that they had to seek guidance from other parts of Greece where silk cultivation was already taking place. In addition, they also would have to create a co-op with modern facilities and, of course, a good final product,[37] if they wanted not just to be traditional but also competitive in the international market.

What now is evident is that words such as “traditional,” much like “authentic,” “heritage,” or “original” and the like, are social constructions, always evidence of invention, signified and resignified in the present. The discourse on tradition, then, is a mode of discourse that people use in order to gain benefits, whether social, economic or otherwise. It should be evident also that there is no one center that creates and controls the results of these process, i.e., the things we call traditions. Rather various interrelated centers are working towards that direction and for their own purposes and interests (that may or may not overlap): UNESCO and its brands ICOMOS, a worldwide organization, established in 1945 (that is, after WWII and going into the so-called Cold War period) made efforts to find ways to prevent another world war by creating the idea of a united mankind through the protection of World Heritages, among other things. The European Union was trying, for yet other political and economic reasons, to find among the countries that constituted it a common ground. Greece, among other countries, which was part of the European Union, was trying to find not only its own marks of distinctive identity but also ways to fit into the European Union’s vision of “a common future for our past.” For the residents of New Panteleimonas, “tradition” became a useful

[37] Unlike their parents and grandparents for whom a cocoon of silk would suffice to live for a year.

anachronistic tool that enabled them to revive their local economy, within an ever-changing and in many ways uncontrollable world. All these are interconnected, though not necessarily complementary, motive forces that led to the invention of "traditional villages" in Greece.

Unless we want to be merely descriptive, our analysis of historical processes ought to be something different than simply repeating the anachronisms social actors use to anchor their present. We should, instead, look at all the other variants (e.g., political and economic changes in Greece, the role of EU and its relation to Greece, UNESCO, etc.) that were in place, prompting these people to turn their attention—by traveling back up the mountain—to their brand new "traditional" village. "Tradition" should therefore not be seen as something static and antique but rather as a process in the present that amasses a lot of energy and requires a lot of investment and effort to maintain it. So apart from the various institutional circles (EU and UNESCO) which for their own purposes initiated an interest towards heritage in Greece, both the people and the state, developed for their own reasons and purposes a discourse on what it means to be part of a tradition that was represented in various ways among which traditional houses/villages are a precious example.

This anachronistic strategy, which is useful for authorizing specific and contemporary social arrangements, is not unique or limited either to Greek villages or to the discourse of tradition. It can be accomplished with words, and in scholarship, and not with just government-approved building materials.[38] In a 1990 essay, Russell McCutcheon, offers a caution for critical scholars to be self-reflexive when studying such

[38] See for example the creation of tradition in Quebec: Handler and Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious?," 273-90; also, David Lowenthal, "Fabricating Heritage," *History and Memory* 10 (1998): 5-24.

processes, and thus to be aware of the limits of *their* conceptual tools and the manner in which they are themselves the makers of what is old again (that is, of a certain type of αναπαλαίωση), when they use modern concepts such as "religion" or "the west" and then project them backwards in time as if they had always been there, as if those concepts have come to us unchanged. In other words, they fail to recognize that the discourse on "religion" or "the west"—and I would add to that the discourse on "tradition"—is, as McCutcheon phrases it, "part of *our* cosmographic formation,"[39] an anachronistic strategy that makes possible a certain identification in the present. Thus looking at Old Panteleimonas's "traditional" houses and trying to study them as something precious handed down from the past, that people today try to preserve and restore because they belong to their "tradition" or to their ancestors, is likely not very helpful, because such an approach does not allow us to look at all the other motive forces that were in place for people to turn their attention to the "traditional" village conceived in this specific way. Furthermore, although the village at the top of that hill may have been abandoned, in favor of hopes for a seaside tourist destination, it never remained it its past form and past usage. For some people in the new village at its base it may have been seen as an irrelevant artifact in their everyday lives in the big cities (and thus not seen at all). And once people returned to the village in order to restore the houses and thus to revive the "old" days, they did not time-travel and neither did they just pick up from where their parents or grandparents left off. There was nothing old of significance left there to return to, nothing of use to them that was handed down and thus to be received, because the minute people decided to return something new was already emerging something that

[39] Russell McCutcheon, "The Resiliency of Conceptual Anachronisms: On the Limits of 'the West' and 'Religion'," in *Claiming Identity in the Study of Religion: Social and Rhetorical Techniques Examined*, ed. Monica Miller (Forthcoming with Equinox).

was idealized, romanticized, monetized and mostly imagined in order to meet new needs and interests unforeseen, even unimagined by predecessors. Despite peoples' understanding to the contrary, "old" things, which are used to serve present needs and interests, are always new, suggesting that the return to Old Panteleimonas was not a return after all.

Looking at "traditional" villages in Greece we may begin to understand that the terms "traditional" and "tradition" do not possess an essential characteristic or meaning that transcends time, and neither do they name actions that possess such a status, but it seems that traditional, much like authentic/original and the like, is an ongoing social construction, always invented and renewed in the present. It is a term people use to suggest a quality, employed in order to gain benefits, whether social or economic. Despite, people's claims that their traditions have a connection to the past "[t]raditions are social creations embedded in the present to justify or validate a particular ideological or political claim…and as Hobsbawm argued traditions occur most frequently in times of rapid social transformation. Wherever old social patterns are undermined or destroyed, it becomes necessary to develop new models to ground the changing and the ambiguous."[40] A tradition thus could be understood as a need for a constant social effort towards the creation of a body of things whose perceived traditional quality can eventually unify people around a common identity and a shared sense of the past and future.

Therefore we can conclude that nothing from the past is important or authoritative in its own right but, rather, all we may have are change, accident, unintended consequences, as well as mixes of agency and structure are what needs to be managed

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[40] Aaron Hughes, "The 'Golden Age' of Muslim Spain: Religious Identity and Invention of a Tradition in Modern Jewish Studies," in *Historicizing "Tradition" in the Study of* Religion, ed. S. Engler and G.P. Grieve (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyer, 2005), 54.

with a tradition discourse. That is, people's present interests and needs (i.e., Greeks trying to find their identity within Greece and the EU) along with various circumstances (e.g., EU, UNESCO, wars, new economic opportunities, etc.) that are in place and each working to set things apart, in a variety of ways, as distinct and important that otherwise would not have been seen as the same or different. People's discourse on tradition and traditional things to which, by reference to a chosen and often imagined past, a group attributes value and ascribes identity—therefore helps to create a sense of common belonging.[41] "Traditioning" acts they are what Bayart calls "operational acts of identification."[42] For the European Union "tradition" or "cultural heritage" was a handy strategy to unite what had up to then been seen as divergent groups under the same rubric, despite their cultural disparities and differences. The same can be said for Greece: "traditional" was made to serve as a unifying category both within the nation but also within the broader European context and its demands. For the people of New Panteleimonas "traditional" and "old" became synonymous with a new economic opportunity and it was this new opportunity, meeting criteria set by the state and the EU, that is actually represented in the architecture of that little village that is a few kilometers up the hill. "Traditional," to paraphrase Bayart (who was talking about authenticity), "is less a matter of conferring or identifying than of making: making something new with something old and sometimes," in the case of what we now name Old Panteleimonas,

[41] Gregory P. Grieve and Richard Weiss. "Illuminating the Half-Life of Tradition: Legitimation, Agency, and Counter-Hegemonies," in *Historicizing "Tradition" in the Study of Religion*, 3.
[42] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identiy*, 92.

"also making something old with something new." In the end, we could say that it is but one more instance of, as he concludes, "making Self with the Other."[43]

[43] Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identiy*, 96.

EPILOGUE

The Ever-Present Past

In the conclusion of his 2007 book, *Situating Islam*, Aaron Hughes writes that "it is necessary to be aware the data discovered do not simply exist naturally in the world waiting to be discovered but that data emerge through questions asked (or not) of material deemed to be significant (or not)."[1] Taking seriously this cautionary remark in each chapter, concerning scholars own roles in the results produced by their work, I advocated against taken-for-granted ideas and interpretations and, instead, I saw those as my primary object of study. I demonstrated how the discourses of historical agents fabricate past material in their current narratives, made evident what kind of worlds, both present and past, their work tries to authorize, always mindful of present purposes. As the title of this conclusion suggests, the past is always present. Though we may all agree on that, inasmuch as many argue that the history has relevance for today, i.e., we must learn from the past, I should explicitly say what I mean by that phrase. Unlike the popular reading of that phrase, I understand the past and the various past material artifacts not as something distinct from the present but similar to Foucault's idea of power/knowledge. That which we call the past owes its *whatever* presence to the present and the present is made possible by the way it imagines itself in relation to a past of its choosing. The two therefore cannot be considered in separation, but as a single formation. Georges Seferis (1900-1971), a Greek diplomat, poet and Nobel laureate, nicely illustrates this idea of a single formation in one of his poems in his poetry collection entitled "Mythistorema":

[1] Hughes, *Situating Islam*, 115.

I woke up with this marble head in my hands

It exhausts my elbows and I don’t know where to place it.

It was falling in my dream as I was waking up from the dream

And this is how our life united and it will be very difficult to be

separated again.[2]

And although it maybe difficult to separate them—those living hands holding the ancient marble head—we can investigate the ways in which their lives became one and the results of how actors choose to signify and use that material.

Each chapter has therefore been an exercise and examination of the various acts of identification, as a series of specific sites where the past is present, for it is through those very acts that past materials have acquired their meaning (and therefore identity). Furthermore, this meaning-making has been demonstrated always to be situational and relational in the sense that the meaning of past material is a historical product created by strategic historic agents through their contemporary acts of identification (such as interpretations, categorizations, representations, classifications), and, as situated historical products, they are always under scrutiny and constant re-fabrication by yet other historical agents who are on the scene with yet other goals. Although in each chapter my focus was primarily on one of the above-named operational acts it should be clear that seeing discrete sites as examples of discrete techniques was done for my own analytic purposes. These acts can be separated for us as scholars, of course, in our efforts to study

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[2] “Ξύπνησα μὲ τὸ μαρμάρινο τοῦτο κεφάλι στὰ χέρια
ποὺ μοῦ ἐξαντλεῖ τοὺς ἀγκῶνες καὶ δὲν ξέρω ποῦ νὰ
τ᾿ἀκουμπήσω.
Ἔπεφτε στὸ ὄνειρο καθὼς ἔβγαινα ἀπὸ τὸ ὄνειρο
ἔτσι ἑνώθηκε ἡ ζωή μας καὶ θὰ εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολο νὰ ξαναχωρίσει.” Γιώργος Σεφέρης, Ποιήματα (Αθήνα: ‘Ικαρος, 1998 [1972]), 45.

them. It was made evident though that each chapter was gradually being complicated, i.e., the approach to the analysis of tragedy in the first chapter seems less complex, but by the time we got to the last chapter and the refurbished tourist village it was made clear that all these operations require each other in the processes of a successful identification. Much as Seferis's poem makes clear, in practice, these identifications likely intersect and reinforce one another.[3]

It should also be evident that, throughout this study, it is assumed that meanings (identities) do not transcend time and space, and neither do they hide deep in the core of material artifacts awaiting to be discovered. Simply put, the shift in my approach had a different primary question than is often asked by those studying history. Instead, of asking what is the meaning of this or that phenomenon and therefore engaging myself in descriptions that, I have argued, are themselves implicated in the discourses that create those meanings, the focus was on why and by what means/processes/acts did we come to this or these meanings in the first place. Although in some occasions (as in chapters 1, 2, and 3) it has been important to problematize current or dominant interpretations by juxtaposing them to an alternative and no less credible reading. The result of such a comparison shifted the attention from past artifacts and their established meanings to present historical agents and their practices, debates, and criteria; and the question now pursued was how the past, or, better put material artifacts, were deemed ancient or old, and thereby how they were positioned in the present by historical agents—by what means and for what purposes?

In the first chapter I mostly looked at scholarly interpretations as an operational act of identification through which, and by the use of such anachronisms (which are

[3] This is part of Schatzki's argument in *The Site of the Social*.

inevitable when we study the past) as the term religion and the idea of the individual self, a certain widely-shared understanding of Euripides' play *Hippolytus* was made possible. Although portrayed as being about the past, about Euripides' time, it turns out to be an interpretation produced by an *imaginaire* of those commentators who made the play relevant to their contemporaries, through their interpretations, in order to learn and make sense not only of the world they inhabit but of themselves as well, in other words, how they imagined the position of the individual within that world.

The second chapter revolved around how categorization, as another act of identification, allowed scholars to identify, and thereby describe (or better construct) the ancient Greek world by dividing it between what appeared to be naturally occurring private and public zones, through the use of categories such as "mystery cults," "voluntary associations," and "mystery religions." It was argued, though, that these categorizations mirror modern understandings of how religious groups ought to be organized. Projecting them backward in time thereby authorizes their existence today, and the social work they carry out, as naturally occurring inasmuch as they can be seen also to have taken place in the past. Despite the fact that the scholarly vocabulary in the 19th and 20th centuries was modified to include, under the same umbrella, what can be understood as a bewildering diversity of phenomenon, what remained unchanged in that scholarly discourses was the idea of free, choosing individuals moving between clearly distinguished private and public religious spheres. Those categories, like the so-called linguistic phenomenon of "code switching" (which despite being used only to refer to the actions of marginalized groups and therefore empower and give voice to them), ended up being seen as a managing device whereby acknowledging, implicitly or explicitly, as

authoritative the language of the dominant group to which the marginalized group had to conform to. The modern anachronistic categories of private and public were therefore used to divide, define and describe the ancient world so as to authorize and authenticate "religion" as a naturally occurring phenomenon in the ancient world and, more specifically, as something that is related to a very modern idea of private feelings and deep experiences.

Although the third chapter is mainly on representations, we also saw that interpretations and categorizations are both effectively used in the restoration of a pitted iconography of a small church in Thessaloniki, Greece. Focusing once more on the historical gaps—something that can be said about the fragmentary past as whole—we examined how people fill in those gaps with narratives (sometimes contradictory) based on interpretations of what happened, doing so by means of anachronistic categorizations (such as "iconoclasm" itself) that suit their current interests, and, in the case of that church, evoke national coherence by means of the construction of the other. Instead of focusing on the pitted iconography as an instance of iconoclasm and then trying to determine the essential substance of those icons and what lies behind those acts (for example, the intentions of the doers), the chapter once again exemplified the shift of the project by looking at how a new symbol was fabricated by means of the representation, interpretation and categorization of material from the archive of the fragmented past.

In the last chapter it was made evident how all these intersecting processes where in place in the construction of "traditional villages." Although classification has been an important operational act of identification, it would not be enough without the way in which representation, interpretation and categorization have been used by strategic social

actors in order to construct what is a "traditional village," doing so for their own social, economic, and political needs and interests. Meanwhile, it was made evident that the meaning of "tradition" even within a thirty year period, has changed because socio-politico-economic interests has changed, and that those changes had an impact in the way material artifacts from the past have been re-presented.

This shift in our approach will be important not only in the way we understand past material but also in the way we approach data in general. J.Z. Smith in the opening of his book, *Imagining Religion*, argued, that "the historian of religion, must be relentlessly self-conscious. Indeed, this self-consciousness constitutes his primary expertise, his foremost object of study."[4] This self-consciousness means that we, as researchers who go to the past's archive to do our work, should be aware of our own positionality, and that we are implicated in the fabrication of past material; the difference of this shift though, is, to quote J.Z. Smith again, that "[f]or the self-conscious student of religion, no datum possesses intrinsic interest. It is of value only insofar as it can serve as exempli gratia of some fundamental issue in the imagination of religion"—or I would add in the imagination of identity.

In order to demonstrate further how all these operational acts that were examined in each chapter work simultaneously in identification processes, I want to return to the White Tower, which I briefly mentioned at the end of chapter 3, as one final example around which a common collective identity has been created by means of a present discourse on what is now understood as past trauma.

[4] Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xi.

It is not an exaggeration to say that many Thessalonians consider the White Tower to be for Thessaloniki what the Parthenon is to Athens.[5] The Tower, which sits on the waterfront, is an Ottoman building and it was part of the fortification of Thessaloniki. It is unclear as to the exact dating of the building (and therefore it is considered by some as Byzantine or even Venetian), but it seems that it served not only several purposes during its history but it was also know by several names. It may seem strange how an Ottoman (Turkish) building came to be adopted as the symbol of Thessaloniki. The question that I'm interested here is how but mainly through what means an Ottoman building came to hold such a status for the Thessalonians.

Growing up in Thessaloniki I knew what most everyone else knew about the building. That it was once a prison and because of the tortures and executions of prisoners it was called once the "Red Tower" and it was only after the liberation of Thessaloniki in 1912 that the Tower was whitewashed and took the name with which it is known today, that is, White Tower.[6]

Writing this epilogue from Edmonton I had to rely on limited Internet sources as to the history of the White Tower. My first thought was the official site of the White Tower itself, which is now a museum of the history of the city.[7] Curiously, the site does not have any information on the building itself. My next search was a site managed by the

[5] Marlise Simons, "As Republic Flexes Greeks tense up," in http://www.nytimes.com/1992/02/03/world/as-republic-flexes-greeks-tense-up.html (Retrieved July 12, 2015)

[6] See for example how an online guide to Thessaloniki describes the White Tower: "The tower was built in 15th century in order to replace an older 12th century Byzantine fortification while it was later recontsructed (*sic*) by the Ottomans. It was used as a fort enhancing the harbors defences (*sic*), as a garrison and a prison. Because of its fame as a notorious prison it was also known as 'Tower of Blood' (Kanli Kule) or 'Red Tower.' It was renamed to White tower (Torre Blanca) after it was whitewashed possibly in 1891." http://www.inthessaloniki.com/en/white-tower-museum

[7] http://www.lpth.gr

Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports called Odysseus, which provides brief information and the history of various, museums, monuments and archaeological sites of Greece.[8] There are two entries for the White Tower, one as a museum[9] (which is only in Greek) and the other on the monument itself (which is both in Greek and English).[10] In the first readers learn that the Tower was built sometime in the 15th century, as part of the fortification of the city by the Ottomans. Initially it was called the "Tower of the Lions,"[11] later in the 18th century it was known as the "The Tower of Kalamaria," in the 19th century as the "Tower of Janissaires"[12] and later as the "The Tower of Blood" (in Turkish Kanli [bloody] Kule [tower]). The site also claims that in 1883 a Sultan named Abdul Hamid whitewashed the tower in his efforts to modernize the empire and this is how the name eventually caught on as "Beyaz Kule" or its Latin name "Torre Blanca" (White Tower).

Now, of interest is that in the second entry on the same site there is another story about the whitewashing: "In 1890, a convict whitewashed the tower's walls in exchange for his freedom, hence the name 'White Tower.' After the liberation of Thessalonike in 1912, the tower became public property."[13] While it was certainly after 1912 that the name "White" was used in reference to the Tower, there should be an important

[8] http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/1/gh152.jsp?obj_id=18701
[9] http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/1/gh152.jsp?obj_id=18701
[10] http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj_id=859
[11] Due to an inscription at the entrance of the Tower, which has not survived. For details regarding the inscription see: Paschalis Androudis and Melpomeni Perdikopoulos, "The Ottoman Thessaloniki's Maritime Defenses During the 15th and 16th centuries" in https://www.academia.edu/5080456/The_Ottoman_Thessaloniki_s_Maritime_Defenses_in_the_second_half_of_the_15th_and_during_the_16th_Century_with_P.Androudis_ (retrieved July 13, 2015).
[12] Because of a garrison of them stationed there.
[13] According to others it was a Jewish prisoner named Nathan Guidili, see: http://www.visitgreece.gr/en/culture/monuments/the_white_tower

clarification in regards to the word "white," that there are two words in Greek meaning white: άσπρο (aspro) a medieval word of Latin origin (asprum meaning a silver coin), and λευκό (lefko), which is of ancient Greek origins. Now it seems that before 1912 the names commonly used by the people of Thessaloniki to refer to the White Tower were its Turkish and Latin names[14] (e.g., "Beyaz Kule" or "Torre Blanca" or "Kanli Kule") as there were and still are many buildings in the city (let alone all over Greece) that retained their Turkish names, at least in the way people refer to them (like as we saw for example on chapter 3 and the monastery of Vlatadon, which is also referred to, by many still today, as "Tsaus Monastery"). Certainly, it was after 1912 that the designation White Tower, or as it is known in Greek Λευκός Πύργος (lefkos pyrgos), gradually gained ground. Why I mentioned this colouring detail is because *lefko* has more connotations than *aspro*, and is immediately linked with the nation. For instance, *lefko* is linked primarily with the Greek flag called also γαλανόλευκη (galanolefki [galano meaning blue] and lefko), and equally important *lefko* is a term linked with the ancient marbles in general. The marbles of the Parthenon, for example, are unlikely to be referred to as the *aspra marmara* (marbles) but they are *lefka*, so immediately *lefko* does not simply describe whiteness but also denotes purity, authenticity, and originality. Using therefore the name *lefko* to refer to the Tower immediately links it in the Greek consciousness (consciously or not) with all the other significant emblems that today make up (construct) the Greek national identity. More importantly, perhaps, creating a natural link through an imaginary colouring (for if you visit Thessaloniki today do not expect to find a literally white Tower when you visit the White Tower), its whiteness (lefkotita) lies not on the building itself but in the national collective *imaginaire*.

[14] In many postcards before 1912 both names are used to name the tower.

The whitewashing that is said to have happened sometime in the 19th century has faded away; in fact during the Nazi occupation (1941-1944) trees and houses were painted on its exterior walls as a camouflage,[15] until those paintings were eventually removed in the 1983 restorations as they were deemed inauthentic, leaving today the Tower bare of any actual colouring similar to other ancient monuments found throughout the city and the country.

As one might predict, just as it has had many names so too it has had many usages: "During the First World War it housed the allied forces' communication centre, and in 1916 its first floor served as storeroom for the antiquities excavated by the British in their sector. It was also used for the city's anti-air defence, as a meteorological laboratory of the University of Thessaloniki and as base for the city's navy scouts, the last to occupy the premises before the building's restoration."[16] In popular memory, though, it always remained a Turkish prison. Between 1983 and 1985[17] restorations to the building started in order to serve as an exhibition centre, and so in 1985[18] it housed the exhibition, "History and Art of Thessaloniki"; in 2001, and for a couple of years it housed the exhibition, "Byzantine Hours. Everyday life in Byzantium." In 2008 it reopened and now permanently hosts in its 6 floors the history of the city of Thessaloniki with the goal "not to turn the city into a museum, but to introduce it to visitors and, particularly, *its residents"*[19] (emphasis added). On the ground flour the museum, through interactive media and the appropriately dim light and sound effects, offers a timetable of the city

[15] http://thessaloniki.photos.vagk.gr/el/photos-gr/old-photos-gr/old-photos-wt-gr/330-old-photos-wt-008-gr.html
[16] http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj_id=859
[17] An important period in the construction of modern Greek identity as we show on chapter 4.
[18] Not an insignificant year since Thessaloniki celebrated its 2300 years since its foundation.
[19] http://www.lpth.gr/en/

throughout history, beginning from the city's foundation (thought to have been in 316 BCE by Cassander). Ascending to its six floors the visitor travels through time from past to 1997 when Thessaloniki became the 1997 European capital city of culture.[20] And of course the last floor (which apart from a gift shop with tables and chairs that one typically finds in Greek taverns, there are interactive computer screens that display Greek traditional dishes), the visitor can step out onto the rooftop and have a panoramic view of the city's waterfront today.

To conclude, similar to my visit at the Vergina Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai and reading in the dim light the inscriptions (as described in the Introduction) that created a certain link between me in the present and the writer of the grave stelae, so too, the White Tower, housing the 2300 years history of Thessaloniki effectively creates the same linear connection of the ancient Macedonian past to the modern Greek nation. The White Tower's history itself is silenced at least on the museum's site, that is, it's various usages, meanings and significations through its own history and in a way the building stands as a timeless vehicle, that transcends time. Yet, it is a building that in popular memory represents the struggles and efforts of Greeks that are further supported by the narratives of the museum itself.

Starting, under the dim light of the ground floor, with the glorious beginnings of Thessaloniki's foundation and moving up through its six floors the visitor (and specifically the resident of Thessaloniki at whom the museum mainly aims) learns the history of Thessaloniki's struggles, traumas, agonies until, that is, she/he steps out to the rooftop, to the light, to what Thessaloniki is today. This special effect from darkness to

[20] A European Union initiative that names each year one city of Europe as the "European Capital of Culture."

light, from traumas to victory, may explain, as I said in the conclusion of chapter 3, not only how it effectively creates a sense of national coherence at a local scale but also why it is the appropriate site for fans to gather around and celebrate their team's victory. All these would not have been possible without those operational acts—of anachronistic usages and interpretations of the building itself, without the act of categorization (its very name), of restoration (to match other ancient buildings), of representation (becoming not only the museum of the history of Thessaloniki but representing the city itself through time)—successfully working in the background. All these effectively create an *imaginaire* similar to Seferis's dream by which the White Tower and the residents of Thessaloniki are united and "it will be very difficult to be separated again."

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