

Evy Johanne Håland**Festival of the Bull: Ox-offering, Summer- and Saint-feast on Mytilini/Lesbos: Agia Paraskeuē around the summer solstice 1992****Abstract:**

The liturgical festival dedicated to *Agios* (i.e. Saint) Charalampos, the protector of the farmers, is celebrated annually in the mating season of the horses, so that the saint may provide for the fecundity of the horses. Since he is expected to assure success of the harvest as well, he is also celebrated later during the year with a popular festival in the village of Agia Paraskeuē, where the ox-sacrifice constitutes the climax of the festival. The purifying procession is also important: In Agia Paraskeuē a sacrificial bull is paraded through the village. But, the following procession indicates a transfer from the culture (the village) into the nature (the mountain of the Bull, i.e. *Tauros*). Here, on the summit of *Tauros*, the fertility-ensuring bull-slaughtering is performed, after the blessing of the animal by the local priest while standing on the step of the church. Accordingly, the festival presents a ritual, which several within the official Greek Orthodox Church still consider to be pagan. On the other hand, the festival is situated within the religious and cosmological context of the Orthodox Church, and they make extensive use of Orthodox symbolism, faith and ritual practice. The sacrificed bull, which is consumed as a communal meal, *kesketsi*, is dedicated by an emigrant. He represents a group of people that always return home to the village during the annual festival of the saint. This is why there is not a fixed date for the celebration of the festival, only that it is always celebrated around the grain harvest. In 1992 it was postponed until the schools had terminated in South Africa, where a great contingent from the village has settled. In this festival dedicated to a deceased Christian saint, horses and the horse races are important elements, particularly for the youths, and the festival concludes by a great communal meal where the whole village participate. The various participants at the feast often have entirely different purposes for participating in the festivities. The feast amounts to a popular gathering where all the activities that are being performed renew and confirm networks that constitutes village solidarity. In the festival we also meet the coupling of “Greekness” and Orthodoxy, through the concept that the Greek War of Liberation had divine sanction, since, according to the local legend, the saint appeared on the mountain, *Tauros* before the war of liberation broke out. After this miraculous appearance, the festival has been celebrated annually since 1774, and it is around the religious aspect of the cult that all the other activities circulate. The article aims to explore the relation between the official and popular faith in the festival, while discussing some of the many meanings and activities that constitutes the festival.

Keywords:

Greece, ancient and modern, religious festival, animal sacrifice, official and popular faith, identities, migration, pilgrimage

In the farming districts of mainland Greece and at the northern Greek islands, a festival dedicated to *Agios i.e.* Saint Charalampos, the protector of the farmers, is celebrated annually in the mating season of the horses. This saint, martyred in 235 CE, is particularly known for protecting bulls. But he is also known for protecting the fecundity of horses, ensuring a plentiful harvest, and offering immunity from the plague. Although his liturgical festival is celebrated on 10 February, he is also celebrated later during the year with a popular festival. In the village of Agia Paraskeuē on the island of Mytilini/Lesbos (henceforward Lesbos), he is celebrated even later, for four days in June-July, so most emigrants may return home for their summer holidays. The ox-sacrifice at *Tauros*, *i.e.* the mountain of the Bull, constitutes the climax of the festival.¹

In 1992, when I observed the festival in the village of Agia Paraskeuē, there resided 2.500 inhabitants in the village. Agia Paraskeuē is named after the saint who protects against eye-diseases. Her chapel is situated at the border of the village, and is built into a cave in the mountain next to the cemetery. In the cave is also a spring, which is connected to a nearby church dedicated to the *Panagia* (Virgin Mary) through an underground passage. The cult connected with the spring of Agios Charalampos in the vicinity may be a modern survival of a cult related to former nymphs, such as Arethousa and the goddess Artemis (cf. Makistou 1970). The ancient sanctuary dedicated to Artemis was replaced by a cult dedicated to Asklepios. Later, hermits lived in the cave and today priests are buried there. So, within the same area, we find a cemetery, a cave and a sanctuary (church). In the center of the village is the main church dedicated to the patron saint of the island, the Archangel Michael, *i.e.* *Taxiarchēs*. On the other border of the village, at the northeastern exit is the church dedicated to Agios Charalampos, where horse races take place during his festival.

The poster from the local farmers' union welcomes everybody to the great festival of the bull, "*which has been handed down by our ancestors*". In 1992, the festival was celebrated from Friday 26 to Monday 29 June. The well-established festival is celebrated in commemoration of the miracle Ag. Charalampos performed for the village, when he, according to the legend, rescued a Greek farmer from being killed by a Turkish bandit during the Turkish occupation.

¹ Since 1983, I have had several periods of fieldwork in the Mediterranean, mainly in Greece and Italy where I have also been conducting research on religious festivals since 1987, cf. Håland 2007a. See particularly chap. 4, for further discussion of the Charalampos-festival, as well as an extensive bibliography on the island and its history.

The legend

The “Tauros-festival” is based on the following legend which is told by all villagers to visitors arriving at the village: During the period of the Turkish occupation a farmer from Agia Paraskeuē, called Malomytēs, lost his ox. While searching for it, he entered the headquarters of a Turkish bandit, who attempted to kill him. Every time, however, that he was about to pull the trigger, his human victim vanished in front of his eyes. The Turk attributed this miracle to Agios Charalampos, who was venerated in the area. He left his hide, and approached the Christian, gave him back his ox, which he had stolen, and told him to light a candle to the saint because he had saved him. Malomytēs, deeply disturbed, returned to his village and told the village elders of the miracle. Carrying the icon of the saint, the priest and the elders set off to the mountain called “Tauros”. Shortly afterwards the Turks, having seen the lights lit by the Christians, arrived in an angry mood. They accepted, however, the explanation they were given, gave permission for a service to be performed and told the elders to come every year to honour their saint, without fear.²

After this miraculous appearance, the festival has been celebrated annually. Today, similar festivals also take place in other villages, such as Pēgē and Napē, and the villages compete for having the greatest festival.

The festival is prepared a long time before the actual celebration. The day before the start of the festival all the tabernas, *kafeneion* (coffee-houses), private houses and streets are cleaned. Several of the emigrants living in USA, South Africa and Australia, come back home for their summer-holidays now when the annual feast is celebrated.

The touring of the village with the bull

The animal is dedicated by one of the respectable rich and devout natives of the village, who has been on a waiting list for several years to get permission to dedicate the bull. In 1992, the donor was from Washington D.C., USA. He dedicated the bull on behalf of his deceased father, who had emigrated from the village of Agia Paraskeuē. It is very popular to dedicate a great offering to one's native village, since the donor will be remembered by everyone. The present ox is particularly big, and has a large flower wreath and a poster placed on his horns, on his right flank is attached another poster with words written in memory of the deceased father. Bill, the donor, was born in the USA. He recounts that his father, who emigrated to the USA, had always wanted to dedicate a bull to the feast in his native village, but he died recently without having had the op-

² For the legend, see Chatzēgiannē 1969. The story might indicate an example of a shared saint, cf. Cuffel 2005.

portunity to do this. Accordingly, his son fulfilled his wish. On the poster is also listed the names of the other family members participating in the festival, and the donor. Thus, the family is blessed by the saint, since the priest intercedes with the saint on behalf of the family. Simultaneously, everybody learn who has given the great gift.

On the first day of the festival, Friday, the decorated sacrificial bull is paraded through the streets of the village with great pomp. The two pavements along the main street of the village are packed by street vendors. Many of them sell pictures illustrating horses. All the coffeehouses are also filled up with people waiting for the procession.

The festival starts quite early because of the heat, and after fetching the sacred symbols in the church, the procession with the bull starts. The procession is headed by a boy carrying the Greek flag. Another carries the banner of the saint. Following are three musicians, playing a particular sacrificial marching tune on their traditional instruments. Members of the farmer's union which organizes the event pass round offertory plates in which men and women throw money. When people throw money on the plates, in fulfilment of a vow, they are sprinkled with "holy" lemon-water. They also get a fortune bringing medallion carrying a picture of the patron saint of the village, Agia Paraskeuē. The "money collectors" carry plastic bags, which soon are filled up with money.

Everybody is permitted to attach an offering to the holy animal. This might be a flower wreath which is put around the neck of the animal, a flower wreath with words written in memory of a deceased, votive offerings, money or personal objects. People might touch the animal, or put their children on the back of the ox for a while, since it is believed that the contact with the animal brings good fortune, success and healing (Fig. 1). During the circuit of the village, the ox is also decorated with shawls and other holy symbols. When the procession passes by a saddle-maker, the importance of the horses for the festival becomes evident, because the ox is decorated with saddles from the shop. According to the donor, the ox has not been fed the last 24 hours, since it is so big. Perhaps it is also fasting before the killing? The purifying procession ends up in front of the house of the organizing committee where the collected money are counted. As with the money collected later during the festival, they will be donated to the church, poor people, or they might decide to build something for a "good purpose".

Later during the afternoon several people arrive in the village bringing with them their horses. Like the vendors, the young boys travel from village to village, to participate in the races. They are now preparing for the races which for many participants are the most important event.

Pilgrimage to “Tauros”

The following procession, however, indicates a transfer from the culture, the village, into nature, the mountain of the Bull, *i.e. Tauros*.

As the climax of the festival approaches, the enthusiasm increases. Already early Saturday morning beautifully decorated domestic animals, with polished saddles, silvered chest bands, and multi-coloured beads stand ready in front of the houses and in the streets. In the afternoon everything is ready to let the horses parade through the village. It is important to be as attractive as possible, both for rider and horse, hence the horses have been decorated for several hours. The male riders wear headscarves wrapped around their heads in a particular way. The young boys wear a red flower (pink) behind one of their ears. The ceremonies are focused around the saint's icon, which is carried by a selected woman of the village. The most important rituals however, take place outside the village, and after displaying themselves in all their splendour, the riders leave the village in small groups, followed by the ox and other villagers.

The officials of the union set out for the distant point of Tauros together with several of their colleagues and their wives, riding on their decorated horses. The first group, carrying the icon, leaves the village at three o'clock p.m. Of the leading couple, also leading the pilgrimage, the husband holds the flag and his wife the icon of the saint (Fig. 2). Members of the union perform this honorable commission by turns. The criterion for holding the icon is that the woman is married to one of the seven men who organize the festival. Preceded by the musicians, the villagers ride on horses parading the streets and around the market place. The riders treat one another with ouzo, nuts, etc. in the coffee shops. They may also pour some wine at the ground, “*so the earth gets its share.*” On their way down the main street, although probably unwillingly, a particular spectacle is performed: some horses run off, and several riders, particularly the foreigners, simply do not know how to handle a horse. This parade which starts one hour ahead of the departure from the village represents an old custom, which makes the festival colorful and extraordinary. When the riders have reached a state of high spirits, they set off for the hamlet of Kaukara, at the border of the village. The musicians accompany them to Kaukara, where the priest, the team with the necessary equipment and the animal, which is to be sacrificed, await them. At Kaukara is also the church dedicated to Agios Charalampos, thus marking the start of the pilgrimage towards his sanctuary at the mountain. From there they set out for Tauros.

So, the pilgrims leave the village and go into the wilderness. But they are protected by the icon and the priest. When the border and the following path have been blessed by the icon and the priest, the other villagers transcend the same border.

After a walk of two or three hours, across the eastern coast, they arrive the mountain, Tauros, where the saint's chapel is situated under the pine trees, opposite the nearby shores of Turkey. The chapel is built on the summit of Tauros, at the place where Ag. Charalampos, according to the legend, appeared to the farmer from Agia Paraskeuē.

Many of the participants are eager to point out that the feast does not take place in Agia Paraskeuē, but on Tauros, since "*his chapel is situated on the mountain*". Before they arrive at the mountain, most riders make a break next to a spring, because it is important to smear the mares and little foals with mud. They daub a cross on the mares' flanks with the mud, likewise they draw crosses at the trunks of the foals and the big stallions (Makistou 1970, p. 68 f.). Arriving at the mountain, the first pilgrims are, however, preceded by the pedlars with their festive merchandise and the musicians, who have already arrived by cars. Later, the other riders arrive by the same pathway. At the top of the mountain, a liturgy is celebrated in the small chapel dedicated to the saint. The officiating priest is from the neighbouring village of Pēgē. All the way up to the chapel horses are tied to the trees. Midway up the slope is a roofed stand, supplied with a long table and chairs. The construction is decorated with the Greek flag and the flower wreath of the bull. Here, the riders are treated with ouzo and mezedes when they arrive at Tauros. Afterwards, they are ready to proceed up the hill to be blessed by the priest when the liturgy has finished.

After the liturgy, blessed bread is distributed to the participants. Next, they drop some money on an offertory plate, pick up candles to be lighted and perform their devotions in front of the saint's icon which is situated in the chapel and decorated with a flower wreath. In the corridor just outside is the icon which was carried in the procession, and, which participates in all the processions at the festival. On the other (*i.e.* right) side is a narrow path leading into a cave over which grows a tree (Fig. 3) When people have performed their devotions to the saint, they enter the cave situated on the backside of the chapel. Here are many icons placed on a shelf. People light candles in front of the icons, perform their devotions, and leave the chapel by the exit.

At Tauros they light torches in honour of the saint, and they remain at the mountain all night. Pilgrims continually arrive in small groups, mount the steps of the rock leading to the picturesque little chapel where the local priest, in his gold vestments, is waiting for them in the open door to bless the horses. Everybody receives the priest's blessing when passing in front of the chapel. The riders pay for the blessing, and expect many foals as return-gifts. Afterwards, they descend on the other side of the chapel. Thus, the ceremony illustrates a purification-ritual or passage rite, since they enter by one way and leave by the other in a purified state.

The sacrifice takes place in the evening. With the laurel wreath around its neck and the “placard” commemorating the donor’s father hanging on its flank, the bull is led up to the chapel. The priest reads a prayer and blesses the ox while standing on the step of the church (Fig. 4). Afterwards the bull is led back and tied to the sacrificial tree. The wreath is removed; the “remembrance placard” is left in the chapel, and is thus dedicated to the saint.

Following is the auctioning of the honorary right to perform the sacrifice. Many participants, who have undertaken a vow to the saint, bid large sums. The money is “*collected to the saint*”. The highest bidder is entrusted with the honorary task of killing the sacrificial animal. He traces a cross with a knife on the throat of the beast. Then, the fertility-ensuring bull-slaughtering is performed by professional slaughterers. It is a fixed ritual to sacrifice the bull next to a tree.

The ox is shot, and the throat is cut immediately so that the blood will flow into the freshly dug hole close to the tree and its roots, thus, symbolising fertility. Everyone who have bid to kill the ox have thereby “*assured their right to be among the first to take the blood*”, according to the local villagers. Similarly to the ancient Roman *taurobolium*, festival of the sacrificial bull, it is important to be drenched by the bull’s gushing blood. By being drenched by the bull’s blood, people are protected against all kinds of sickness the next year. Accordingly, everybody immerse their hands into the blood. The male pilgrims daub a cross on their foreheads and palms with the blood, while the women dip their handkerchiefs and pieces of cotton-wool in the blood, and draw crosses on the foreheads of their children. The same happens during other rituals on the island, because people are convinced that the blood has a healing function and wards off the evil.

The big bull is cut up (Fig. 5). The meat is mixed with wheat, onions and spices, and left to cook all night long in great cauldrons as the ceremony demands.

The rest of Saturday evening is given over to celebrating under the pine trees, while the traditional dish *kesketsi* is prepared. They hang the laurel wreath over the entrance to the special kitchen- or cooking-hut where the food is cooked all night. Inside, the great cauldrons are lined up over open air fires. The hut was built by emigrants from Australia and USA who started to finance the festival by the end of the 1950s. It is situated a little below an enclosed open air area where they used to cook the food earlier. The woods echo with music and singing during this “vigil” which is a bit different from the obligatory vigil at all saints festivals, and all night riders arrive from Agia Paraskeuē.

Sunday morning, after sunrise, most of those who stayed at home during the night set out to participate at the liturgy which starts at eight o’clock in the saint’s chapel, and obtain their portion of the *kesketsi* which

is distributed to the pilgrims after being blessed by the priest who officiates at the holy liturgy in the chapel.

Packed cars arrive at Tauros coming from all over the island. People rush out from the cars. Everyone carry with them empty plastic boxes, depending on how many they have promised to provide with *kesketsi*. A strong smell of cooking from the hut fills the air. Inside, several exhausted men stir the food in the great cauldrons in which they mix wheat. The mix is stirred for another two to three hours until it becomes a thick porridge, *kesketsi*. The smoke sting their eyes, the tears are flowing during this cooking in which only men participate. The priest officiates in the chapel, and the cassette players of the youngsters are going full blast.

Latecomers are still arriving. They ascend to the chapel and are purified as the riders from yesterday and last night. Several are also standing inside the chapel during the liturgy which lasts until ten o'clock. Afterwards blessed bread and *kollyba*, a mixture of wheat, nuts, fruit and honey, are distributed from the stone bench in the corridor opposite the chapel. Thus, the icon of the saint is watching the distribution. The holy Charalampos, does not only receive the bull, but also *kollyba*. "*Agios Charalampos demands kollyba*," according to the local people. He is not the only one: As soon as the liturgy finishes Sunday morning, the decorated dish with *kollyba* is, literally, plundered by the eager pilgrims, rushing into the corridor to receive pieces of blessed bread and a napkin with *kollyba*.

People pass in front of the priest standing in the door of the iconostasis to bless them, simultaneously as he distributes the sacraments. Afterwards most women rush into the cave carrying candles.

Following the festal mass in the chapel, the food is ready and at noon they call upon the priest to come to the cooking-hut in order to bless the food. He reads the prayers and another answers (Fig. 6). These prayers for sacrificing a bull are found in Byzantine writings from 8th century CE.³ When the priest has finished the blessing of the food, he is the first person to get his plastic boxes filled to the brim with the holy *kesketsi*. After the long waiting time, everybody is impatient. People are handing their boxes and bowls through the windows of the cooking-hut to be filled with the *kesketsi*. The food is divided up, and the midday food and drink is served. So everyone gets their share of the communal meal, which is distributed during what must be labelled a wild fight. Most people leave the mountain as soon as they have managed to get their part of the long-awaited *kesketsi*. The ritual finishes at midday.

³ See Conybeare 1901, p. 109, cf. Håland 2007a, chap. 4 and n. 290 for the 1992-version of the same prayer.

Horse race and communal meal

The festival is divided into two parts: One part is celebrated in the Saint's church at the mountain, and the other part is celebrated in the village. After the meal on Tauros, the groups of pilgrims set off back home to the village, where the local people gather and await the pilgrims on their horses.

Returning from the mountain are also the traders. Back in the village, some traders offer homemade *chalba* (Greek or Turkish "sweets", made of ground almonds and sugar). Others sell string bags, nuts or herbs for making tea, and which has an intoxicating effect. In the village every single taberna has engaged its own orchestra, to preserve its self-respect. The competition is enormous, and every orchestra tries "to drown the neighbour" with their own music, and they are "very expensive", according to the villagers. The kafeneion are filled early, and they are also expecting tourist buses. Most people talk about "the races".

At *Stalos* a short distance outside of the northeastern border of the village, the traditional and spectacular horse races, on horses not yet broken in, take place on Sunday evening, in the vicinity of the church dedicated to Agios Charalampos. Professional riders are not permitted to participate in these races. The horsemen ride bareback. The winners, both riders and horses, get valuable prizes which have been on display in the village earlier during the festival. For many, particularly the young boys, this is the "Festival". They associate the races with the festival and go from one feast to the next to participate in the races and exercise as much as possible. According to them "*this is a possibility to break in the young horses. It is the only possibility for a working horse to be exercised*" and underline that "*due to the races, the festival is useful*".

In the afternoon at five o'clock, participants from the organizing committee leave their office and go up to the church dedicated to Taxiarchēs, the protector of the island. As already mentioned, his church is situated in the centre of the village, this is also the site from which all the processions start. The procession is headed by the four musicians. A man carries the Greek flag, another carries Charalampos' banner which is fetched from the church. Following is the feast committee, the priest and the riding woman carrying the icon, followed by another woman. Two participants from the committee also carry the traditional offertory plates on which they collect money. Another follows carrying a bottle with blessed "lemon water", and a third carries plastic bags with medallions from the village. So, people throwing money into the plates receive tangible return gifts carrying an imprint of the patron saint of the village symbolized by a cross. As during the procession on Friday, they collect money, following is a "lemon water-shower" and distribution of medallions all the way up to *Stalos*. When reaching *Stalos*, the four continue their task along the rows of spectators.

During the procession up to Stalos, a woman reads the story telling about the feast tradition over the loudspeaker.

Half an hour after setting out from the village, the procession arrives at the military area at the village boundary, where the winning post for the races is situated. Decorated with green plants, the honorary stand is ready for the races. The columns of the stand are painted in blue and white, as the foundation wall of the Saint's church, which is situated uphill to the right. Both the church and the enclosure in front of the sanctuary are gifts, and as the custom is when dedicating a gift, a brass placard announces the name and title of the donor. The organizing committee gathers at the honorary stand. Here, we also find the priest, the chairman of the village, the sponsor of the feast and their families. The sponsor and his family are the honorary guests of the year. Here, is also the table on which the prizes are arranged.

The races start around seven o'clock. Adolescents are continually arriving into the area riding on their untamed or half-broken horses. They are introduced to the spectators by "speaker" who announces their name and place of origin. Accordingly, everyone knows on whom it is worth to put one's money if they did not know that in advance. Among the participants are also people who have arrived from Australia annually for the last ten years. For the first time, a woman is also among the riders. When the riders have been introduced, they proceed to the gate of the military area. Then, they turn off, ascend to the right and pass by the church dedicated to Ag. Charalampos. Accordingly they encircle the church before they return to the starting area. At the table with the prizes, the committee distributes white cards, on which people might indicate their "winning horse", or rank the horses. There are three categories of horses, on which they put money.

They ride bareback, two by two, and only the winner proceeds. When the finish has been passed, they ascend to the right and pass the Saint's church once again. It seems like a prayer before the race and an expression of thanks after the race, which is dedicated to the honour of the saint. Some of the riders, who do not proceed, are frantic and angry because "*people come into the path*", and thus obstruct them during the race. Initially, the only participating girl has to ride alone. During the second round, however, in which only those who proceed are permitted to participate, she is allowed to ride together with a boy, and she loses, which is a great pleasure for the male spectators: "*You could not expect anything else*", is their comment. The best horses might run one by one most of the way. Several participants have to run three by three, to elect the final winner. When the winner has been elected, follows the distribution of prizes: the rider gets money, a cup, trophy of a horse, and harness with a shawl for the horse. The priest distributes the first prize and the fastest horse gets the laurel wreath around its neck (Fig. 7). The other prizes are distributed by the

other authorities. Then, the musicians start, and the two men carrying the Greek flag and Charalampos' banner take their stand. The woman with the icon arrives, and the riding procession escorting the banner rides back to the church.

After the horse race the villagers celebrate in the late evening, at all the kafeneion and tabernas in the village. From the various tabernas echoes the bouzoki-music. In the course of the evening and night, the parties become quite wild, and, particularly, the young riders treat their horses with ouzo as well as champagne.

The greatest celebration however, takes place Monday evening when all the villagers gather to a vast communal meal, *Charlamelia*. In the evening, people gather at the kafeneion and tabernas of the village and celebrate until early Tuesday morning. Actually, and for two reasons, more people participate on Monday. Several are exhausted after the "vigil night" at the mountain and the following horse races. Hence, they go to bed early on Sunday. In addition, the curious tourists leave after the horse races. So, today, they celebrate a common village festival. When the evening approaches, the older villagers start to walk up and down along the main street of the village, they are soon followed by others: Several younger women, pushing their baby carriages, wear new beautiful evening dresses. They assure each other that their dresses "*are newly bought for this event*". It is, indeed, important to display the newly bought clothes and be as good-looking as possible. A similar ritual is found in Plomari, on the southern part of the island, when they "*go bolta*" on certain weekdays. At the tabernas, the stoves are cooking. According to one of the participants in the feast committee, they have traditional dishes at the tonight's menu. He is not permitted to participate in the celebration, however, because his father has just died. Therefore, he wears a mourning band round his upper right arm.

So the four days long festival concludes with a great common meal for all the inhabitants of Agia Paraskeuē, who are now refreshed after the sleepless night at the mountain.

The same groups who went up the mountain are also celebrating together. The same men, who rode up jointly, now bring with them the women and the rest of the families and celebrate at the tabernas of the village. They share the bill, but they also bring much of the food along with them from their homes. So, the farmers' union pays the festival, while the American pilgrim paid the holy meal at the mountain. In the typical Greek manner, the feast, *i.e.* the meal starts late in the evening, at 10:30 p.m., when all the participants have finished their daily tasks.

After the communal meal, the dance starts and the celebration lasts until Tuesday morning at the kafeneion and tabernas in the village. Following the customary rules, the dancing people throw money to the musicians, thus illustrating how much they appreciate the music. According to one of

the members in the organizing committee, this is the way they pay the musicians. Nevertheless, they are also paid by the collected money of the organizers and the taberna-owners. This is particularly illustrated the days before the festival by their lively complains of the “*expensive orchestras they have engaged this year*”. However, this is also done to demonstrate their prosperity.⁴ According to some of the older women, this is the feast of the year, it lasts the whole night, and tomorrow they can sleep. The four days festival has now ensured the prosperity for another year.

After giving this “thick” description of the festival, as I experienced the celebration in 1992, the following aims to explore the relation between the official and popular faith in the festival, while discussing some of the many meanings and activities that constitutes the festival.

Some comments on the historiography of the festival

According to the legend, the festival dedicated to Ag. Charalampos has been celebrated since the Turkish period, as described in the pamphlet (Chatzēgiannē 1969) which is presented to interested visitors at the office of the organizing committee. Both the date and legend about the Turkish bandit might be seen as a statement in the struggle against the Turks. It has also been suggested (Makistou 1970, p. 63) that the festival may be traced back to the ancient Greek period, but was abandoned early during the Turkish rule. The custom is also found other places in the north-eastern Aegean. Since the festival thus resumes after the appearance of the saint around the beginning of the struggle against the Turks, we meet a parallel to other “supernatural” signs at the same period, for example findings of icons or the appearance of divine persons.

Although the legend is traced back to the 18th century, the bibliography about the festival is produced in the 20th century, and there are many similarities between my own observations and the actual documentation.⁵

The Greek researcher Kōstas Makistou, a native of Agia Paraskeuē has particularly focused on the fertility-aspect of the festival, and contrary to other Greek researchers, themselves being Orthodox Christians, and thereby often affected by the problems of connecting Orthodoxy with Survivalism (cf. Stewart 1991; Håland 2007a, chap. 3), Makistou (1970, p. 68-74) generously records what he considers to be pagan elements which the festival of the bull-sacrifice has in common with other local festivals. He

⁴ Cf. Vernier 1991, p. 36 ff.

⁵ Cf. Håland 2007a, fig. 79, 82 f., 85 f. from 1992 and Paraskeuaidē 1991, p. 85 fig. 1 f., p. 97 fig. 1 from 1929; Makistou 1970, fig. p. 64 f., 67, 69, 71, 73 f. from 1969, see also Aikaterinidēs 1979, pls.1 f. from 1969 and 1973, see also Kakouri 1965, p. 67, she visited the festival in 1964. See also n. 1. *supra* for the bibliography of the festival.

also indicates relevant ancient parallels, such as animal sacrifice as a votive offering; the spotless animal and its life in freedom; the touring of the village with the decorated animal before the sacrifice; the auction before the killing; daubing with blood from the sacrificial animal; animal sacrifice and banquet for the common benefit of the society; the presence of the priest, his blessing and the custom of giving him the sacred hide of the animal and a shoulder blade with meat; the duration of the festival; and the libation to the earth when leaving for Tauros. Makistou compares the ritual daubing with blood with the taurobolium of the ancient Romans, Hebrew, Persian and Greek bull sacrifices dedicated to Mithra and Apollon respectively (Makistou 1970, p. 64-68). Makistou (1970, p. 68-72), also indicates several specific traits of the Tauros-festival dedicated to Ag. Charalampos, which have ancient parallels: the source with mud, and its properties to secure the fertility and health of the animals. He also reminds about the importance of the blood, all the silver-plated ex-votos (*tama/ta*) representing a horse which is dedicated to the saint, persons making vows about pilgrimages to Tauros if the animals are in foals and the importance of fulfilling their vows, wishes at Tauros about health and the contest (*agōn*) or horse races. The nocturnal feast and the sacrifice under the pine trees which lasts for two days and nights, including cyclical dances is compared with the Dionysiac ritual on Clean Monday. The custom of making inarticulate shouts is compared with Bacchic shouts and dances in the ancient Dionysian cult and similar cult dedicated to Artemis.

Makistou also discusses the various features around the festival at Tauros which he assumes are modern examples of earlier fertility-cult dedicated to Artemis: her aspect as general protector of the vegetable and animal life, protector of newborn animals, her cult which similarly to the Dionysian cult, included orgiastic dances, her aspect as hunter and protector of untamed animals, changes in the living conditions that made her protector of cattle breeding. He also discusses her aspect as nymph, the connection with Arethousa, etc. (Makistou 1970, p. 70-72).

Finally Makistou (1970, p. 74 f.) also discusses newer features at the festival: changes concerning the main participants, the touring, the duration of the festival (the earlier three-day celebration has developed to four days, since Monday's Charlamelia has been added), urbanization, exotic picnic and tourism which however, makes the festival with its old elements an continuing ritual, contrary to other festivals in the area. The last statement, however, should be nuanced, since the other villages in the neighborhood compete for having the most magnificent festival.

He also discusses the relationship between the gods of the ancient festival of Thargelia Apollon and Artemis and the modern Agia Paraskeuē and Panagia in the area.⁶

⁶ Makistou 1970, p. 81-90, 110 ff., 156-158.

Collective Identities

Several of the elements discussed by Makistou, are important within Greek religion, official and popular, although there has also been frictions between the two, particularly in connection with the animal sacrifice (cf. also for example Oikonomides 1964).

The sacrificed bull, which is consumed as a communal meal, *kesketsi*, is dedicated by an emigrant. He represents a group of people that always return home to the village during the annual festival of the saint. This is why there is not a fixed date for the celebration of the festival, only that it is always celebrated around the grain harvest.⁷ In 1992 it was postponed until the schools had terminated in South Africa, where a great contingent from the village has settled. In this festival dedicated to a deceased Christian saint, horses and the horse races are important elements, particularly for the adolescents, and the festival concludes by a great communal meal where the whole village participate. The various participants at the feast often have entirely different purposes for participating in the festivities. The feast amounts to a popular gathering where all the activities that are being performed renew and confirm networks that constitutes village solidarity.

It is very problematic to claim that the actual festival goes back to the ancient period. On the other hand, several of its elements have a very long tradition within Greek religion, modern and ancient, and may be traced back to the ancient Greek period, particularly the ceremonial blood sacrifice, the collective banquet, horse races and divine appearances in periods of crises. These elements are also important features within modern Greek culture in general and very often belong to legends told in connection with religious festivals. Another important feature is the contest or *agōn*, which is not only demonstrated by the horse races. Accordingly, the following section will discuss the importance of these factors within modern Greek culture and draw on ancient parallels to illustrate the traditional importance of the aspects in the geographical area, and their significance for the construction and maintenance of collective identities.⁸

⁷ Earlier it was celebrated in May, cf. Paraskeuaidē 1991, p. 136.

⁸ That the same factors are used in the construction of collective identities all over the Balkan and Mediterranean areas is another topic, which I do not have possibility to discuss here, despite its importance, see however for example Håland 2007a, chap. 2.

Blood sacrifice

Although many Greek researchers, who are Orthodox believers, have been reluctant to claim direct continuity between the pagan ancient Greek culture and the modern Greek nation state, which is Christian, it has, since the Greek independence (1832), also been important to concentrate on particular cultural traits as potential proof of the fledgling nation's ancient pedigree.⁹

Among the cultural traits within the modern Greek state that has been considered as survivals of ancient cult, the ceremonial animal sacrifice has an exceptional position.

Particularly the animal sacrifice was a climax in the ancient cult, and many have seen the bull sacrifice in Agia Paraskeuē as a modern example of the ancient bull sacrifices to Zeus or Poseidon. As in the ancient religion, the animal chosen has to be perfect and it is adorned, entwined with ribbons, with its horns gilded. As a rule, the animal will still go to the sacrifice voluntarily,¹⁰ although this is not always the case (Håland 2007a, chap. 4).

In the Christian period, the official Church has, in every possible way, tried to abolish the rituals which they considered unacceptable to Christianity. The animal sacrifices headed the list of banned rituals. But the Greek villagers did not stop sacrificing animals to their saints. Since the Church did not manage to forbid the ritual, some priests tried to make the tradition legitimate by attaching the ritual to Hebrew cult, and as already mentioned, we find prayers for sacrificing a bull in Byzantine writings from 8th century CE, since prayers preserved in the Barberini Library in Rome, were brought to the council in Florence as authority manual within the Byzantine church by Greek priests who participated in such sacrifices. We also have prayers from the following two centuries.¹¹ Generally, the upper clergy turned their back to the whole affair, thus letting people do as they wanted (Papamanoli-Guest 1991, p. 87), and in Agia Paraskeuē the local priest (*i.e.* from Pēgē) even blesses the sacrificial animal. One might say that the pagan sacrificial ritual is replaced by a Christian. The modern ritual, certainly, is influenced by ancient Greek, Christian, Jewish and Islamic culture, and is therefore presented as a legalized Christian custom (cf. Aikaterinidēs 1979).

⁹ Herzfeld 1986; Stewart 1991; discussed in Håland 2007a, chap. 2 f.

¹⁰ Cf. Pausanias, 9.12,1 f.; Burkert 1985, p. 56; Aikaterinidēs 1979, p. 118, 170 f., 115.

¹¹ Cf. *supra*. See Conybeare 1901, p. 109 for prayer for sacrificing an ox from the 8th century CE, see also p. 108-110, cf. Håland 2007a, chap. 3-4. Cf. also Burkert 1983, p. 8 f.

Among the aspects discussed in the analysis given by Makistou, particularly the blood sacrifice has been analyzed by all researchers who have dealt with the festival, particularly its ancient precursors, Greek or Hebrew (see for example Georgoudi 1979). The importance of the blood sacrifice is also illustrated by the way the festival most often is identified: “The festival at Tauros“, “The Bull sacrifice at Tauros” or “The Festival of the Bull”.

The ceremonial animal sacrifice, *i.e.* *kourmpani*, is also present in other festivals in modern Greece, such as the Anastenaria in northern Greece.¹² The animal sacrifice, in fact, is so important that the church signifies the Anastenaria as “*kourmpani*” (Mpougatsos 1963, p. 636). This is the classification of the modern official Church, but also the bishop of Macedonia, Theophilos, who in his text published at the “*Tameion Orthodoxias*” (Treasury of Orthodoxy) from approx. 1780, is particularly critical to the ceremonial animal sacrifice, the “*kourmpania*”.¹³

Blood sacrifice is also a common phenomenon at official festivals and rituals, such as at saints’ days and other religious festivals in general as well as life-cycle passages. The ceremonial animal sacrifice is often dedicated as a votive offering, such as in the present festival dedicated to Ag. Charalampos. In addition, several other villages on the island perform similar celebrations during the summer. Taxiarchēs is also celebrated with a bull sacrifice in the village of Mantamados on the third Sunday after Easter. The bull is slaughtered after the blessing of the priest, and as in the ancient tradition, it is said that the animal does not usually resist, *i.e.* “it goes freely to the sacrifice”. Female holy figures also get ox-offerings: At the island of Imbros, in the northern Aegean, the “Tauros sacrifice” is performed every year on 15 august at the Dormition of the Panagia (Psychogiou 2008). Today, “*kourmpani*” is a common custom both in northern Greece and Turkey, but it is also common to perform animal sacrifices among the Albanians in Attica. Ritual bull sacrifice combined with a nocturnal procession with torches is also dedicated to Agios Basilios.¹⁴ These customs are nevertheless not limited to the Greek and Turkish areas, since “*kourmpania*” are found in the whole Eastern Mediterranean area, within the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions.¹⁵

¹² See Håland 2007a, chap. 4, see also chap. 3 particularly n. 48 for discussion of *kourmpania*.

¹³ Romaïos 1949, p. 52 cites Theophilos.

¹⁴ Kakouri 1965, p. 137 f. n. 87. Michaël-Dede 1986, p. 71 f.: sacrifices among *Ἀρβανίτες* (in Attica), cf. Markou 1981.

¹⁵ Cf. Håland 2011 (forthcoming). At the 9th SIEF Congress, Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland, 2008, I learned that the same ritual also is performed for Saint Charalampos in Bulgaria. However, since the announced speaker did not participate, I was not able to get more information. Bull sacrifices

The most complete presentation of modern Greek blood sacrifices is given by Geōrg. N. Aikaterinidēs (1979). One of the very interesting themes in his presentation, is the popular belief that the selected life-giving and fertility-ensuring ox which is offered to Ag. Charalampos, also incarnates the saint, who protects the animals, particularly bulls (Aikaterinidēs 1979, p. 66).

According to Edmund Leach's (1986, chap. 18), analysis of, particularly Jewish, sacrifices

the animal or object sacrificed is also a metonymic sign for the donor of the sacrifice. By arranging the sacrifice, the donor provides a bridge between the world of the gods and the world of men across which the potency of the gods can flow towards himself. During the ritual, the initiate is separated into two parts, one pure, the other impure. The latter part can then be left behind, while the pure part can be aggregated to the initiate's new status. In the case of sacrifice, the sacrificial animal plays the part of the initiate. Likewise, the donor is purified.

In the Mediterranean *clientela* system, people employ strategies based upon gifts and benefits to gain return gifts. The gift makes the recipient morally obligated for return giving, a favor for a gift. All personal and social relations rest on expectations of reciprocity. This principle also pervades the relations between people and their saints. The religion reflects a culture in which reciprocity and feasts are important elements. The logic of sacrifice illustrates how a religious ritual serves to express a relationship between the human world and the other world. By making a gift to the gods, the gods are compelled to give back benefits to man (Leach 1986, chap. 18). This logic is also found elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and in the ancient Greek, Roman and Jewish worlds.

Aikaterinidēs might also be classified among those researchers who discuss survivals of ancient elements in modern cult. Contrary to the "survivalist" or "continuity-researcher", Makistou, however, Aikaterinidēs' "survivalism", tends more towards "pseudo-survivalism",¹⁶ since he claims that the modern Greek blood-sacrifices preserve numerous elements from the ancient sacrifices. Nevertheless, they are also influenced by Jewish and Christian customs. Accordingly they are often celebrated with the festivals of the church, and emerge as a legalized Christian custom.¹⁷

are also performed in South Italy at the spring festival, *Festa del Pitu*, dedicated to Saint Antonius (Rotonda), cf. Håland 1990, chap. 6.

¹⁶See Håland 2007a, chap. 2, 4-6 for an extended discussion of the problems with "survivalism", "pseudo-survivalism" and "anti-survivalism" in modern research on Greek culture.

¹⁷ Aikaterinidēs 1979, p. 173-176, cf. p. 207. See also Håland 2007a, chap. 3 for animal sacrifice, condemnation and assimilation within the Christian tradition.

Accordingly, although the festival presents a ritual, which several within the official Greek Orthodox Church still consider to be pagan, a sacrilegious survival of pre-Christian idolatrous rites, the festival is situated within the religious and cosmological context of the Orthodox Church, and they make extensive use of Orthodox symbolism, faith and ritual practices. The ritual therefore illustrates one of many instances of popular versus doctrinal religion, for example as illustrated by the relations between the official and popular faith on present-day's Lesbos.

The logic behind blood sacrifices is that life continues through the killing. Blood symbolizes life. When the earth receives blood via the dead, one dedicates what one wants to receive back, *i.e.* life and fertility. So, the farmer sacrifices to assure the following harvest.

Blood

The power of blood in religious belief is found in ancient and modern Greece. On Lesbos, blood and blood magic has a very particular significance. This is illustrated by the holy icon in the church at the monastery in Mantamados which is dedicated to Taxiarchēs (Fig. 8). According to the legend it is made of earth and blood from monks who were killed by the Turks (Paraskeuaïdēs 1953, p. 159-161).

Mantamados is famous for its church dedicated to Taxiarchēs. The icon of Taxiarchēs is carved from some unknown material which local tradition claims is clay mixed with blood. There was a monastery here, and the story goes that it was attacked by Saracen raiders, who killed all the monks except one, who had scrambled up on the roof. When the pirates attempted to catch him, the sea rose up in wrath against them, and they fled in terror. The monk, who attributed his salvation to Taxiarchēs, came down from the roof and made the icon with clay and the blood of his dead brothers. Taxiarchēs is now the patron saint of the village and the island. As already mentioned, he is celebrated in Mantamados after Easter, when thousands of pilgrims arrive to the church. After the sacrifice of the bull, everyone obtain some blood and is thus safe for another year.

The importance of blood in ideas surrounding life and death is illustrated by the revitalizing, life-giving and healing signification of the blood in the feast of Ag. Charalampos. At the Tauros-festival blood from the sacrificed bull is also smeared on the mares, little foals and big stallions for the same purpose as the mud (Makistou 1970, p. 69). The ritual parallels ancient purification rituals, *inter alia*, in connection with Apollo cult in Asia Minor.

In Greek conception blood is connected with the life-cycle. According to an ancient Greek myth Athena gave Erichthonios a particular gift, since he received two drops of blood from the dead Medusa, which, according to

Euripides, have miraculous power upon the human body: the one kills, the other heals (Euripides, *Ion*. 999-1015). An altar in Didyma (Pausanias, 5.13.11) was said to have been made from the blood of the victims. At the Roman *taurobolium*, “*the initiand, crouching in a pit covered with wooded beams on which a bull was slaughtered, was drenched by the bull’s gushing regenerating blood*”. As the modern equivalent, the *taurobolium* was a “*token of good luck*”, “*an insurance against all evil that may befall a person*”.¹⁸ In ancient society sacrificial human blood might also be employed in purification rituals (Athenaeus, 13.602c-d). Blood- and first fruit offering is also illustrated by several myths where maidens, *i.e.* much fertility, are sacrificed before battle (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 222-230), or on a heros’ tomb (Euripides, *Hec.* 39 ff., 123 ff.), *i.e.* blood sacrifice and “killing”, is seen as a source to fertility. The cult dedicated to Artemis of Ephesos is reminiscent of the cult dedicated to other mother-goddesses: The eunuch who leads the college of priests of the Great Goddess of Syria (Lucian, *Syr. D.* 51), invokes the self-castration of Attis beneath a pine tree, the god who is celebrated with blood rituals. The ceremonial self-infliction of wounds and self-castration by initiates in a state of ecstasy, *i.e.* the sacrifice of the virility of those who personified Kybele’s shortlived lover, increase the fertility of the goddess.¹⁹

The fertility-aspect of the ancient cult might be clarified by comparison with a modern ritual on Lesbos where male blood is sacrificed to Agia Paraskeuē.²⁰ at the festival dedicated to Agia Paraskeuē, Syrtos is danced. During the dance, once the enthusiasm of rhythmic movement has reached its height, the leader of the dance, the “*protosyrtis*”, wounds himself in the foot and continues to dance while bleeding. This is an offering to the female saint to “*bring health*” (Kakouri 1965, p. 68). Similar self-inflicted wounds figure in popular wisdom for healing, and the male patron saint, Taxiarchēs, receives girls’ blood (Michaël-Dede 1992, p. 203-207). The wound has the shape of a pink (though it is also red in colour), and the reason is that “*they want fresh blood to improve their health*”. Three days old babies go through the same ritual.²¹

The aforementioned Attis is also represented as a bull which is sacrificed next to a tree. The relation between bull sacrifice and castration is also present in the festival of Ag. Charalampos, since the sacrificed animal is capable of breeding. After the slaughter, the testicles of the animal, the

¹⁸ Burkert 1987, p. 18, 6, cf. p. 10, 25, 49, 98. See also Burkert 1985, p. 59 f. for blood rituals. Cf. Håland 2007a, chap. 4, 6.

¹⁹ Motte 1973, p. 96, cf. p. 107.

²⁰ Se Håland 2007a, chap. 6 for a comprehensive discussion.

²¹ Cf. Stewart 1991, p. 226 f. Cf. the male riders with a pink behind their ears.

personification of the saint, are dedicated to Mother Earth. The blood sacrifice to the earth via dead saints, thus, parallels similar ancient rituals.²²

Most sacrifices were and are a prelude to a meal, since the natural and straightforward aim of a festival is feasting: eating and drinking. In the ancient world, the festival is spoken of as the banquet of the gods. In connection with the blood sacrifice, their portions however, were generally limited to what was not fit for human consumption, such as bones and fats.

The Communal meal

The libation dedicated to the earth might be seen as a modern equivalent to the ancient custom of dedicating a libation to the gods in connection with the participation at a communal meal (Homer, *Il.* 1.470 f.).

At the festival, the community group comes together to periodically reaffirm group sentiments. On another level, the fertility of renewable subsistence resources depends on the collective ritual efforts of all members of the society. Therefore, fertility is a form of social communion. This is often expressed by a communal meal. The communal meal and the food have a particular function in all festivities (Wuthnow 1986, p. 112). As in the modern festivals the communal meal was also important in the ancient festival, since at the center of the festival is the communal meal which the society dedicates to itself and the god (s).

The festival, then, is an important means of communication, an offering or a gift, most often dedicated to a deceased guardian of society. Simultaneously the festival is dedicated to the participants themselves, and the gift exchange is manifested through a symbolic communal meal, often resulting from a blood sacrifice, dedicated to the deceased mediator.

In the festival dedicated to Ag. Charalampos, we have evidence of several communal meals, first and foremost, *kesketsi* which is a distinctive, traditional dish at Lesbos. The dish is made of meat boiled with wheat, onions and spices. In addition to the various festivals dedicated to Ag. Charalampos, *kesketsi* is also cooked (meat and wheat) on White Friday (*i.e.* after the Resurrection) at the chapel dedicated to Agia Paraskeuē in the cave. Here the flesh of the sacrificed animal is cooked in the churchyard, with wheat, “*so the crops may flourish*”, and eaten in a public feast. *Kesketsi* is also cooked before the Ascension Day, “*so the priest can call out, ‘Christ is risen’*”. It is also cooked during the festival dedicated to Panagia 15 August in Petra, at the spring festival (after the Resurrection) dedicated to Taxiarchēs in Mantamados and at the festival dedicated to Kosmas and Damianos, which is celebrated in Arisbē in the neighbourhood of Kallonē on 1 July.

²² Cf. Homer, *Od.* 11.30; Homer, *Il.* 3.103 f.

In the festival dedicated to Ag. Charalampos, all villagers do not make pilgrimages to Tauros to obtain *kesketsi*: It is very cold in Agia Paraskeuē in the morning, and many older men prefer to stay at their *kafeneion* in the market place awaiting the return of the others. One might as well send an empty plastic box with someone of those who go up to the mountain, since “*we are freezing*”. We have a parallel to the custom when people going to the church also fetch blessed bread to other family-members and friends.

Although *kesketsi* is a particular dish found in Lesbos, the sacrifice of a bull after the blessing of the victim by the priest, followed by the cooking and sharing of its meat to the villagers, is also found other places in Greece. In the village of Agridia on Imbros, they cook “*kourkouta*” when the “Tauros sacrifice” has been performed on 15 august at the Dormition of the Panagia (Psychogiou 2008). *Kourkouta* is most likely a Turkish word. It is a kind of soup, cooked on the meat mixed with wheat.²³ In Spata, Attica, they use to sacrifice a bull at the festival of Agios Petros on 28 June and cook *stiphados*, to be blessed by the priest the following day.²⁴

The symbolic meaning of the food is important in all ceremonies, as the ancient *dais* (i.e. banquet) or the animal sacrifices in general which always were dedicated to the human participants as soon as the ritual dedicating to the god (s) was finished (Homer, *Il.* 1.457-468). Today, we meet the communal meal in the *kesketsi* at Tauros and the communal meal on the last day, Charlamelia, which thus terminates the festival. On a general level, by providing the festival meals, the participants “dedicate” the food to themselves and the saint, in the same way as they equip the church with bread, wine and oil. The treating with ouzo, nuts, etc. in the coffee shops, parallels similar ritual distributions of sugared almonds, etc. at other life-cycle ceremonies, such as baptisms, weddings and name-days. Concerning the ingredients in the food, also paralleling the aforementioned *kollyba*, the actual consuming also illustrates a wish for the kind of fertility to which these symbols refer: The mixture consists of boiled stewed wheat mixed with honey or sugar, pomegranate - the symbol for abundance - cinnamon, raisins, minced walnuts - symbolizing the pleasures of life -, sesame, parsley, currants, etc. The mixture is decorated with powdered sugar. *Kollyba* is also offered before harvest, and this modern equivalent to the *panspermia* of the ancients offered at sowing, sprouting and harvest, still seeks to assure the future crop. Since the natural cycle also depends on the participation of the dead, the same mixture is distributed during the memorial services at the cemetery, paralleling the mixture which was dedicated to the dead on their graves in ancient Greece.

²³ Personal information from E. Psychogiou.

²⁴ Personal information from Eleutherios Alexakēs, who has also published on this particular *kourmpani*, i.e. 2001, 2008. See also Markou 1981 for earlier versions of the festival in Spata.

The wine and blood-offerings to the earth reminds us that although the treating of the living is important during the passages rites, the dead, the earth and the tree also get their share, today, as in the ancient world, when a libation always was poured, *i.e.* dedicated to the god (s) before drinking one's fill.

Horse races and other competitions

The feast ends with a prosperity-ensuring horse race, to ensure the fecundity of both wheat and horses. As already mentioned, horse races are also found other places in Lesbos, and are very important, particularly for the younger generation, some of them also coming from Australia mainly to participate at the annual races. Horse races are also found other places in Greece in connection with festivals, for example in Mesolongion at Pentecost (Whitsunday).

Several researchers have observed the competitiveness and "agonistic" (cf. *agōn/-es*, *i.e.* contest/athletic games) nature of village life which, however, also binds villagers together (Herzfeld 1985; Dubisch 1993). Through the dialectic of challenge and riposte, or exchange of honour between peers, they also exchange *symbolic capital*, which it is also important to accumulate through the game of honour, and behind which lies the logic of gift and counter-gift, *i.e.* the importance of paying off services rendered or gifts received (Bourdieu 1966, 1980).

On Lesbos, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean, for example in Italy, there is a huge competition between the local villages for having the greatest festival, and several villages celebrate during the summer, thus illustrating the importance of honour also on a collective level, *i.e.* among villages. In 1992, people in Agia Paraskeuē claimed that "*Pēgē started four years earlier because they say that Charalampos lives on their land (i.e. the sanctuary of the saint is at Pēgē's territory), but the real and oldest festival is celebrated in Agia Paraskeuē*". Further, the farmer, Malomytēs, was from Agia Paraskeuē, and all the movable property in the chapel, such as the icon of the saint, belongs to Agia Paraskeuē. So, on a collective level, the village possesses a relatively great amount of symbolic capital. This is also indicated by an episode during the ritual at Tauros, since just before the slaughter of the bull, I heard a man standing next to me, mumble that: "they would never have the possibility to sacrifice such a big and impressive ox in his village, Pēgē". In 1992, the festival in Pēgē was celebrated 15 July. In mid-July, they have a similar festival in the neighbouring village of Mantamados. All the villages celebrate at Tauros, and everybody perform pilgrimages to the mountain. During the festivals of Pēgē, Napē and Kōmē, they perform the horse races at the racecourse of Pēgē which is

situated just below the chapel. There is also a particular festival at the bay of Tsonia.

At the organization of the ancient festivals, it was prestigious to dedicate rich gifts. This was manifested through the *leitourgiai* (liturgies) or “services for the people”, for example as a *choregos*; the person who was obliged to train and equip one of the choruses for the tragedies at the Dionysiac festivals. To the classical Greek it was a burden, yet at the same time a source of political and social credit, as when Demosthenes, for propaganda reasons seeks to call attention to his patriotism, when he acted as choregos (Demosthenes, 21.16 ff.). The modern festivals are arranged in the same way: by gifts dedicated by people, for example the American pilgrim. One may also remind about the complaints over the expensive orchestras of the year, which nevertheless also manifest their prosperity.

The logic behind *agōn* is already present in Hesiod (*Op.* 9-41) when he talks about the good and evil strife also personified as a goddess, *Eris*, and from the epics of Homer to modern society the contest has been very important. In ancient Greece *agōn*, the prize-combat or contest was a central institution. Funerary rites are at first a major occasion for games, and horse races were performed in connection with burials, such as evidenced by Homer in the description of the funeral games performed at the burial of Achilles’ friend Patroklos (*Il.* 23.258-897). Mythology also associates the games at the Panhellenic festivals with funeral games, with a local hero whose death had occasioned the first celebration. The ancient Greeks, in fact, believed that the various agonistic festivals derived from commemorations dedicated to a deceased *hero*. The Parparonia festival in Sparta was dedicated to the god, Zeus, but the festival also needed a hero, Othryades. In Olympia the death of Pelops (cf. Pausanias, 5.17,9) or Oinomaos occasioned the celebration. The agon, as transition from an aspect of death to an aspect of life, is intimately connected with the various sacrificial rituals. In Olympia, the festival opens with a preliminary sacrifice for Pelops, and great ox sacrifices for Zeus. We meet the same pattern at the Panathenaia dedicated to Athena, because death-cults both in the *Agora* (market place) and on the Acropolis were of major importance in connection with the cult of the goddess. All the agonistic festivals had their own hero, because they were traced back to some mythical death and burial, *i.e.* festival games originated as funeral games for heroes. The rituals re-enacted the ceremonies conducted at the burials and memorial celebrations for a deceased hero. The same picture emerges when we consider the Panhellenic festivals and lesser local festivals, although the connections are more obscure. A putative tomb was a prerequisite for the festival site, and blood-offerings were made in honour of the heroes at the altar that was of central importance in the cult of the *hero*, a person who lived long ago and was still honoured (Robertson 1992). This dead person was the wielder of a magical influence. Like the dead *heroines* (Pausanias, 9.17,4-6), he was also a me-

diator between even stronger powers in the underworld, who were responsible for the fruits of the earth. It was of great importance to manipulate these powers for the benefit of the living world.

The contest motif is also central in connection with other life-cycle passages, in particular concerning the reciprocal interaction which is necessary to create something new, as illustrated by the sexual union. The fertility of the newly married couple might be ensured by a contest or game. The contest motif, thus, is and was an important part of weddings and official festivals. It belongs to the negotiations, the wooing and the customs in connection with the wedding in modern Greece. We meet the same aspect in the ancient myth about the marriage of Pelops and Hippodameia (Pausanias, 5.13,7, 5.14,6, 5.17,7). The actual marriage was preceded by a race to obtain the bride. The hero who wins the bride might end up by having a tomb at the site, for example the very Pelops' aforementioned "tomb" or sanctuary (Pausanias, 5.13,8) where later there were performed courses to his honour.²⁵ When the hero receives a tomb where he earlier won a bride through a game, it is difficult to separate burial games from wedding games. Perhaps this illustrates the complementarity between death-cult and fertility-cult? Anyway, the race course of Olympia probably had the same shape as the one within which the modern *Palio* (i.e. race) in Siena takes place on 2 July and 16 August. According to psychoanalytic analysis the entrance is shaped as the neck of the womb and the course as a womb.²⁶ A parallel is found outside of Agia Paraskeuē (cf. also Makistou 1978), where the prosperity-ensuring race dedicated to Ag. Charalampos takes place. As already indicated, the significance of the race, is also found in the ancient Panathenaia, where the horse and chariot races as well as the torch race were important. The torch race was run by young men from the altar of Eros in the Academy to another at the foot of the Akropolis, and may thus be linked to the prenuptial ritual of the young *Arrēphoroi* where the sanctuary of Eros and Aphrodite is central. At the Athenian Skira festival, young men, were racing from the sanctuary of Dionysos to the temple of Athena Skiras at Phaleron. The Skira-race in honour of the virgin, is a fertility-ritual, paralleling other contests associated with marriages. In connection with agon, we meet the custom of carrying off or abducting the bride in ancient myths and the distributing of brides, paralleling contemporary carnivals.²⁷ The contest is also important in connection with sowing,

²⁵ Cf. funeral games Pausanias, 5.17,9. See the comment in Levi 1985, p. 253 n. 120 concerning the relation between the tomb of Ag. Charalampos, Tantalos and Pelops.

²⁶ Dundes/Falassi 1975, chap. 9. See however, Silverman 1979, p. 413-435, 1985, p. 95-103 for another analysis.

²⁷ Håland 2005, 2007a, chap. 4 and 6. Cf. Pausanias, 3.12,2 the race for the Danaids. Herodotus, 6.126-130 the contest for Agarista. Pausanias, 3.12,1 the race

illustrated by the slaying of the carnival-figure, the Kalogeros in Northern Greece (Håland 2005), and the contest between the seasons. A parallel to the racing course is the relation between the life-giving cave and a mother's womb, manifested by the cult which takes place in the caves, for example the cave of Agia Paraskeuē and the cave behind the chapel at Tauros.

So the contest or agon is demonstrated in many ways, by the agonisitic nature of village life, illustrated by the prevalence of "honour" as a social value in Greece and the Mediterranean area (see *inter alia* Peristiany 1966; Gilmore 1987; Håland 2008). In the actual festival this is particularly illustrated by the importance of being the most generous person, Bill being the winner of the year. One may also recall the parading: both the riders on their horses and the women displaying their evening dresses, but also – and particularly – the horse races.

Mystical visions

In the festival we also meet the coupling of "Greekness" and Orthodoxy, through the concept that the Greek War of Liberation had divine sanction, since, according to the local legend, the saint appeared on the mountain, Tauros before the war of liberation broke out.

Within the orthodox belief we often learn about someone who has "seen" a Saint in her or his sleep, demanding the faithful to do various things, for example find a buried icon wanting to be liberated. Mystical visions by devout persons and findings of buried icons, are in fact common features within the orthodox Church, both in the beginning of its era and in modern times.

According to the legend behind the cult dedicated to the Panagia Cryospēliōtissa in the Acropolis cave in Athens, an icon helped the Athenians to save the city against the assault of the Goths: Roxanne, the daughter of a pagan medical doctor, dreamt Panagia who asked her "to set her free". "She was imprisoned." In other words, her icon was buried here. After three dreams, she asked the other Christians to go along with her, dug and found the icon. Then, the Panagia appeared to her in a vision. She promised to help Roxanne to liberate Athens. When Alaric came, he wanted to destroy the city. But a light appeared before them, Alaric saw the Panagia on the city-wall, and Alaric departed. According to the legend he left because he was a Christian and believed in the Panagia. Many of the pagan Athenians interpreted the miracle in their own way, and they thought that

for Penelope. Pausanias, 3.12,6 f. the outcome of the abduction of Helen. See also Dowden 1989, p. 161, cf. p. 163, 148. See Romaos 1949, p. 178 for the agonisitic element.

the protecting city goddess on the Acropolis, Athena, had appeared on the city-wall. The miracle happened in August 395 CE (cf. Håland 2007b).

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

Athena on the city wall is a common motif in ancient myths telling about periods of war for example when the inhabitants of Troy dream that Athena participates in the fight (Plutarch, *Luc.* 10.3). Paralleling several stories telling about fighting women participating in battles, we meet the armed virgin who protects the territory in the modern and in the ancient worlds.²⁸

The divine intervention by way of a light appearing before the invaders has many ancient parallels, for example the cloud of dust and song (from the pilgrims' procession to Eleusis) or omen of Persian disaster in connection with the battle at Salamis (Herodotus, 8.65, 8.84) the snowstorm in the war between the democrats and the Thirty tyrants (Xenophon, *Hell.* 2.4, 14 f.; Diodorus of Sicily, 14.32, 2 f.), and the story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt (Clément d'Alexandrie, *Strom.* 1.24, 163, 1-3).

Dreams and the following finding of an icon or divine appearances has traditionally been a common causal connection in Greece in periods of conflicts such as in connection with rebellions and the fight for liberation from Turkish rule and other stories from more recent times when the "nation" is threatened.

The story from the Acropolis cave dedicated to the Panagia Crysospē-liōtissa represents similarities to the history of the Aegean island of Tinos, the greatest shrine of Greek Orthodoxy. Here, we meet an analogous account to the one told in the cave. The most famous mystical visions in Greece are in fact connected with the Tinos-legend.²⁹

In 1823, after several mystical visions of the nun named Pelagia, they found the Miraculous Icon of the Annunciation of the Panagia. According to the tradition, Pelagia saw repeatedly in her visions the Panagia, who ordered her to inform the elders to start excavations in order to find her icon, and to build her "house" (*i.e.* her church) on that place. The icon, said to be the work of Agios Luke, was unearthed in the field where it had re-

²⁸ Cf. Mazarakēs-Ainian 1987, pls. 4, 11, 13, 48 and Seremetakis 1991, p. 237 ff. (modern material: Panagia/women) with Xenophon, *An.* 3.2, 11 f. (Artemis). See also Håland 2007a, chap. 6 for further references.

²⁹ Cf. Håland 2007a, also for dreams/visions among the anastenarides in connection with the finding or making of icons, etc.

mained since the church built on the ruins a pagan temple was destroyed by the Saracens in the 10th century CE. Two years before the icon was found, the great Greek War of Liberation broke out. The finding of the icon, the construction of the church, the enormous crowds of pilgrims and all the miracles contributed to the fact that the island was declared a sacred island.

Conclusions

Several important traits within Greek culture meet and convene at the festival of Ag. Charalampos: the myth telling about the origin of the festival, following the divine appearance, pilgrimage, blood sacrifice, honour and exchange of honour, the importance of demonstrating one's wealth and beauty, the procession, agon or contest, the horse races, auction, the various common meals, etc., and it is around the religious aspect of the cult that all the other activities circulate.

The importance of display and demonstrating one's prosperity, beauty, hospitality, etc. both on a collective (village and team or group) and individual level in the exchange of honour is illustrated during the whole celebration. To give some examples, it is clearly indicated at the procession when Bill goes next to the bull he has donated and by his announcement at the poster hanging on the bull. Among other examples one might mention the parading of the teams on their decorated horses before setting out for Tauros; the importance of treating other people with plenty of food during the night at the mountain when particularly the housewives compete when trying to surpass each other in hospitality; the horses and riders during the races; the women "going bolta" before the Charlamelia wearing their expensive dresses; and the expenses used on the different orchestras.

The continual contest and boasting in surpassing each other in public displaying, illustrates the logic of honour. To possess beautiful dresses, horses, etc. a lot of money and food to be spent on hospitality and generosity, represents a challenge. If other persons try to surpass a particular person, other persons reply, the very reply gives the challenge importance and status as a challenge. By following the logic of honour in the festival, people become socially visible in relation to other members of society, the groups, and at the village level versus other villages.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1966, 1980) the game of honour by allowing the honour to be expressed in institutional ways, by giving the society the possibility to, in a symbolic manner, present its cultural values, confirms the actual values. So, these ritualized contests, in which the Greeks constantly exchange, demonstrate and confirm their honour, continually constitute them as Greeks, confirms their cultural identity on a national level, or within the particular village, etc. Their collective social strategies thus constitute collective identities on different levels both con-

cerning people actual living in Greece and in the migrant and diaspora communities. The importance of adaptation and memory is particularly illustrated by the latter since the emigrants come home to the village during the annual festival dedicated to Agios Charalampos, and they certainly know “the rules”. In this connection it is particularly important to remember that the emigrants have been the main sponsors of the festival since the end of the 1950s. The significance of the legend behind the festival is illustrated both by the dissemination of the pamphlet and the broadcasting over the loudspeaker before the races. All the villagers, of course, know the history by heart, and tell it to all visitors arriving at the village.

In the festival dedicated to Agios Charalampos then, the religion unites both economic and religious activities. The festival demonstrates communication between several parts, and may be regarded as a ceremony that is performed to renew and confirm networks that constitute local village and national solidarity. This is for example illustrated by the general local pilgrims who arrive at Tauros, but also by those residing in Athens, USA, South Africa and Australia who return home to the village for their summer-holidays.

The cult of the saint that is manifested through the festival joins many functions and meanings in a complex cultural-personal metaphor that relates expressions of reciprocity as instances of the underlying form of the society. This is illustrated through the votive offerings or gifts dedicated to the saint, and particularly the bull sacrifice, etc. The offerings have to be periodically renewed, particularly through the annual festival. The cult of the saint is the key element that joins all the other activities. The religious aspect of the cult is that around which all other activities circulate, and under the religious “umbrella” we find economic, social and political meanings (cf. also Di Tota 1981; Meraklēs 1986).

Concerning historical and geographical aspects of folk narrative research in relation to questions of transmission and adaptation then, the importance of the Mediterranean area generally, and Greece particularly offers a unique opportunity to follow questions of continuity and change over very long spans of time directly and not conjecturally. One may also mention the new international push on intangible heritage, with the UNESCO statements.

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List of figures:



1: The bull which is a personal offer, is paraded through the streets of the village of Agia Paraskeuē on the first day of the festival dedicated to Ag. Charalampos. (Author's photograph)



2: The wife of one of the members of the farmer's union carries the saint's icon. (Author's photograph)



3: Over the sanctuary at Tauros grows a tree and behind is a cave filled with icons. (Author's photograph)



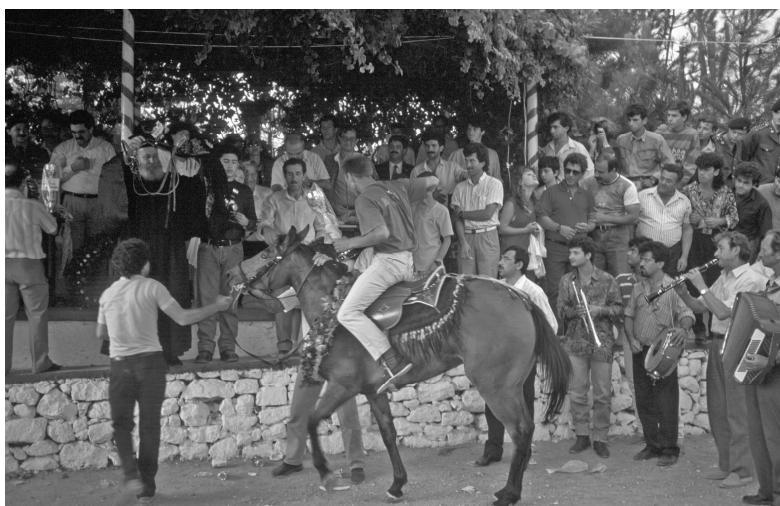
4: The local priest blesses the bull in front of the saint's chapel on the summit of Tauros. (Author's photograph)



5: The bull is cut up. The meat is mixed with wheat, onions and spices, *kesketsi*, and left to cook all night in great cauldrons lined up in the cooking-hut. The men are responsible for the food. (Author's photograph)



6: The priest blesses the kesketsi at Tauros. (Author's photograph)



7: After the horse race on the third day of the festival, the winner gets his reward, the horse as well. (Author's photograph)



8: The icon in the village of Mantamados which is dedicated to the Archangel Michael, i.e. *Taxiarchēs*. According to the legend it is made of earth and blood from monks who were killed by the Saracen. (Author's photograph)

Evy Johanne Håland

Festival bika: žrtvovanje bika, letnji i sveti praznik na Mitileni/Lezbos: Agia Paraskevi oko letnjeg solsticija 1992.

Liturgijski festival posvećen Agios (odnosno, Svetom) Haralampiju, zaštitniku stočara, slavi se na godišnjem nivou, u sezoni parenja konja, tako da svetitelj može da obezbedi plodnost konja. Pošto se od njega takođe očekuje da obezbedi uspeh žetve, slavi se i kasnije u toku godine popularnim seoskim festivalom u selu Agia Paraskevi, gde žrtvovanje bika predstavlja vrhunac festivala. Procesija pročišćavanja je takođe važna: u Agia Paraskevi se žrtveni bik vodi kroz selo. Ali, sledeća procesija ukazuje na transfer iz kulture (selo) u prirodu (Planina Bika, odnosno, Tauros). Ovdje, na vrhu Tauros, obavlja se klanje bika koji treba da obezbedi plodnost, nakon što je životinja blagosiljana od strane lokalnog sveštenika koji stoji na stepeništu crkve. U skladu sa tim, festival predstavlja ritual koji neki zvaničnici Grčke pravoslavne crkve i dalje smatraju paganskim. Sa druge strane, festival se nalazi u okviru verskog i kosmološkog konteksta pravoslavne crkve i u velikoj meri koristi pravoslavnu simboliku, veru i ritualnu praksu. Žrtvovani bik koji se konzumira kao javni obed, *kesketsi*, posvećuje se od strane emigranta. On predstavlja grupu ljudi koja se uvek vraća kući na selo u periodu godišnjeg slavljenja sveca. To je razlog što ne postoji fiksni datum festivala, već se samo zna da se slavi u doba žetve. 1992. godine je odložen do svršetka školske godine u Južnoj Africi gde se naselio veliki broj ljudi iz sela. Na ovom festivalu, posvećenom preminulom hrišćanskom svetitelju, konji i konjske trke su važni elementi, naročito za mlade, a festival se zaključuje velikom zajedničkom gozбом, gde celo selo učestvuje. Različiti učesnici u svetkovini često imaju potpuno različite razloge za učestvovanje u festivalu. Praznik postaje popularno okupljanje gde sve aktivnosti koje se izvode obnavljaju i potvrđuju veze koje predstavljaju seosko jedinstvo. Na festivalu se takođe susrećemo sa spregom "grčkosti" i pravoslavlja kroz ideju da je Grčki oslobodilački rat bio po božjoj volji pošto se, prema lokalnoj legendi, svetac pojavio na planini Tauros pred izbijanje rata. Nakon ovog čudesnog prikazivanja, festival se godišnje obeležava od 1774. godine, a sve aktivnosti cirkulišu oko religijskog aspekta kulta. Članak ima za cilj da istraži vezu između zvanične i popularne vere u okviru svetkovine, razmatrajući i neka od mnogih značenja i aktivnosti koje čine festival.

Ključne reči: Grčka, drevno i moderno, religijski festival, životinjska žrtva, zvanična i popularna vera, identiteti, migracija, hodočašće.