

THE SURVIVAL OF MYTHOLOGY IN THE GREEK ISLANDS.¹

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The islands of the Ægean sea, especially the smaller ones, offer a better scope for the study of comparative folklore than any part of the Greek mainland, and the reasons for this are as follows. In the first place these islands never were, like the mainland, subject to the incursions of barbarous tribes; this fact is especially noticeable in the island of Andros, the most northern, and the most accessible of the Cycladic group from the mainland by way of Eubœa. The northern portion of Andros is exclusively Albanian in speech, manners, and customs, The Greeks in the south are highly influenced by this intermixture, which has in a measure destroyed the identity of the continental Greeks; but here the Albanian wave has ended. There is no trace of it in any other of the Cyclades.

Secondly the Italian influence which was dominant in the middle ages in the Cyclades has left traces which extend little beyond the towns on the coast. The Latin rule seems to have been at the same time mild and unpopular amongst the Greeks; religious feeling always ran high and the result is that even to this day the two races when together on the islands retain their own religion and their own customs. At Naxos, for example, there are still existing many Italian families, but they reside almost exclusively in the chief town. The sailors, in their dialect have quantities of Italian words, but up in the mountains of Naxos a few hours distant from the town, the villages are inhabited by Greeks of the most undoubted pedigree.

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Thirdly, during the Turkish times the smaller islands of the Ægean sea have been deemed of no account and hardly ever interfered with, and if their annual tribute was regularly paid they were allowed comparative self government. The result has been that to the smaller islands, refugees came and settled from many parts of Greece, Cretans, Peloponnesians, and Greeks from Asia Minor to escape from oppression. They built walled villages up on the hills to protect themselves from pirates and there they have maintained their customs undisturbed ever since.

The material for comparing modern Greek customs with the ancient which I have collected during three winters spent amongst these islanders is very considerable. Parallels between the Greeks of to-day and the Greeks of classical times may be produced from nearly every branch of life, from their agriculture and from their industries, from their medical folk-lore, from their games, from their ceremonies connected with births, marriages, and deaths, nay, even from the way in which they catch their fish and plant their vines. To-day I will confine myself entirely to the survival of mythological deities and superstitions, as culled from their religious observances and local belief, in both of which the folk-lore of their ancestors has in a great measure survived. The ritual indeed of the Eastern church is but an intellectual adaptation under Christian guidance of the popular doctrines of polytheism. This has been brought about in many cases by a process of barefaced ecclesiastical puns. For example on Seriphos there is a healing spring with iron in it; this is dedicated to St. Isidore because *Isideros* as the modern pronunciation makes it, resembles *sideros* or iron which is the prominent feature in the water. In like manner St. Jacob Ἅγιος Ἀκουφός as they call him is supposed to cure deafness, the idea being derived from the word *κοῦφος* deaf. Numerous instances such as these might be adduced to prove how ingenious the early divines of the Greek church were in the use of names to suit special circumstances.

The name and attributes of Dionysos have been transferred to St. Dionysios. This is particularly noticeable at Naxos, when the great wine god Dionysos is said to have

passed his infancy and was greatly worshipped in antiquity. There are many churches on this island dedicated to St. Dionysios, and a fable about him which is still told clearly points to the continuity of the myth. It runs as follows: St. Dionysios was on his way one day from the monastery on Mount Olympus to Naxos, and he sat down to rest during the heat of the day. Close to him he saw a pretty plant which he wished to take with him, and lest it should wither by the way, he put it into the leg bone of a bird, and to his surprise at his next halting place he found it had sprouted; so accordingly he put it into the leg bone of a lion, and the same miracle occurred; finally he put it into the leg bone of an ass, and on reaching Naxos he found the plant so rooted in the three bones that he was obliged to plant them altogether; from this up came a vine, from the fruit of which he made the first wine, a little of which made the Saint sing like a bird, a little more made him as strong as a lion, and yet a little more and he became as foolish as an ass.

Who will not say that Bacchus does not exist as god in Greece to-day, when they find existing on Paros a Saint called the Drunken St. George? His festival is on the 3rd of November, the day of the anniversary of St. George's burial, the day on which the inhabitants usually tap their new made wine and get drunk, but why on such a solemn occasion as the anniversary of his death St. George should be called *μεθύστης* the drinker I could not make out except that the Greeks of to-day love, like their ancestors, to deify passions. On the neighbouring island of Seriphos on the occasion of planting a vineyard, they have quite a Bacchic orgy. Every landowner who wishes to plant his vines, calls together on a certain day fifty or more men; when church is over, he gives them a spade and slaughters some goats and fills his skins with wine. Thus equipped they all start off to their work preceded by a standard bearer holding a white banner. In the field they eat the food, drink the wine and plant the vineyard all in the space of one day, and return home again most of them decidedly merry; then the evening is wound up by a Bacchic dance and revelry in front of the village church, which is hallowed by the presence of the priest.

Sometimes, indeed, it seems as if the Greeks thought it a religious duty to get drunk. They are a sober race, taken as a whole, but on stated occasions, such as "clean Monday," the first day of Lent, everyone considers it a religious duty to wash out his inside with wine, just as the housewife washes her cooking utensils and puts them away till Easter. In Naxos side by side with traces of the worship of Dionysos we find also traces of Jupiter. The Mount Zia or Jupiter is the highest in Naxos, and on the northern slopes of this we read an old inscription on a rock which tells us that this was the mountain of Milesian Jupiter: near the summit is a great cave which goes far into the bowels of the mountain. At its entrance now stands an altar called the "church of Zia," where a priest goes once a year to hold a liturgy for the mountain shepherds. By this altar a shepherd is accustomed to swear to his innocence if another charges him with having stolen a sheep or a goat. An oath by the altar of Zia is held very sacred by these mountaineers. Thus we have the name of the mountain, the inscription, and the modern altar. It is highly probable that this is the cave in which the ancients believed that the great God spent his infancy when brought from Mount Ida in Crete. The idea of a supreme God has been transferred from Zeus to suit the modern religious tenets. A Naxiote mountaineer will say, "God is shaking his hair" when there is an earthquake, as if he were Zeus on his throne at Olympus.

The ancient goddess Artemis, like many others, exists still, but she has changed her sex, her attributes having been given to St. Artemidos, who in the island of Keos is looked upon as the patron saint of weakly children. The church dedicated to this saint is some little way from the town on the hill slopes; thither a mother will take a child afflicted by any mysterious wasting, "struck by the Nereids," as they say. She strips off its clothes, and puts on new ones blessed by the priest, and if the child grows strong she will light a candle to St. Artemidos in recognition of the favour vouchsafed, unconscious that she is perpetuating in the memory of Artemis—*Κουροτροφος παιδοτροφος*, as the epithets were. Curiously enough the Ephesian Artemis was greatly worshipped in this island, and many statues of her have been found here.

By means of another ecclesiastical pun the cloak of Phœbus Apollo has been handed down to the Prophet Elias. Every highest peak in every island is dedicated to the Prophet: it is an obvious transition from Ἥλιος to Elias, invented by the accommodating divines who initiated the new religion. In times of drought the people flock to his church for he has power over rain. When it thunders they say the prophet is driving in his chariot in pursuit of demons. The sun too is personified just as he was in antiquity; he is still to them a giant driving his chariot in the sky, bloodthirsty like Hyperion when tinged with gold. The common idea is that when he seeks his kingdom (βασιλεύει ὁ Ἥλιος) he expects to find forty loaves prepared for him by his mother to appease his hunger after his long day's journey. Woe to her if these loaves are not ready! the sun will eat his brothers, sisters, father and mother, in his wrath. He has been eating his mama is said when he rises red of a morning.

In some places St. Demetrios has assumed the attributes of Demeter, and is recognized as the protector of crops and husbandmen, but in Keos St. Anarguros has supplanted Pan as the protector of flocks. His church is at a remote hamlet, and whenever an ox is ailing they take it to this church and pray for its recovery; if the cock crows when they start, or they hear the voice of a man, or the grunt of a pig, there is every hope that the animal will be cured; but on the contrary if they hear a cat, a dog, or a woman, it is looked upon as an evil omen. When at the church of St. Anarguros they register a vow that if the ox recovers they will present it to the saint when its days of work are over. Accordingly every year on the 1st of July, the day of that saint, numbers of aged oxen may be seen on their way to this church where they are slaughtered on the threshold and the flesh is distributed to the poor. On the neighbouring island of Kythnos I saw a church dedicated to St. Anarguros, built at the mouth of a cavern, as the protector of the place instead of Pan, the ancient god of grottoes.

St. Nicholas is the modern seaman's god, and the successor of Poseidon. This fact is especially obvious on Tenos. Where once was situated a great temple of Posidon is now built the town of St. Nicholas, and wherever stood

formerly a temple to the sea-god we now find a mean whitewashed edifice dedicated to St. Nicholas. Eikons or sacred pictures to St. Nicholas are often painted inside a gilded crab's shell. No sailor will go to sea without first lighting a candle at St. Nicholas' shrine, and nautical songs of to-day represent him as the inventor of the rudder, and sitting at the helm of every ship. In storms sailors will call upon him for succour, and his shrine is usually decorated with tiny silver ships as votive offerings, doubtless like those which Demetrius, the silversmith, sold for the worshippers at the great temple of Diana at Ephesus, for in every church a silver votive offering representing a lamb, a cow, or a ship, is considered the proper thing to hang up before the pictures of the saint who is supposed to have answered a prayer.

St. Eleutherios is the saint called upon by women during the pangs of childbirth, this pun speaks for itself, and doubtless the resemblance of the name of the goddess *Eileithyia*, who presided on like occasions in ancient days, and the word *εγυδερία* freedom suggested the change. Of course the madonna, the Panagia, absorbs into herself many of the attributes of ancient deities, as Η *παναγία Θαλασσίης*, she corresponds to Aphrodite *εμπνοια*, and wherever stood a temple to Aphrodite now stands a church to the Virgin. In the great church of Paros there is a curious legend about an ignorant peasant who challenged the Virgin to a musical contest on the lyre, and the punishment with which he was visited for his impudence, bears a striking resemblance to that inflicted by Apollo on Marsyas.

In astrology, too, the ancient ideas are still to be traced. In Melos we were pointed out two stars, namely, the Jordan and David's chariot, which are merely a transition from the Nile and the Chariot of antiquity, and curiously enough, wherever the Nile was named in ancient days, the Jordan is now substituted. On the island of Delos for example, where the mysterious stream still comes up out of the bowels of the earth, and which was by the ancients supposed to come from the Nile, they now affirm that it comes from the Jordan.

The rainbow is now called the nun's girdle, and is supposed to be a messenger from God to point out to man

a hidden treasure. This is a curious adaptation of the idea contained in the belief in the virgin goddess Iris, who was Jove's messenger from heaven to earth.

St. Charalambos may be styled the Æsculapius of modern days. He is worshipped, and has a church in all unhealthy spots. He was, in years gone by, given special jurisdiction over the plague, and is assisted by St. Mavra and St. Barbara, in the case of small-pox, and a host of other maladies. In the churches of St. Charalambos and at other shrines where healing is performed, the old incubatio (ἐγκοιμησης) is still carried on; invalids who aspire to a perfect cure must sleep in the church for one night at least, sometimes for a great many more. In most of the ancient temples of Æsculapius, rooms were provided for the reception of invalids who wished to try this cure, and it is the same to-day at most of the feasts and panegyrics, those holidays which are as dear to modern Greeks as ever they were to their ancestors, and productive of the same curious admixture of joviality and religious excitement.

In their religious tendencies there is much that corresponds to antiquity. Their love of kissing the eikons or sacred pictures recalls to one's mind the statue of Hercules at Agrigentum, the mouth and chin of which Cicero tells us was worn away by the kisses of the faithful, the lamps too which they hang before their sacred pictures in their houses and at the shrines are the survival of the ἄσβεστος λυχνος of antiquity. If a peasant girl is ill, she will vow on her sick bed what she loves best to the Madonna of Tenos. On her recovery she reflects that this is her hair. Accordingly next year she cuts it off, and takes it to the festival. There are quantities of lovely locks of hair presented in this fashion, also old embroideries and household ornaments. In this we see what Pausanias must have witnessed at Titane, in Sicyonia, for he says he could not see plainly the statue of Hygeia for the quantity of hair and silk stuff which women had hung up as a sacrifice to it.

Again, a modern Greek thinks with his forefathers, that Charon rules below in Hades. Death to them is the deprivation of the good things of life. They do not seem to comprehend the Christian doctrine of a future beyond

the 'dark grave' and the black earth. Charon is to them still the ever watchful guardian of the dead. His palace is decorated with bones; bones are used for every article of domestic use and the dead who haunt it, are forever planning to return to the upper air, and form schemes for so doing which Charon always discovers; sometimes they even manage to steal his keys, but in vain.

Punishments for sin are carried on in Tartarus in the fiery river (*πυρρινὸς ποταμὸς*) the Phlegethon of antiquity. In this manner has Christian teaching adapted to itself, rather than obliterated ancient myths.

'Charon seized him' is a common expression for death, and a clever popular enigma likens the world to a reservoir full of water at which Charon as a wild beast, drinks; but the beast is never satisfied and the reservoir never exhausted. The modern Greek death-wails are in many cases highly poetical. They sing to you of feasts, and banquets in Hades, when the dead are eaten for food: they tell you of the gardens of Hades, when the souls of the departed are planted and come up as weird plants, one of these, I heard in Karpathos is wonderfully expressive. Charon wished to plant a garden, it says; the aged he planted and they came up as twisted bent lemon trees, the young as tall erect cypress trees, but the little children he planted as flowers in his vases.

King Charon is not the death of the middle ages, he is the Homeric ferryman, he rows souls across to Hades in his caique, and he is a hero of huge stature, and flaming eyes of colour like fire, *πορφύρεος* as he is described in the Iliad. He can lurk in ambush to surprise his victims, and can change himself into a swallow, like Athene, who perched on Ulysses house on the day of the murder of Penelope's suitors.

There are traces still of the old *ναῦλου*, or freight money for Charon, in existence in a little mountain village we visited in Naxos; it is not a coin as in older days, but a little wax cross with the initial letter I.X. *Ν Ἰησοῦς χριστός Νικᾷ*.—(Jesus Christ conquers) engraved thereon this they put on the closed lips of the deceased to call the *νοῦλου* to secure a passage across the river of death.

There are traces too of Lethe in the lamentations they

sing to-day—a river of which the dead drink, and forget their homes, and their orphan children. There is a parallel case too from animal life; a shepherd will tell you that there grows on the mountains a herb called “the grass of denial,” and when the flocks have eaten thereof they forget their young.

Such traces as there are to be found to-day in the Greek islands of heathen mythology are mixed up with their religious observances. We will now briefly consider the lower order of the supernatural, namely the ghosts and hobgoblins which are supposed to haunt the caves of modern Greece, much as they did in ancient days.

First come the Nereids, endless stories of whom we heard in our travels. We have Nereids of the streams, water witches, which correspond to the water nymphs of antiquity. Wherever there exists a warm healing stream they believe that it flows from the hearts of the Nereids. But he that wishes to be cured must go to fill his jar holding a green lamp, and must leave a bit of his clothes there, and must hurry away without looking back, otherwise he will lose his senses. When these waters are troubled they say the Nereids have been bathing and woe to the man who is unlucky enough to see them; they revenge themselves on him for his impertinent beholding. Then we have the Nereids of the woods, valleys, cliffs, &c., the Dryads, and Hamadryads of antiquity. We hear of them with goats' and asses' feet, some resembling the Satyrs, others the Harpies of antiquity. They are supposed to rush in a whirlwind through the air, they injure children, they dance to the tune of the lyre played by some wretched man whom they have smitten, for by their beauty they can attract men to their peril. Sometimes by getting their wings or their handkerchiefs, a man may capture a Nereid with whom he is smitten; but first she will turn into all sorts of forms; a snake, fire, camels, &c., like the old story of Peleus and Thetis, and he may have children by her—for instance the great family of Mavromichælis of Manes are supposed to have Nereid blood in their veins. Much poetry is connected with the popular idea of the Nereids: their smiles turn into roses, their tears into pearls, they have lovely long hair. Beautiful as a Nereid, is a common expression for beauty. Their work

is weaving, and they produce most exquisite things; as they work, a man, whom they have bewitched, plays the lyre for them.

A popular cure for those smitten by Nereids is to spread a white cloth under the tree or cliff where they are supposed to dwell, and on it they put a plate with bread, honey, and other sweets, a bottle of good wine, a knife, a fork, an empty glass, an unburnt candle, and a censer. These things must be brought by an old woman, who utters mystic words, and then goes away that the Nereids may eat undisturbed, and in their consequent good humour they may allow their victim to regain his strength. Such offerings as these the Athenians used to place on the slopes of Areopagus just outside the caves where the Eumenides were supposed to dwell.

Then we have the Lamiaë, evil working women who live in desert places, ill-formed like their ancestors, daughters of Belus and Sibyl. Utterly unfit are they for household duties, for they cannot sweep, so an untidy woman to-day is said to have made the sweepings of a Lamiaë; they cannot bake, for they put bread into the oven without heating it; they have dogs and horses, but give bones to their horses and sand to their dogs. They are very gluttonous, so much so that in Byzantine and modern Greek the word *λαμίωνω* is used to express over-eating. They have a special fancy for baby's flesh, and a Greek mother of to-day will frighten her child by saying that a Lamiaë will come if it is naughty, just as mothers terrified their children in ancient days, for the legend ran that Zeus loved Lamia too well, untidy though she was, and Hera, out of jealousy, killed her children, whereat Lamiaë was so grieved that she took to eating the children of others. Some Lamiaë are like the Sirens, and, by taking the form of lovely nymphs, beguile luckless men to their destruction.

Wherever we went in the Greek islands we heard stories of vampires, of men who had been buried, and, for their sins, were compelled to wander on the earth until put to rest by priestly exorcism. These vampires chiefly haunt and terrify their own relatives, "they feed on their own," as the expression goes, that is to say, they are supposed to suck the life blood of their friends to acquire

strength for their ghostly wanderings. This is also an ancient idea and common to many creeds. Homer tells us how the stones of Hades had an idea that by filling themselves with blood they could return to life, and consequently eagerly lapped up the blood of slaughtered sheep.

Other evil spirits called Kalkagarer appear on earth for ten days only, that is to say, from Christmas to Epiphany. During these days they dwell in caves, and subsist, like the Amazons of old, on snakes and lizards, and sometimes on women for a treat, if they can manage to entrap them. At night they dance till cockcrow, and enter houses by the chimneys. This is the reason why priests go round on Christmas day to bless the houses. When Epiphany comes they are forced to flee underground, taking before they go a hack at the tree which supports the world, and which one day they will cut through. They are personified as being of evil shapes—huge men, with goats' or asses' feet, and when they stand erect they are higher than the highest chimney. In short, they are the modern representatives of the satyrs, *δύσμορφοι αἰγίποδες*.

Wherever there are remains of huge cyclopean walls the inhabitants call them the houses of the Dragons, beings endowed with superhuman strength, who can tear up trees and hurl huge rocks, like Polyphemus of old; in one fable of a dragon now told there are the dramatis personæ of a tale out of an Odyssey. The dragon is Polyphemus. Spanos, a wily traveller, who conquers the silly dragon is obviously Ulysses.

Even in busy Syra we found superstitions existing. The peasants there commonly believe that the ghosts of the ancient Greeks come once a year from all parts of Greece to worship at Delos, and as they pass through Syra they are purified by washing: a cliff above the town is still called *Ἀήλι*, where the country folks tell you their ablution takes place, and even to-day they will reverently speak of the "god in Delos."

The peasants of Syra are vaguely aware, too, of a game called *Δίσκος*, which they say their ancestors played with quoits, for which they used two large stone olive presses, which stand outside a church. How thoroughly Greek this is to believe in the superhuman strength of

your ancestors; it is the survival of the idea which generated the myths of Hercules.

In Andros Erinnys are still spoken of. When a person is suffering from consumption they say an Erinnys has seized him, and when he is dying they imagine that four of these demons are standing at the four corners of the room ready to pounce on the survivors, consequently consumption is considered infectious, especially to children of whom the Erinnys are said to be fond. So that they are carefully kept out of the sick room during the last days of this illness. Again in many places we find witches are believed in who haunt caves and rocks; they are old men and women past a hundred, who go by the name of *σπίγλαι*. Some we heard of in Paros reminded us of the Harpies of old, for they are said to be able to turn into birds at will, and have sometimes women's heads and the bodies of birds. About those who haunt the mountains near the village of Leukis many fables are told of how they eat men, and of the ravages they occasioned until a prince came and conquered them just as the mythical Perseus overcame the Crommyonian Sow.

The inhabitants of the adjoining island of Antiparos, a wretched forlorn place, the Pariotes call "crows," and on asking the reason of this, I was told how the Antipariotes are accustomed to take oracles from crows as their ancestors took oracles from the Dodonian oak. If the crow settles on the left, the right, high up or low down on a tree, on a wall, or on the ground, they interpret the oracle according to certain rules and act accordingly.

Much might be said about the Fates as they exist to-day, and their resemblance to those weird women of ancient mythology. They are still believed to be three in number—old women who inhabit inaccessible mountains, of whose whereabouts none but magicians are aware. "I will go to the mountains to call on my Fate" is a common expression of dissatisfaction with destiny. These old women resemble their predecessors in that they are always spinning the thread as symbolical of human life. They preside over the three events of life, birth, marriage, and death, and in the ceremonies after a birth, the Fates are mixed up much in religious observances. Seven days after the child is born the Fates are called upon to choose

his patron saint. Seven candles, dedicated to seven saints are lit around the cradle, and the first to be extinguished is declared by destiny to represent the child's protector through life. A year after the birth the fates are called upon to decide as to what calling in life the child is best suited for. Objects are put on a tray, and whichever the child first touches is considered to indicate the will of the fate. If he touch a pen he will be clever, if a coin he will be rich, if a tool he will be a carpenter, and if an egg,—woe to the parent whose child touches the egg,—the fates decide that he will be good for nothing, a mere duck's egg, so to speak, in society. Pimples on the nose and forehead are called the writings of the Fates, *τὰ γράμματα τῶν Μοιρῶν*, and the decrees of the Fates are unalterable. Only one legend, we heard in Naxos, spoke of an ugly girl who was so disgusted with her lot that she managed to find the abode of the Naxiote Fates up in the mountains and to work on their feelings so adroitly that she became exceedingly lovely, and married a prince. But, concludes the legend, "she had no children, showing that the Fates never consent to any person being altogether happy."