

The open and the domesticated sea *

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Περίληψη: Στο άρθρο αναλύεται το πώς μια πρώην απομονωμένη και σχεδόν νησιωτική κοινότητα, το Τρίκερι, η οποία βασιζόταν σε μια διχοτόμηση της ζωής και του ρόλου ανδρών και γυναικών (μέσω της αντίθεσης θάλασσας και ξηράς), αλλάζει λόγω διαφόρων παραγόντων, όπως η κρίση στις ναυτιλιακές δραστηριότητες, η ίδρυση γυμνασίου και λυκείου και κυρίως η διάνοιξη δρόμου που τη συνδέει με το υπόλοιπο Πήλιο. Οι μετατροπές συντελούνται μέσω της αλλαγής του ρόλου της θάλασσας, εκφράζονται δε κυρίως με τη μεταβολή λειτουργίας του λιμανιού, της Αγίας Κυριακής. Οι νέες δυνατότητες που ανοίγονται κυρίως λόγω τουρισμού οδηγούν σε μετατόπιση των παραδοσιακών ρόλων των δύο φύλων και της σχέσης τους με τη θάλασσα και την ξηρά, και αυτό σε όλα τα επίπεδα των οικονομικών και κοινωνικών δομών.

Εννοείται ότι τα στοιχεία της παρούσας ανάλυσης ανάγονται στην εποχή εκείνη. Έκτοτε, πολύς χρόνος έχει περάσει και μόνο με νέα επιτόπια έρευνα θα μπορούσε να ελεγχθεί η εξέλιξη των πραγμάτων και να επιβεβαιωθεί ή να αναιρεθεί η ορθότητα των υποθέσεων.

Η μελέτη του Τρίκερι έγινε με επιτόπια εθνογραφική έρευνα δεκαετούς διάρκειας (μεταξύ 1975 και 1986), τα σημαντικότερα αποτελέσματα της οποίας παρουσιάζονται στην βιβλιογραφία.

This paper is about a maritime village, one of the rare genuine maritime villages that have not yet undergone major structural transformations, although my aim is to refer to sliding and shifting in directions and meanings.

This I will try to do by examining and analyzing some aspects of how people organize life on and around the sea, pointing out what I consider to be meaningful for this particular society's evolution.

Trikeri is a peninsular community of about 2000 people in the southern most arid part of Pelion, isolated until this year (1987) because accessible only by sea. (fig. 1).

For two and a half centuries it has based its economic activities on the "cultivation of the sea", as they say, through all kinds of maritime enterprises which I will summarize here, emphasizing only the principle aspects for each period.

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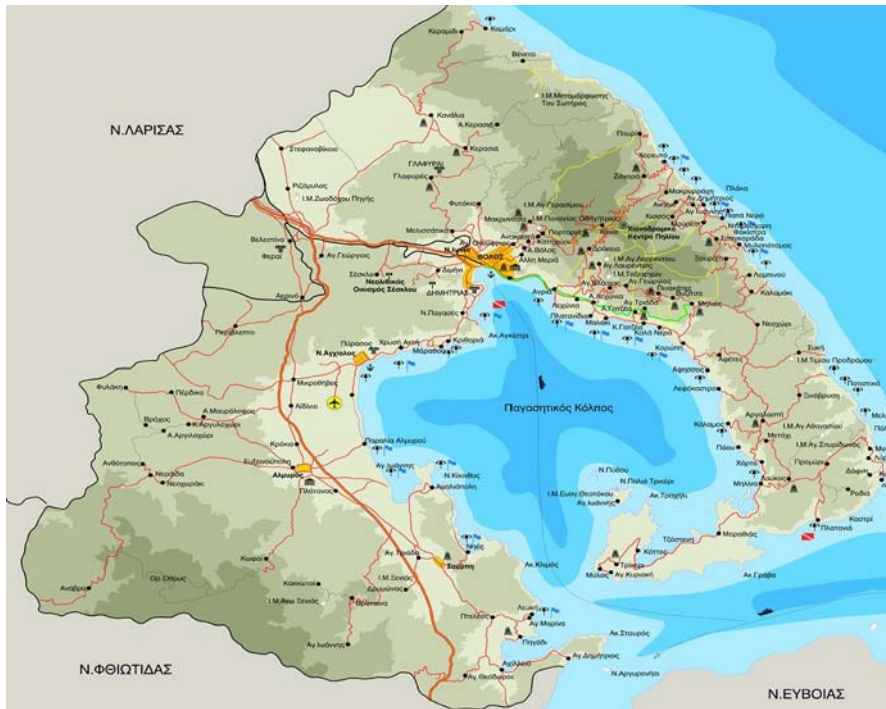


Fig. 1. Map of Pelion and Magnesia

Octopus and sponge fishing were the first reported occupations of Trikeri in the eighteenth century. From the second half of the 18th to the early 19th century, maritime trade was greatly developed through ship ownership and ship building as well as through money lending at high interest rates. After the Greek Revolution against the Turks (1821), the Trikeriot economy declined and most of its ships were burned. Trikeri remained under Ottoman rule until 1881, and continued with fishing, coastal navigation and acts of piracy, a practice which accompanied sea-faring throughout this turbulent period. Sponge fishing was given a particular emphasis with the early introduction of diving suits (“scafandre”) at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. All kinds of fishing together with maritime transportation were practiced until the 1950’s, when the Trikeriots enrolled massively in the salary-paying merchant marine. Finally, after the merchant marine crisis, which was an echo of the recent international economic crisis, they developed large-scale fishing enterprises, encouraged by the new policy of financial support for fishing. Within these occupational activities, occupational mobility was possible. So, throughout the period, Trikeriots were able both to adapt to the wider society’s evolution and to preserve the essence of their social organization.

The latter, however, was also achieved through village endogamy and by conferring upon women the responsibilities of organizing social life in the village. This

includes the appropriation and transmission of the house and other real estate property, the administration and transformation of revenues and the politics of consumption, the control of marriage strategies and the bringing up and education of children, in other words, by the concentration and immobility of women in a closed space of uxorilocal units from which men depart and to which they return regularly.

Beyond this stable territory of the village social life, materialized and symbolized by women, begins the drifting territory of the men's deployment, a vast world of which I will present only the aspects related to the subject of this paper.

Life and work at sea, as organized by the Trikeriots, implies first of all the men's departure and long absences from the village. This is true for all maritime activities exercised by them. Maritime transport in the past and the recent merchant marine employment requires deep sea navigation which may last several months and even years. Until 5 years ago, when almost every productive man in Trikeri sailed, the uninterrupted absences could last 2 years. Except for a few instances of in-shore fishing, most fishing expeditions also require absences of at least one month. Depending on the nature of the maritime work, the area of deployment begins at the near coast and extends to the most remote seas.

Seasonal division of labor is very important especially for fishermen. They are constantly obliged to readapt the fishing methods, implements and objectives according to the location and movement of fish and other sea products and, of course, according to the climatic conditions permitting safe sailing and efficient capture. Except for the close coastal fishing which may bring men back more frequently but for short periods of time, those sailing and fishing far away come back generally in winter to rest for 2 or 3 months and resume the village social life. If they can manage it, for 2 weeks at Easter they attend the important festivities organized at this period of the year.

So, parallel to the time and space partition, one of the most important characteristics of sea work is that production takes place in a space exterior and strange to the village territory. In order to confront the vastness and strangeness of this no-man's and everyone's territory, to meet the technical and relational constraints of these perilous and complex activities, men work in joint ventures. The most frequent form of organization is the associative collaboration. In the past, for big shipping, joint ownership was the practice and this continues to be the case today for some of the larger vessels.

Because of the business-like character of the great majority of these activities, and also because of their close dependence on the market economy and competition, financing and money-making determine maritime ventures and results in special human, professional and economic bonds and obligations.

In the past, for example, the terms of a sponge-fishing expedition or a freight deal

were scrupulously set forth in advance in a written agreement which defined the objectives and duration of the expedition, the division of tasks, responsibilities and profits, and the commitment to respect the hierarchical order and to manifest solidarity during strenuous personal or collective tribulations.

So, the hard conditions of life at sea, the ever-present menace of injury and death, the braving of what is alien and unforeseeable require a strictly organized occupation of the external to the village territory in a compact body of associated and collaborating men.

On the other hand, this open and variable territory, its transient events and people offer the occasion for unexpected and extensive profits either by legal or illicit commercial practices, including acts of piracy, which may confer personal distinction through exceptional acts of bravery, resulting in myths of legendary wealth or hidden gold treasures that survive up to the present day.

Nevertheless, the character of the maritime expedition and the diverging personal interests lead systematically to the separation, the splitting and reconstitution of new groups and objectives. This aspect constitutes a fundamental, a structural feature of the Trikeriot economic organization and its effect on human relationships.

Furthermore, what seems inherent in this type of activity, that is the encounter of strangers, is random and incomplete. An exclusively male society crosses the sea and lands in foreign places to commerce with another world composed of men, where the narrowly specified exchange is not sufficient to give the relation a cultural depth. In fact, the ports are the frontiers of the Other, places of transition where different identities meet instantly and separate.

The precariousness of relationships, the discontinuity of deployment in space and time, the unpredictable outcome of the expeditions, the constant necessity of renewal and replacement of the short-lived means of production, the fragmentation and dislocation of the working groups, the absence of continuity in the ownership and transmission of the means of production lead the Trikeriot man to search for stable points of reference where their dispersed efforts and achievements can be transformed into secure property, anchored in a protected space and transmissible over time.

Thus we come back to the firm soil of the village where women, who are expected to live longer than men, and who are organized in matricentered networks, are entrusted with the manipulation of goods and social institutions.

The geographical and urbanistic configuration of the village territory is most revealing of the Trikeriot social organization.

High up, arranged in concentric circles around the top of a hill, a nucleus of fortified houses dominates the entrance of the gulf and the surrounding lands and seas.

Below, linked by road, lies the port of Aghia Kyriaki, the front and frontier of the

sea, with its houses sitting amphitheatrically and parallel to the curve of the coast (fig. 2). In front of the sea, a series of buildings which serve as cafés, hotels and storehouses connects the land to the sea with individual piers, transitory constructions of space, where vessels can be attached and visitors land. Behind, a narrow street, and other houses.

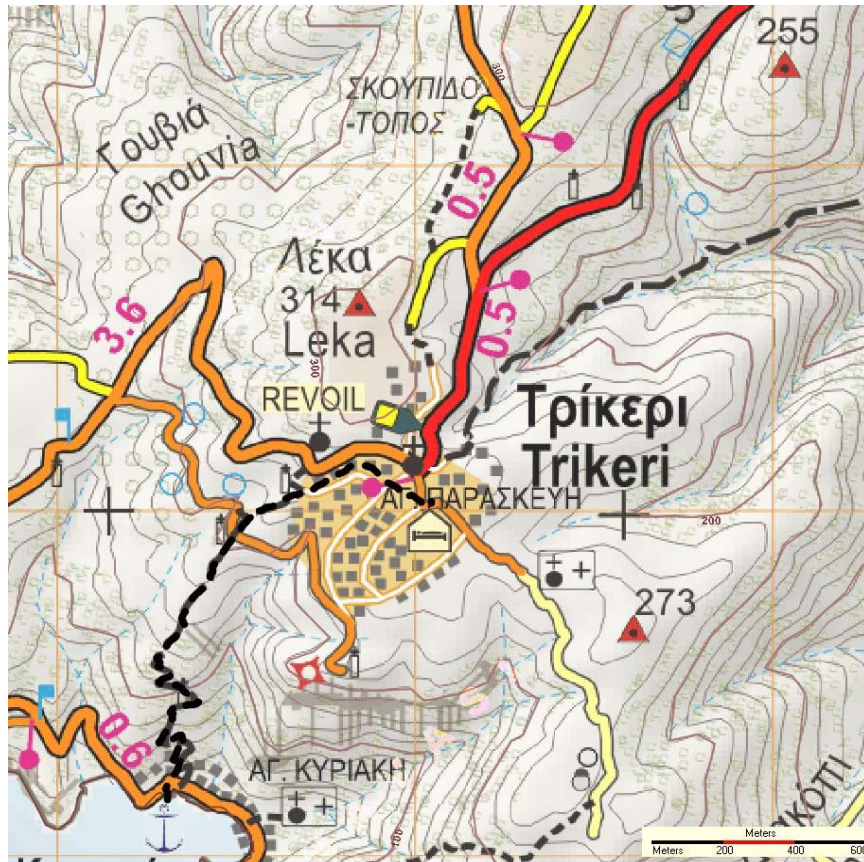


Fig. 2. Map of Trikeri and Aghia Kyriaki

In the past, the port was only a station for departing and arriving men, a male territory in opposition to the female upper main village territory. Strangers could disembark, rest and conduct business. A place which retains the external world and at the same time represents the only means of communication with it, a kind of intermediary place, a relay station between one's own and the outer world.

Today, the port has grown into a village of in-shore fishermen and their families who settled there permanently. The port village however has no existence independent from Trikeri proper.

Until this year, communication with the surrounding world passed through Aghia

Kyriaki by regularly-scheduled ship. Six months ago a new road was opened connecting Trikeri with the villages of the Pelion. Since this time, the landscape has quickly changed. Outsiders arrive now in the village without having to cross any borders. Products of every kind arrive by light truck to the very heart of the previously inaccessible main village and then down to the port. Still, for the newcomers the port is the main point of attraction.

Imperceptibly, with changes in the surrounding world, a shift has occurred in the role of the sea in Trikeriot life, primarily because of rapid and secure terrestrial communication with the nearby city of Volos. The first to profit from this situation was the female population who, after the men's massive employment in the merchant marine and the consequent and substantial remunerations arriving in bank accounts, crossed the village boundaries in order to buy trousseau articles and house equipment which formerly were brought by men.

This was a crucial movement of effortless approach and gentle appropriation of the sea by women. Another analogous movement of appropriation of the sea is the swimming customs of children and through them women. The sea became familiar and, more importantly, a place of pleasure and well-being. This transformation is the pivot of the established and impending changes. The transitional phase has already been accomplished. More and more secondary summer residencies are being built in the port, the price of residential plots has risen and now the houses in the port begin to be transmitted by dowry through women. This last element undermines a structural characteristic of the place which was that the immovable property of the port used to be the only property preferentially owned and transmitted by men.

But in shifting slowly to a summer place, it nevertheless continues to be one's own place with codified ways of being and circulating. The few women swim in discreet and remote places, the front of the sea is always liminal.

Until the present, outsiders were considered to be a menace. Trikeri was said to be inhospitable, underdeveloped, hostile. The road changed all this, brought in merchants, Greek and foreign tourists. The Trikeriots began to "sell" the sea, exploiting it in a way that they had never done before.

New public buildings of a different character begin to mark the place. Restaurants, bar-cafeterias, hotels have been built in strategic places. The sea is being humanized and made homey. It is compartmentalized, encircled, inhabited, subdued through private and public construction. The treatment of the seaside tends to smooth out the limits separating earth and water and to render the sea as accessible as possible.

Trikeriots themselves, as if pushed by outsiders, begin to frequent taverns and cafeterias. Young men mostly and a few daring young married couples. Except for festive occasions, this is the first time that Trikeriot men and women are seen together

in public places.

But all this happens near the sea, in the transitional and from now on permissive area of the port. The main village still turns its back to the pleasure-seeking intruders. Moreover, a new regional bus line departing from Volos once a day replaced the preexisting local bus which made very frequent trips between the main village and the port, thus weakening the linkage between the two places and reinforcing the trend toward their separation.

Within the framework of the sea's transformation into a source of pleasure and spectacle, new social rearrangements are taking shape. The existing gender-determined domains are being shaken. This becomes a reality for the sexual division of labor. Women, who until now did not participate in areas of production outside the family realm, begin to enter into the center of what is public par excellence, the area of outsiders. This is accomplished by the introduction of female tasks in the sea's exploitation, that is, food preparation and hotel-keeping. In other terms, the house-keeping domain spreads out and embraces the new face of the sea's exploitation, changing its character in what I call domestication of the sea.

The same analogy can be observed in the male domain. Men are shifting from seamen to land-dwelling, sedentary ("sterianoí") people who can work and live of the sea without going away. They need no more go out to find the sea since the sea has come to them. Fishing and tourism are, of course, complementary but the nature of the organization and the objectives of fishing change. Fishermen must provide for the daily seafood consumption of local tourists. On the other hand, the new occupations do not require any association of collaborating men since there will be no more large-scale ventures. The new enterprises will be familial, fixed in space and the collaboration will include both genders.

These last years, Trikeri had to face some conflicting situations. One of these is the merchant marine crisis which narrowed the possibility of easy employment. The art and experience of fishing has been interrupted for one generation. Concurrently, since, until five years ago, the only traditional employment possibilities were maritime activities, children were not sent away to study. But the recent creation of a high school in the village obliges some families to move to Volos in order to accompany their children (especially sons) for further studies. About five families per year settle in Volos, without, still, the intention to stay there permanently and without big employment problems since the maritime occupations can be held from this coastal city as well.

A disorder in the marriage market has resulted from this situation. Village endogamy has been suffering recently because of the introduction of outsiders. Some young women were obliged to marry men from outside the village but among them there is no one seaman. They are all land-based workers. In contrast, no Trikeriot seaman has introduced outside women into the village. When they marry out, they

settle elsewhere. There is a fundamental reason for this. As I have already said, the marriage residence in Trikeri is uxorilocal. The house is transmitted from mother to daughter bringing together the consanguineal women while men change residence thus interrupting the previous strong bonds with their consanguineal kin. Outside spouses would be completely strange and not easily incorporated in this kins-woman-dominated structure.

The two diverging movements of Trikeriot men dispersing and foreign men coming into the village risk to lead to the transformation of the social composition. Women were the referent of social cohesion and perpetuation of the cultural identity. Now, with the newly-traced path of outsiders entering freely in the village, facilitated particularly by a female passage, the existing, well-established and solid social settlements are being displaced as by the waves of the incoming sea which spread out through the village territory.

The ongoing transformation of the sea's exploitation not only introduces women to this working area but also permits them to ease the penetration of outsiders with the most efficient means of integration, that is, marriage. Marriage becomes thus the other means of admittance of the external element. As if the outsiders could not be accorded the right to meet women without being appropriated by them.

On the other hand, the sea which has come home tends to pacify and settle down the mobile male population while pushing women to overstep the bounds of their area. This means also that the social domains which women are supposed to preserve and carry on (the ownership and devolution of immovable property, the control of marriage strategies, etc.) will have to be at least shared by both genders since the men will no longer be absent.

So, there appears another aspect of the shift in direction, the passage from the sea, male territory, to the sea at home, a man's and woman's affair.

Many of the elements of my analysis are almost like a scenario which is being realized. Trikeri has not yet changed that much. You may be surprised by figures that I will give describing its present situation: more than 300 boats of all sizes sail from the port, more than 300 fishermen continue to work at sea, about 150 men sail with the merchant marine, which means that the large majority of working men are at sea.

Nevertheless, the appearance of new choices is menacing. The upcoming conflicts, opposing movements and ruptures will they bring to Trikeri what Trikeriots themselves, as do most other Greeks, call civilization? Trikeriots are already saying with some pride that they have progressed and developed after the recent transformations, that they have ceased to be "behind the world". Do they mean, in other words, that they have ceased to be "behind" the sea? I am tempted to pose another "big question": does civilization mean becoming like the others, does civilization come with outsiders and, finally, is it brought by bringing home the sea?

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