

# ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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The years after the Second World War, and especially after the 1960s, saw not only an astonishing development of the sciences and technology, but also the evolution of a close, two-sided relationship between them. At the same time, despite the growing specialisation, the sciences tended increasingly to become interdependent and mutually influence each other, a phenomenon which, to speak only of the human sciences, was of decisive significance. Thanks to this cooperation, we now have the opportunity to achieve a more global and diachronic view of human culture, and to understand cultural phenomena by reference to the past.

At a recent scientific meeting of the PACT-EURETHNO Network held in Budapest (September 1994) and devoted to the general question of the relationship of European Folklore and Ethnology and their teaching at the level of tertiary education, I had the opportunity to stress that the above circumstance has contributed to the great proliferation of cultural studies in recent years, both in Europe, and especially in America. The object of these studies consists of all expressions of cultural life – arts, beliefs, institutions, practical communications, and, generally speaking, the relationship between society and culture, as expressed through various traditions.

The breadth of the social, intellectual, cultural and economic area covered by these studies is a factor contributing to the increase in scientific interest. New roads are continually being opened up, on an international scale, in the subject matter and methodological approach to social phenomena and expressions, the aim being to help related sciences to study broad cultural phenomena in depth and to assist in the evaluation of such phenomena, thereby acting as a lever for cultural evolution and development. It is characteristic that in the United States, as we know, Ethnology, Ethnography and Folklore are special areas of Cultural Anthropology which, together with Archaeology, Linguistics and Physical Anthropology, comprises the broad field of Anthropology; according to Philipp Whitten and David E. K. Hunter, (*Anthropology* 1993:xiii), this includes the whole of human experience and all the kaleidoscopic variety of human culture.

Culture is investigated in its broadest anthropological, and at the same time its narrowest humanistic sense (Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg 1992: 4). Traditional sciences such as Archaeology were faced with the challenge to cooperate with or use the research methods of the other sciences that investigate human culture and its evolution. Its cooperation with Folklore, Ethnography and Ethnology has been particularly profitable. Archaeology, of course, especially as practised until recently, mainly in Europe, was related rather to history and the investiga-

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tion of the past. New Archaeology, however, turns its attention not only to the study of the material remains, but also to the understanding of social structures and cultural change. As Professor Colin Renfrew (Anthropology 1993:88) has already noted, it is not concerned simply to reconstruct the past, but attempts also to explain why things change, and why they became what they are, in an endeavour not to be exclusively 'ethnocentric'. As Renfrew (Anthropology, op.cit) writes, characteristically, 'if our goal is to understand how and why things change, the study of the processes at work in one part of the world may give us very valuable insights into those operating in another'.

This trend, which was pioneered by Binford and Clark in the United States in the 1960s as a reaction against traditional Archaeology, turns its interest to the study of the evolution of culture, and endeavours to approach the past through understanding the present. The archaeologists of continuity are interested not only in archaeological discoveries themselves, but also 'in the way in which the archaeological record itself was created' (Anthropology, op. cit.).

The history of the New Archaeology from the time of its emergence to the present day, has not, of course, been without its ups and downs, or its critics. Since it first appeared, various trends have evolved, as is made clear in the book by Jaroslav Malina and Zdenek Vasicek, published in an English translation in 1990 under the title *Archaeology Yesterday and Today: the Development of Archaeology in the Sciences and Humanities*, in which they attempt a theoretical approach to the evolution of the science of Archaeology. At the same time, New Archaeology has been influenced both by the natural sciences and by other branches of the human sciences (such as History, Sociology, Ethnology, Ethnography, Folklore, etc), leading to the creation of trends such as industrial archaeology or social archaeology, urban archaeology, and so on.

In this way a new branch has been created — that of Ethnoarchaeology, which has evolved mainly in countries close to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, though also in some Eastern European countries. Ethnoarchaeology aspires to give global answers to questions relating to the historical past and its approach is closest to the anthropological and ethnographical method. It relies for the most part on the comparative study of phenomena, and on a search for similarities or relationships between the formations that have emerged in earlier periods and have been identified by ethnographers, anthropologists, etc, in so-called primitive or archaic societies. Consequently, it is often necessary 'to live in a suitable contemporary community, which has a way of life that is in some respects similar to the prehistoric or historic one that one seeks to understand. The ethnoarchaeologist studies how the modern archaeological record in that contemporary society comes out' (Renfrew, op. cit., p. 90). The same method is used to study expressions of life in urban communities, and conclusions are drawn relating to the material life of human beings both in the past

and at present. At the same time, it becomes possible to approach a variety of forms of cultural expression and to understand social groups or shed light on procedures that have been observed, or are still observed in different parts of the world. The modern scholar no longer thinks in terms such as 'primitive' or 'advanced'. Everything is part of 'the rich process of human culture' (Renfrew, op. cit.).

An important prerequisite of this new branch of study is, of course, that a comparative approach be adopted towards the ethnographic material, and that this material should also be cross-checked with other sources. As Malina and Vasicek comment, 'That is the reason why so-called ethnoarchaeology (archaeological ethnology, living archaeology, action archaeology), which studies the relation between cultural dynamics and archaeological statics in living communities, is becoming important... It is thanks to ethnoarchaeology that the number of hypotheses about matters which could not be studied until recently has rapidly increased. This is especially so in the area of symbolic meaning, which in the past was closely linked with social, economic and spatial organization, and through them, with material culture as well...'. As they go on to say, citing the comments of other scholars, 'Ethnoarchaeology has significantly increased the possibilities of prehistoric interpretations, but, at the same time, it has made us aware of the pitfalls of ethnographic analogy.' This is particularly true with regard to the drawing of conclusions by analogy that are then treated as data, susceptible of further investigation and available for the formulation of rules. On the other hand, the comparison, or the noting of similarities between cultures, especially in the case of cultures that are separated in time or space, may contribute to an understanding of this fact itself and lead to further investigation to furnish answers to how and why this came about.

### **Ethnoarchaeology and cultural identity**

The definition of cultural identity and the recognition of ethnic groups also fall within the sphere of research of Ethnoarchaeology. In particular, the record of material life is often used by researchers as a means of understanding not only the cultural, but also the ethnic identity of specific groups. The way in which cultural identity is approached from the point of view of Archaeology is the subject of a volume written by various contributors, under the title *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*. This volume, the second edition of which appeared in 1994, is part of a series of publications arising out of the World Archaeological Conference held at Southampton in September 1986, under the general title *One World Archaeology*. The second part of it is devoted to the relationship between cultural identity and material culture. It includes a number of ethnoarchaeological papers (ch. 7, 8, 9) which endeavour to establish the ethnic character of certain groups on the basis of the definition of their cultural identity. A study of the evidence of the material culture, such as architectural

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forms, or expressions of religion and cult, reveals that this approach often gives rise to particular problems, especially when the historical record is examined in isolation. It may then lead to defective or erroneous conclusions, which may even prove to be dangerous, especially in cases where ethnic groups attempt to demonstrate their ethnic identity on the basis of the cultural.

There are not a few instances in which the ethnographic approach to the early material associated with different ethnic groups has failed to confirm essential differences. Or has led to the detection of significant deviations between social groups of the same ethnic origins. Ethnoarchaeology thus demonstrates that the material must be approached with caution, and generalisations must be avoided, especially with regard to the material remains of the past, which often have a symbolic significance, though one that is not immutable. Thanks to this new branch of study, and also to the development of another, related branch, ethnohistory, we also have the opportunity to understand ethnic history not within a narrow, often chauvinistic context, but as part of the overall history and evolution of the human race and of culture. A better understanding can be achieved of social structures and their close dependency on economic development and the evolution of technology at both a local and a broader level.

As we have already noted, not only instructive conclusions can be drawn with regard to chronologically parallel phenomena, but cultural features of the past can be interpreted on the basis of similar, modern features. By way of example, mention may be made of functional pottery. The recent visit of the *European Seminar* to the Centre for the Study of Modern Ceramics enabled us to appreciate better how, it is possible, through the types, morphology, materials and decoration of functional pottery, to understand earlier periods, *mutatis mutandis*, and to realise whether we are dealing with periods of peaceful evolution, of social development or of economic progress. Also that certain developments may be noted in different places without this necessarily presupposing influences of any kind (trade, migration, etc). Similarly, our visit to the Archaeological Museum of Dion in Pieria gave us some experience in approaching artefacts of the distant past (mainly of the Hellenistic and Roman periods) that can also be found in more recent, and even in contemporary societies. Objects of everyday use, in particular (e.g. cups, pincers, spatulas, knives, pruning knives, keys and locks, looms, vases for transporting goods, ovens, drainage and sewage pipes, etc), revealed that the societies of earlier periods evolved in a complex, multi-faceted way, the traces of which consist of specific objects that are comparable with their modern counterparts.

To close, I would like to note that in the modern, rapidly chang-

ing world, new nations are making intense efforts to bolster their ethnic identity by turning to their cultural heritage, on which they frequently rest their hopes of national and broader economic development. It is for this reason that the human sciences today are called upon to play a wider role. By successfully cooperating with each other, they help the emergence of new branches of study which move and function at different cultural levels (e.g. Ethnoarchaeology, Ethnohistory, etc.). Frequently, they assist in the drawing of conclusions that transcend local or national boundaries. And they often make possible a broader understanding and cultural consensus, which may contribute more generally to cultural development and evolution.

# MASQUERADES DURING CARNIVAL

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*Naoussa: Yenitsaros.*

## GENERAL REMARKS

The wearing of masquerades is a widely known custom, practised throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. It is a universal anthropological phenomenon, exhibiting great endurance through time and fulfilling a variety of functions (Ekaterinidis 1965). The origins of the custom seem to have been in magic, and to have been connected with the cult of dead ancestors.

Disguises have always been in use in Greece, from antiquity to recent times. The custom has attracted the attention of many scholars, the majority of whom (Ekaterinidis 1965) relate it to the mimic performances of early Christian times, which were in turn inherited from Greco-Roman antiquity. The view has been advanced that they were a survival of Dionysiac worship, and corresponded to the Rural Dionysia, which took place from 15 December to 15 January. Similar masquerades were also held under the Byzantine empire during the Twelve Days (from Christmas to Epiphany), and depictions of them in wall-paintings have been preserved (e.g. Ayia Sophia in Kiev). It should be noted that masquerades were the object of fierce polemic on the part of the Orthodox Christian church which, however, failed to put an end to them. They continued to be held without break, reviving a series of elements of ancient Greek cult practice, such as the enactment of weddings, miming of the sexual act by people wearing masquerades, simulation of ploughing, miming of sowing, and so on (ibid).

Masquerades are found in Greece today mainly during the period of Carnival (*Apokria*), through also during the twelve days and from the first day of the year until Epiphany. The latter are attested mainly in Thessaly, Macedonia and Thrace. Similar masquerades at this time of year were also very common in the region of Pontos. The main features in the masquerade include the animal skin worn by the masqueraders, masks in a variety of forms, mainly of animals, and above all, large sheep- and goat-bells that hang from the waist of the masqueraders. In some areas, indeed, these bells are the main feature of the masquerade.

In addition to the pleasure they offer, these customs have a religious and magical significance, and aim at securing a favourable outcome for farming and other productive activities, as well as protecting the health of the inhabitants.

The role of the bells in the dress of those wearing masquerades is, of course, symbolic. The bell reinforces the apotropaic character of the mask.

The resounding bells were used, irrespective of the material and manner of their construction, to ward off evil by virtue of the sounds

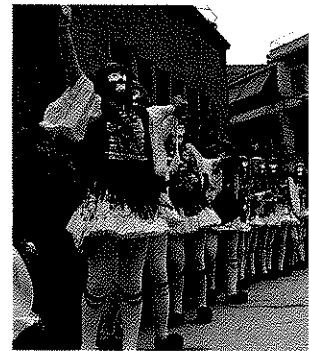
they produced. Bells moved on from their natural use (means by which the flock could be recognised by the shepherd, frightening away wild animals) to a metaphysical one, and were worn to keep away evil and demons. They thereby acquired a magical and religious quality which was extended to other uses in folk religion, invariably of a symbolic nature.

This symbolic purpose continues to be present in the masquerades worn at Carnival period, though these generally have the character of light-hearted entertainment. The masqueraders are known by a variety of names (*Karnavalia*, *Koudounati*, *Koukougeri*) and operate in groups, some of which are standard (e.g. the bridegroom, bride etc), while others are formed on the inspiration of the moment. The main element in the masquerade is the mask, usually made of unprocessed animal hide (sheep – or goat-skin) or of cloth, or cardboard, or simply by suitable painting of the face. Broadly speaking, there are local variations, often associated with local historical or social events.

### The masquerades in Naoussa

The masquerades in the district of Naoussa in North-west Macedonia are a characteristic example. The custom, known as the dance of the *Yenitsaros* and the *Boula*, is connected with the fighting of the inhabitants against the Turks during the Turkish Occupation. Its origin is to be found in the ancient ceremonies celebrating the coming of the Spring. Symbolic movements, dances and other mimic gestures depict the first forms of the custom, to which new elements have been added during its evolution.

The Seminar group visited Naoussa on the last Sunday of the Carnival (5 March 1995), the day that sees the climax of the celebrations of Carnival, which are held under the aegis of Municipality of Naoussa and generally have an organised character. As in other regions, an effort is made to promote local traditions as far as possible, in order to attract as large a number of visitors as possible, with a view to increasing tourism to the region. The Naoussa Carnival dates from the 18th century (it is first found in 1705), when it began in different neighbourhoods, each of which organised its own groups of masqueraders; these groups had many features in common, which are still found at the present day. One of the main features is the dance of the *Boula*, performed by groups of men dressed as *armatoloi* (men-at-arms), with their faces covered by wax masks and their chests by rows of thousands of coins. The band is led by a man dressed as a woman, who is called *Boula*. The entire celebration is devoted to the memory of the dead who fell in the struggle against the Turks. According to the convention, the group of masqueraders goes to the Town Hall, where it asks permission from the Mayor to begin the dance. After that the groups of masqueraders dance in the streets of the town, following a particular route and making par-



Naoussa: groups of masqueraders: *Yenitsaroi* and *Boules*.

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*Skyros: group of masqueraders wearing large, heavy bells.*

ticular movements and poses, to the accompaniment of music played by specialist musicians.

It may be noted that the main body responsible for the protection and promotion of the custom is the local dance society 'Yenitsari and Boules', whose efforts are directed towards ensuring the authenticity and continuation of the custom, and who participate in various Greek and international festivals. The information pamphlet issued by this organisation states that 'the principle of the Society is to preserve the custom of the *Yenitsaros and the Boula*, free from any foreign or modern influence. The costumes, music and dances are authentic and are handed down from generation to generation, without any outside influence'. All the young men of the area want to become masqueraders, since by so doing they demonstrate that they respect and honour the traditions of their region. The main aim is not merely to preserve the custom from outside influence, but to keep it confined to the town of Naoussa. Those who make the costumes, shoes and various costume-attachments therefore stay in the city and refuse to transport their art to the regions. It is also worth emphasising that:

— the costumes differ mainly in their decorative elements (coins on the chest, head decoration, silver icons), and according to the age of the masqueraders. They are quite expensive to make, ranging from 500,000 to 1,000,000 drachmas. The support of the musicians, who are called upon specially for the day, is also very costly. (Two people for four days cost 1,500,000 drachmas, not counting the tips offered to each of the players by the members of the families of each of the *Yenitsari*, who watch him dance.)

— the entire activity is organised, and leaves no room for spontaneity. Although in theory all young men may dress in masquerades, they have to learn the conventions (in what row they should stand, what house they should call at, at what points they should adopt their poses, and so on). This means that at an early point in time they have to become a member of one of the groups that still continue the custom.

### **The masquerades on Skyros**

Amongst the most impressive carnival masquerades are those held on Skyros, culminating on the last Sunday of the Carnival. The masqueraders form groups of five or six people. They wear goat skin masks on their faces, and half their body is covered with a black, hairy cape. Round their waist hang large numbers of goat and sheep bells. The main characters in the carnival group are the *yeros* ('old man') and the *korela* ('young girl'). The 'old man' is the leader of the group. He wears a mask, a shaggy woollen cape, a shepherd's over-breeches, and the traditional shoes called *trochadia* worn by Skyrian villagers, together with the socks known as *trochadokaltses*. He holds a shepherd's crook in his hand, around the end of which are tied a few plant tendrils. All round



his waist are tied a large number of large sheep-bells. The old man is accompanied by the maiden, a man dressed in traditional women's costume. His face is covered with the same kind of mask, and he also wears *trochadia* and *trochadokaltses*. He carries a kerchief in his hand which he waves continuously as he dances around the 'old man'. To these two main characters was later added a third, the 'Frank'. He wears a mask of some kind and European trousers and has a large bell hanging from the back of his waist. He holds a large conch in his hand, and moves constantly, blowing the conch and teasing the passers-by (Megas 1982: 60-69).

The groups of masqueraders move about continuously, and their movement causes the bells to ring, each time with a different sound. The festivity comes to an end on the afternoon of Clean Monday. According to custom, the groups go up to the monastery of Saint George, the patron saint of the island, venerate the saint's icon, and ring the monastery bell in celebration. They then return to their homes, take off their masquerades and sit down at the family table. The masquerades of Skyros are closely connected with ancient Dionysiac rituals, and seem to have been initiated by villagers. Their aim is to give magical assistance to the earth to sprout and bear fruit (Loukatos 1977)

### The masquerades at Sohos

The masquerades at Sohos near Thessaloniki have their own special character. They begin with the *Triodion* and climax on the last Sunday of Carnival and Clean Monday. They include many festivities. The masqueraders are called *karnavalia*, and differ from those in other regions in two main features: the face mask and the bells.

The article that follows this one is a summary of the study by G.N. Ekaterinidis, a researcher at the Folklore Centre of the Academy of Athens, that was published in the *Proceedings of the III Symposium on the Folklore of Northern Greece*, organised in Alexandroupolis in 1976 (14-18 October) by the Institute for Balkan Studies; it was reprinted in 1984 by the Cultural, Educational and Folklore Association of New Sohos, because of the great interest displayed in the carnival customs of the village.

As the writer himself notes in his study, he collected his data after field research during the Carnival of 1976, as a representative of the Folklore Centre of the Academy of Athens. He filmed, photographed and recorded the popular celebrations, noting down every relevant feature, and deposited the material so collected in the above-mentioned centre. Supplementary information was gathered by him in 1977 (Saturday of *Tyrini* — the Saturday before Lent) and even later.

The Seminar group visited Sohos on Clean Monday (6 March), when we had the opportunity to gather information from the inhabitants, and mainly from Mr. A. Glavinas, a professor at the University of



Skyros: Yeros ('old man').



Skyros: Yeros and korela ('young girl').

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Thessaloniki, and Mrs. Chr. Nokiou, who is a very active member of the local cultural society.

The present-day form of the custom may briefly be summarised as follows:

1. The custom continues to have a magico-religious character. The young people also continue to have a strong desire — irrespective of age — to dress up as *karnavalia*, generally following the traditional convention. Masquerades take place throughout the whole of Apokrias, but climax on the three-day period surrounding the Sunday of Carnival (*Tyrini*) — that is, on Saturday, Sunday and Clean Monday. Masquerades involving just the wearing of bells are also common on several weekends in the period between Epiphany and the beginning of the Carnival.

2. The custom continues to have a recreational-entertainment character. The inhabitants take part in the communal dance organised in the main square, and in general share in the good-humoured nature of the festival, exchanging good wishes and teasing each other, and offering drinks to the *karnavalia*. Many of the villagers of Sohos who have moved to neighbouring towns, or to Thessaloniki, return to the village for this three-day period, to join in the celebrations with their family and friends. During the three days of Apokrias they also take part in a series of other local customs that bind the members of the community together. According to Professor A. Glavinias, the inhabitants of Sohos continue to engage in those traditional practices which are connected not only with blood relations, but mainly with spiritual relations (godfather, best man, etc.), which contain a religious element, and which inaugurate a new cycle that is brought to completion on Easter Sunday. The Sunday of the Carnival, and more commonly Clean Monday, are chosen as days on which to visit the godfather, for 'forgiveness', which is sought from godfathers at the beginning of Lent. During this visit a set procedure is followed (kissing of the hand at the beginning and end of the visit, proffering of lenten sweets), and oranges are invariably offered to the godfather. A similar ritual is followed on Easter Sunday, when a basket (called *kaniska* in the local dialect, from the ancient Greek word *kaniskion*) is offered, containing a large loaf of bread (in earlier days this was baked by the women of the house themselves, especially for the godmother, but now it is bought from the baker's), eggs, a few sweets, and a main dish (a piece of meat, a fish or, financial means permitting, a whole lamb or goat). The godfathers respond with a gift or, usually, eggs.

3. Several new features have been grafted on to the Sohos carnival, some of them obviously 'folkloristic' in nature. Specifically:

— it has now become the practice for women, too, to dress in masquerades, in contrast with the practice in the past, when only young men dressed up.

—The carnival is increasingly assuming an organised character. The overall responsibility in 1995 fell to the Municipality of Sohos, which received a grant from the Ministry of Culture to organise it. The Municipality also assumed responsibility for printing advertising posters to promote the carnival and offered wine free to all the visitors, an increase in whose numbers is one of the aims. To this end, despite the fact that Clean Monday is a fast day, cakes and pies are distributed to the visitors — mostly sweet pies whose main ingredient is rice, but also a variety of other kinds. According to the custom, these pies are made on Saturday of the week before Lent (*tis Tyrinis*) in memory of the dead, and are distributed along with a piece of halva, to 'sweeten' the dead. Because the majority of the visitors to Sohos arrive on Clean Monday, however, the distribution of pies has been transferred to this day in order to demonstrate the local custom to everyone, we were told by the locals. It is for this same reason that on one of the days on which people abstain from meat, grills serving meat were set up in the open.

— Although the traditional elements are basically retained in the festivities, and in the other masquerades that are held (the Arab, the Camel, Enactment of a wedding), the carnival ends with a parade of the masqueraders, and attempts are made to ensure that it is of an organised character, like the parades in urban carnivals. The goat-figures and other masqueraders parade around the main square of the village in a specific order, and there is also a parade of floats with themes satirising current events, which come from neighbouring areas. These floats are sent in reciprocation for the parade of the bell-wearers, who have visited the areas in question some day during the period of the Carnival.

Generally speaking, the original mission of the masquerades was to secure a good harvest and a good year. Gradually, the original elements were forgotten and the festivities assumed a purely recreational character. The retention of the custom cannot be accounted for on recreational grounds alone, however. There is also the need to let down one's hair and relax, and, of course, the need to preserve the traditions. At the same time, recreational needs are always present, in the broader sense of change, transformation and the deeper socio-political reasons for liberation and relaxation, in order to avoid dangerous social tensions and explosions. Finally, the endurance of the kind of masquerade discussed above is due to the long traditions in these areas of rituals designed to secure good fortune; these have their origins in Dionysiac cults, which originated in Thrace and Macedonia and then spread to the rest of Greece. Their confinement to the particular local regions, finally, is closely connected with the social and economic structures of the areas in question, which have also determined the character of the rituals.

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