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Preface to the Greek Translation of *Demons and the Devil*

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When I published this book in English I pledged that I would make its contents available in Greek so that the people of Naxos, where I did field research, would be able to read it. Now, at last, I am able to fulfil that promise. I do so with considerable trepidation, however, because this is, after all, an unusual situation. A foreigner has made an anthropological investigation of the intimate cultural area of Christian Orthodox and unorthodox beliefs and practices. Now he submits his interpretations for inspection by a wide Greek readership, most of who have lived the ideas described herein. On the basis of personal experience, this audience may claim an equal, or greater, authority to determine cultural meaning. Perhaps this is another way of saying that I occupy the wrong side in a matter of what Michael Herzfeld (2005) has termed 'cultural intimacy' [*politistikí oikeiótita*] a concept roughly summarized by the following illustration: I may criticize my parents but you are not allowed to do so, at least not in front of me. Even if what I say in this book is relatively accurate, there remains the question of whether an outsider should be allowed publicly to say these things at all. It is a vulnerable position, to say the least. But 'cultural intimacy' becomes a dangerous idea in anthropology if it cuts the ground out from beneath a people's ability to respond to anthropological representations made of them. This volume will no doubt receive the criticism it deserves. My real hope, however, is that it will stimulate further discussion of how Orthodoxy figures as part of everyday practice, and how it is configured in local religious worlds.

In approaching this book I ask readers to bear in mind that it reports ethnographic data collected during the 1980s. When I refer to the 'present' one should imagine 1985, a time when Andreas

Papandreou and his PASOK Party governed Greece, ideas of political decentralization were just barely beginning to revitalize peripheral areas like the Cyclades, and the drachma was still the national currency. Obviously, much has changed in the intervening twenty years. It must also be borne in mind that this book was written for a foreign audience and a number of self-evident Greek language terms and cultural concepts are taken apart and explained. These passages may be of interest for showing how foreign anthropological analyses of one's own culture and language defamiliarize the familiar.

Demons and the Devil remains distinctive for the synthesis it offers between the data collected during my field research on Naxos and the rich body of publications in Greek folklore and local history. To a certain degree this direction came from my doctoral supervisor John Campbell, who had written about the Devil among the Sarakatsani and used the publications of the Greek folklorist Angeliki Khatzimikhali along the way. I sought to enlarge on that area, zooming in for a close-up of the Devil and the *exotiká*, and asking how they related to each other, how they were represented in terms of imagery, and how they articulated with Greek social relations and values. To do this I resorted to a much greater range of folklore literature than Campbell did and I added a close look at the standard theology of the Orthodox Church, even citing relevant passages from the Church Fathers and the New Testament. The exemplary scholarship and the personal advice of Margaret Alexiou (who co-supervised my doctoral research along with Campbell) were crucial to this endeavour. Her studies of funeral lamentation and the figure of Charos demonstrated the relevance of the textual study of folk traditions for understanding contemporary practices and ideas. The step of matching up ethnography and folklore seemed an obvious one to take.

In her recent study of archives and local historiography in Greece, Penelope Papailias (2005) has drawn attention to the division of labour between, on the one hand, local historians, sometimes referred to as *istoriodíphes*, who collect source materials, and, on the other, professional historians who place these raw materials into broader perspective. Professional historians often look down upon the *istoriodíphes* as unskilled amateurs, and the latter absorb this opinion and do not dare refer to themselves as bona fide 'historians'. The two divisions of labour cannot, however, be segregated. Good historiography, as Nikos Svoronos contended (cited in Papailias 2005: 51), often demands that the historian perform both tasks.

In a similar fashion anthropologists have tended to look down on folklorists as sociologically unsophisticated compilers of local customs. Local folklore accounts do often lack the social contextualization that would make their data more useful. And they frequently report traditions as if the whole community embraced them. Asking the 'wrong kinds of questions', and problematizing the veracity and uniformity of local traditions does characterize the transition from folkloric to anthropological research (Herzfeld 2005). Despite the differences between the two disciplines, folklore does offer a wealth of empirical data which, like the anthropologist's own empirical data collected through ethnography, must be analyzed, theorized, and set into cross-cultural perspective. Folklorists have published reports on every conceivable traditional practice in every corner of the Greek-speaking world over the past century and a half. An anthropology seeking to understand these social practices ignores this body of literature at its peril.

In the case of *Demons and the Devil*, the combination of folkloric and theological materials created a cultural historical context for my ethnographic material. The way people on Naxos

currently live with ideas of the *exotiká* constitutes a synchronic moment where ideas about polymorphous evil demons take shape in relation to life in a particular place. Reference to historical materials made it very apparent that the Naxos ethnography was just a snapshot of a diachronic process. The *exotiká* have been developing in the eastern Mediterranean, in relation to standard Orthodox Christian ideas of the Devil for at least 1500 years. The placement of the contemporary *exotiká* in historical context made this work relevant to cultural historians. And several major books relating to various historical phases of Greek demonology (e.g. Johnston 1999, Frankfurter 2006, Brake 2006) have drawn on *Demons and the Devil* thereby extending the dialogue between history and anthropology that animated my original.

Shortly after I began teaching at University College London, as a joint appointment in the History and Anthropology Departments, I presented my first seminar to my new history colleagues. I gave an illustrated overview of some of the main issues of this book. A medieval specialist came up to me afterward and exclaimed that I had shed new light on the medievalist's conundrum of how to analyze religion and 'superstition'. Outsiders can often identify and distil what one is doing better than one can oneself. At least I would like to believe that this work does offer one of the most complete studies available of the relationship between an official, standardized religion and what it designates as 'superstition'. In this Greek case the evidence showed that the contents of religion and 'superstition' (a word which I find pejorative, and thus use only to quote the language used by others) actually overlap to a great degree. They do so because both have largely developed from the same pool of cultural ideas traceable back to the pre-Christian, Hellenic past. Christianity appropriated some of these ideas in its formative years, and incorporated still more (such as the evil eye) over the following centuries. Of course, it also excluded some beliefs/practices and labelled those 'superstitions' (*deisidaimonías*).

Ultimately the whole landscape has become so tangled and badly demarcated that not everyone in Greek society knows where religion ends and 'superstition' begins. As many of these issues are minor and inconsequential, most ordinary Orthodox Christians don't see why they should care.

Should a doctrinally-minded person such as a priest or an informed layperson tell children to stop jumping over the *máides* on the day of St. John, as they are pictured doing in this book (fig. 31), several different things might happen. The children might simply stop out of respect for an elder person. Their parents might come out and tell this person off for being a petty spoilsport and ruining a fun custom with which no one has had a problem in the past. Or the parents might protest aloud, but quietly register the comment, feel embarrassment and prevent their children from performing the custom in the future. The important social fact to observe is that no one defends so-called 'superstitions' or putatively 'pagan' customs by citing a freedom to worship paganism. People do not defend their belief in *neráides* or *stoikheía* by citing the authority of pagan theology, or their own participation in a different history. For the most part, however, no one is attacking anyone in the first place. Greek Orthodoxy would be pushing through an open door in such situations since no one would attempt to resist it; no one is embracing the *exotiká* as part of an alternative faith.

Orthodox imagery of the good does take form in symbolic opposition to the ambiguous, demonic, *exotiká*. But this dialogical interaction takes place more at a conceptual, symbolic level rather than on a socio-political level (i.e as a contest between groups of people), and it is situated entirely within Orthodoxy, rather than between Orthodoxy and another religion. I have translated the *exotiká* as 'demons' in the title of the book because 'demons' is an accepted

Christian concept, theologically related to the Devil and fallen angels. In practice the *exotiká* may easily be accepted as metamorphoses of the Devil and thus operate within the sphere of Orthodoxy. Calling them 'superstitions', 'fairies' or even just '*exotiká*' obscures that by polarizing them outside of Orthodoxy.

Since writing this book I have changed my mind on one matter. In the Introduction I considered that Greek Orthodoxy had traversed a period of active syncretism in late antiquity when it was in active dialogue with various other religions, notably Greco-Roman religion. Over the centuries it triumphed and ancient paganism disappeared altogether as a vital alternative, as mentioned above. Considering the length of time during which the Orthodox population of Greece has not contemplated itself as anything other than Christian, I initially proposed that we consider it a 'synthetic' rather than a 'syncretic' religion, a distinction generally elaborated by Pye (1994). After studying the issue of syncretism in more detail, however, I concluded that all religions are inevitably syncretic, all have absorbed exogenous influences during their histories (Stewart 1995). I feared that calling them 'synthetic' or 'stable' risked adopting an internal political view (e.g. that of the Church) and that, furthermore, it opened the door to the possible consideration of such religions as 'pure'. Consequently I have decided that it is better to maintain a view of Orthodoxy as syncretic.

The Oxford-based social anthropologist David Gellner has criticized this decision. He believes that I had it right the first time round, and that I have now introduced an unhelpful postmodernist relativism by maintaining that all religious traditions 'are equally syncretic, equally unstable and equally hybrid' (1997:278). The term 'equally' in this quote from Gellner possibly misrepresents my position. I think that all religions are syncretic and unstable, but not all in the same way, or

for the same reasons, or with the same political consequences at any given point in time. The question then becomes whether we want to create different categories to denominate these differences, or maintain one category (syncretism), which has variability within it. The distinctions that Gellner makes between bricolage, synthesis, syncretism and accretion are illuminating, but I would cite them as different ways in which religions are syncretic, rather than as alternatives to syncretism. Basically, Gellner is a 'splitter' and I am a 'lumper'. Is there any compelling reason to choose one or the other option?

The main reason why I advocate lumping the various modalities of religious mixture together under the larger category of syncretism is in order to recognize the fluidities and transformations that occur between the various types. Gellner himself acknowledges that his different categories of mixture are ideal types, which may blur or transition into one another (1997:289).

Linguistically demarcating synthetic, accretive and syncretic religions as discrete types of religion risks obscuring that. Take, for example, the assessment of Orthodoxy as 'synthetic'. This seems a secure judgement. Yet Greek neo-pagans reviving the Olympian religion and celebrating Ancient Greek rites, as they did recently (Smith 2007) at the temple of Zeus in central Athens, might destabilize this certainty. In fact, neo-paganism in Greece has quietly been gaining momentum for several decades (Pachis 2004). Unlike the case of jumping over *máides*, officials of the Orthodox Church have expressed vehement opposition to the 'miserable resuscitators of the degenerate dead religion' (Smith 2007). Neo-paganism could be an inconsequential fad, or we might be witnessing the re-germination of a significant alternative cosmology. Keeping Greek Orthodoxy categorically 'syncretic' maintains this latter possibility in our purview by clarifying that elements of different religions do exist within Orthodoxy and could potentially be activated. If it proceeds far enough neo-paganism might eventually

transform the *exotiká* from manifestations of a Christian Devil back into so many Pans, Erores, Nymphs and Satyrs.

My definition of 'syncretism', like my anthropological definition of Greek religion as the body of ideas and rituals directed at supernatural beings, rather than as the domain presided over by the Greek Orthodox Church, both take a line of thought independent from that of the Church. This does not mean that this volume is against the Church. As a foreigner, unencumbered by socialization within Greek Orthodoxy, it has perhaps been easier for me to write anthropologically about this religion than it would be for Greek researchers. In a footnote buried deep in this volume (the last footnote of Chapter 9) I point out that I have been able to identify commonalities between religion and 'folklore', which Greek folklorists (in this case) have not spotted because they hold their religion separate from their normal analyses of 'folklore'. Anthropological analysis demanded crossing and contrasting these cultural domains and formulating interpretations that might seem strange or even slightly sacrilegious to some members of society.

At the time I wrote this book, Greek folklorists had done the majority of work on the *exotiká* and on saints' cults and local rituals (which they categorized as folk practices). Although works by foreign anthropologists on religion were numerous back then (e.g. Danforth 1989, Hirschon 1999, Hart 1992, Dubisch 1995), works by Greek anthropologists on this topic were few, but then there were only a few Greek anthropologists; the subject was in its infancy in Greece. Now the balance has swung, and Greek nationals, many affiliated with Greek universities, produce the majority of anthropological work on Greece. They have focused research on topics of current importance for Greek society such as immigration, ethnicity and nationalism. Religion

receives some consideration in these studies, but there have been few extended studies concentrating on religion. Some notable exceptions are Khristina Vේikou's book (1998) on the evil eye (another Greek anthropologist, Evgenia Roussou is currently completing a doctoral thesis on this subject at University College London), and Katerina Seraïdári's work focusing on icons (2005, 2007). For the most part, however, consideration of religion appears only contextually in studies with a different main focus. Why are foreign anthropologists, generally speaking, more interested in Orthodoxy, and more willing to write about it?

Perhaps religion has fallen between the stools of folklore and anthropology in Greece?

Folklorists have often proceeded by dividing the 'folk' from the educated segment of society, who could study the folk. Apparently, the official Church had been classified as non-folk and thus not an object of study. Perhaps in addition to the disciplinary exclusion of mainstream Orthodoxy, the folklorists of twenty-five or more years ago held religion apart from study on account of their faithful membership in the Church. They could not easily put their own religious faith under objective, secular analysis. In contradistinction to this position, I would venture that latter-day anthropologists, as a group, have minimized the role of religion in their lives for a variety of personal and political reasons. Having undergone personal struggles to arrive at this position vis-à-vis Orthodoxy, they are not eager to spend time suspending their disbelief and their political criticisms of the Church in order sensitively to attend lengthy services and listen to what followers of the faith have to say. They know that anthropological research requires a great sympathy for the object of study, and they might rule themselves out as being able to deliver it.

The matter is surely more complicated. The absence of anthropological studies of religion might simply reflect professional choices in line with current major areas of interest within the discipline such as nationalism, new technologies, medical anthropology, migration, applied anthropology and public policy. Certainly several of these offer more career opportunities than does a specialization on religion. Writing from beyond Greece I can only speculate on this matter, which belongs with the set of questions already raised by Greek anthropologists (e.g. Gefou-Maidanou 1993, Bakalaki 1997) under the rubric of 'anthropology at home' (*anthropología oikoi*). Perhaps the appearance of this book in Greek will renew and further that discussion by posing the question of how we can have an indigenous anthropology of Greece that includes Orthodoxy.

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It remains only to thank the people who helped bring this volume into being. Evangelos Avdíkios persuaded me that this book should be translated into Greek, and he was instrumental in making it happen. I was initially ambivalent about the prospect since I knew that it would involve the gargantuan task of finding all the original Greek texts for the many passages presented in English in the original publication. I searched through old files of photocopies, re-read fieldnotes and even listened again to some field recordings. In the end I supplied some two hundred texts to create this book, which is now a more valuable edition for scholarship than the English original, since it includes all these texts in the language which most matters for the serious analysis of Greek culture -- Greek. I would like to thank Marianna Sokratous for her hard work in bringing this text, which contains so many angles and registers of speech, into a consistent and coherent translation. This publication also allows me to renew my gratitude to

the people of Naxos for their kindness and extensive hospitality during my original fieldwork, and during my many visits since. My only regret is that some of the people who most inspired and facilitated this study are now no longer with us. I think, especially, of Dialekhtí Zevgólí-Glézou and Petros Glézos, and Nikos Kephalliniádis. I dedicate this book to them; a memento of our many conversations and the knowledge that they so generously shared with me.

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