MEANING AND IDENTITY IN A GREEK LANDSCAPE

In this interdisciplinary study, Hamish Forbes explores how Greek villagers have understood and reacted to their landscapes over the centuries, from the late medieval period to the present. Analysing how they have seen themselves belonging to their local communities and within both local and wider landscapes, Forbes examines how these aspects of belonging have informed each other. Forbes also illuminates cross-disciplinary interests in memory and the importance of monuments. Based on data gathered over twenty-five years, Forbes’ study combines the rich detail of ethnographic fieldwork with historical and archaeological time-depth, showing how landscapes have important meaning beyond the religious sphere in terms of kinship and ideas about the past and in their role as productive assets.

Hamish Forbes is associate professor of archaeology at the University of Nottingham. He has excavated in the United States, Ireland, Britain and Greece and conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Greece on Methana, Crete and in the Southern Argolid. He is co-editor of A Rough and Rocky Place: The Landscape and Settlement History of the Methana Peninsula, Greece.
MEANING AND IDENTITY IN A GREEK LANDSCAPE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

HAMISH FORBES

University of Nottingham
To the women in my life: Anne, Helen, Janet and Lin

And to the memory of Michael H. Jameson,

whose ideas on the Greek
countryside led to the research described
here
CONTENTS

List of Illustrations and Tables  page xi
Preface and Acknowledgements  xv
Transliteration Conventions  xxi

1 Introduction  1

2 Landscape Studies: From Frame-and-Tame to Visceral Feeling  9
The Development of Landscape Archaeology and Anthropology  9
Phenomenology: A Critical Overview  18
Sensory and Visceral Landscapes  30
Theoretical Approach of this Study  44

3 Historical Background to the Landscape of Methana  50
Geology, Geomorphology and Soils  51
Methana from the End of the Medieval Period to 1821  56
From 1821 to the First World War  61
The Interwar Years  83
The Second World War Onwards  88
Conclusion  95

4 Conducting Fieldwork on Methana  97
Cultural Ecology Studies  97
Archaeological Survey  108
The Study of Households and Household Transformation  110
CONTENTS

Archival Sources and Methana in the 1990s 111
Presentation of the Evidence 113
Conclusion 114

5 Kinship, Marriage and the Transmission of Names and Property 116
Introduction 117
Family and Household 118
Other Relatives 124
Extent of the Kinship Group 127
Greek Kinship and Anthropological Kinship Theory 136
Marriage Alliances 142
Fictive Kin 149
Neighbours 152
Kinship Obligations 152
Names and Naming 157
Dowry and Inheritance 162
Conclusions 173

6 The Productive Landscape 177
Introduction 177
The Methana Settlement Pattern as Part of a Decision-Making Process 178
Methana Communities in their Landscapes: Ethnographic Data and Archaeological Approaches 184
The Methana Landscape as a Vertical Economy 190
The Crop Rotation System in the Landscape 195
Site ‘Territories’ versus Household ‘Territories’ and the Problem of Appropriate Analytical Levels 199
Individual Plots and their Meanings 203
Conclusion 205

7 The Historical Landscape: Memory, Monumentality and Time-Depth 207
Of Time and Time-Depth 207
Oral Testimonies and the Memory of Past Events 210
Kinship and History: The Effect of Name Recycling 212
Oral Testimony, ‘Official’ History and Local History 219
CONTENTS

The Meaningful Past 222
Structures in the Landscape: Memorials of Past Time 224
   Settlements and their Locations as Historical Monuments 224
   Houses as Monuments 227
   Field-Houses 236
   Fields and Terraces 238
   Wells, Cisterns and Loutses 239
   Ambaria 248
   Grape-Treading Floors 250
   Churches 257
   Cemeteries 259
   The War Memorial 263
The Nature of Time 264
Conclusions 284

8 The Kinship Landscape 286
   Introduction 286
   Kinship and the Village Landscape 287
   Kinship and the Landscape of the Dead 314
   Kinship and the Organisation of the Productive Landscape 318
   Kinship and the Wider Landscape of Methana 327
   The Kinship Landscape Beyond Methana 331
   Methanites in a Linguistically Related Landscape 333
   Conclusions: A Greek Landscape with Relatives 335

9 The Religious Landscape 343
   The Supernatural in the Landscape 345
   The Supernatural in Methanites’ Lives 348
   The Supernatural in the Settlement Pattern 352
   Panigiria 358
   Extra-Mural Churches: Empty Spaces as Central Places 359
   The Religious Landscape in the 1990s 374
   The Dead in the Landscape: Cemeteries 380
   The Dead in the Landscape: Wayside Shrines 385
   The Supernatural and Movement Through the Landscape 387
   The Changing Importance of Churches in the Landscape 391
   Conclusions 392
CONTENTS

10 Conclusions: A Greek Landscape from Within 395

Glossary 409
Notes 413
References 417
Index 433
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1 Location of Methana
1.2 Panoramic view of Methana
2.1 Methana’s spectacular volcanic landscape
3.1 Geological map of Methana showing the main domes and lava flows
3.2 A terraced hillside on Methana with mixed arable and trees
3.3 Cross sections of Methana landforms and associated soils
3.4 Changing settlement on Methana from the medieval period onwards
3.5 Present settlements on Methana
3.6 The village of Meghalo Khorí: note steeper slopes above the village and gentler slopes below
3.7 Inscribed stone on Kounoupitsa’s main church, dated 1824
3.8 Kypseli’s original church: the western (left-hand) end was probably added to an older church in the 1840s
3.9 Above: exterior view of a mud-roofed house. Below: interior view of a mud roof
4.1 Grafting domesticated pear scions onto a wild pear tree
4.2 A laden mule on a mule track (kalderimi)
5.1 Two kinds of kinship systems
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Barba Thanassis’ fragmented landholding</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>A kalivi (field-house)</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>A medieval church. Above: the west end, showing ornamental tile work in masonry. Below: the east end, with Byzantine tiles still in place on the apse</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Fabvier’s War of Independence fort – the Kastro Phavierou</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>A gheranaki (swipe)</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>A cistern-head inscribed with a date</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>An ambari. Above: exterior view. Below: interior view</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>The remains of an old rock-cut grape-treading floor near a mountain vineyard</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>The war memorial</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Plan of the main study village</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>The growth of the Petronotis neighbourhood in the village of Liakotera</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Kinship relationships continuing after death: a village cemetery with kinship ‘neighbourhoods’</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Sketch plan of the ownerships of an area of small irrigated plots</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>The distribution of Methana’s churches</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Byzantine wall paintings in a small Methana church. The saints look down on worshippers from the vault of the church as though from the vault of heaven</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>The church of Aghii Asomati (Taxiarkhai), with works in progress</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>The panighiri at the extra-mural church of Saint Barbara (Aghia Varvara). The people standing outside are worshippers who cannot get inside the packed church</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Empty space transformed into a central place: the Moularobazaro. Buying wool after the service at the panighiri at Saint Epiphanios’ extra-mural church</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Empty space transformed into a central place. Above: Saint George’s church in the mid-1980s. Below: the same church in the late 1990s, with the war memorial moved to a more prominent position</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

9.7 The road built in the 1960s passes close to extra-mural churches 377
9.8 Saint Athanasios’ church. The white objects on the road in the foreground and beside the concrete picnicking bench are abandoned party litter 379
9.9 Different signposts point to different places of interest for different constituencies. None directs travellers to a settlement 381
9.10 The cemetery illustrated in fig. 8.3. Above: External view, showing the single entrance. Below: internal view 383
9.11 Different kinds of proskinitario 387

TABLES

5.1 A sequence of closely related households 125
5.2 Greek kinship terms in regular use 126
5.3 Links between household head and non-household members in work groups 154
5.4 Examples of naming in the 1879 census 159
7.1 Examples of discrepancies in ages reported in the mitroo arenon and the 1879 census 270
7.2 o/ξ ages in the 1879 census: those significantly above 20% suggest many ages were guesswork 271
7.3 o/ξ ages in the 1879 census: gender differences in uncertainties over ages 272
8.1 A neighbourhood dominated by close kinship links 296
8.2 A sequence of closely related households 298
8.3 Two related groups on opposite sides of a street 300
This book is an ethnography aimed primarily at archaeologists, but I hope it will also be of interest to cultural geographers and social and cultural anthropologists. Indeed, my original research on the peninsula of Methana in Greece, the focus of this study, was an ethnography, written up as my Ph.D. in cultural anthropology. Yet I never intended to be an anthropologist. I embarked on a British undergraduate degree in Archaeology and Anthropology having already had some experience of archaeology, in both the classroom and the field. My experiences as an undergraduate only confirmed my belief that archaeology was much to be preferred over social anthropology, which seemed to me at the time a way of turning the lives of real people into artificial conceptual categories, as often as not via arid exercises in kinship algebra.

My graduate studies in the United States in a Department of Anthropology in which archaeology was a sub-field, along with cultural and physical anthropology, initially left me with much the same views about anthropology and its practitioners. Here the situation was exacerbated by occasional disquisitions on why North American cultural anthropology was so much better than European social anthropology: the differences between the two versions seemed minor in comparison with the similarities. However, my views about anthropology changed when I met one of America’s foremost cultural ecologists, Robert Netting. He showed me that some kinds of anthropology could remain firmly rooted on – indeed, in – the ground, in a pragmatic way that made sense. His empathy with dwellers in rural communities, as well as his mastery of the well-placed pun, have remained an inspiration for much of my own work.
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thus, although I considered myself at heart an archaeologist, I eventually found myself conducting ethnographic research for two years in a village on a small peninsula in Greece – Methana (pronounced with the stress on the first syllable). The understanding derived from that initial fieldwork on Methana forms the basis of much of this book. However, it was also significantly informed by a campaign of archaeological survey in the 1980s and by research into nineteenth-century documentary sources in the late 1990s. Over the period represented by these dates, I have seen many changes in the people, their livelihoods, and their landscape on Methana, which I have incorporated into this account.

The original germ of a book on Methana landscapes came from a discussion with a colleague who had also worked in Greece. After I had described aspects of Methana and its landscapes, she was very insistent that I should write what I knew. At the further urging of Lin Foxhall, my wife and closest colleague, I eventually applied for, and was awarded, a Leverhulme Research Fellowship for 1997–8. It was this award which allowed me to initiate this book and conduct research into documentary sources, the existence of some of which I had known about for almost a quarter of a century but had never had a suitable opportunity to study.

The other element in the germination of this book was the flurry of publications on prehistoric landscapes, starting in the 1990s, in which phenomenological approaches were frequently employed. As will rapidly become apparent, I felt dissatisfied with the ways in which landscapes, ancient and modern, were conceptualised and with the apparent desire to employ ethnographic parallels which seemed simultaneously maximally different from (aka ‘most anthropological’), and also least relevant to, those of Europe. Many scholars discussing the meanings of ancient landscapes were mining the literature on modern societies and their landscapes within the narrow confines of university libraries. From my direct experience, I felt that some of their efforts were leaving the subject as little rooted in the realities of real people wresting a living from unforgiving and unpredictable environments as the kinship algebra which had turned me off anthropology as a student. Ultimately, the stance of the phenomenologist, dispassionately standing on the outside looking in, whilst purporting to empathise
with the experiential world of their objects of study, lacks the genuine empathy with dwellers in rural landscapes which is so necessary for understanding the reality and complexity of meanings that their landscapes have for them.

In this book, therefore, I present an alternative view of a set of rural landscapes, seen not from the outside, but from within. Of course, not being a Methanitis, I cannot give a direct personal description of the meanings of the peninsula’s landscapes as one who has grown up there. However, much of this book represents the ethnographer’s viewpoint gained as participant observer – as ‘marginal native’, or ‘outsider within’. It also represents the understanding of someone accustomed to participating in rural communities and their landscapes in Britain, before I ever visited Greece, and since.

This presentation is also ‘alternative’ in being holistic in two senses. First, it represents a complex mix of sources of information. Traditional ethnographies have depended very largely on ethnographic data gathered via observation of life in the community or communities studied and via interviews which draw out information on a wide variety of topics. While this study depends greatly on such information, it also draws heavily on the material cultural record, much of it derived from archaeological survey. In addition, information from a unique set of nineteenth-century documents has been incorporated into the discussion and analysis to give a greater time-depth than is possible for most ethnographic studies.

Second, unlike many recent archaeological examples, this book goes beyond discussion of religious monuments in landscapes. Although these have had a pivotal role in Methanites’ landscapes, so, too, have issues of production, reproduction and questions of remembering and forgetting in the secular sphere. Ultimately, the key which unlocks the greatest number of doors to understanding these landscapes is that most ‘anthropological’ aspect of so many small communities: kinship and the family.

Equally ‘alternative’ is the European-ness of the study community, in contradistinction with the exoticism of many of the ethnographic studies used in discussions of prehistoric European landscapes. The issue of ‘valid’-‘invalid’ or ‘more valid’-‘less valid’ ethnographic studies to assist in understanding specific archaeological problems has a long
and unresolved history to which I do not wish to contribute directly. However, many will have nagging doubts about the extent to which arctic reindeer herders or foragers from the Great Australian Desert can really shed light on the meanings of places and spaces for European agriculturalists and herders in prehistory. More important, I argue that using highly exotic ethnographic examples risks dehumanising the people thus involved. Ultimately, interpretation in archaeology is about trying to understand the lives and knowledge of real people in the past.

In a period of research now extending over more than thirty years, focusing on data collected over a span of twenty-five years, a large number of people and organisations have had inputs in one way or another. This book would never have been written had it not been for periods of study leave in which I was able to concentrate fully on research and writing. I gratefully acknowledge the award of a Leverhulme Research Fellowship noted earlier, generous study leave provision from the University of Nottingham, and a semester of study leave funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board. I also owe an unrepayable debt of gratitude to all those Methanites who have accepted me into their villages, their churches and their homes, teaching me the true meaning of philoxenia (hospitality) and, equally important, giving me a glimpse of what a privilege it is to be a Methanitis. Particular thanks go to the president of the Demos of Methana, Panayiotis Lambrou, for permission to study and copy the archival sources held in the town hall and to the secretary and assistant secretary who made such study possible; also to Tobias Schorr, another non-Methanitis who has a special affection for Methana. Particular thanks, too, go to Athena Masst and her sister Penny, who have provided encouragement and important information on Methana from afar.

Many friends and colleagues have also contributed to this book in multifarious ways. Studying the cultural ecology of rural Greek communities was the inspired idea of the late Michael Jameson, who maintained an interest in my research on Methana throughout. The debt that I owe to the late Robert Netting is equally great – not least for showing me that it is possible to be both an archaeologist and a cultural anthropologist and to enjoy both. I would also particularly like to thank Karen Stears for her suggestion that I put what I have
learned about Methana landscapes into a book; Mari Clarke, with whom I shared my first period of fieldwork and on whose subsequent publications many aspects of the present work rely; Harold and Joan Koster, who introduced me to the benefits of working in the fields as part of fieldwork, and much more besides; Chris Mee, with whom I shared several summers during the Methana Survey and who has helped with a number of illustrations; Theo Koukoulis, who shared his knowledge and love of Greek churches with me; Bill Cavanagh for guidance on matters statistical; Lena Cavanagh for help on some abstruse aspects of Greek language and culture; Mercouris Georgiadis for correcting the Greek in the text; Jack Davis and Michael Given for pointing me towards some crucial references; David Taylor for most of the line drawings and diagrams; Keith Streb for his ingenuity in scanning a number of illustrations onto CD; Simon Whitmore and latterly Beatrice Rehl and Barbara Walthall for their advice on publication matters and for forbearance over missed deadlines; and two anonymous referees who provided supportive comments and insightful suggestions. Above all, Lin Foxhall has provided inspiration, support, advice and guidance while I have been involved in writing this book: she knows better than anyone what it is like to juggle teaching, administration, and research while also looking after an energetic family.

Particular thanks are owed to the following for permission to reproduce illustrations:

- Mari Clarke: figs. 3.2, 3.9a, 3.9b, 4.1, 4.2, 7.4, 9.4 and 9.5
- Liverpool University Press: figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 3.8, 7.1a, 7.1b, 9.2 and 9.6a
- Modern Greek Studies Program of the University of Minnesota: figs. 3.9a and 3.9b
- Stanford University Press: figs. 3.9a, 3.9b and 7.4
- Stefanie Moehrle: fig. 9.9
- Tobias Schorr: figs. 1.2, 2.1, 3.6 and the cover photo
TRANSLITERATION CONVENTIONS

There is no fully satisfactory system for transliterating modern Greek into Latin characters: the system used for ancient Greek is not entirely suitable. I have assumed that for those who do not know Greek, a simple transliteration into Latin letters will generally be of little value, so on occasions I simply give a word or phrase in Greek characters with its translation in English. However, where words or phrases in Greek are repeated, I give the Greek and a transliteration when they first appear and subsequently use a transliteration.

Many Greek characters have close equivalents in Latin letters, but a number do not. Where they do not, I generally transliterate them approximately phonetically.

\[\begin{align*}
\alpha &= a \\
\alpha i &= e \\
\alpha u &= av\ or\ af,\ depending\ on\ whether\ the\ following\ letter\ is\ voiced\ or\ unvoiced \\
\beta &= v \\
\gamma &= gh\ (\gamma\ before\ \epsilon,\ \iota,\ \upsilon,\ \varepsilon\ and\ \omicron\ has\ a\ sound\ close\ to\ an\ English\ initial\ y,\ whereas\ before\ other\ vowels\ and\ diphthongs,\ it\ is\ closer\ to\ an\ aspirated\ g.\ Nevertheless,\ I\ use\ gh\ throughout\ in\ order\ to\ distinguish\ \gamma\ from\ \gamma\kappa) \\
\gamma\kappa &= g \\
\delta &= dh\ (a\ sound\ similar\ to\ the\ th\ in\ ‘then’) \\
\epsilon &= e \\
\epsilon i &= i \\
\epsilon u &= ev\ or\ ef,\ depending\ on\ whether\ the\ following\ letter\ is\ voiced\ or\ unvoiced
\end{align*}\]
TRANSLITERATION CONVENTIONS

ζ = z
η = i
θ = th (a sound similar to the th in ‘thin’)
i = i
κ = k
λ = l
μ = m
μτ = b if used in initial position, otherwise generally mb
ν = n
ντ = d if used in initial position, otherwise nd
ξ = x
ο = o
οι = i
ου = ou (a sound similar to the oo in ‘boot’)
π = p
ρ = r
σ, ς = s
τ = t
υ = i
ϕ = f
χ = kh (a sound similar to the ch in “loch”)
ψ = ps
ω = o

The acute accent indicates where the stress falls.

Exceptions: Certain place names (e.g., Piraeus) and surnames (e.g., Triandaphyllou) do not conform strictly to these rules, if they are conventionally written in the form used for transliterating ancient Greek.

In addition, I use the following characters in Albanian place names: è represents the ‘er’ sound as in the standard British English pronunciation of the word ‘water’ – that is, without the post-vocalic r.
j represents a sound like initial English y.