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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*.

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MEANING AND IDENTITY IN A GREEK LANDSCAPE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

HAMISH FORBES
University of Nottingham

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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

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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
Panighiria 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

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

10 **Conclusions: A Greek Landscape from Within** 395

Glossary 409
Notes 413
References 417
Index 433

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1 Location of Methana *page* 2
1.2 Panoramic view of Methana 3
2.1 Methana's spectacular volcanic landscape 11
3.1 Geological map of Methana showing the main domes and lava flows 52
3.2 A terraced hillside on Methana with mixed arable and trees 53
3.3 Cross sections of Methana landforms and associated soils 55
3.4 Changing settlement on Methana from the medieval period onwards 59
3.5 Present settlements on Methana 63
3.6 The village of Meghalo Khori: note steeper slopes above the village and gentler slopes below 65
3.7 Inscribed stone on Kounoupitsa's main church, dated 1824 67
3.8 Kypseli's original church: the western (left-hand) end was probably added to an older church in the 1840s 69
3.9 Above: exterior view of a mud-roofed house. Below: interior view of a mud roof 77
4.1 Grafting domesticated pear scions onto a wild pear tree 105
4.2 A laden mule on a mule track (*kalderimi*) 107
5.1 Two kinds of kinship systems 133

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

5.2 Barba Thanassis' fragmented landholding 163
6.1 A *kalivi* (field-house) 185
7.1 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 209
7.2 Fabvier's War of Independence fort – the Kastro Phavierou 217
7.3 A *gheranaki* (swipe) 243
7.4 A cistern-head inscribed with a date 247
7.5 An *ambari*. Above: exterior view. Below: interior view 251
7.6 The remains of an old rock-cut grape-treading floor near a mountain vineyard 253
7.7 The war memorial 265
8.1 Plan of the main study village 288
8.2 The growth of the Petronotis neighbourhood in the village of Liakotera 289
8.3 Kinship relationships continuing after death: a village cemetery with kinship 'neighbourhoods' 317
8.4 Sketch plan of the ownerships of an area of small irrigated plots 323
9.1 The distribution of Methana's churches 344
9.2 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 345
9.3 The church of Aghii Asomati (Taxiarkhai), with works in progress 361
9.4 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 365
9.5 Empty space transformed into a central place: the Moularobazaro. Buying wool after the service at the *panighiri* at Saint Epiphanios' extra-mural church 367
9.6 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 373

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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 arrenon* and the 1879 census 270
7.2 0/5 ages in the 1879 census: those significantly above 20% suggest many ages were guesswork 271
7.3 0/5 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

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978-0-521-86699-6 - Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography
Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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.

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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.

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

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.

α = a

αι = e

αυ = av or af, depending on whether the following letter is voiced or unvoiced

β = v

γ = gh (γ before ε, ι, υ, ει and οι 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 γ from γκ)

γκ = g

δ = dh (a sound similar to the th in 'then')

ε = e

ει = i

ευ = ev or ef, depending on whether the following letter is voiced or unvoiced

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Hamish Forbes
Frontmatter
More information

ζ = z
η = i
θ = th (a sound similar to the th in 'thin')
ι = i
κ = k
λ = l
μ = m
μπ = 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:

ë 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.

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