

STOMACHOMA

by a mazochtreya

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STOMACHOMA

From the words we utter through our mouths to the soil we toil with our hands, as a form of artistic practice, to being closer to the ground, where the functionality of cultivation becomes a performative practice in everyday life.

Dissection

*“Stomachoma”*¹ literally means “mouthsoil”. It is the purest, most lyrical way of expressing how a seed can sprout when spat directly out of the mouth and into the soil. It represents the active role between body and land. It is proof of the key role of language in our existence and the constant re-shaping of our understanding of the world and the ways in which we relate to it. It stands for a direct and violent way of existing on planet earth. Physical work, as a form of artistic practice, commences with the involvement of the body in physical labor, which is done either to make a living or to learn a craft or to research a subject or all of the above combined. In this case, it is based on cultivation. Going back to basics – the soil in this case – being closer to the ground, means observing the seasons, managing time as indicated by the environment and living based on the resources of a place, which means being closer to seasonal requirements, adapting to local needs, to the local vegetation, produce and weather. It also means adapting physically to the demands of the geology of the land where the *agroergo*² takes place.

1. “Stomachoma” is a compound noun formed by two Greek nouns, i.e. “stoma” and “choma” which mean mouth and soil respectively.

2. I will refer to “physical work as a form of artistic practice” as “agroergo”, a Greek compound noun, where “agro” refers to cultivation, farming and harvesting and “ergo” means “work, project, design”.

Abstract

As an artist and a local/foreigner, you become the architect of yourself.

For the purposes of this project, which lasted almost two years, I was part of an endeavor in search of local elements, such as soil, people, culture, folk stories and trees. I ended up with a treasure hold of gargantuan proportions, a trove of silent topographical treasures that are dear to me and ultimately, universal.

The island of Lesvos is the site for my research. The reason I chose this island is twofold: a) my paternal grandparents are from Lesvos b) it is a place that fills your soul and your eyes with its olive groves. The olive trees are indeed silent poetry for the soul.

My work began with my involvement in the olive harvesting on the island. I actively participated in the picking of olives twice. I was first introduced to the job in November 2019 when I learned the basics from an older generation of olive harvesters. In February 2021, I returned once more to the fields, but this time I was working with people closer to my age. My work on my thesis was concomitant and for the most part, remote. Although challenging, this proved invaluable, because it intensified the pressing need I felt to be amongst the olive trees. At the same time, gaining perspective certainly helped me to study my collection from another vantage point and to explore the method used for the working and manipulation of materials.

The focus of my research is primarily to explore the ways in which harvesting is done, in addition to tapping into the skills and technical know-how of generations of olive pickers. That is the main reason why I chose to be a part of their close-knit group. Also, by taking the plunge and breaching their circle, which employs mainly men, I was challenged to comprehend the current way of working in the olive fields and my own role in such a setup.

The significance of the olive tree as a symbol and an entity in the identity of the Mediterranean people never ceases to amaze me. On the island, rural life is still deeply rooted in its diverse landscape. In fact, the olive groves imply an incredibly rich socio-economic background. To me, the strong industrialized past of the island is evident, although today it is only visible in fragments, mainly through the ruins found all over the island.

STOMACHOMA

I find folk tradition meaningful for its objects, cultural narratives and its everyday rituals, but I remain critical of its strong affiliation with conservatism. Having experienced that very sensation, I hope to gradually construct a critical, perceptive blanket and weave a liberating flag blowing against the conservatism that drowns out tradition.

Finally, as a resident of this planet and an artist in this life, if there is one thing I consciously desire to achieve through my research and art, it is to detoxify myself of the nostalgia of the past and to denounce any system that feeds on exclusivity and discrimination. I wish to be taught collectively by the soil we toil with our hands, by the words we utter through our mouths and by the cosmos of the olive trees. Olive trees are witnesses to events, the tall observers of life through their centuries-old life-history. Through my work, I am addressing both my ancestors whom I have never met, and the people of here and now. Together.

As an artist and a local/foreigner, you become the savior of yourself.

Introduction

The *STOMACHOMA* research project detailed below has been composed as a system of action-relation, which imitates the experience of conducting research in an actual field, an olive field in this case. In such a process, the participation of an active self in an attempt to de-conform from the non-self in nature is required. The aim of this written accompaniment to my work is to convey this experience rather than delving into a profound formal explanation based solely on source material.

The following pages offer an insight into the themes of location, textiles, and the facets of cultural information or paradoxes, and they complement the approach to mystical representations explored in my artwork.

Concurrently, this thesis dives into the worlds of language, sub-language, and the meaning and sub-meaning of words. The reason for this is that my interest lies in understanding how the aforementioned influence our concept of reality and to what extent their power shapes the interrelationship between nature and social structure. Moreover, language and indeed dialect are playful, fluid systems of complex realities.

At the core of my thesis lies my work in the field, for which morphology is formed where the Body in Action appears to raise awareness, adaptability and a tangible contemplation of all living surroundings. An unexpected aftereffect appears on the scene when the entire experience transcends the mind in the form of newly created realities, that of sacrifice and ritual. Said topic is approached by examining ancient sources; it is only the beginning in a long-term process of excavation of an ancient, silent identity of the soul.

An issue of paramount importance, which is inextricably linked to my venture into the olive groves, is that of the dynamic role of a “foreign” (as opposed to “local”) apprentice and a female artist in a male-dominated sector. This fluid position was challenged on multiple occasions: working in the olive fields proved increasingly empowering, helping me to reclaim my femininity and to restore my masculinity.

Of course, my research also takes me back to the historical events that lead to the economic development of the island of Lesbos and its olive oil industry. In addition to examining the social web surrounding olive oil production and its relation to diverse peoples or nations, profiles of a political aesthetic were also traced and analyzed.

STOMACHOMA

I heed the call; I stand ready to be devoured and reborn.

greek salad with feta and olives
or a holistic manifesto of
a self-defiant non-self:

I approach the folkloristic way of working with the land; I learn techniques that I then implement in my artwork, which includes letters, artifacts, apocalypses and epiphanies, moments of sudden but not always amazing revelations, means of communication.

I embrace the title of *“foreigner”* (as I am referred to) and I re-interpret it as *“ντόπιος³ ξένος”*, for I feel more like a *“local foreigner”*

I find it equally important to be able to turn the page and move forward, to discern what is true as a *“ντόπιος ξένος”* - *“local foreigner”* compared to what is considered the local norm in a society like that of the village in which I find myself

I enter a culture and I become a court-like jester who entertains, an observer and a bystander, a connoisseur and an apprentice of nature herself

I praise the ingenuity that I recognize in the field and I choose to praise the *“table”* on which offerings and respect for the very being create a magnificent opportunity for bonding, critical dialogue, and the power to overcome and overthrow agro-toxicity⁴

I wish to recover my masculinity and let my femininity rise through my work in the olive groves as a nurturing element of the practice for a non-self

3. ντόπιος (is a Greek noun, an abbreviation of εντόπιος I t means that someone is a local a “ to the area someone who resides in the place where s/ he was born

4. Agro-toxicity: A term I have coined to refer to the male toxicity found in the agricultural world and which targets women. Agros Αγρός means grassland, field, farmland

THEMATOLOGY

The themes I have selected in my research are approached from three basic perspectives: intuition, observation and literature. I have chosen to present my experience and offer my view on re-inventing realities, rather than to resort to over-analysis.

In brief:

On Location: I move from geography to locality and nature.

On Textiles: I focus on the importance of this material and how I interpret it.

On Storing: I formulate both practical and symbolic thoughts.

I would like both the readers and viewers of my work to use their knowledge to freely navigate the concepts I have brought to the surface and to form their own critical ideas and opinions on the issues discussed.

On Location:

“For me, my homeland was Here and Now—not a place, not a time, a condition rather, or domain, enormous and yet intimate, close to the stars and the grasses.”

P. L. Travers⁵

Research location: the island of Lesbos⁶

(art)work materials: field techniques, comical paradoxes, silent storing, words-language, textiles, prints, (*agroergo*)

My works are often related to some sort of locality. I tend to question the borders of “legitimate being”, the difference between “to belong” and “belonging to”. There is a certain definition I give to the term “home”: *“Home is where one can breathe effortlessly”*. Once I began to seek this organic definition through re-education and re-rooting, I understood that the island would become the center of this venture.

Geographically speaking, Lesbos is located in the northeastern Aegean Sea. Its neighboring country is Turkey, from which it is separated by approx. 15 miles of sea. Its natural landscape consists of mountains and forests, olive groves, and some grassland. The island’s volcanic origin is manifested in several hot springs and two gulfs. The shape of the island resembles the leaf of a plane tree (*Platanus*). There are many aspects, geological and cultural, to be explored, but the connection of the southern part of Lesbos with the olive tree is the one I set out to understand.

The site of my research, the village of Plomari, is as unique and as insignificant as any other provincial, slightly off-the-beaten-track, part of the world. In contrast to its current state of ruin, when you walk its streets and alleys and observe the architecture, you understand that it must have been a busy and wealthy place in the past. But whatever the past might have been (and you will learn about some of it in this paper), the island exhales multifaceted meanings of locality, and I think that we

5. LaChapelle 1992 : 6

6. *Ἄεθος* is often called Mytilene in Greece, after its capital. It has an area of 1,633 km² with 321 kilometers of coastline making it the third largest island in Greece. It is separated from Turkey by the narrow «Mytilene Strait» Greek: *Στενό της Μυτιλήνης* Turkish: “Midilli Boğazi” and in late Paleolithic/Mesolithic times was connected to the Anatolian mainland until the end of the Last Glacial Period. Source: Wikipedia

should look at the present realities, and from our existing knowledge create new visions for life and the practice of art. My collection of artwork is equally based on my experience in the olive groves and on my own interpretation of what is to be said of this ancient example of cultivation and harvesting and its interrelation with the people.

I have endeavored to construct an artistic practice in a trial phase that is necessary to discover anew a craft, i.e. the “secrets” of picking olives, as well as finding other ways in which we can relate to our everyday surroundings. The “secrets” are the tangible act of picking olives, the everyday selective gestures that I choose to observe, the fantastic words/ worlds that I choose to document.

“We” are the newborns coming out of a state of a collectively lost mind of cultivation; we are the apprentices of nature returning to the land, thirsty to learn from the “old”. Not to be misinterpreted with any longing for the past:

“Old” means true, right, normal, in the flow of the universe.[...]“Old” because available to all-regardless of culture, race or place, who will set themselves down to the ground of their mind. We go about our Twentieth-Century fossil-fuel-fired tasks, trying to keep in touch with that vast resonance.⁷ We want to shed the molds of ignorance and set out on a quest to re-educate ourselves.

“Nature is not a place to visit, it is home-and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places.”

Gary Snyder⁸

7. LaChapelle 1992 : 27

8. Snyder 1990 : 7

On Textiles⁹

There is something about textiles that I find primordially irresistible. It is, I believe, their essential connection to our skin, to all human surfaces. They are tangible and ever-present. They seem light-weight and fluid. They remain one of the most notable platforms of transmission of cultural phenomena.

A textile can be, is home. A primary relationship arises between fabrics and architecture with a *“corresponding beginning. Their vast history starts from the role of providing shelter, shade and protection in the building envelope, the skin, originating from crudely stitched animal skins. The history, form and expression of physical woven construction and the use of membranes exist from the light tent structures of human habitation. The significance of the connection between the two disciplines allows and carries complex imprints of geographical, cultural, social and personal influences. Textiles are a powerful medium, rich with symbolic meaning and aesthetic significance.”*¹⁰

For example, the inhabited landscape of the Greek countryside has been shaped into a very particular mix of modern constructions and the paradoxes of political decisions, especially those of 1980, following the *“Metapolitefsi”*¹¹. Admittedly, it constitutes the so-called aesthetic of Greek decadence, which still remains visible in the semi-ruined villages of the country so many years later. Visually speaking, it cannot be described in words, you have to see it with your own eyes. It is a mixture of a once-promising neo-rich state that sought to erase (and dust off) any provincial, rural aesthetics in an effort to compete with its more affluent and refined European neighbors¹² and to stockpile money¹³.

The idea of a textile can extend to further symbolic connotations. I personally see the olive fields and the mountains, the coast and the riverbanks, the shaky cottages with their DIY rooftops in various,

9. Women have always produced and woven the fabrics of the world in particular textiles.

10. <https://ukdiss.com/examples/architecture-and-textiles.php>

11. Metapolitefsi (the Greek term designating a polity or regime change) is the longest period of political and social stability in Modern Greek history. It is a period in which, up until the onset of the financial crisis of 2007-2008, Greece and its people enjoyed unprecedented growth and wealth, most of it through borrowed money, as well as social and political liberties and rights.

12. Greece became a member of the EU in 1981.

13. What followed was the total absence of meritocracy.

random-sized tin panels, the olive press, the tools and the olive harvesting equipment as endless veils or textures that reveal information, cultural and comical paradoxes, political gestures, and everyday ephemerality. I acknowledge that the entire (picturesque) aesthetic of the village, no matter how appealing or false it seems from a certain perspective, does in fact say a lot about the current choices of its residents and what lives they wish to continue to lead. Cultures differ according to their jokes and visual nonsense which I find amusing.

Life in the fields, life in the village unveils an assorted collection of textiles before my very eyes. On my walks, I observe the remnants, the discarded objects, strewn garbage, marine residue like discarded seashells which I can only assume become entangled in the fishing nets¹⁴. Around the area of Tarsana¹⁵ you see bed covers thrown over barrels in which fishing nets are safely stored. The motorbike culture, the horse culture, the truck culture... all ways or details of the simple life, of day-to-day errands, of the web of life cast in the village influence the way I approach my art.

the surfaces I explore, both literally and metaphorically, and which I evoke in my artwork include:

- A. Soil, dirt, litter
- B. Cloths, covers, harvesting tarps and nets
- C. DIY – in-situ tools for and related to olive picking
- D. The clothing people choose to wear every day in the fields, etc.
- E. The know-how of the equipment and the olive pressing process
- F. Language, both body and oral, in the field or on the road
- G. The laundry hanging from the roofs or drying in the yards
- H. The familiarity of customs, folklore, ethnography and, last but not least, the rocky landscape and the steep slopes

14. One of the reasons why I prefer to work with used materials that I come across.
15. Tarsanas or Arsanas is a Greek vernacular term derived from the common maritime language of Byzantine-Turkish origin. This term mainly refers to small shipbuilding units and shipyards in which fishing boats and smaller vessels are kept for general maintenance, cleaning, painting and storage. This term is used as a name in many areas (such as coves), in which there are or have been similar facilities in the past.
Source: Wikipedia

On Storing

Storing, literally as well as metaphorically, are a foundation stone for me. The idea of storing includes the storing of culture, of words, of the world. Not for safekeeping per se, but for divulging and sharing with other people and places. It is a concept of subtle but continuous metamorphosis.

The idea of storage, on the other hand, is related to the idea of home and mobility. Since the beginning of mankind, there has been one particular plant that has caught the attention of our ancestors¹⁶. The gourd. It is one of the oldest plants, used by people as what we would call today a bag, to store tools, some food, etc. It is believed to have first been cultivated in Africa as many as 40.000 years ago. It was extremely useful, not only for our ancestors to keep their hands free, but also to make all sorts of things with. Its hard shell was (and still is) carved into cups, bowls, water bottles, plates, rafts, cricket cages... the list is endless. Strangely enough, in ancient times, in Greece, the people did not use any type of cloth to collect the olives (like they do now with tarps and nets); they just picked them by hand directly from the ground.

How things are stored, how things are transported, how we seal and fold surfaces, how we move equipment, in this case to work the fields, what technical methods are used to prepare for the harvest and what maintenance work is need, these are my main concerns. When I pick olives, I learn how to manipulate the tools and the materials needed to get the job done, so that the transfer of the olives and the efficient management of quantities is made easier. I believe that the technicality behind these tasks offers insight into the blossoming of spiritual activities, language inter-rooting, and political thought as one.

16. It is more likely that the plant made itself known to the travelling creatures that were our ancestors.

THEMATOLOGY

LEXICON

of Olive Harvesting and other related words in dialect

γλιτώματα (glitomata) = a celebration, it indicates that a season's agricultural work is done and that the summer break has finally arrived

κοκολογώ (kokologo) = the word imitates the sound made by hens and is used to describe how women olive pickers sound when gathering and picking the last olives from the ground, which is a job delegated to women

καλαθίδα (kalathida) = small straw basket

καστανιά (kastania) = food storage pot, to take with when picking olives

μαζοχτριγιά (mazochtreya) = female olive picker, who mostly picks olives from the ground

μπουλάδα (boulada) = tree

μπούρδα (burda) = in the field it refers to the sack for olives. Its origin is Albanian - burdhë – and it is type of sack. In Greek, it means a silly thing, a gaffe

ορδινιά (ordinia) = a small cloth, in which a snack is wrapped, e.g. cheese, bread, tomatoes and perhaps a piece of fruit

πιάσαμε το λαγό (piasame to lago) = literally means “we caught the rabbit”; metaphorically it means that we have almost finished picking the olives in the field

πύρος, πυριάζω - τσιτώνω (piros, piriazo-tsitono) = a handmade nail, used to secure and seal the sacks

σωθήρ (sothir) = an olive field surrounded by a stone fence

σιριάζω (siriazoz) = to call a female worker to help with the olive picking

ταϊφάς (taifas) = crew, from “Tayfa”, meaning “crew” in Turkish

τεζάρω (tezaroz) = stretching the tarps, nets, etc.

νταμάχι (damachi) = hard work

“We thus learn our native language not mentally but bodily.”
David Abram¹

THE MORPHOLOGY OF *agroergo*

The entire structure of this thesis is based on the physical practice of working in an olive field. The tool is the “Body in Action”. In addition to this practice, another type of expression arises, with its own connotations: “On Sacrifice”.

Agroergo is “physical work as a form of artistic practice”, where “agro” refers to cultivation, farming and harvesting and “ergo” means work, project, design. Practicing art and acquiring knowledge can also be done collectively by many participants. Working in the fields is conducive to this. What makes it different from any other agro-related work in any other way is the morphology of its completion. It requires the physical performance of an awakened body that adapts to labor/work/nature¹⁷, that aims to adapt within the “wild” and to re-root the (collective) self. For me, the definition of wild nature provided below truly resonates with my perspective on this subject:

“Wild and free” [...] Both words, profoundly political and sensitive as they are, have become consumer baubles. [...] To be truly free one must take on the basic conditions as they are—painful, impermanent, open, imperfect—and then be grateful for impermanence and the freedom it grants us. For in a fixed universe there would be no freedom. With that freedom we improve the campsite, teach children, oust tyrants. The world is nature, and in the long run inevitably wild, because the wild, as the process and essence of nature, is also an ordering of impermanence.

[...] Thoreau says ‘give me a wildness no civilization can endure’. That’s clearly not difficult to find. It is harder to imagine a civilization that wildness can endure, yet this is just what we must try to do. Wildness is not just the “preservation of the world,” it is the world.

Civilizations east and west have long been on a collision course with wild nature, and now the developed nations in particular have the witless power to destroy not only individual creatures but whole species, whole processes, of the earth. We need a civilization that can live fully and creatively together with wildness.”

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17. Nature as “The physical universe and all its properties”. Snyder 1990 : 9

18. Snyder 1990 : 6

In the world of olive cultivation, I had a glimpse of unfair attitudes, unsustainable practices and purely lucrative intentions. Conversely, my theory on our involvement seeks to marginalize such phenomena and to highlight another, new and conscious relation to the natural world of the olive tree.

Body in Action

Technicality - Tangibility - Language¹⁹

First of all, we should acknowledge the fact that when working the land, when using our hands to tend to and pick the fruit of the tree, our very being is imbued with a specific, almost biological sense of self-fulfillment. Unfortunately, what twisted, contemporary living does to human beings, is to constantly undermine the importance of this aforementioned process for the sake of profit and socio-political power. The body awakens the mind; therefore, keeping bodies asleep and motionless is a perfect way of disciplining the masses. This takes its toll on the ethical evolution, sustainable development and mental health of humanity. Undoubtedly, its impact is obvious to the natural environment. Therefore, when we are increasingly confronted with extreme local and global plights, we are finally expected to look for ways to re-navigate the world on an organic level.

By applying the practice of *agroergo in situ*, where the harvest occurs, I learn and I unlearn the techniques of the job. As I come into direct contact with the soil, matter is interpreted on an intimate scale and other types of realities are built from and for the cosmos of the olive tree.

dirty and out-spoken:

My decision to delve into this topic was sparked by my personal desire to answer the call of the island. It was a journey that called for my strength as a female artist and as a modern daughter of a generation that knows very little about its roots. In the process of gathering information about the inhabitants of the village and their roots and customs back in the day, I discovered that our family name is affiliated with the homonymous island of Tinos. Its people came to the island of Lesbos for their technical skills as church builders. My paternal grandmother, on the other hand, was from an important family of the island. Her father was a merchant who often travelled to Turkey for long periods of time, where much of his business was conducted. His trading business flourished, until the Greek genocide, including the Pontic genocide²⁰.

19. "Language is not a fixed or ideal form, but an evolving medium we collectively inhabit, a vast topological matrix in which the speaking bodies are generative sites, vortices where the matrix itself is continually being spun out of the silence of sensorial experience." Abram 1997 : 84

20. (Γενοκτονία των Ελλήνων, Genoktonia ton Ellinon) i.e. the systematic killing

All this, together with the fact that I grew up in a family with architectural ties and that from a young age I found myself helping my father with all sorts of design projects, I quickly felt a strong connection with the island. As it turned out, in my attempt to learn about the olive and all the work it brings with it, which when I started was very much a mystery to me, I managed not only to enter an agricultural domain that doesn't usually employ women, unless they are related to the male workers, but also to learn how I stand in the field. Without expecting it in advance, I suddenly found myself reclaiming the wronged, underprivileged and misrepresented real female nature.

For me, the Body in Action, an active body, became for the first time a fully-aware condition of interaction with the worlds that surround me. Thus, an active body, even far from the olive groves, has the potential to acquire other dimensions in art-making:

“Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word ‘silence’, that one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word ‘impossible’ and writes it as ‘the end’”.²¹

Now this body indicates to me that the choices made are crucial for valuing a newly creative and “honest”²² relationship with planet earth. Choosing a different path than the one that the world is heading down, is a critical move for a responsible role and an active political stand. If that means that as an individual I should unlearn and challenge everything I was raised with, so be it.

As simple as it might sound, but not at all naive, I can claim, with almost absolute certainty, that there is nothing more honest and meaningful than breathing the sea-salty air or walking up through the mountainous

of the Christian Ottoman Greek population of Anatolia carried out during World War I and its aftermath (1914–1922). Source : Wikipedia

21. Cixous, 1976 : 886

22. “Honest weather”, the conceptual view of a Nordic man, Walter Götsch, on very cold temperatures: “It is a kind of weather that does not hide from itself. It comes straight back and looks you in the eyes. Harsh weather will make roots strong and the eagle flies high after the storm”.

hills, among the trees and weeds while heading off to work, whatever “work” is.

“Writers and artists we free ourselves in order to imagine a healthy world because how are we gonna build it if we don’t imagine it? We need to imagine the humane being so that we can put that archetype out there, so we can become it.”²³

Manual work is a form of survival in a world that is already too tangibly distant. “*Mano*” means “hand” in Latin. But also “man-as-man”. In our lives, we are unconsciously submerged in non-tangible realities²⁴, which by their design are not harmful; it is the way we make use of them that proves problematic. What is actually lost through this use is the haptic and graspable, which can bring us closer to our own being and to sense-making activities of the world we inhabit, because it becomes comparable, touchable and rooted. It is a process of relating to the natural matter and the natural world that includes it.

And while the Body in Action is important in the *agroergo*, there is one more parameter that I like to look at: the language of olives, nature and the village. In my mind, the words that catch my attention are like doors to a world with many truths and often humor. I trace their roots and their correlations with other words, but in reality there is no fixed origin, as in this world, interconnection and interrelation have no limits. This is something I like and I manipulate for my own projects. I believe that fluidity, or flexibility if you will, are features of change and constant learning:

“Language is like some kind of infinitely interfertile family of species spreading or mysteriously declining over time, shamelessly and endlessly hybridizing, changing its own rules as it goes.

Words are used as signs, as stand-ins, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects (and informs) the shifting values of the peoples whose minds it inhabits and glides through. We have faith in “meaning” the way we might believe in

23. Maxine Hong Kingston in the video “A World of Ideas: Maxine Hong Kingston Part 2” <https://vimeo.com/33660963>

24. Aka : tech, media, internet, currencies, software, etc.

wolverines—putting trust in the occasional reports of others or on the authority of once seeing a pelt. But it is sometimes worth tracking these tricksters back."²⁵

Naturally, perspectives on the creation and symbolism of language vary, especially when it comes to ancient Greek that has long been the basis of Western thought. I find it very positive that there is a growing plethora of all-encompassing and more accessible critical theories against the Western bubble and I would like to embed here an excerpt from Dolores LaChapelle's view on the Greek written language and how it further alienated European thought from the natural world in contrast to the Chinese thought on writing and how it relates to nature:

"Because it did not develop out of their spoken language, in the Greek written language neither the individual letter nor the syllable had any meaning in itself. This seems so normal to us that we cannot conceive of any other possibility; but in other written languages such is not the case. For instance, each of the letters, J or H or V means nothing to us. But the meaning of each of these letters to the ancient Jews was so powerful that to put them all together into the word, JHVH (Jehovah) was blasphemous. The complete word was too powerful for human beings to utter. Near Eastern written languages developed directly out of the spoken language so that the meaning remained present to them in the sound of each letter in other words, orally.

In China, the meaning is visual. It lies in the individual ideographs of the Chinese written word. Their written script grew directly out of the drawings of actual physical things in the environment, which had been scratched on the ancient oracle bones. Thus, even today, the written character for each word has some strokes which have to do with the human being, some with nature, and quite often some with the gods. For example, if we analyze the Chinese character which means "abundant, rich, fertile, prosperity, plenty" we find that the origin goes back to the pictograph of a sacrificial vessel with a bunch of green plants in it. In this one written character we have some of the lines showing the sacrificial vessel, other lines showing the vessel made by humans, which was to serve the gods and still other lines showing the bounty of nature contained within it. Thus the underlying meaning of prosperity must include all three aspects, nature, man and gods of their world. There is no possibility of the 'arrogance of humanism' here. Everything connects with everything else in the Chinese organic philosophy of life."²⁶

25. Gary Snyder 1990 : 7, 8

26. LaChapelle 1992 : 24

It is imperative that we examine diverse views on written and spoken languages and ask ourselves how we relate to them. I think there are endless forms of expression, endless structures, that have yet to be discovered. Unfortunately, there are also those used in order to cause harm, but I will not dwell on that. In contrast to what is taught in schools, language – as I mentioned earlier – is something incredibly fluid and not fixed. After all, it is only one medium of expression.

In conclusion, words, or entities if you prefer, are all equally valuable to the everyday flow of life. All entities can relate to each other, neither in a solid way nor through power relations, but rather in multiple fluid ways. Their resulting meaning/making creates images where every symbolized part counter-balances the other. Examples of beauty and life-making can be seen and read all over the world²⁷, especially in places the West has marginalized and labeled exotic. If only we could incite our mouths to speak our truth.

“...if human language arises from the perceptual interplay between the body and the world, then this language ‘belongs’ to the animate landscape as much as it ‘belongs’ to ourselves.”
David Abram²⁸

27. ...or at least the parts that remain inviolable.

28. Abram 1992 : 82

*heavenly summit of the
mountain descending
Sappho²⁹*

adaptability and movement in the world of the olive field:

“Man has ceased to adjust his body to his environment; he now adjusts his environment to his body.”³⁰

In the south of the island of Lesvos, the olive groves are located in hilly areas, a fact that is not to be taken lightly. In fact, the ground is usually so steep that, most times, the manual labor required is highly demanding. A person’s physical endurance is called into action. The harvesting season begins in late October and may last until February.

Harvesting olives means being in touch with the land, with the soil, the fruits and the trees. On the haptic side of things, sensing your labors through tangibility is an ability that you choose to develop over time and with practice. What this means is that you become aware of the “here and now”. Concentrating on a particular task is your main goal and the focus of your thoughts and actions is the land and the harvest. You let the soil, the sacks, the cold weather, the warm days influence your presence in the fields. You are part of this world and its laws. You relate to it like a Chinese character embodying words and worlds.

Your personal equipment and clothing should definitely include a good and supportive pair of work or hiking boots, and a lot of layering – especially around the torso – to keep you warm and dry. As an outer layer a vest jacket functions as a great protective and breathable garment that allows movement. Keep your knife close. Wear a scarf on both hot and cold days. Choose a pair of trousers with a good number of easily accessible pockets: they’re great for storing nails. Put your phone away. Wear a smile. Be confident. Breathe in the mountain air. Drink lots of water.

From a practical point of view, the tasks are shared as follows and are repeated in a chain of work:

The Ραβδιστής (ravdistis) is in charge of one tree at a time. S/he shakes the branches by using either a traditional Τέμπλα (tebla = wooden stick) or by operating an electric one that is powered by a mobile battery.

This causes the olive fruit and quite a few leaves etc. to fall to the ground. The electric τέμπλα looks like a big long fork; its tines overlap as they move fast.

The rest of the group (varying from 2+ people) is responsible for positioning the nets and tarps under and around each tree, gathering the olives, cleaning the batch from most branches and leaves and stacking them in τσουβάλια - μπούρδες (tsouvalia – bourdes), i.e. sacks.

When the olives have been picked from one tree, the ραβδιστής moves on to the next one in the row. The rest of the group continues to sort the olives strewn across the nets and to move the nets and tarps to the next trees.

To secure a net you need to press a nail into the medium-soft ground and then stretch out the net by attaching its bottom sides, which are tied to ropes, to a tree's branch and tie a knot tight enough to do the job but loose enough to be easily untied after the olives have been harvested. It is interesting to note how with the help of the surrounding trees a tree is harvested. It is an intricate network of knots.

Next, you need to use a πέτρα (stone) as a βαρίδι (weight) to help pull down the rope over a branch before making a knot. The nets or tarps need to be held down with stones so as to create a sort of wave in which the olives can fall, and not run off onto the ground.

When the time comes to clean the olives collected in the “textiles” (aka the tarps and nets), it's best to look at your fellow olive pickers and observe their movements. Actually, an olive ταιφάς (olive picking

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crew) always varies its techniques to some extent, meaning there are different ways for tasks to be performed. Together, you kneel or sit next to the crew and sort the fruit that has collected in the large branches - which are not valuable at this stage.

Remember that in the field, you do as the weather commands. There are times you will either not go to harvest or you will need to stop working and return home e.g. because of strong winds which can blow the nets and tarps away, meaning your collected olives fly off too; heavy rain, or worse, snow make the work (almost) impossible.

For me, these techniques can be as informative as they are speculative and abstract. This means that when making the tools for olive picking, knowledge is embodied in ways that follow you in your everyday life. I use this knowledge in my art. And that is the most intriguing part of the methods I explore.

“...meaning sprouts in the very depths of the sensory world, in the heat of the meetings, encounter, participation”³¹

As I explained earlier, the geo-morphology of the region calls for special know-how of the olive groves. When working in the mountains, you need to be sure you have brought all your equipment and tools along from the beginning of your shift. If you need something at some point, you can take comfort in the knowledge that you will have it in the afternoon, unless it is essential. In that case, the person in charge will go to the nearest village, garage, etc. to retrieve or repair it, in the case of a piece of malfunctioning equipment.

31. Abram 1997 : 75

Technicality and functionality are related to our tactile ability and the decision to drop our defenses so as to transcend the surface and penetrate other dimensions that are essentially more familiar:

*"Yet we are still called on to wrestle with the curious phenomenon of the complex human self, needed but excessive, which resists letting the world in."*³²

Thus, from adapting our habits to the needs of the earth we care for, to a process of self-adaptation to the morphology of the soil, we have a continuous flow. On or off the beaten path, the outdoors is a great and tough school:

*"We must wander through it to learn and memorize the field-rolling, crinkled, eroded, gullied, ridged (wrinkled like the brain)-holding the map in the mind." [...] 'The perfect way is without difficulty. Strive hard!' This is the fundamental paradox of the way."*³³

Admittedly, working the olive fields is not easy, but on a spiritual level, the reward is manifest. And even if this experience of the Body in Action is very personal, what does occur is a dispersal of the ego. The landscape becomes a place, the place replaces the self, and they become interconnected. Some might still think that spirituality is not connected with the physical world, but they most likely have swallowed another commercial and propaganda pill. Let them be.

32. Snyder 1990 : 145

33. Snyder 1990 : 149

On Sacrifice

and a ritual of synergy in the incorporation of the “unspoken” into words or praxis

To perform on/off the olive field means: to apply - to sacrifice - to participate - to listen - to orchestrate - to understand - to observe - to create - to preserve - to accumulate – to self-reject - to let go - to laugh – to welcome – to archive – to breathe

“Repetition and ritual and their good results come in many forms. Changing the filter, wiping noses, going to meetings, picking up around the house, washing dishes, checking the dipstick—don’t let yourself think these are distracting you from your more serious pursuits. Such a round of chores is not a set of difficulties we hope to escape from so that we may do our “practice” which will put us on a “path”—it is our path.”³⁴

The reason for bringing the topic of sacrifice and ritual forth is my need to find the sources and semantics of such events in the social web made up of the peoples and communities that inhabited the different territories in ancient Greece. Remnants, beliefs, habits, masquerades, mystic rituals, all of which have traveled down the centuries to today’s Orthodox ceremonies and Greece’s eastern amalgams.

No easy task, considering that the religions and rituals of that time, as well as their central figures, have been simplified significantly in recent centuries, even in the Greek education system, where nothing is taught beyond the typical representation of the twelve gods and the most memorable myths involving them. What a loss for the people who could truly grow and enrich their spiritual lives by learning about such diversity, that existed in many places and many years ago.

As a result, there have been many times I have strayed from the ancient Greek standards and any identification with them, because the values they advertise have little to do with the values that I practice.

What appears as a multiverse in the rituals, sacrifice rituals and myths I explore, is an interrelated conception of the natural world. Thus, in everyday life, these ritualistic practices function as networks that restore the private and collective self in an inner/outer bond with nature. Perhaps, from my point of view, the most crucial element of this process or

34. Snyder 1990 : 153

of the way of life is that there is no strict boundary between the being and work (in nature), the social bonds and the environment in which they are all developed. There is no classification or even expertise. Though of course, when one goes into these mysteries it becomes clear that these were specific events and that their activities were precisely designed.

I have no intention of overanalyzing the topic, neither from a historical nor from an anthropological perspective. My absolute interest lies in the fact that upon reading about it, I recover pieces of my own ancient core/self and cross-reference the reasons why my practice results in similar essences, senses and unspoken mysteries that complete the puzzle. Accordingly, I have opted to cite a number of references and share some of my thoughts.

“How do I work with mystery if I am denied the exotic? You know exoticism is just sort of a cheap way of denying something that’s true mystery. In life there is deep mystery, but what people in the west have done is to say that ‘mystery belongs to the orient, we don’t have mystery’. What happens is that we deny what’s truly exotic and mysterious in ourselves.”³⁵

a smoky becoming:

The verb *“θυσιάζω”* = sacrifice is derived from *“θύω”³⁶*: *The basic meaning is “to smoke.” Similarly, in Hebrew and Hittite, the verb “to do” is used in the sense of “to sacrifice”. Indeed, this is what it means “to act,” «ρᾶζειν», operari (whence “sacrifice” is Opfer in German) – the name merely covers up the core of the action with a euphemism.“*

“To do”. This might be the core of the action itself as well as the fact that in mysteries or rituals people were “not acting”, like some sort of theater, but they were actually present, communing. Current daily communions may include cooking and sharing a meal (a standard practice in Mediterranean cultures), walking, picking herbs, training in groups for difficult tasks and other various and countless examples.

This reminds me of aspects of the repetitive work needed in the field and its aftereffect on the process of letting go of the ego and embracing something or someone else:

35. Maxine Hong Kingston in the video “A World of Ideas: Maxine Hong Kingston Part 2” <https://vimeo.com/33660963>

36. “θύω” means I produce smoke. The verb «θυσιάζω», which means to sacrifice, derives from it. Bukert 1983 : 3

“We study the self to forget the self [...] when you forget the self, you become one with the ten thousand things [...] ten thousand things means all of the phenomenal world. When we are open that world can occupy us.”³⁷

In ancient Greece, sacrificial rituals, in most cases, sat between encountering death and affirming life. They consisted of a moment of preparation, a frightening central moment and restitution.

In every part of Greece, there were variations on the interpretation of the ritual, because every ritual was bound to permanent local groups and therefore to localities. But generally, the form would be the same as the one described above.

“Sacrificial killing is the basic experience of the ‘sacred’. [...] Antithesis and tensions are the stuff of the ritual [...] Not just the religious cult but the order of society itself takes shape in sacrifice [...] The bliss of encountering divinity finds expression in words, and yet the strange and extraordinary events that the participant in the sacrifice is forced to witness are all the more intense because they are left undiscussed.”³⁸

On so many different levels, in mysterious entreaties or in sports initiations and victories, both of which pay tribute to some mythical hero or god, sacrificial ceremonies take place.

“It comprises savagery versus clarity, lack of inhibition versus awareness of limitations, female versus male, proximity to death versus affirmation of life: this is the circular course that sacrificial ritual charts again and again, renewing life by encountering death.”³⁹

The Τριποδικός λέβητας/ The Tripod Cauldron is basically a large kettle used over an open fire. I imagine it was made of cast iron back in the day. *“Cooking in a kettle is clearly a cultural achievement and an essential part of the rite.”⁴⁰* Meat was cooked (and stored) in these kettles.

37. Snyder 1990 : 150

38. Bukert 1983 : 3, 84

39. Bukert 1983 : 124

40. Bukert 1983 : 83

As for the role of those attending the ceremonies, their position and activity in the ritual was determined by their social class, which would also indicate if the participants might enjoy some of the meat of the sacrificed animal or not. In many areas, the meat was separated into specific pieces, half of which were boiled and half of which were roasted. This is what happened at many a gruesome banquet.

A woman at Delphi, known as the Pythia, always took on the role of tripod master, of the oracle:

*"The tripod was kept in the temple's innermost area, the adyton, which was open to only a few. Those who came for advice could probably have seen what was happening only from a distance; they would have seen the consecrated woman sitting on the tripod, would have heard her altered voice and thus have known that Apollo's word was passing through her lips. [...] it was simply subjective opinion and traditional belief that the tripod rocked and shook in the murky room, that a power from the depths was at work when the Pythia spoke or, rather 'sang' and 'screamed'."*⁴¹

The tripod kettle was so meaningful to the sacrifices at Olympia that it was even selected as a symbol for a temple dedicated to Zeus.

In fact, ancient Greek sacrifice was so hardcore and bloody that I think no one today would believe that this practice belonged to the same peoples on whom major parts of Western civilization were based. The rituals became known as a result of the stories of people who after eating human flesh turned into werewolves, or the sons of bears, people who returned to life as dolphins, people who indulged in anthropophagy and all sorts of metamorphoses.

I wonder where all that familiarity stands with the gruesomeness, the animal spirits, the sacredness of all acts of (our) nature, with flesh, blood, death, or hunting. How ironic that rituals and mythology were westernized and colonized by the same people who exalted them. Where is the mystery?

I wish to focus on the feeling that as an abstract idea and in a metaphorical sense, the tripod kettle concentrates oracle powers and can predict the successful or devastating outcome of an event. Your actions can be

41. Bukert 1983 : 122, 123

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mirrored back and forth and the idea you think you are shaping about your surroundings is constantly changing under the watchful eye of the smoky monster, that transmits serenity, eternity, and destruction altogether. The kettle utters the essence of what is present, what is to be reborn and what has been catastrophically realized. Silently.

When finally (es)sensed,
no one can deny the ultimate allure of the oracle entities.
That is, the Mediterranean effect of a sea of olive trees.

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σωθήρ/ SOTHIR

*olive grove surrounded by a stone fence

A look at the social, religious and economic landscape of the island. Selective scrutiny of a world that still partly believes in the doctrine of the parthenogenesis of human prosperity. Eternal illusions of ownership.

Labor Dynamics

In this particular agricultural crew, I came face to face with a very interesting yet challenging game of power and inclusion. Naturally, I felt responsible for being honest and willing to work as an olive harvest apprentice / artist with my fellow olive pickers. Working the olive fields is not easy for anyone, especially for those whose income depends on it.

The power dynamic of the group I came to be a part of was somehow blurry in the beginning, but became clearer as the days progressed. There were some members who had been working with my friend/boss for quite some time, and who had enough experience to perform the most demanding of tasks, namely picking the olives off the tree. The rest of us fell easily into this dynamic chain, being more or less active, depending on our skills and experience. I can with confidence say that the working atmosphere was somehow balanced and pleasant from the beginning, because of the young age of the workers and the reassuring character and respect of my friend/boss.

That wasn't the case of my first visit back in November 2019. At that time, I was working with a different crew. During my two weeks of observing and researching their activities, and one week working in the fields, I experienced what I can only – and rather woefully – refer to as casual, sexist behavior on the part of some of the male members of the group. Upon returning this year and having consolidated my ideas and objectives on the matter, I was ready to interact on a completely different level and reject any agro-toxicity that could affect me negatively, especially my art.

I wonder: where are all the women proprietors of the olive groves?

caution: men-at-work!

In the field, men are at the top of the hierarchy; after all, there are almost no women working in the olive fields these days. In the past, the groves would be filled with families that would spend the whole day picking olives, enjoying their breaks together and sharing a meal in the fields, before continuing with their work until the sun set. Through this activity, of course, they were not only creating a tradition in agricultural work, but also engaging with each other and naturally, establishing rituals and customs in their everyday life. The women had the position of the *“Μαζόχτρεγια”* - Mazhochtreya (female picker): they would pick every single olive that fell off the tarps and nets. The olive fruit was so precious on the market that literally nothing would be left behind. At the end of the harvest, the ground would be cleared and all fruits would be collected and taken to the press.

As a sweet apple reddens
on a high branch

At the tip of the topmost bough:
The apples-pickers missed it.

No, they didn't miss it:
They couldn't reach it.

Sappho⁴²

Kinesis and Identities

Concerning the later history of the Greek economy and migration, there is a major subject worth discussing, i.e. the immigration of Albanians and the crucial role that they have played in the economic development of Greece.

How did I come to this reference? A high percentage of olive workers in Greece are Albanians. Indeed, some of my fellow olive workers were of Albanian descent. Some were born in Albania and then immigrated with their parents as newborns to Greece or they were born in Greece to Albanian parents, thus becoming first generation Greek-Albanians. There is of course one last category of Albanians who work in the fields, those that come to Greece⁴³ with a 3 month visa for seasonal work in the olive fields (among other employment sectors).

These migrants are employed mainly for jobs that are physically demanding. The reasons for this can be explained as follows: firstly, because of the discriminatory attitude that Greek society has towards them. Hatred swelled when waves of Albanians fleeing a totalitarian regime migrated to Greece in the '90s and started to work construction, filling numerous positions that Greeks had often snubbed. It is implicitly understood that Albanian construction workers have built contemporary Greece.

“Albania remains one of the poorest countries in Europe with a high unemployment rate, particularly amongst the youth – some 28 per cent of young people aged 15-29 years are unemployed.”⁴⁴

Racism against Albanians is exacerbated due to the difference in religious faith. Greeks are mainly Christians. In Albania, 56.7% of the population (2011 Census figures) are Muslim, the rest are Catholics, Orthodox Protestants, etc.

“In 1967, Albania declared itself an atheist state. Religious persecution continued until the fall of Communism in 1990, at which point Albanians embraced their religious identities once again. Believers of all faiths began to return to their places of worship and slowly rebuild sacred places that were damaged or destroyed during the Communist period.”

43. When the migrant workers enter the country legally

44. Máire Rowland, “Is Albania the last beacon of religious tolerance in Europe?”

Having faced harsh living conditions and an extreme Communist past in Albania, it comes as no surprise that Albanian migrants take up jobs in the construction or agricultural sectors, which demand high physical endurance. Then again, when they choose to reside in Albania, because living there is so cheap, and work in Greece, they earn enough to live a comfortable life without working an entire winter in Albania. This seasonal work may include construction work in the summer and farming in the winter.

Of course, Albanians and Greek-Albanians never cease to encounter racist and discriminatory behavior. Not only from Greeks, but from their own people too. For Greek-Albanians, it is common to be referred to as a “Greek bastard” when visiting Albania; when living in Greece, they are known as “Albanian bastards”.

Unfortunately, this inherited fear of the “Other”, of different cultural groups and the conservatism that surrounds migrants is not new to the collective memory. Perhaps once again the abstraction of western European thought in language towards nature applies to the abstraction of entire peoples and ethnic groups.

By making these important historical and cultural references to Albanian-Greeks, I would like to juxtapose the paradox of “Greek nationality”, national pride and its effect on migrants and other minorities.

Let us not forget that since Greece officially became independent in 1821 (200 years ago this year), the implemented national plan was to successfully cleanse what it means to be Greek of the east microbe:

“[...] from the contamination it suffered for centuries, by the tastes of various eastern peoples, and help the Greeks to identify themselves as European subjects.”⁴⁵

All this to reclaim an “authentic and glorious ancient past” and to establish a Greek European presence that could stand as powerful as the European identity, character and aura.

For generations, Greece has been brainwashing its subjects to idealize Europe and look up to the West. Greece will never progress or overcome its crypto-hating self if it doesn't fully embrace its 100% east and Ottoman roots and the intercultural influence of other minorities.

Traces of intercultural exchange can be seen in the whole of contemporary Greek culture. And it has been systematically demonized for generations. From our common language idioms with Albanian, like Arvanitika⁴⁶, to our shared and extremely tasty and rich cuisine with Turkey and the Slavic countries. From music and orchestras from Asia Minor⁴⁷ to the 300 words of Turkish origin we use every day in the Greek language.

Greece will always be known as the white-house-blue-waters "poster boy" of a tourism commercial, because that is the only thing it can subjectively and apolitically offer to global consumers who rush to spend their money in the land of summer, sea and sun.

46. Arvanitika (Latin: arbërisht) is a branch of the Tosk dialect of the Albanian language spoken in present-day southern Albania as well as in some parts of Greece. It is an endangered language. Source: Wikipedia

47. For example, Rebetiko originated in the music of the larger, mainly coastal cities of today's Asia Minor, where large Greek communities resided during the Ottoman era. In these cities, the cradles of rebetiko were the ouzeri, the hashish dens (tekedes) with their hookahs, the coffee shops and even prison. Source: Wikipedia

hajde moj
ler gjerat ne shpi
do ndalojme te Gucci & Lui V
hadje moj
ikim ne Greqi
eshte sezoni, do vjelim ulli

Come on, Come on
Leave things at home
We will stop at Gucci & Lui V
Come on, Come on
Let's go to Greece
T'is the season, we will harvest olives

(A satirical internet hit in Albanian my fellow olive pickers
were singing and which they happily shared with me)

STOMACHOMA
OLIVE STATE

The Village of Plomari

Plomari's first name was "Potamos" (which means river), due to the River Sedountas running through it. The village was built in the mid-19th century, when its inhabitants, no longer living in fear of sea pirates, decided to leave Megalochori (the old village of Plomari located in the mountains that is still inhabited today) and transfer their homes to the "wet valley", at the advice of their compatriot, Benjamin of Lesvos. In fact, that wet valley, the sea, had plenty to offer them.⁴⁸

It is commonly said that Lesvos is the island of the olive tree. About 11,000,000 olive trees are estimated to live on the island. Now take the time to stop and think about this fact for a second: all these trees were planted by people, one by one! Traces of a pre-historic olive mill were found in the area of Thermi. The history of the olive tree and olive oil goes back 3,000 years.

The geographical position of Lesvos offered its inhabitants the opportunity to develop a strong sea trade with the ports in the East (Smyrna, for example). Plomari built its own ships, of course, not only for fishing but also for shipping olive oil and soap abroad. The olive oil industry of Lesvos, and in particular Plomari, flourished in the period 1780-1840.

48. <https://www.visitplomari.com/history/>

Olive Oil Soap

According to Greek folk tales, soap originated from ancient Lesbos⁴⁹. The islanders worshipped Artemis, the goddess of hunting, and would offer up sacrifices to her. A tale narrates that when the pouring rain carried down the river the leftover fat of plant and animal derivatives combined with wood ash, it created a yellow stream of water. The women washing their clothes in the river noticed that this yellow liquid was leaving their garments cleaner than just plain water.

Another legend has it that soap was named after Sappho, the poet, who lived between 630 BC - 570BC on the island of Lesbos. In Plomari, they believe that Sappho herself discovered the magical powers of soap! The story goes like this: One day Sappho was traveling by boat but the weather was quite stormy and windy, and the sea choppy. Suddenly, a ceramic pot that was filled with olive oil broke into pieces and the olive oil spilled onto the surface of the boat and mixed with some leftover ash. Indeed, in older times they used to clean the boats with sea water and ash.

There are other Mediterranean cities that claim to be the inventors of soap. Cities like Marseille, Genoa, Venice, Bari and Castile were notable olive oil producers and they produced soap too.

In other words, the sea routes not only played a major role in the trading of products, but also in the exchange of knowledge and in the intermingling of diverse cultures.

It was at the end of the 18th century that Plomari's soap production began to flourish. By the 19th century, Plomari was a fully industrialized city. And funnily enough, this small dot on the map shared a sense of brotherhood with Marseille as a result of their shared soap heritage and the significance of their soap industry.

49. In History: The name "Lesvos" in Ancient Greek means "forested" or "woody", possibly a Hittite borrowing, as the original Hittite name for the island was Lazpa. An older name for the island that was maintained in Aeolic Greek was Ἴσση (Issa). In Greek mythology, Lesvos is known to be the son of Lapithus (brother of Centaur) and the grandson of Aeolus. Lesvos was also the "eponymous hero" of the island of Lesbos, that is, the person who gave his name to this island. This happened because an oracle told him to go and settle in Lesbos, and he obeyed. There he married Makareas' daughter, Mithymna (who gave her name to the town of Mithymna now commonly called Molyvos.) Molyvos is located in the northwest part of the Island. Source: Wikipedia

how to make olive oil soap:

A FRAGMENTED RECIPE, TAKEN FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE SOAP COMPANY
“FRIXOS A. METAXAS”, PLOMARI - MYTILENE - HELLAS EST. 1892

(Incomplete due to the magic of alchemy. Do not attempt to reproduce the recipe.)

SOAP WITH ORANGE BLOSSOM PERFUME

Ingredients:

680g olive oil
700g vegetable fat
200g sodium hydroxide
250g distilled water
60ml neroli essential oil
A few oranges

Equipment:

1 glass jug
1 beaker
1 kitchen scale
2 laboratory thermometers
Plastic containers of various shapes to use as molds
1 wooden spoon
1 cooking pot
1 big knife
1 cheese grater

Instructions:

1) Pour the sodium hydroxide into the glass jug and carefully add the distilled water. Keep children away from this step in the recipe. Use one of the thermometers to measure the temperature of the mixture. Wait till it drops to 36.6 degrees Celsius.

2) In the cooking pot, slowly melt the vegetable fat on low heat. Add the olive oil and put the mixture aside. Use the second thermometer to measure the temperature of the liquid. It should drop to 36.6 degrees Celsius.

3) When both of the mixtures reach the same temperature, i.e. 36.6 degrees Celsius, mix them together by pouring the liquid in the jug into the fat. Now, the process of creating soap begins.

4) Oil the plastic molds well and pour the liquid mixture into them. Cover without closing or sealing and leave to rest for a day.

5) The next day, uncover the molds and leave them to dry in the open air for another day.

6) On the third day, remove the soap from the molds and cut it into pieces.

7) Leave the soap to dry and harden fully for 10 days.

This is why when strolling through the village, when you see the old soap factories, you suddenly realize how their architectural layout served a very special purpose: spacious floors with wide windows that offered light and fresh air for the drying process of the soap.

What it means to be “Greek” and the economy during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the olive oil industry on the island of Lesbos up to the mid-20th century

It is of increasing importance to clarify that in this period the term “Greek” existed not only to describe the ethnic Greek-speaking populations, but the Slavic- and Albanian-speaking populations as well. All three ethnic groups shared three important characteristics:

- a) their knowledge of the Greek language,
- b) their Christian Orthodox dogma, and
- c) the fact that they were merchants

Therefore back then, to be a “Greek” meant that one had a vital role in the economy of the land and in the trade sector. It wasn’t until the 18th century that the term “Greek” started to define a shared ethnic origin, empowered by the Greek bourgeois enlightenment movement, shaped by a multi-faceted working class and a partly proletarian power.

The Greek territories - as we know them today – have been under Ottoman Rule since 1453, when the Ottomans occupied Istanbul. During the course of the 18th century, and at the beginning of the 19th century, the land was ruled by the dominant Ottoman Empire, with some exceptions (the Ionian islands, or Eptanisa). Despite the fact that the Greek Revolution erupted in 1821, Lesbos was occupied by the Ottoman Turks until 1912 and Plomari was one of the first villages of Lesbos Island to be liberated on the 8th of November 1912.

The Greek Revolution was politically driven by class interests and clashing class interests of a “wannabe nation of power”. In fact, it began because of its people who, due to the increasing use of the Greek language in trade, shipping, and economic transactions, felt that they enjoyed shared rights and values and that they played a decisive role in the unity of the Revolution. Consequently, the feeling of a geographical affinity with Ancient Greek regions and their heritage came to merge with the so-called “unification” of the Greek state.

Moreover, the Balkans and the east Mediterranean region were gradually increasing their trade with the main powers of Europe, namely France and England, because of the rising demand for food and raw materials. Another factor that favored Greek trade at that time was the French Revolution, as it allowed England to increase its sovereignty and demand.

For example, Patra, a major industrial city center in the Peloponnese peninsula, was famous for its raisin trade with England.

These demands caused the creation of monocultures or the sole production of certain traditional products that were favored on the foreign market, one of which was olive oil. In the final decades of the 18th century, Smyrna was the major trading center of commerce of the entire Ottoman Empire and even busier than Istanbul. Almost all of Lesvos' olive oil production was shipped to Smyrna.

Amendments to agricultural laws and harsher taxation were both implemented by the Ottoman Empire in order to retain power over and profit off its subjects. Indeed, this brought capital to the empire. Exports were carried out by the Greek merchants who eventually formed their own trading networks by making use of the established land and sea routes. As the transactions grew, so too did the ports of the Ottoman Empire, which established connections with Istanbul, Smyrna (a major trading hub for the island of Lesvos), Alexandria, Valletta, Trieste, Livorno (Leghorn) and Marseille.

It is a well-known fact that French merchants based in Smyrna would trade olive oil from the island and make a significant profit by selling it at almost triple the price in Europe. Its value was also determined by the Ottoman dealers (at a super low price) and often the olive oil was mixed with other oils, re-valued and distributed to the rest of the Mediterranean ports. Naturally, during the years of the uprising, economic growth changed, and a significant number of eastern ports were cut off from the trading routes of the Greek territories.

In the years that followed, Lesvos gradually grew into an increasingly more powerful economic center. When at its most prosperous, Plomari had 18 active factories producing olive oil soap, in addition to numerous olive presses. In 1913, the island counted 113 modern steam-based oil mills, 6 steam fire-run factories, 8 steam-based soap factories, 79 classic olive mills and 34 soap factories. Up to the first quarter of the 20th century, Plomari experienced a significant growth in industry and commerce. Its soap industries were supplying high quality soap to the entire Mediterranean, while navies from all over the Aegean Sea were constructing their ships in the shipyards of the village.

A series of events led to the decline and eventually, the closure of the factories by the mid-20th century. In short, trade and consequently, production were ruined due to the unification of Lesvos with Greece in 1912,

the fact that the island was shut off from the commercial hubs of the Ottoman Empire, the global economic instability of the '20s and '30s, the October Revolution that cut the island off from the markets of Russia, the Asia Minor Catastrophe (Greco – Turkish War, 1919-1922) and the discovery of detergents.⁵⁰

However, as the years went by, the area made some progress in the financial and cultural sectors. Nowadays, agriculture, such as milk and cheese products in the north of Lesvos, the ouzo industry in the south of Lesvos, and most importantly, tourism play a crucial role in sustaining the economic life of the island.

50. Source: Wikipedia: Greco-Turkish War

MIREMENGJES

**Albanian for Καλημέρα, Good Morning*

Worlds, gestures that greet you in the morning create a sense of normality. My research is only the beginning for art in the open air, featuring collective minds and exquisite olive oil. No end. No conclusion. The way to approach olive harvesting and work in the fields is to instill an actively participatory core.

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STOMACHOMA

EUCHARISTIC

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