

TRADITION - LANDSCAPE - HISTORY: THE ISLAND OF SYROS AS AN EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE CULTURAL CORRELATIONS

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Abstract

Presenting the intentions of the article, it is important to stress, first of all, the effort for the production of a general theory scheme, interconnecting the three principal terms of the title - tradition, landscape, history. Next, it is also important to stress the attempt to apply this general scheme on the specific case study of the island of Syros.

The previous general theoretical effort corresponds, to the relation of both preindustrial tradition and organized western history with landscape; either with a landscape considered as natural substrate or with a composite, manmade landscape, involving architecture and urban design as well. Syros presents a clear articulation of all the above distinct structural parts, related to the initial, general theory scheme. We may accept it therefore as an ideal application example of the proposed theoretical position.

This first acknowledgment immediately leads to a second one. To the acknowledgement that this specific island offers not only a useful case study, but, evenmore, an internationally unique example.

The most important contribution of the text presented is to demonstrate the cultural uniqueness of the island of Syros, because of the compound relation of a traditional settlement with a neoclassical city, both placed at a region centrally correlated to the ancient Greek history. Ancient Greek history, in its turn, will be presented as the prototype of the Modern Western Civilization or Culture as well as a prototype of the modern bourgeois political systems of government.

The above demonstration may be finally related to a proposition for landscape interventions, aiming at the total upgrade of the complex formation of the two central island settlements, those of Ano Syra and Ermoupolis, as well as of the wider landscape field surrounding them.

Key words

Ano Syra, Civilization, Culture, Ermoupolis, History, Landscape, Tradition.



E.1.: View of Ermoupolis through the window of the Jesuits' Monastery in ano Syros
Introductory remarks

The present essay is the result of the author's continuous scientific contact with the isle of Syros; more precisely with the city of Ermoupolis and the neighboring traditional settlement of Ano (Upper) Syros. The contact with the island has been realized through the stimulating impact of the 1st Training Seminar in August 2011 and 2nd Training Seminar in July 2012, both organized by the Center of Historic Studies of the Catholic Episcopacy of Syros (KIMKES) in collaboration with the Institute for the Research of the Sustainable Development, Culture and Tradition, within the frame of their mutual scientific activities.

It was because of the above mentioned seminars that the author of the present essay understood, even after a certain delay, that Syros possesses an incomparable identity concerning the relation of the native traditional culture to a number of important historical references, overcoming the limited geography of the island.

Those references are related to the modern western history and modern western civilization in general³⁷ and may be described by the immediate conjunction of the pre-industrial rural settlement of Ano Syra, medieval in its origin, with the modern, 19th century city of Ermoupolis. That is to say with the first really urban formation of the post-revolution Greece, a city whose civilization and political qualities were clearly oriented towards bourgeois identity. It was because of this bourgeois orientation that Ermoupolis, though built at the immediate vicinity of the traditional settlement of Ano Syra, has chosen the emblematic neoclassical architectural style, in order to express the special aspirations concerning the civilization and the political ethics accepted by its inhabitants. In this way the new city clearly denotes its wish to belong to the western societies, to those societies that have chosen, in their turn, Greek antiquity as the ideal paradigm of their historic origin.

Those seem to be the principal remarks imposed by the example of Syros. Remarks that may be extended to the whole geographical region and to the landscape of Greece in general, revealing the fact, acknowledged by an important part of modern and contemporary western world intelligentsia, according to which this particular region and this particular landscape are not solely related to a specific native tradition. They constitute a geographical region and a landscape of

³⁷ As far as it concerns the antithetic or complementary use of the terms "cultural" and "culture" in comparison to the term "civilization", see in detail later.

reference for the whole modern western civilization and for the modern western bourgeois regimes as well.

Nowadays however, the above described historical condition seems to be rather poorly understood by the majority of the Greek citizens, and unfortunately neglected even by the Greek State itself. It is often accepted as an unnecessary ideology burden, which contemporary Greek reality would have better to get rid of³⁸. On the contrary, if perceived from a critical distance permitting comparisons, those references appear to offer an important element, qualifying the identity of the Modern Greek civilization or of the Modern Greek culture. This important element seems to be clearly expressed in the works of art of Odysseas Elytis, a rather mediocre Greek painter who, at the same time, was a poet of international recognition.

In his collage works³⁹, Elytis conceived the identity of the islands in the Aegean Sea through the relation of local tradition or *Volkskultur*⁴⁰, with Greek antiquity. According to the great poet's figurative proposition, both conceptions, the reference to local tradition as well as the reference to antiquity, should not be disarticulated; they should not be taken apart from the single "body" of the civilization or culture to which they both belong. Moreover, they are both presented by Elytis, emerging from the common substrate of the native landscape.

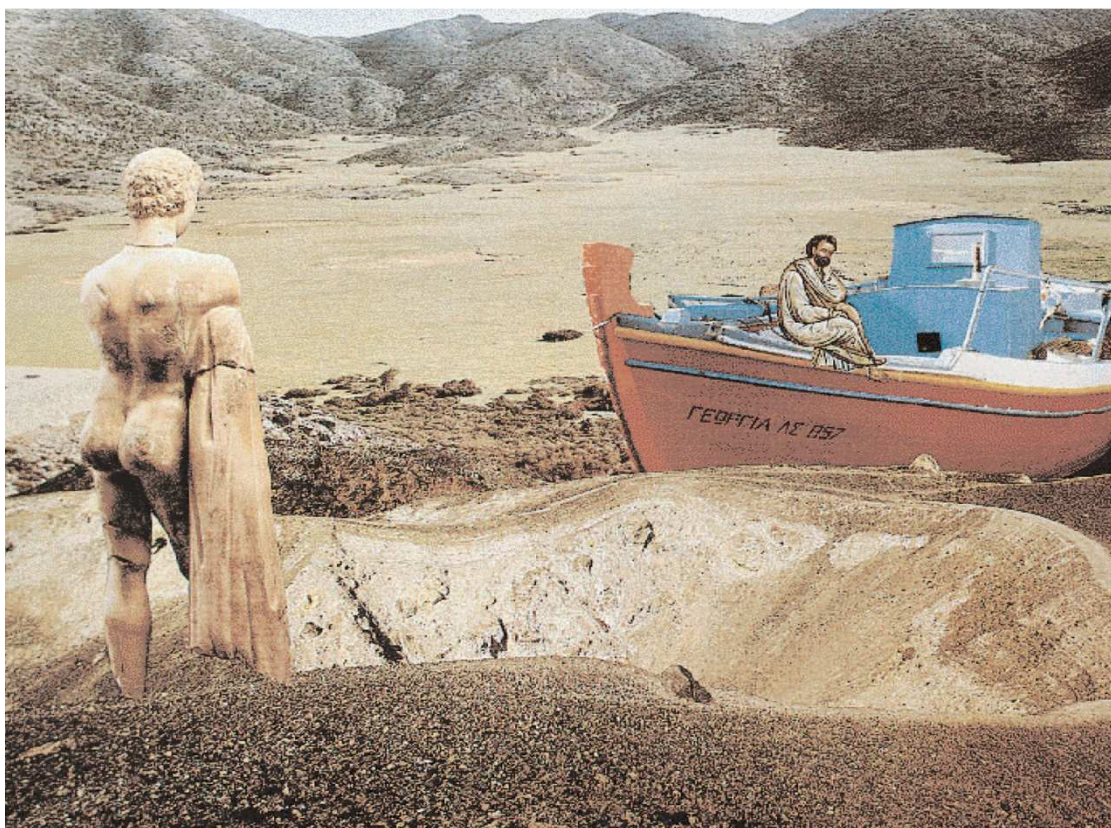
The previous comment emphasizes the continuity between cultural formations related to tradition on one hand and cultural formations being the outcome of centralized civilization on the other hand. In addition, the comment emphasizes the connection of both types of cultural or civilization formations to landscape, explaining in this way the title of the present small essay.

According to the title, both tradition and organized history related to centralized schemes of civilization necessarily correspond to a socially active condition of place that is to say to landscape. In this way landscape provides the fertile soil for the offspring of the immaterial as well as of the material heritage.

³⁸ In relation to their modern architectonic quests for example, Modern Greek architects face neoclassicism as a formal fixation that has to be eliminated. Modern attempts, internationally or in Greece, tending to overthrow the older architectural concepts, have of course not to be historically underestimated. We must however emphasize that the import of neoclassicism in Greece was not dictated by a mere act of civilization mimesis. The present essay will persistently refer to the fundamental, emblematic political importance of neoclassicism for Modern Greece, as well as for Western world in general. Following the concise statement of Dimitris Porfyrios, we should rather agree that "classicism is not a style" or, at least, that classicism does not mean for Modern Western world what other eclecticism stylistic references do. See D. Porfyrios: *Classicism is not a style*. London: Academy editions, 1982.

³⁹ As the collage work presented.

⁴⁰ German expression meaning folk culture, the culture of people.



E.2.: In Odysseas Elytis' collage works the vision of the Aegean Sea is described as a contemplation of tradition and folk culture, related to Greek antiquity.

Intentions and aim of the present essay

Analyzing the intentions of the essay presented, it is important to stress, first of all, the effort for the production of a general theory scheme interconnecting the three principal terms of the title. Next, it is also important to stress the attempt to apply this general scheme on the specific case study of the island of Syros.

The previous general theoretical effort corresponds, as already clarified, to the relation of both preindustrial tradition and organized western history with landscape; either with a landscape considered as natural substrate or with a composite, manmade landscape, involving architecture and urban design as well. Syros presents a clear articulation of all the above distinct structural parts, related to the initial, general theory scheme. We may accept it therefore as an ideal application example of the proposed theoretical position.

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The most important contribution of the text presented is to demonstrate the cultural uniqueness of the island of Syros, because of the compound relation of a traditional settlement with a neoclassical city, both placed at a region centrally correlated to the ancient Greek history. Ancient Greek history, in its turn, will be presented as the prototype of the Modern Western Civilization or Culture as well as a prototype of the modern bourgeois political systemes of government.

Needless to say that the above demonstration clearly drives to a proposition for landscape interventions, aiming at the total upgrade of the complex formation of the two central island settlements, those of Ano Syra and Ermoupolis, as well as of the wider landscape field surrounding them.

According to the above mentioned proposition, we are gradually directed to a feasibility decision concerning the reorganization of the specific characteristics of the island as well as their international promotion, having as final aim the cultural and economic upgrade of Syros. In other words, we are gradually directed to an effort for the definition, the reinforcement or even the production of specific important qualities, able to form an integrated specific character, a "physiognomy" describing not only a city, concerning not only a "city branding", but in an even broader way the physiognomy of the whole island.

If this aim is accepted as the final, "practical" feasibility purpose of this essay, let us continue our investigation. Let us wonder about the fundamental qualities which we have to point out while examining the isle of Syros in general and the landscape territory of Ermoupolis and Ano Syra in particular.

Let us return to the title of the text...

A first important characteristic is the quality of the local tradition, which would be restrictively accepted as principally related to the settlement of Ano Syra.

A second important feature refers to the modern city, Ermoupolis, still preserved, at its central part in a pure neoclassical form.

However none of the two previous characteristics appears, in the case of Syros, in a "typical" form. It is this remark that seems to explain the theoretical interest of the case examined.

Syros and the "reversal" of the usual, conventional assumptions, concerning tradition and history. The uniqueness of the case of Syros

The examples offered in the case of the isle of Syros, examined both as a traditional settlement as well as a city of organized historical references, are in no way, conventional examples. Without exaggeration, Ermoupolis disposes, in accordance to Modern European or Modern Western Civilization, unique qualities. It seems to be the only city that may offer to the neoclassical renaissance, to the neoclassical revitalization of classical antiquity, a specific locus at the immediate vicinity of the "sacred" cycle of the Cycladic islands.

At the same time, Ano Syra undermines the conventional theory assumptions, concerning tradition, in a unique way that surpasses the importance of its architectural quality. It proves the theory gaps in our viewpoints concerning traditional people's culture. It indicates that, for an important depth of time, tradition has never existed isolated, at least in the European region, and what is more, it has never been cut off from history, from the structured history of the Western European world.

If through the term "tradition" we refer to introvert cultural relations being rather self-sufficient in their inner reproduction, then the whole European region and even more the basin of the Mediterranean Sea are constantly reversing this cultural confinement. How deeply do we have to dive into the sea of time, in order to find a Mediterranean place with traditional identity that had nothing to do with the mainstream of the official, centralized history? How deeply do we have to dive in order to escape Herodotus' structural effort, in order to escape historical conscience established, since the beginning of time, around the mother-sea of the enlightened civilizations?

Contemporary research easily discovers that the settlement of Ano Syra constituted , in the past, the center of the political penetration of the sovereign French Kingdom in the region of the east Mediterranean Sea, and that, in this way, it consisted a focal point for the organized creation of political, strategic and cultural relations.

During modern times, the same settlement of Ano Syra, Apano Chora as it is called by its inhabitants Hpanochorites, constitutes an important nucleus of cultural development, an important nucleus for the development of the “marginal” social groups’ culture; a nucleus where important modes of expression of modern popular culture had been created through “rebetico” song. Those modes of expression seem to have been created by the fusion of musical elements that came to Greece, originated from Minor Asia tradition, and merged with the cultural sensitivity of local modern working class. Thus, those emerged modes of expression had been principally developed by the inhabitants of the industrial territories and the city regions existing around the harbors of Modern Greece.



E.3.: Markos Vamvakaris. A leading personality of the modern Greek rebetico music culture. He was born in Apano Chora (Ano Syros), where he spent a part of his life.

Insisting on the relation of pre-industrial tradition with landscape

Erich Hobsbawm, introducing a book under the extremely provocative title *The Invention of Tradition*, explains that this invention, “*being so interesting for the historians of the last two centuries*”, appears to be the result of the opposition against “*continuous transformation and renewal of contemporary world*” as well as the result of the effort “*to compose in it, some views of the social life at least, as unaltered and steady*»⁴¹.

In this way, many of the elements of the local traditions, accepted as results of an older, probably timeless formation, constitute in reality products of more recent intentional “constructions”. Moreover, the increasing interest for tradition, the increasing reference to tradition, characterizes the modern, closer to us period; it is in this way historically relative.

⁴¹ E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (ed.): *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 1983. Greek translation, Athens, 2004. See, page 10, from Hobsbawm’s introduction under the title “Inventing traditions”.

What do we mean using the expression “historically relative”? It is an expression implying that the reference to tradition consists a choice of our civilization, let us insist on the term “civilization” as opposed to the term “culture”, a choice that does not qualify in general for all the societies that we do know. It qualifies in particular for societies after the first period of the industrial development. Societies, we shall remark, which had already experienced the first period of severe, radical cultural reclassifications, and which had experienced, let us notice this remark in advance, the first radical modern environmental destructions as well as the accumulation of impoverished population, under conditions of misery, in the workers settlements of the big European cities.

That is to say, the reference to tradition principally qualifies for societies that had already lived in the “landscape”, figuratively speaking, of big political and cultural pressures, and which, at the same time, already possessed the experience of big downgrading pressures that had been exerted on the built environment, as well as on the agricultural and natural environment; that had been exerted on the landscape, literary speaking this time, on the urban and non-urban landscape as well.

However the reference to tradition, in many cases the “invention” of a tradition, does not only comprise a need of the civilization or culture, or even a political need primarily emerging through the demands of the civilization or culture. In a very precise way the reference to tradition may be, in many cases, a direct political one. It may form, the cultural version of a field of political claims, clearly related to the terms of the political identity or even more clearly to the terms of the national identity. It may be clearly related to the national identity of a population group or to its specific national character, determined through specific cultural characteristics or cultural differences.

In this way we do not only refer to tradition in general but, even more, to “traditions” in particular, traditions of various, and different national groups. In the same way, though the field to which tradition is addressed is the field of culture, its formation is fundamentally dictated by the centrally organized civilization. It is formed by the same social groups, by educated scholars or even by the central state mechanisms, to which supposedly, its criticism is directed. It is formed by groups that possess or try to establish a central civilization control.

In an extremely penetrating historical text of his, Isaiah Berlin described the way in which the end of the Thirty Years War in the 17th century, created to the Germanic population groups the feeling of a military and political inferiority that would define afterwards their relation to the rest of the big, influential European forces⁴². What is more, these European forces were related to the production of the central European civilization, which claimed to possess supralocal significance. In this way, the less important European nationalities had to answer back, in order to survive in opposition, with a regionalist proposition determined by political as well as by cultural features.

At the antipodes of a general concept, common for many representatives of the European Enlightenment, according to which the fundamental principles of the human, social or political behavior are similar by “nature”, the marginal countries had critically declared, under the above mentioned historical conditions, the claim for differentiation. They had namely insisted on the difference of their population, related to the quality of their unique culture and ultimately to their unique hereditary origin.

If civilization, to which this new line of romantic conceptions seems to be opposite, was a centralized, official one, then its opponents had to invent a rival field of superiority or, at least a field of opposed importance. This was the field of the folk culture extended to all the groups of the local population. The German philosopher, theologian, poet, and literary critic Johann Gottfried

⁴² I. Berlin: *The Roots of Romanticism*. Greek Translation, Athens: Scripta ed., 2000. See pages 74,75.

Herder baptized this folk culture with the name "Volksgeist", a German term that means the "spirit" or the "soul of people".

Herder, whose theory concerning the priority of intuition over rational response tremendously influenced the conceptions of Romanticism, highly insisted on the demand for the political self-management of the individual ethnic groups, and finally formed a political doctrine advocating "natural" or "organic nationalism". Logically, the defense of such an hereditary nationalism does not refer to arguments concerning the common blood ancestry only, the "consanguinity" of the national population, but also to arguments concerning the common land origin, the common land of the "fathers" wherefrom the national population originates. However this fatherland is already presented as a landscape - a cultural landscape⁴³, a landscape of all the cultural elements that had been inscribed on the common place of origin.

Why, however, do we address to this land in terms of "cultural landscape"? What is more, why this cultural landscape has to be related with every possible cultural reference and not only with references having to do with the leading classes only? With the classes which in their turn are connected with the centralized European or Western civilization?

We have to explain at first that the centrality of the European or Western civilization is not only related to the centrality of the leading classes but also to the centrality of the sovereign European or Western countries.

The answer to this civilization, which the less powerful marginal countries and the less powerful national groups of the European region had to give, demanded, as we have already stated, the formation of a rival field that seemed to be offered by folk culture and tradition... Our research however has to be vigilant. The whole population, peasants and rurals at the same time, was equally accepted to participate to the folk culture and to the local tradition. In an analogous way, fatherland, the land of the ancestors and the landscape related to it, was also presented as a common coherent receptor of all social classes. Consequently, reference to tradition did not appear as relative to movements of interior political subversion. It rather appeared as principally connected to the demands for national coherence that might include the reference to a primordial affinity, to the common cohesive to a shared language or dialect, as well as to the territory corresponding to the native landscape of the fatherland or of the mother-country.

In the above explained way the presence of landscape, as a reference field of the modern national and nationalistic processes appears important in connection to the origin of the people and obviously in connection to the declaration of their territorial claims.

However, as the origin of the people and their national cohesion are presented as being extremely old, usually prior to modern history, the landscape "shape" ascribed to it is also presented as timeless, or at least is placed over modern history. It is often described as possessing an independent, pre-cultural physical quality and strength... Or again this all powerful landscape is related to the studded tracks of the ancient origin, to ruins and memories, or to the quality of the traditional settlements. It thus qualifies as important to nurture both the popular psyche and the social elites.

Those three versions of the landscape reference are equally interpretable and do all interrelate to the formation and the characteristics of the tradition.

It seems therefore fair to assert that the recognition, or the invention of tradition for the modern communities, necessarily involves the correlation to landscape.

Sometimes intentionally, in a conscious way, or otherwise under automatic response mechanisms, modern societies tried to retain or "build" webs of pre-industrial relations, which

⁴³ As described by the pair of terms introduced by the American geographer Carl Ortwin Sauer and the School of Landscape of the University of Berkeley.

they considered necessary to maintain or establish key elements of their specific character, as opposed to constantly changing conditions of life. The construction of these tissues, of these nets, woven from "slowly passing time and strong forces"⁴⁴, destined to "fish" deeper ancestry evidence, continues to employ the societies of our time. Their grids include the references to landscape, as important nowadays as at the beginning of the first European interest for the tradition; landscape accepted as natural background, or as a field of cultural traces or as a pre-industrial landscape of traditional settlement assemblies.

Trying to explain in detail the above fundamental description we will go back to an earlier remark. Romanticism, during which the interests for pre-industrial cultures and for natural substrate are equally related, already had acquired the experience of the first big tide of environmental degradation. A degradation that took place in connection to the rapid, dizzying social transformations, caused by the failure of the European Enlightenment to accomplish its proclamations for equality, social justice and overall happiness. Thus the requirement for the maintenance of the pre-industrial cultural character finally appears as a claim of solidarity to the respect for natural qualities – a condition which seems today readily understandable.

Landscape and tradition remain thus inseparable, not only because they can both indicate timeless presence, referring to the beginning of the time or to the primordial origin of social and ethnic groups, but also because they both seemed to be equally vulnerable to uncontrollable processes of decay and destruction.

The changes concerning the concepts of civilization or culture in relation to the changes concerning the concept of landscape

If we attempted to condense the theoretical foundations of this essay in a single sentence, then this sentence would have to stress that the changes residing in the concept of landscape, in the range of modern western history, tag along with the changes of the concepts of the Western societies concerning civilization or culture.

In accordance to those successive changes, we can explain the successive validation of the landscape attitudes proposed by the island of Syros, as well as the current interest for their simultaneous, cumulative presence in one and only place. In a clear way the formation of the settlements existing on the surface of the Cycladic Island of Syros, describes at least three different distinct attitudes in relation to landscape.

A first attitude concerning the intervention in the landscape, in the example of Syros, refers to the process of the direct correlation of pre-industrial cultural production and pre-industrial human settlements in particular, with the natural landscape background.

The landscape background is not yet recognized by the respective communities as a distinct presence, but it fully supports, nevertheless, the formation of culture with the immediate relationship between nature and society. This type of relationship may favour the use of the adjective "organic"; an adjective indicating a quasi-natural immediate way, in which, in the communities of tradition, the culture grows out from its natural trestle, following a pre-social process of biological priority; as in the case of Ano Syra which is an agricultural pre-industrial community.

Apparently pre-industrial societies possessed, them too, complex cultural systems. Thus it would be probably better to associate the adjective "organic", with romantic ideology that tend to attribute to traditional communities an undeniable quality guaranteed by the similarity to the natural processes.

⁴⁴ A S. Kontaratos' reference to the L.A. von Arnim's book *Von Volksliedern*, written in 1805, a text that seems to be constitutive for the research of the German folk songs. See S. Kontaratos: *Architecture and Tradition*. Athens: 1986, page 51.

The example of Ano Syra persuades us, as it has already noted, that the complete immediacy between nature and tradition was rather rare, especially in a region dense with exchanges and cultural influences as the Mediterranean area. The rural village of Ano Syra had also been a point of correlation of the natives with the Holy See as well as with the omnipotent power of the French Kingdom. However it is obvious that despite these “high” influences, the culture of the place is marked by the osmosis of human society with the natural elements of the landscape and it seems that this close correlation was maintained until the eve of the modern period.



E.4.: Neoclassical Ermoupolis was emphatically oriented toward Western cultural norms.

It is also attributed in the example of Syros, a second attitude of landscape intervention, which can be described as controlled design. As an attitude that is to say, according to which control is exerted upon the natural background and the preexisting landscape, in relation to formal standards of architectural and urban design, usually of international influence.

This imported style of architectural and urban expression corresponded to the new bourgeois manners of living that had also been imported in the island. It was associated with the installation of groups of refugees in Syros, during the Greek Revolution; with groups of bourgeois' identity and international orientation that built the coast city of Ermoupolis and developed, after the establishment of the Greek State, an extrovert economy based on shipping and trade activities. Thus it seems normal for this innovative style of building and housing organization to serve the new profile of the residents of Ermoupolis and to display their effort to identify their “lifestyle” with international cultural, economic and political models.

In Ermoupolis, there is no planned landscape intervention, such as a suburban park or an extended urban garden. However we must insist on the observation that the neoclassicism of the 18th and 19th century is deeply related to landscape concepts, constantly applied through the design of the urban landscape. In the example of the Town Hall of Ermoupolis, the building, integrated in the bas relief of the ground, is immediately associated to the city's central square. The Hall, designed by the German neoclassicist architect Ernst Ziller, is related along its axis of

symmetry with the axis of the square in front of it, as well as with the axial view to the harbor, along Ermou Street.

We have therefore in the general case of Syros, the more specific example of a traditional settlement, Ano Syra, developed through the direct “organic” relation between the natural background of the landscape and the production of a rural pre-industrial culture. But we also have the specific example of an urban formation, Ermoupolis, qualified by the attributes of the central urban civilization.

However the most interesting remark lies within the observation that, in the context of modern Western history, examples of traditional character as the first one concerning Ano Syra, are usually recognized and evaluated through the critical attitude developed in relation or in opposition to the examples of the centralized cultural expression, as the second example of Ermoupolis. In other words, the importance of the regional cultures,⁴⁵ that may be described in plural, had been recognized and evaluated only through the critical attitude opposed to the arrogance of the central “singular” civilization.

Identification and evaluation of the regional cultural idioms can only be made through the identification of the impasses of the central western civilization, that is to say they are essentially realized through maturation and criticism that the host civilization turns against its own validity, questioning its completeness and its self-sufficiency.

Finally, we approach the third attitude concerning the relation of culture to landscape. We have already announced above that we would present it and associate it to the example of Syros, contrasting it to two other attitudes. The first one refers to osmosis of culture with the natural background - it may be described as a constant, rather unconscious everyday relation, whose analogy to an immediate biological response tends to reduce the impact of the rational intervention. The second attitude refers to a conscious rational process of enforcement - it may be described as being blind for different cultural paradigms and therefore unable to be taught by them. The third attitude refers to the critical assessment of the two previous possibilities. Firstly it designates the cultural florescence of Romanticism in late 18th and early 19th century, when romantic spirit marks a turnover towards tradition and natural landscape. In its extreme version, it fully rejects the previous authority of civilization. Nevertheless this first parricide movement gradually gave way, during the centuries that followed, to a number of attempts for critical correlation. Thus, natural landscape intentionally penetrates in the interior of urban formations, while the cultural expression and the residential production of the traditional communities constitute an important object of study that engross the attention and care of developed societies. During this second extensive period of critical approach, a period that touches our days, the care for cultural rescue also includes the care for the production of civilization. In this way it tends to integrate a number of partial cultural elements, as tradition, central history and landscape, under the unifying concept of the cultural heritage.

Let us leave aside the fundamental objection, according to which the above mentioned “care” seems to be the final cunning effort, from the part of the centrally organized civilization to establish its control. Let us investigate then the etymology of the terms, which describe civilization, culture, as well as the adjectives related to them, in the languages of Latin origin.

It seems easy to note that, in its Latin version, “civilization” refers to an urban social structure, possessing a dynamic tendency. We can easily recognize the etymological

⁴⁵ S. Kontaratos, in his book cited above, identifies three different directions of interest, through which romantic opposition tried to answer to the supremacy of the centrally organized modern western civilization. The first of them referred to the interest for the medieval past. The second referred to the interest for “marginal” expressions of culture in the European or Western countries themselves. Finally the third one referred to the westerners’ interest for non European cultures, as for example for those cultures related to orientalism.

correspondence to the Latin word “civilis”, which means political, also associated to the Latin words for the citizen, “civis” and urbanity, “civitas”. Émile Benveniste, in his exemplary text on culture, notes that from the very first attested use of the word, that of Marquis de Mirabeau, the term not only offers a “*historical view of the society, but also an optimistic and decidedly non-theological interpretation of its growth*”⁴⁶.

Raymond Williams, associated the content of the word “civilization” to an institutionalized social structure - to those activities of the western societies considered to be the “highest” expressions of their culture; as for example activities concerning economic and productive development, organized science or the official expression of the fine arts. According to a pervasive remark of the same author, the word “culture” may be classified among the most complicate and sophisticated words in terms of its content⁴⁷. It would be wise therefore to elude a more detailed analysis of its concept, in order just to compare it, once more, with the concept of “civilization” or, even better, with the concept described by the verbal terms “to civilize”. This verbal expression denotes the active intention to “induct” civilization to the less civilized individuals, or to the less civilized social groups of the western countries, or to the “uncivilized” societies existing outside the developed western world. In this way, civilization attempts to integrate in the control region of western societies, to “colonize” the whole reality. It directs civilizing action towards the marginal parts of the population, towards the region of the non-western societies, and finally towards the side of nature. Civilizing activity produces in this way the western arts of landscape; that is to say the means for the aesthetic and the technical control treatment of the place.

The European claim for the Greek origin of the Civilization

As we have already explained, the relationship between tradition and landscape refers to the way landscape is perceived, interpreted or shaped by regional, pre-industrial in their origin, native cultural modes of expression. However, if this correlation seems to be internationally well understood nowadays, well understood even for the contemporary Greek society, another condition that largely transcends the local Greek geography seems curiously to absorb in a decreasing manner our interest...

This condition concerns the correlation of the geographical area to which our local Greek tradition refers, that is to say the correlation of the Greek landscape to which local traditional culture refers, to the Greek antiquity. What is more, this condition concerns the essentially political way in which modern European and Western societies have been related to the Greek landscape, indicating through an idealized landscape image their reference to classical antiquity, to classical civilization and to the constitutional for the modern western world political paradigm of the ancient Greek democracy.

We can easily agree that every specific place, in every specific part of this world, has the cultural right to refer to a specific tradition and to a specific place-receptor of this tradition.

⁴⁶ Even though, Mirabeau himself generally regarded religion as a prime factor for the formation of civilization. Benveniste considered that the use of the word “civilisation” in French, by Mirabeau, in the book of his, *L'Ami des hommes ou traité de la population*, written in 1756 and published in 1757, was prior than the use of the English term. See E. Benveniste: «*Civilisation. Contribution à l'histoire du mot*». 1954. Published in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: [Éd. Gallimard](#), 1966, pp.336–345. To be compared to B. Binoche (ed.): *Les équivoques de la civilisation*. Seyssel: Éd. Champ Vallon, 2005.

⁴⁷ Williams refers to the English word “culture”. However his remark seems even more valid for the Greek word “πολιτισμός”, a word corresponding to the English term “culture”, and, in the same time to the centrally organized civilization.

However, only a limited number of geographical areas, only two, Italy and Greece,⁴⁸ may claim a central political connotation for the Western world and consequently, a central importance for the civilization of the whole world. We should identify one of those two geographical areas with the Greek geographical territory.

Attempting a more detailed analysis we may comment that the culture of every different traditional community and of its native landscape as well, seem to essentially disdain an evaluative ranking. Every specific tradition and its adjacent landscape seem to be central for the native population and therefore seem to overpass comparative assessment. As contrasted to this condition of evaluative acceptance of cultural and landscape difference, an idealized view of the Greek area has been installed on the absolute peak of western history. It is thus proved to be entirely non-comparable, not because of a quantitative superiority, but because it had then been declared as constitutive for the nascency of the western civilization in general, and for the political systems of western bourgeois democracy in particular. It is along with this historical primacy of the ancient Greek antiquity that a primacy of Greek landscape perceptions had been installed.

Thus the reference to Greek landscape, even as defined by romantic ideology, had at the same time to be directed towards antiquity. A typical analogous example is offered by the Greek romantic intellectual, Periklis Giannopoulos when referred to the landscape of Attica. In a typical example of native romanticism, Giannopoulos, who had been described as "Greek centered",⁴⁹ had presented Greek landscape through the metaphor of maternity. "*All the rocks, the hills, the mountains, are sitting side by side, in modest reverie, as beautiful women of the people*", noted in his book *The Greek Line*⁵⁰, "*similar to mothers holding graceful children in their arms, similar to byzantine icons with Virgin Mary slightly careening her head*". However this reference to natural landscape, to the native people or to the byzantine tradition cannot step aside, beyond the influence of the Greek antiquity. "*The hill Hymettus, the hill of Ardetus, mount Egaleo, mount Parnitha*", Giannopoulos continues describing the hills and the mountains around Athens, "*even the mount of Penteli similar to a sinewy, robust adolescent from Arcadia, ...all of them nicely trimmed they appear; they just say, as statues able to speak, as classical headstones that may talk: at our handsome stature you have to stare!*". However, why have we to insist on the reference to the ancient history, on the occasion of a seminar held in the traditional settlement of Ano Syra? What radically distinguishes Ano Syra from any other traditional village that I do know is its coexistence with Ermoupolis, their mutual placement in the hub of western civilization, in the group of Cycladic Islands.

What is Ermoupolis? It is an extremely well preserved neoclassical city. What neoclassicism is? Is it just another architectural style? We rather have to accept that neoclassicism corresponds to ideas much broader than mere architectural expression; to accept that this style principally represents the emblematic expression of the western bourgeois democracy. It represents the architectural statement that western societies had finally succeeded to become bourgeois democracies. This is the statement projected by the neoclassical landscapes of the western cities, or by the neoclassical references of the landscape architecture.

⁴⁸ Both because of their relation to antiquity and to ancient civilization as well as to their ancient democratic systems of government.

⁴⁹ Another characterization ascribed to Giannopoulos, because of his romantic suicide, was the Greek adjective "*erisithanatos*", meaning "*lover of death*", "*the one who fell in love with death*". A characterization proposed by the Greek scholar Ioannis Sikoutris, who had also been a lover of both Greece and death and terminated, he also, his life through suicide.

⁵⁰ The citation to P. Giannopoulos *Greek Line*, is a cross-reference to a D. Filippidis' text. See D. Filippidis: "*Historical Recursion*", introductory text in *Greek Traditional Architecture, First Tome – Eastern Aegean Sea, Sporades, Eftanisa*. Athens: 1983, page 34. Compare the web listing of quotes from *Greek Line*, in the site www.ellopos.net. First publication of Giannopoulos' text in the Greek newspaper "Estia". Athens: 12th April 1910.

However, amidst all the western neoclassical approaches, there is one that may claim an absolute priority. We refer to Greek neoclassicism and to its relation to the Greek non built landscape. Obviously the absolute archetype of this relationship is exemplified by Parthenon in relation to the Athenian landscape. Aside to this well-known archetype, Cyclades, themselves offer a luminous, ancient sacred cycle too. Let us think of Cyclades, let us think of a unique neoclassical city, Ermoupolis; it seems impossible not to face this historical relation, whatever our care about Ano Syra may be.

Therefore, it is here, in Syros, in the relation of Ermoupolis with Ano Syra that we have the perfect example to describe the connection of the centrally organized history to tradition, as well as the whole range of architectural references, historical or traditional, in a culturally continuous landscape.



E.5.: Ancient ruins at the sacred isle of Delos. Think of Cyclades, think of the unique neoclassical city of Ermoupolis - it is impossible not to be impressed by this double directed relation to Greek antiquity, whatever our concern about the traditional, medieval in its origin, settlement of Ano Syra maybe.

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