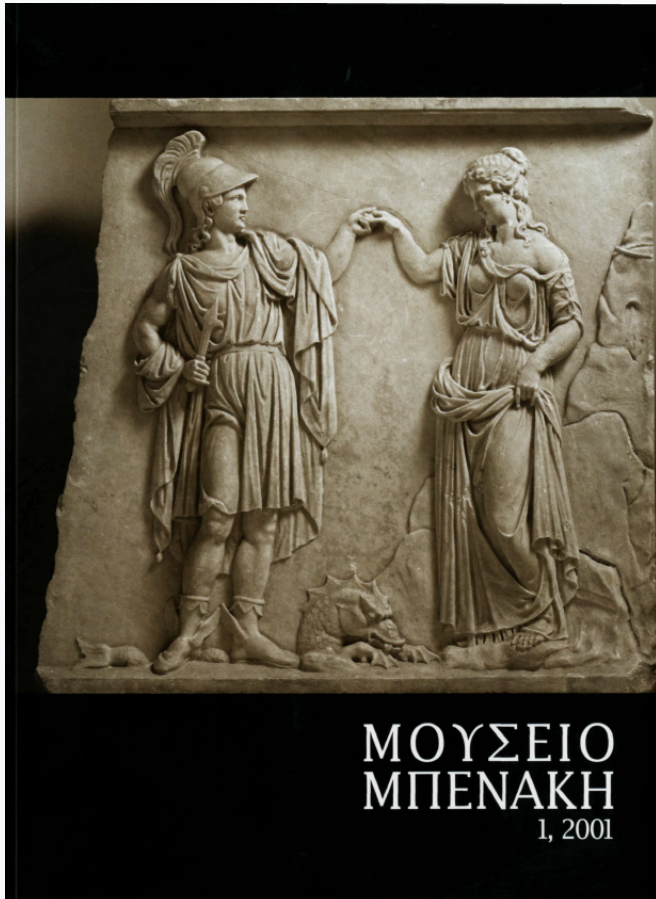


## Μουσείο Μπενάκη

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Ξυλόγλυπτες ελληνικές κασέλες από την Πελοπόννησο. Ζητήματα τεχνοτροπικής και θεματικής ιδιαιτερότητας

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## Carved wooden chests from the Peloponnese: questions of stylistic and thematic singularity

SECULAR WOODCARVING of the post-Byzantine era – by contrast with the ecclesiastical variety<sup>1</sup> – can hardly be said either to be represented by spectacular works or to have been the object of systematic study. During the centuries of Turkish occupation the precautions taken by the church to protect its possessions were of course much more strenuous than those which the vigilance of private households devoted to their domestic chattels. But the poverty of the material which has been preserved, or rather published, is also due to the limited interest shown by scholarship in the artistic output of this period<sup>2</sup> – an output condemned in advance on academically questionable, if not improper, grounds of anonymity and naivete, crude workmanship, unsophisticated design and mere decorativeness, rigid symmetry in the handling of the motifs and dearth of narrative content, immobility and disregard for the achievements of perspective.<sup>3</sup> In attempting to understand the mechanisms which regulate the expressive idiom of so-called folk art I shall have recourse to an unknown, numerically restricted group of carved wooden chests from the Peloponnese, in the hope of initiating not so much a scholarly dialogue as an increase the number of works under examination which hover in the space and time of modern Hellenism.<sup>4</sup>

The denudation, of the Peloponnese in particular, in respect of all evidence to shed light on its cultural profile is attributable to the Turkish reprisals in the War of Independence and the relentless plundering by Ibrahim.<sup>5</sup> This dramatic conjunction of historical circumstances, from which only architecture remained to

some degree immune,<sup>6</sup> and which had a catalytic effect on the preservation of every other form of artistic output, significantly blurred the image even of local forms of costume.<sup>7</sup> Against this background the information that a wooden chest in the Benaki Museum had an origin in Mani or Arcadia takes on a particular significance; this carved chest is notable for its exceptionally unusual combination of painted decoration on the inside of the lid, showing two brikia (ewers) full of sinuous flowering tendrils, facing each other and flanking a shallow vase in the centre (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>

Even without the aid of comparative material, the well preserved painted composition clearly indicates the craftsman's preference for a linear as opposed to a plastic rendering of the subject matter. The strictly symmetrical arrangement of the conventional design is particularly noteworthy, especially as it is governed by a spirit quite contrary to the freedom of execution which marks the carved section of the chest. There the dense, unruly texture of the formulation provocatively defies the rules of symmetry,<sup>9</sup> making it difficult to follow the design of the subsidiary features and to "recognise" the content of the representation. Nevertheless the irregular configuration of a mass of convoluted tendrils is clear enough; emerging from an long-stemmed, shallow cup in the centre (as in the painted version of the same theme on the inside of the lid) they terminate in spiral coils, with no leaves and only one meticulously drawn flower. There can be no doubt that this representation is one of the many variants of the "tree of life"<sup>10</sup> and that, consciously or unconsciously, it has been chosen





Fig. 1. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Benaki Museum 35496 (photo: K. Manolis).



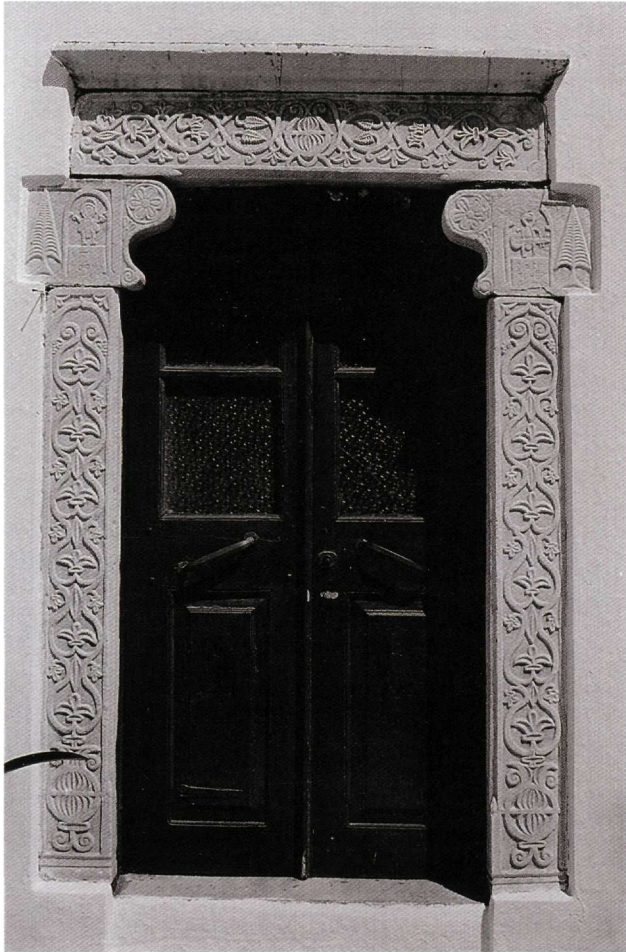


Fig. 2. Marble door frame of 1730, Amorgos (photo: G. Despotidis).

Fig. 3. Detail of door frame fig. 2 (photo: G. Despotidis).

Fig. 4. Detail of door frame fig. 2 (photo: G. Despotidis).

for the indomitable semantics of its fertility symbolism, and is closely connected with the nuptial-matrimonial content which tends to characterise the most skilfully worked bridal dowry chests.<sup>11</sup> The bird and the indeterminate four-footed creature followed by a snake, which flank the stem of the cup asymmetrically on the carved wooden surface, must have the same function as the two brikia in the painted version, while the small fish hidden among the vegetal features on the right hand side may possibly retain a vestige of its early Christian protective symbolism.<sup>12</sup>

Also relevant is the significance of the two human figures who complete the representation, of which the one on the right projects its conceptual weight more obviously, both through its size and through its dominant frontal pose. This is a male figure with in his mouth a long pipe of the type which retained its popularity throughout of the War of Independence.<sup>13</sup> This iconographic detail is particularly significant, firstly because it provides a terminus ante quem no later than the first quarter of the 19th century, and also because it indicates a relaxed and tranquil situation, suggestive of the social superiority of the man portrayed, which is underlined by his wearing breeches instead of a fustanella (skirt), the more usual form of dress in the Peloponnese.<sup>14</sup> In the enigmatic "narrative" context of the rep-



resentation the significance of the male figure is also emphasised by its position in a rectangular frame,<sup>15</sup> one of whose vertical sides terminates in the sacred symbol of the cross.<sup>16</sup>

In maintaining that the man portrayed with breeches and pipe represents the ideal figure of a bridegroom I





Fig. 5 Section of a carved wooden chest. Athens, Benaki Museum 37911 (photo: M. Skiadaresis).

Fig. 6. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Alekos Eustathiadis Collection (photo: K. Manolis).

would invoke the general atmosphere of fertility in the representation, with its plethora of plant motifs, the standard "erotic" content of many similar compositions,<sup>17</sup> the nuptial purpose common to the more skillfully ornamented chests, and, above all, the corroborative evidence of the second figure, the decipherment of which leads us to an equally fascinating field of specu-

lation. This figure is to be found on the left side of the carved panel, and is female, but smaller-scale than the male, and portrayed in a three quarter pose, in a movement suggestive of flight towards the left, holding a mirror in her right hand and lifting up her skirt with the left. This treatment immediately raises several issues, but I would place emphasis on her presence in





Fig. 7. Front section of a carved wooden chest. Athens, Benaki Museum 21777 (photo: M. Skiadarexis).

the semiologically dominant position of the narrative level, on the left and not on the right, because it overrides the "canon of hierarchy" which is respected even in folk art.<sup>18</sup> The same aberration is also a feature of the remarkable relief composition on a marble door frame of 1730 from Amorgos, where the female figure is flamboyantly glorified through her revealing nudity, in a manner far from common in the secular art of the era of the Ottoman occupation (figs 2-4).<sup>19</sup>

In the Amorgos door frame the male figure is also depicted nude (fig. 4), but from the context of marriage and fertility there emerges an erotic nuance of a poetic order, as the ideal bridegroom is shown as a musician-singer with his lute in his hands.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the idea of the prosperous householder suggested by the representation in the carving on the chest (fig. 1), this crystallises another view of how male virtue was understood and visualised by the consciousness of the age. In both cases however, the placing of the male figure on the right side of the composition instead of the hierarchically more significant left must reflect a deeply held conviction that the woman is the ultimate master of the house, since she holds the semiologically prime left hand position, in spite of the honorary recognition of the superiority of the other sex indicated by the difference in scale of the figures on the chest.<sup>21</sup>

As already mentioned, in so-called "folk art" couples

are normally portrayed as being of equal scale and size, with the man in the semiologically and hierarchically dominant left-hand position. The breach of this rule also contravenes the equally fundamental principle which requires the narrative flow of representations to move in a direction towards the right. In the example under review the contrary movement of the female figure, which concentrates the kinetic flow of the narrative towards the left, recalls the rhythm of the unique representation of the dance on the extant panel of another Peloponnesian chest in the Benaki Museum, probably from Mani (fig. 5).<sup>22</sup> This might provide justifiable grounds for speculation about the possibility of a different perception of the social position of woman, but issues of this kind fall beyond the scope of my objectives here. However I would not make the same disclaimer about the issues relating to the provenance of the work under review which arise from its stylistic affinity –albeit somewhat distant– with the "Dance" chest, in spite of the different level of density of the decorative features. I refer specifically to the overall manner of the execution of the work which avoids sharp outlines and displays a clear preference for succulent curves.

A comparison of the chest which has stimulated our arguments so far (fig. 1) with another in a private collection, which the owner understands to come from Dimitsana (fig. 6),<sup>23</sup> casts further doubt on the former's



alleged origins in Arcadia, while at the same time strengthening the case for its alternative provenance in Mani; apart from the obvious differences in the quality of the carving and of the synthetic development of the ornamental motifs, the totally unsophisticated portrayal of the female figure in the centre of the Dimitsana chest betrays the naivete and clumsiness which go hand in hand with the dying era of Greek folk art. This view is corroborated by another work which has the same provenance and subject matter, but displays much more meticulous execution.<sup>24</sup> Closer stylistically, on the other hand, is the representation on the panel with the dance (fig. 5), as well as the surviving carved panel of another chest in the Benaki Museum from the Helen Stathatos bequest (fig. 7).<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the obvious difference in the execution, the expressive idiom is in both cases governed by quite similar accents. In the second however the subsidiary motifs display a more "constricted" design with a glut of densely arranged supplementary elements, recalling the "abhorrence of a vacuum" which is a feature of the works of other periods and other categories of artefact.<sup>26</sup> It must be admitted however that the stifling profusion of thematic ideas does not totally obscure the structure of the composition, with the pivotal central position allotted to the apotropaic/protective roundel with the double-headed eagle, crowned by two birds facing each other (fig. 7).<sup>27</sup> The left-hand section is dominated by the monumental, heraldic presence of two confronting lions rampant.<sup>28</sup> Below, a smaller-scale vase of flowers provides the semiological completion of the coded message of the life force which is always presented by adherents of the "tree of life". The discreet presence of the birds here also ensures a happy outcome to the prayer for fertility suggested by the thematic material, and, in combination with the apotropaic/protective significance of the double-headed eagle, it obeys the rules of a symbolism which is totally in accordance with the nuptial/matrimonial purpose of the work.

On the right hand side of the composition (fig. 7) the allusive symbolism is completed by the heroic theme of a fantastic hunt, with an impressively large-scale male figure, raised sword in hand, prominent in the centre of the representation and flanked by a smaller companion and a cypress tree with a bird on its crest.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation of the scene is confirmed by the presence of a

group of three lions, which is also indirect justification for the decipherment of the conceptual significance of the two horsemen as hunters in the upper register of the "Dance" chest, mainly because of the presence of the two dogs accompanying them (fig. 5).<sup>30</sup> The heroic dimension of this subject, which is repeated in a different form in the more clearly carved ornamentation on a chest from Epiros,<sup>31</sup> may be attributed to the idealised dream of manhood which girls must have devised for their future companion -not merely a prosperous, successful, and socially recognised figure (fig. 1), a musician who can sing his melodious song of love (figs 2-4), or a skilled dancer (fig. 5), but also a brave hunter, who has the strength to defy the dangers of the forest and the irrational supremacy of the life force. Such were Heracles, Perseus, and in more recent times St George.<sup>32</sup> In the Benaki Museum chest the happy outcome of the confrontation is suggested by the superior positioning of the male figure among the narrative components, the unusual plasticity of his bearing, the splendour of his striking garments, and, especially, the optimism which radiates from the presence of the single vase with flowers.

I shall not spend time here on an examination of the subsidiary decorative features surrounding the basic thematic nuclei of the representation, which display inventive and imaginative variations on more or less well known vegetal motifs. Once again it seems to me that there is more significance in the uncanonical arrangement of the material, with the main narrative weight of the composition on the right hand side and an unorthodox kinetic inclination towards the left. The fact that precisely the same thing does not occur in another chest in the Dionysis Fotopoulos collection, which in spite of its stylistic differences can readily be attributed to the same craftsman, might perhaps lead us on to the secrets of the enigmatic dating of all these works (fig. 8).<sup>33</sup> In the representation on the Fotopoulos chest the narrative level is continuous, the supplementary vegetal ornamentation sparse, with intermediate breathing spaces, while the unusual two-headed eagle in the centre lacks the roundel which both emphasises and confines it in the other examples (figs 5, 7). The hunting scene here unfolds correctly in the left section but with the large lion rampant coming first and, confronting it in the semiologically secondary place,





Fig. 8. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Dionysis Fotopoulos Collection (photo: M. Skiadaresis).

Fig. 9. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Alekos Eustathiadis Collection (photo: K. Manolis).





Fig. 10. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Alekos Eustathiadis Collection (photo: K. Manolis).



Fig. 11. Carved wooden chest. Nauplion, Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation 1989.09.0001 (photo: Museum).



the hero-hunter, who is dressed as impressively as in the Benaki Museum example, and also raises his sword with his right arm (fig. 7). On the right hand side is a clearly delineated flower vase with two birds face to face on the top, with below a small cypress tree surmounted by another bird. The upper edge of the representation has a border with two coiled snakes facing each other and uninterrupted tongue-shaped ornamentation, which, as in the previous example, frames the whole of the carved surface.

Despite the reciprocally matched pose of the confronting snakes, here again obedience to the rules of symmetry appears not to have been the craftsman's main preoccupation in the work. The same goes for the "canon of hierarchy", since the huntsman is on the right, in the secondary position, which might suggest his defeat at the hands of the beast, were this not inconceivable in the context of the overall spirit of the work and the subsidiary thematic material. Nevertheless although, at least at present, it is difficult to find any plausible explanation for the divergences from the traditional rules, the narrative flow begins logically on the left side of the representation, to end, also logically, on the right, with the promise of fertility inherent in the symbolism of the flower vase.

Narrative unity and, to some degree, symmetrical positioning of the decorative motifs are of greater interest to the craftsman of two other, more crudely executed, examples in the Alekos Eustathiadis collection, which again urgently raise the issue of the date of the entire group under review. The first has in the centre a female figure whose hands are clasped to her waist, with below her a vase from which a long flowering shoot stretches out to the right (fig. 9).<sup>34</sup> On the left side, above a low shoot stemming from the same vase, a male figure in a *fustanella* and *fez* approaches the woman, holding a flowering branch and clumsily grasping at her breast.<sup>35</sup> The "canon of hierarchy" is reinstated here through the primary place held by the male figure, although the woman indisputably carries the greater weight in the composition, as can be deduced from her pivotal position and frontal immobility, as well as by the notable profusion of flowering vegetation which forms the conceptual counterweight to the male figure. It is also not without significance that of the two figures who face each other with raised swords, on either side of

the central subject, the dominant position on the same side as the female is held by the second, who can be identified with certainty as St George from the dragon depicted below his horse's feet. This forces us to identify the first horseman as St Demetrios, and also to seek some interpretation for the bird pecking at a bunch of grapes below his horse.<sup>36</sup> It follows that the same guardian saints are represented on the second chest, galloping off to the right, in a headlong rush away from the large pot of flowers and the two birds placed back to back in the central axis of the composition (fig. 10).<sup>37</sup>

In the remaining works the narrative element of the representations gradually diminishes and finally disappears, and the human figures steadily lose their semantic interest, while there is an intensification of the spirit of ornamentation, whose demands are met by symbols which are by now abstractive and conventionalised. The attainment of symmetry – albeit to a limited degree – in the configuration of the motifs seems to be a somewhat desiccating process, as can be seen for example in a chest in the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation (fig. 11).<sup>38</sup> The modest, unassuming relief of the carved surface is here surrounded by a band of the tongue-shaped moulding familiar from other representations, though here transformed into triangular form, and the narrative unity is obscured by the vertical lines which create three equal planes, the central one containing the roundel with the double-headed eagle. In the first plane on the left two horsemen are shown facing each other with raised swords and a snake between them; these are St Demetrios and St George, as indicated by the barely visible monster and the clearly depicted dragon beneath the horses' feet. The two figures are arranged symmetrically with, under them, stylised vegetal motifs and a symbolic wheel in the form of a circle with six leaf-shaped radii, which also appears in the previous example (fig. 7). The same symbol forms the decoration of the third plane, in the midst of similar vegetal motifs and with two animals facing each other above.

Even cruder and more simplistic, displaying a diffused child-like naivete but also a curious immediacy, is the representation on another chest in the Eustathiadis collection, where three irregular planes are created by four tall cypress trees (fig. 12).<sup>39</sup> In the first of these, above a six-petalled flower, is a roundel containing a rosette with six petals, an enlarged version of which





Fig. 12. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Alekos Eustathiadis Collection (photo: K. Manolis).



Fig. 13. Carved wooden chest. Athens, Alekos Eustathiadis Collection (photo: K. Manolis).



dominates the second plane, below two many-petalled flowers of differing size. The third by contrast emits a rather faint echo of the hunting scenes found in the preceding examples, with a male figure standing acrobatically on the back of a horse below a beast with two flowers next to it, whose execution recalls the chest from Dimitsana (fig. 6). More competent design and exceptionally skilful carving is to be found in the totally symmetrical ornamentation of a large chest also in the Eustathiadis collection (fig. 13).<sup>40</sup> The carving on the main panel consists of a broad band of convoluted leafy plants which frames the rectangular decorated inner plane containing three contiguous roundels of equal size, with the double-headed eagle in the centre. On the other two roundels the human faces with a double halo of rays might be thought to represent two suns, but the clear discrepancy in the facial features suggests the idea of sun and moon, and that the chest was probably intended for use in church.<sup>41</sup> The outer edges of the design are symmetrically delineated by a large animal with a smaller one above – probably lions – while four pairs of vertically placed rosettes separate the subsidiary features.

The cohesion, or rather inter-connection, of the stylistic and thematic elements, as well as the corresponding failure of the compositional principles to observe certain rules of fundamental significance even in folk art, provide a decisive argument for the attribution of all the works examined here to a common centre of production. The first chest in the group (fig. 1), the chest with the representation of the dance (fig. 5), and that in the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation (fig. 11) were all acquired with the vague information that they come from Mani. The chests in the Eustathiadis collection (figs 9, 10, 12, 13) are said more precisely to have their origin in Messenian Mani, the provenance of the last being given as Tseria, in the Taygetos mountains above Kardamyli, while all information regarding the examples in the Stathatos bequest (fig. 7) and the Fotopoulos collection (fig. 8) has disappeared. At present therefore we only have the evidence of dealers who have been handling this material on the Athenian market since the 1970's to substantiate the

existence of workshops established somewhere in the south-west Peloponnese to service the requirements of a wider area, nor has it been possible to trace any bibliographically corroborative clues in marriage contracts or local newspapers, in publications of secondary academic importance or in more general treatises. Even oral testimony provides scant recollection of the presence of such chests in Maniot houses to confirm the existence – albeit hypothetical – of a woodcarvers' workshop there. It is indeed persistently reported that after the burning of Laconian Mani by Aslan Pasha in 1614, the first olive trees were only planted in the 1860's, while from Areopolis downwards wood was unavailable even for the basic necessities of life.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, in a context where problems of artistic creation relate to space, the parameter of time intrudes uninvited – the duration of human memory and the duration of historical data, the duration of works of material culture and the duration of unverifiable scholarly ignorance. There may well have been no trees in Central Mani, but walnut wood, the material from which the majority and the best examples of Greek chests were made, could be found in Outer Mani and neighbouring Messenia, and also in the not too distant areas of Laconia and Arcadia, quite apart from the fact that it was a marketable commodity which could be transported.<sup>43</sup> It is inconceivable that the household effects of the Maniots – however limited and meagre – should not have included a chest, the one basic piece of furniture in every Greek house.<sup>44</sup> The heroic spirit of that inaccessible area can be similarly adduced in support, to provide an interpretation for the singular thematic material of certain of the representations. But I believe there is more decisive significance in the clear, if somewhat remote, stylistic affinity displayed by the stonecarving of the same area: as yet, however, I am not in a position to go further and answer the question as to whether the craftsmen who carved in stone and in wood were one and the same.<sup>45</sup>

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Delivorrias 1990: A. Delivorrias, Γύρω από την αντοχή της παράδοσης στη νεοελληνική κεραμική του όψιμου 19ου αι., in: *Αρμός, τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Ν. Κ. Μουτσόπουλο*, I (Thessaloniki 1990) 477-90.

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## NOTES

1. See E. Tsapralis, *Ξυλόγλυπτα Τέμπλα Ηπείρου 17ου-α' ημίσεος 18ου αι.* (Athens 1980); Ch. M. Koutelakis, *Η ανάπτυξη της ξυλογλυπτικής στο Αιγαίο και ιδιαίτερα στα Δωδεκάνησα* (Athens 1985); *id.*, *Ξυλόγλυπτα τέμπλα της Δωδεκανήσου μέχρι το 1700* (Athens, Ioannina 1986); *id.*, Νέα στοιχεία για εργαστήρια ξυλογλυπτικής και αργυρο-χρυσόχοϊας, *Μνημοσύνη* 12 (1991-1993) 326-52; *id.*, *Έλληνες αργυροχρυσόχοϊοι και ξυλογλύπτες* (Athens 1996) 231-333.

2. Cf. Hatzimichali 1925, 155-72; Hatzimichali 1937, 33-34, 133-39; Makris 1969, 49-50, 63-75; M. Faltaits, *Σκυριανή ξυλοτεχνία*, *Ελληνική Λαϊκή Τέχνη* 10 (1973) 33-43; Delivorrias 1997, 308-11; Zora 1994, 17-20, 72-77.

3. Delivorrias 2002, 95-96 n. 2 with refs.

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5. *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* XII (Athens 1975) 376-91; A. E. Vakalopoulos, *Ιστορία του νέου Ελληνισμού* VII (Thessaloniki 1986) 782-90; *ibid.*, VIII (Thessaloniki 1988) 314-16, 332-55.

6. See Ch. Kalliga, Η εξέλιξη των οικισμών στη Μάνη, in: O. B. Doumani, P. Oliver (eds), *Οικισμοί στην Ελλάδα* (Athens 1974); Ch. G. Konstantinopoulos, *Οι παραδοσιακοί χτίστες της Πελοποννήσου* (Athens 1983); *Επώνυμα Αρχοντικά των χρόνων της Τουρκοκρατίας* (Athens 1986) 125-88; *Ελληνική Παραδοσιακή Αρχιτεκτονική* (ed. D. Philippidis), *Πελοπόννησος* I (Athens 1986); *Πελοπόννησος* II – *Στερεά Ελλάδα* (Athens 1987) 9-204; M. G. Zagorissiou, *Παραδοσιακή αρχιτεκτονική της Δημητσάνας. Έρευνα και προτάσεις για αποκατάσταση και αξιοποίηση* (Athens 1977).

7. With the exception of Argolidocorinthia, I. Papantoniou, Οι χωρικές φορεσιές της Αργολιδοκορινθίας, in: *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of Peloponnesian Studies* III (Athens 1976) 419-46, pls 22-40; Hatzimichali 1979, 138-71; L. Welters, Women's Traditional dress in the Provinces of Argolida and Corinthia, *Ethnografika* 7 (1989) 17-30; *id.*, Women's traditional dress in Argolidocorinthia. Local Variations, *Ethnografika* 11 (1998) 133-76. On the costume of Leonidion, I. Papantoniou, *Ελληνικές φορεσιές. Συλλογή Λυκείου των Ελληνίδων Καλαμάτας* (Athens 1991) 28; Papantoniou 1996, 24-25, and of Arcadia, Papantoniou 2000, 106, figs 119-20. The Benaki Museum possesses items of female costume from Doliana (EE 508, 530, 533), Kalamata (EE 540-541), Messenia, Kyparissia (EE 496, 500-506) and Mani (EE 1781, 1913).

8. No. 35496. Dimensions: 0.50 x 0.82 x 0.45 m. The wood, which is from a broad-leaved ring-porus variety, presents a microscopic image similar to oak or chestnut.

9. These are strictly followed even in Greek folk art: Makris 1969, 64; Zora 1969, 162; Korré 1978, 32 n. 3 with bibliography; Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1983, 46-47; Delivorrias 1990, 485-486 n. 12; Delivorrias 2002, 99 n. 10.

10. *DACL* I 2, 1907, 2691-2709 s.v. Arbres; O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (New York 1961) 699-700 s.v. The Sacred Tree; K. G. Korré, Φύλακες δένδρων και κιώνων, in: *Proceedings of the 3rd Symposium on the Folklore of Northern Greece* (Thessaloniki 1979) 335-47; Zora, 1993, 5, 9-18, 22.

11. See generally Hatzimichali 1937, 33-34; Ch. Binos, Ευλόγυπτες λεοβιακές κασέλες, *Zygos* 2 (1965) 46-56; K. Kefalas, Κασέλες, μπαπούλα και σεντούκια στο Βορειοελλαδικό χώρο, in: *Proceedings of the 3rd Symposium of the Folklore of Northern Greece* (Thessaloniki 1979) 325-33;

Ch. Vallianos, G. Pervolarakis, G. Neroladakis, *Τα Κρητικά έπιπλα* (Athens 1986) 108-34; Zora 1994, 19.

12. On birds and their significance, see Spitzing 1989, 291-93, s.v. Taube/Taubenhaus; Delivorrias 1990, 485-86 n. 14; Karagiannis-Moser 1997, 29-30, 57-59, 63-69, 77-81, 121-24, 138-41, 165-66, 199-201, 211, 215-26; and in connection with the stonecarving of Mani, Kassis 1983, 52, 83, 116. On the snake, *DACL* XV 1 (1950) 1353-58, s.v. serpent; Florakis 1980, 128-30, 149 n. 246; Kassis 1983, 30, 49-50, 78 (reliefs from Mani); Spitzing 1989, 285-87, s.v. Schlange; Delivorrias 1990, 484 n. 10; Zora 1993, 30-37; Zora 1994, 218, fig. 57; Karagiannis-Moser 1997, 206-07, 289-302, 330. On the fish, *DACL* VII 2 (1927) 1990-2086, s.v. Ιχθύς; Spitzing 1989, 120-22 s.v. Fisch; Karagiannis-Moser 1997, 174-75, 195-96, 207-08. The snake and the fish on the reliefs of a fanlight: Florakis 1980, fig. 88.

13. R. C. W. Robinson, Tobacco pipes of Corinth and of the Athenian Agora, *Hesperia* 54 (1985) 149-203 pls 33-64. Cf. the representations on a cup in the Museum of Folk Art, Athens, no. 3114; Delivorrias 2002, 116 n. 51 drawing 2, and the leaves of a cupboard of 1804 from Siphnos: Delivorrias 1997, 303, 346 fig. 116.

14. Papantoniou 1996, 23-24, 27; Papantoniou 2000, 228-42, where it is emphasised that it was worn by the nobility as well as by the islanders.

15. Cf. the well-known embroidered cushion with the schooner from Skyros, Benaki Museum no. 6389: Zora 1969, 172 fig. 158 (= Polychroniadis 1980, 23 fig. 1); Zora 1994, 224 fig. 79; Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 439 fig. 761; Taylor 1998, 97. Another example is recorded in Hatzimichali 1925, 113 fig. 110, and another in the Museum of Folk Art, Athens 6190: Zora 1994, 223-24 fig. 78. It is quite possible that the frame signifies the idea of a house, as in other examples: Johnstone 1972, 39-40 figs 10-12, 42 fig. 17, 100 fig. 124; Polychroniadis 1980, 19, 21-22, 24-25, fig. 2, 25, 51, 97 (=Zora 1994, 226 figs 88-89); Taylor 1998, 62-63, 138-39; cf. also for woodcarving in: Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 418 fig 715, 421 fig. 725.

16. *DACL* III 2 (1914) 3045-3144, esp. 3139-43, s.v. Croix et Crucifix; Dalton (n. 10) 680-82, s.v. The Sacred Monogram and Cross; Zora 1966, 41, 44-45, 49, 52-53; Korré 1978, 66-67; Florakis, 1980, 125-27; Spitzing 1989, 193-204, s.v. Kreuz; *ODB* 1 (1991) 549-53, s.v. Cross.

17. See Delivorrias 1990, 485-86 n. 13 with bibliography; Delivorrias 2002, 98-99 nn. 9-10.

18. To my knowledge this exceptionally interesting subject has not yet been properly studied: A. F. Lagopoulos, Τελετουργίες καθαγίασης του ελληνικού παραδοσιακού οικισμού, *Ethnologia* 6-7 (1998-99) 65-66; Delivorrias 2002, 115 n. 49. For the strength of the Canon in antiquity, see A. Delivorrias, Der statuarische Typus der sogenannten Hera Borghese, in: H. Beck, P. C. Bol (eds), *Polykletforschungen* (Berlin 1993) 226-27 n. 9; A. Delivorrias, Polykleitos and the Allure of Feminine Beauty, in: W. G. Moon (ed.), *Polyk-*



*leitos, the Doryphoros, and Tradition* (Madison, Wisconsin 1995) 203 n. 38.

19. Delivorrias 1992, 313 fig. 152; Delivorrias 1997, 313 fig. 152. For nudity in Byzantine art, see *DACL I 1* (1907) 510-19, s.v. Adam et Eve; H. Maguire, *The Profane Aesthetic in Byzantine Art and Literature*, *DOP* 53 (1999) 189-205; cf. in connection with post-Byzantine ecclesiastical art: Makris 1969, 64 fig. 24; K. A. Makris, *Εκκλησιαστικά ξυλόγλυπτα* (Athens 1982) 22-23, 28, 36; Kassis 1983, 67. Cf. on rural woodcarving: G. E. Papatrechas, *Ποιμνικά ξυλόγλυπτα από Μαχαίρα Ξηρομέρου* (Athens 1986) 64, 74.

20. F. Anoyanakis, *Greek Popular Musical Instruments* (Athens 19912) 212-58. Cf. the representation on a chest from Mytilene and on two decorative features from Rhodes, Benaki Museum 31165, 8728, 8726, and on a wardrobe in Patmos: Delivorrias 1997, 302 fig. 121 (=Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 424, figs 732, 733) 304 figs 122-23, 125. The subject is common on embroidery from Skyros (Polychroniadis 1980, 23 fig. 86 [=Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 451 fig. 779; Taylor 1998, 20]), Ioannina (Polychroniadis 1980, 19 fig. 23) and Crete (E. K. Frangaki, *Από την Κεντρική στην Κρήτη* [Athens 1979] 15-16 fig. 7; Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 439 fig. 762; Taylor 1998, 106-07, 112-13).

21. As on a piece of embroidery from Arachova, Benaki Museum. EE 106: Hatzimichali 1979, 118, 127 fig. 120; Polychroniadis 1980, 27-28 fig. 123a; Delivorrias 2002, 109, n. 33 and fig. 13, with comments on its special features.

22. No. 37911. Dimensions: 0.41 x 1.07 x 0.02 m. The wood comes from a broad-leaved, diffuse-porus variety, which from microscopic examination of a cross-section resembles walnut. A. Delivorrias, in: *Επίλογος '98* (Athens 1998) 75, 77 with fig.; Delivorrias 2000, 123 with fig.; Delivorrias 2002, *passim*, fig. 1.

23. Alekos Eustathiadis Collection. Dimensions: 0.50 x 0.97 x 0.41 m.

24. Also in the Alekos Eustathiadis Collection. Dimensions: 0.44 x 0.96 x 0.40 m.

25. No. 21777. Dimensions: 0.39 x 1.29 x 0.02 m. Wood conifer, probably cypress: Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 418 figs 714, 718. I originally attributed no. 21776 to the same group (Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 418 fig. 716), but the more I study it, the less I am persuaded of this view.

26. Cf. Zora 1969, 162; D. Stamelos, *Νεοελληνική λαϊκή τέχνη. Πηγές, προσανατολισμοί και κατακτήσεις από τον 16ο αι. ως την εποχή μας* (Athens 1975) 133; Florakis 1980, 160-61; Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1983, 45 n. 1, 48; Delivorrias, 1990, 485 n. 11.

27. For the double-headed eagle, one of the basic motifs of "folk" art, see recently Delivorrias 2002, 114 n. 45 with bibliography.

28. See generally Florakis 1980, 96-98, 134; A. E. Florakis, *Εραλδικά διακοσμητικά θέματα στη νεοελληνική χειροτεχνία, Deltion Eraldikis kai Genealogikis Etaireias*

*Ellados* 8 (1992) 184-89 esp. 185-86; specifically on the lion: Spitzing 1989, 223-24 s.v. Lowe; Karagiannis-Moser 1997, 180-81, 331, 338. The motif is common in Mani stonecarving: Kassis 1983, 80-82, 84-85.

29. Cf. Makris 1969, 64 fig. 29; P. Zora, *Οι Βοτσαλωτές αυλές των Σπετσών*, *Zygos* 70 (1961) 26; Florakis 1980, 150-51, figs. 222-23, 228-29; Polychroniadis 1980, 19 fig. 25; 20 figs 28, 37. 24-25 fig. 97. Door frames from Ios, Benaki Museum; Delivorrias 2000, 89 fig. For the cypress, see A. Petronotis, *Το κυπαρίσσι στην ελληνική παράδοση: βυζαντινά και νεοελληνικά λιθανάγλυφα, και άλλα δείγματα του στην τέχνη*, in: *5th Symposium on Byzantine and post-Byzantine Archaeology and Art, Programme and Summaries of Papers, Thessaloniki 7-9 June 1985* (Athens 1985) 80-81, with examples and bibliography.

30. Delivorrias 2002, 114-15 nn. 46-47. Cf. Karagiannis-Moser 1997, 47-48.

31. Benaki Museum no. 12999: Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 416 figs 712-13; D. Filippidis, *Διακοσμητικές τέχνες. Τρεις αιώνες τέχνης στην ελληνική αρχιτεκτονική* (Athens 1998) 17 fig. 15; Delivorrias 2000, 117 fig. 124; Delivorrias 2002, 114 n. 46, with further examples.

32. N. G. Politis, *Τα δημόδια ελληνικά άσματα περί της Δρακοντοκτονίας του Αγίου Γεωργίου*, *Laografia* 4 (1913) 185-235; C. Walter, *Η εικονογραφία του Αγ. Γεωργίου με το Δράκοντα*, in: *5th Symposium* (n. 29) 101-02; Spitzing 1989, 130-32, s.v. Georg, der siegreiche Reiterheilige. There is an interesting representation of the saint on an unpublished bridal headband from Skyros: Benaki Museum 6411. Cf. for the two confronting horsemen, Zora 1969, 176 fig. 169; A. Lambrou, *Οι σκυριανές φορεσιές* (Nafplion 1994) 48-51 fig. 47. On the hunt generally, see N. G. Politis, *Εκλογαί από τα τραγούδια του ελληνικού λαού* (Athens 1914) no. 74 (της Λιογέννητης) 91 lines 2, 9, no. 90 (του Κολυμπητή) 135, lines 5-7, no. 91 (Η μάνα η φόνισσα) 136 line 1, 137 lines 17-20; Karagiannis-Moser 1997, 47-48, 70-77, 80-81 (Le cheval a une competence spécialisée en matière de relation amoureuse), 85-147, 332-47. Cf. the subject matter of a wall painting of 1762/3 in Siatista: M. Garidis, *Διακοσμητική ζωγραφική. Βαλκάνια - Μικρασία 18ος-19ος αι.* (Athens 1996) 49-50 fig. 56 and the examples in Delivorrias 2002, 114-15 n. 47 with bibliography. See also Zora 1966, 45 fig. 16; Korré 1978, 48-50; Florakis 1980, 120-22.

33. Dimensions: 0.40 x 0.97 x 0.35 m.

34. Dimensions: 0.49 x 0.86 x 0.41m.

35. While I know of no other example of grasping at the breast, the offering of flowers, the most overt erotic gesture in the vocabulary of folk art, is generally a feature of representations of female figures: Hatzimichali 1925, fig. 210; Polychroniadis 1980, 23 fig. 86 (Taylor 1998, 20; Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 422 fig. 728, 426 fig. 735). Cf. however Polychroniadis 1980, 19 fig. 2, fig. 25 (=Fotopoulos-Delivorrias 1997, 445 fig. 770); Taylor 1998, 151, 152-53.

36. For the Byzantine origins of the motif, see J. Toynbee,



J. Ward Perkins, *Peopled Scrolls: A Hellenistic Motif in the Imperial Art*, *BSR* 18 (1950) 1-43; *LCI* 4 (1972) 483-86, s. v. Weinbau, Weinernte (with full bibliography); L. Bouras, Some observations on the Grand Lavra Phiale at Mount Athos and its Bronze Strobilion, *DChAE* 8 (1975-76) 85-96, pl. 47a; Th. Pazaras, Κατάλογος χριστιανικών αναγλύφων πλακών με ζωομόρφους παραστάσεις, *Byzantina* 9 (1977) 23-95, nos 30, 48-49; *id.*, *Ανάγλυφες σαρκοφόγοι και επιτάφιας πλάκες της μέσης και ύστερης βυζαντινής περιόδου στην Ελλάδα* (Athens 1988) 100, no. 7, 24, 27, pl. 6a, 18, 20; Kassis 1983, 92 (relief from Mani).

37. Dimensions: 0.38 x 0.87 x 0.35 m.

38. No. 1989.09.0001. Dimensions: 0.36 x 0.77 x 0.30 m.

39. Dimensions: 0.34 x 0.77 x 0.31 m.

40. Dimensions: 0.55 x 1.36 x 0.51 m.

41. In spite of the fact that the moon is usually represented differently: P. Johnstone, *Byzantine Tradition in church Embroidery* (London 1967) 107-08 pl. 56, 125-26 pl. 113, 127 pl. 118; Korré 1978, 64-65; Florakis 1980, 142-44. For the significance of the motif, see N. G. Politis, Ο ήλιος κατά τους δημόσιους μύθους. Η Σελήνη κατά τους μύθους και τα δοξασίες του ελληνικού λαού, *Laografika Symmeikta* 2 (1921) 110-53, 154-77; Spitzing 1989, 240-41 s.v. Mond. Cf. in connection with stone carving in Mani, Kassis 1983, 50, 66.

42. As D. Vayiakkakos has pointed out to me: see A. E. Vakalopoulos, *Ιστορία του νέου Ελληνισμού* III (Thessaloniki 1968) 357; *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* X (Athens 1974) 328-33; D. N. Mexis, *Η Μάνη και οι Μανιάτες. Θέματα για την ιστορία τους, τη λαογραφία και την τέχνη*

(Athens 1977) 288-93.

43. See the remarks of A. Petronotis on timber in connection with architecture generally, *Μανιάτες Μαστόροι, Lakonikai Spoudai* 5 (1980) 172-74, 183-84; Kassis 1983, 15.

44. The evidence from travellers is clear: J. Galt, *Voyages and Travels in the years 1809, 1810 and 1811* (London 1812) 155: "A bed occupied the furthest corner, under which I perceived a large, antique, carved coffer" (in the tower of Antonbey, at Vathy); B. de St. Vincent, *Expedition Scientifique de Morée* (1829-30) 1 (Paris 1836) 351: "ce sont des coffres ou bahuts, quelquefois cependant d'un certain prix a cause de leurs ornements, qui en garnissent le pourtour; on renferme dans ces sortes de magasins tout ce qu'on possede, depuis la plus vile chaussure jusqu' au linge de corps, aux tresors et aux titres de famille...". Cf. G. Saitas, *Ελληνική Παραδοσιακή Αρχιτεκτονική, Μάνη* (Athens 1992) 67 n. 220, 90-91 n. 259, 103 n. 283.

45. For details of similar thematic features see above nn. 12, 28, 36, 41. Compare also the style of chest no. 8 with the reliefs decorating a window of the chapel in the tower of Bourzinos in Kardamyli, Kassis 1983, 70. There are also affinities in the carved ornamentation of the church of Agioi Taxiarches in Areopolis (1789): K. G. Korré, *Λαϊκά λιθανάγλυφα από την Αρεόπολη Μάνης, Lakonikai Spoudai* 4 (1979) 349-54; Kassis 1983, 29, 61-66.

## ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ΔΕΛΗΒΟΡΡΙΑΣ

Ξυλόγλυπτες ελληνικές κασέλες από την Πελοπόννησο. Ζητήματα τεχνοτροπικής και θεματικής ιδιαιτερότητας

Η παρουσίαση μιας ανέκδοτης ξυλόγλυπτης κασέλας από τις συλλογές του Μουσείου Μπενάκη (εικ. 1) και η συνδρομή δύο συγγενικών έργων (εικ. 5, 7), καθοδηγούν την ψηλάφηση ορισμένων ζητημάτων γύρω από έναν ανέγγιχτο ουσιαστικά τομέα της κοσμικής τέχνης των μεταβυζαντινών χρόνων. Με τη μελέτη αυτή επιχειρείται για άλλη μια φορά μια διείσδυση στον αινεματικό κόσμο της λεγόμενης "λαϊκής" δημιουργίας.

Οι κασέλες, τα απαραίτητα αν όχι μοναδικά έπιπλα κάθε παραδοσιακού σπιτιού, απαντούν έως και τον πρώιμο 20ό αι. σε όλη την έκταση του ελλαδικού χώ-

ρου, χωρίς εντούτοις να έχουν ακόμα μελετηθεί συστηματικά. Από τον έλεγχο της περιορισμένης άλλωστε βιβλιογραφίας συνάγεται εύκολα ότι το σωζόμενο υλικό, ούτε επαρκώς δημοσιοποιημένο, ούτε και εξαντλητικά αποσταγμένο είναι. Ενδεικτική για το επίπεδο της έρευνας θα πρέπει μάλιστα να θεωρηθεί η απουσία μιας έστω και δοκιμαστικής κατανομής των καταγεγραμμένων παραδειγμάτων σε συγκεκριμένες ενότητες με κοινά τεχνοτροπικά γνωρίσματα. Κάτι που θα διευκόλυνε κάθε μετέπειτα απόπειρα γεωγραφικής κατάταξης, αλλά και κάθε σοβαρή προσπάθεια



να ιχνηλατηθεί ο αβέβαιος εξελικτικός χρόνος της επεξεργασίας, κυρίως όμως να εντοπιστεί το διαφεύγον στίγμα όσων διαδικασιών σχετίζονται με τη διακίνηση της παραγωγής.

Η υπό εξέταση ομάδα των παραδειγμάτων του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, εμπλουτισμένη από μία ενότητα ομόλογων έργων σε άλλες συλλογές (εικ. 6, 8-13), μπορεί να αποδοθεί με σχετική ασφάλεια σε εργαστήρια της νοτιοδυτικής Πελοποννήσου και ειδικότερα της μεσσηνιακής Μάνης. Ως προς την τεχνοτροπική ιδιαιτερότητα και το γενικότερο προσανατολισμό της αισθητικής, επισημαίνεται ο εντελώς διαφορετικός χαρακτήρας που παρουσιάζει τόσο η ιδιοτυπία της λάξευσης, όσο και η θεματική του διακόσμου σε σχέση με κάποια υστερότερα προφανώς παραδείγματα από την Αρκαδία (εικ. 6). Το γεγονός αυτό επιβεβαιώνει τη βασική για τη λεγόμενη "λαϊκή" τέχνη αρχή της εκφραστικής αυτονομίας που διέπει το καλλιτεχνικό ιδίωμα πολλών ελληνικών περιοχών, τη μεγάλη δηλαδή κατά τόπους ποικιλία των καλλιτεχνικών εκδηλώσεων, η οποία είναι αισθητή λ.χ. στην κεντητική, προπάντων όμως στο εξαιρετικό ανάπτυγμα του διακοσμητικού πνεύματος που παρουσιάζουν οι γυναικείες ενδυμασίες. Οι άλλοι επιμέρους τομείς της "λαϊκής" δημιουργίας, παραμένοντας ερευνητικά μετέωροι, δεν προσφέρουν δυνατότητες συγκριτικών παραβολών. Τούτο ι-

σχύει ειδικότερα στην περίπτωση της Πελοποννήσου, η οποία για λόγους ιστορικούς εμφανίζεται πραγματικά απογυμνωμένη από τα συστατικά του πιο πρόσφατου πολιτιστικού της παρελθόντος.

Με αφετηρία τα δεδομένα επισημαίνονται και σχολιάζονται κάποιες από τις ιδιομορφίες της μανιάτικης ξυλογλυπτικής, κυρίως ως προς τις θεματικές επιλογές των διακοσμητικών πεδίων. Σε σχέση λ.χ. με ορισμένες τουλάχιστον από τις αρχές που σημαδεύουν τις συνθέσεις της "λαϊκής" τέχνης, ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζουν οι συχνές αποκλίσεις από το βασικό κανόνα της συμμετρίας (εικ. 1, 7, 8). Σημαντικότερο νοηματικό βάρος πρέπει ωστόσο να υποκρύπτεται στην επανειλημμένη διατάραξη του κανόνα της ιεραρχίας με την αντιστροφή της καθιερωμένης φοράς, που κατευθύνει και γενικότερα τη διηγηματική ροή των παραστάσεων από τα αριστερά προς τα δεξιά (εικ. 2-4, 5). Σε ορισμένες περιπτώσεις τα εικονιζόμενα θέματα αφήνουν να προβάλλει ευδιάκριτα ένα ερωτικό στοιχείο, όπως και σε αντίστοιχα παραδείγματα άλλων περιοχών (εικ. 1, 2-4, 9). Η ηρωική, τέλος, διάσταση, η οποία διαφαίνεται στις διηγηματικές απόπειρες των παραστάσεων του κυνηγιού (εικ. 5, 7-8, 11-12), δεν είναι καθόλου ξένη προς το φρόνημα των κατοίκων της Μάνης και το πνεύμα της μανιάτικης αρετής.