

SIMILARITIES IN THE RURAL LIFE  
OF  
ANCIENT AND MODERN GREECE

Submitted as School Paper  
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June 1, 1929



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If one wanders through the Greek countryside of today, one sees pictures everywhere recalling passages from Homer, Hesiod, Aristophanes, Sophocles and other of the ancient writers. And here and there we might be looking at the very group selected by a fifth century vase painter for his subject. Indeed, so many of the methods employed in the field and in the house, and the implements themselves, are so similar to the ancient ones that it seems quite possible that they have been inherited in a direct line from the Greeks of antiquity. Of course all primitive rural life is bound to be very much the same in whatever age, because of the limited type of work. Furthermore, when we consider how conservative most agricultural communities are in accepting change, and that in Greece the pooriness of the soil prohibited much in the way of rapid development, it seems plausible to consider that customs that are peculiar to Greece today and in antiquity are direct survivals. If such be the case the study of modern Greek rural life may help to elucidate obscurities in the ancient and it is with this in mind that I shall endeavour to point out some of the most obvious similarities between the two.

First, let us consider the location and the appearance of the country village. Today we find the older of the villages built on hillsides, while the fields lie below. From archaeological remains of ancient towns, from prehistoric times





FIG. 1  
island of Melos



times on, we find the towns similarly placed on hillsides. There is always the acropolis with houses clustering about it. Obviously this was for protection from attacking bands of neighbouring enemies or of brigands, and the practice was continued<sup>in modern times</sup> for the same reason. The house construction today varies according to the available materials of the neighborhood, sometimes they are built of wood with rubble foundations, sometimes of sundried brick, and sometimes of stone. Usually the plan is rectangular with two or three rooms and a courtyard in front for the animals. We have very scant evidence for the appearance of ancient peasant huts, but at Eutresis, a prehistoric site, there are rubble foundations of small houses of varying shapes, but which look very much as a modern peasant hut would appear if ruined. In southern Euboea on Mt. Ocha stone huts were found, called the "Dragon Houses", by the peasants.<sup>1</sup> They are rectangular in shape, and built<sup>of</sup> carefully fitted stones in fairly regular courses of varying height. Mr. Franklin P. Johnson dates them in the fourth century or later, and says they were probably used as shepherd huts. They certainly are identical in appearance to the stone peasant hut of today. So although the evidence is meagre it is very likely that the ancient villages were much the same in appearance as the modern hill towns.

Not only the appearance of the houses is the same but the life on the streets seems to harken back to the ancients. The ass laden with a bundle of faggots might be that which Polygnotes painted.<sup>2</sup> It still seems to be the chief burden bearer as it was in the time of Aristophanes. In fact the phrase "ὄνος ἄγνων" was used proverbially of those who underwent toil

1. Johnson, F.P., A.J.A., 1925, p. 398 ff.

2. Frazer, Paus. V, 27.4





FIG. II  
EPIRUS



for the benefit of others.<sup>1</sup> Xanthias says, in the Frogs,

"And I'm the donkey in the mystery show.  
But I'll not stand it, not one instant longer."<sup>2</sup>

Donkeys laden with water jars, with panniers of fruit, or carrying a human burden are as characteristic of ancient Greece as they are of the modern.<sup>3</sup> The women still draw their water at the fountains and carry it on their shoulders, just as did the maidens in the Panathenaic procession. ~~Add~~ <sup>with</sup> like Electra they might say:

"Hail, black-winged night, nurse of the golden stars,  
Wherein I bear this pitcher on mine head<sup>3</sup>  
Poised, as I fare to river-cradling springs."

There is a red-figured hydria by Hypsis showing a woman filling a pitcher at a fountain, from a satyr's-head spout, while next to her stands a man waiting for his amphora to be filled at a lion's-head spout.<sup>4</sup> One can see a repetition of this scene at practically every village fountain today.

In Old Corinth, in the Castalian Spring at Delphi, and in innumerable other places I have seen the women treading their clothes, even as Nausicaa did in Homeric times:

"Now when they came to the beautiful streams of the river, where were the washing tanks that never failed - for abundant clear water welled up from beneath and flowed over, to cleanse garments however soiled - there they loosed the mules from under the waggon and drove them along the eddying river to graze on the honey sweet grass, and themselves took in their arms the raiment from the waggon, and bore it into the dark water, and trampled it in the trenches, busily vying each with each. Now when they had washed the garments, and had cleansed them of all stains, they spread them out in rows on the shore of the sea where the waves dashing against the land washed the pebbles the cleanest."<sup>5</sup>

1. Aristoph., Frogs, 159 footnote, Loeb ed.

2. idem.

3. Eurip., Electra, 54

4. Buschor, p. 152

5. Homer, Od. VI, 85 ff.



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FIG. 11

In Old Corinth, in the Corinthian Spring at Delphi, and

in innumerable other places I have seen the women treading their clothes, even as Washing did in Homeric times:

"Now when they came to the beautiful streams of the river, where were the washing tanks that never failed - for abundant clear water welled up from beneath and flowed over, to cleanse garments however soiled - there they loaded the mules from under the wagon and drove them along the eddying river to grass on the honey-sweet grass, and themselves took in their arms the red ment from the wagon, and bore it into the dark water, and trampled it in the trenches. Now when they busily vying each with each, had cleansed had washed the garments, and had cleansed them of all stains, they spread them out in rows on the shore of the sea where the waves dashed against the land washed the patches the cleanest."

1. Alcibiades, Tragedy, 122 footnotes, 122 ed.

2. Idem, Electric, 24



At Delphi the women had wooden troughs with a water channel grooved at one end. They were so placed that there was a continual stream of fresh water passing through them. Some of the women used heavy wooden paddles to beat the garments and others used the more primitive method of treading.

This primitive way of working is also true of many of the other household occupations. Spinning with the distaff and weaving is an ordinary sight, often the duty of the old grandmothers. Leonidas of Tarentum writes of just such an one:

"Morning and evening, sleep she drove away,  
Old Platthis, - warding hunger from the door,  
And still to wheel and distaff hummed her lay  
Hard by the gates of Eld, and bent and hoar:  
Plying her loom until the dawn was grey,  
The long course of Athene did she tread:  
With withered hand by withered knee she spun  
Sufficient for the loom of goodly thread,  
Till all her work and all her days were done.  
And in her eightieth year she saw the wave  
Of Acheron, - old Platthis, - kind and brave."

Besides this and other literary references, the vase painter has left us ample evidence of the similarity of ancient and modern spinning.  
2

Perhaps one of the most typical institutions of Greece, if we may call it that, is conversation. What town or village is without its Kapheneion, which is primarily devoted to what sounds like violent lingual battles fought over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine? True, coffee is a modern importation and the Kapheneion is a converted wineshop, but none can deny that the feeling is the same. What Greek of today would not feel perfectly natural saying with Aristophanes' chorus in the Peace:

1. Leonidas of Tarentum, The Spinning Woman, trans. by A. Lang  
2. For looms, see Neuberger, abb. 229; Bieber, abb. 135  
For spinning, see Neuberger, abb. 227



"But I love to pass my days  
 With my wine and boon companions  
 Round the merry, merry blaze,  
 When the logs are dry and seasoned,  
 And the fire is burning bright,  
 And I roast the pease and chestnuts  
 In the embers all alight,  
 -- Flirting too with Thratta  
 When my wife is out of sight. (ground,  
 Ah, there's nothing half so sweet as when the seed is in the  
 God a gracious rain is sending, and a neighbour saunters round.  
 'Oh Comarchides!' he hails me: 'how shall we enjoy the hours?'  
 'Drinking seems to suit my fancy, what with these benignant  
 showers! 1

Scenes with two or men in conversation seem to have been a common motif for the ancient vase painter, which is significant in proving that it must have been as obvious a habit of the Greeks as it is today. 2

The very food served during these social hours was ~~very~~ much akin to what one would receive today. The roasted pease and chestnuts mentioned by Aristophanes can be bought on nearly every street corner. The meal of a farmer today is exactly like that of the countryman, coming into town for the assembly in Aristophanes' time:

"Each with his own little  
 Goatskin of wine,  
 Each with three olives, two  
 Onions, one loaf, in his  
 Wallet to dine." 3

In the Peace a more hearty diet is mentioned:

"Therefore let three quarts, my mistress,  
 of your kidney-beans be fried,  
 Mix them nicely up with barley,  
 and your choicest figs provide;  
 .....  
 Then there ought to be some beestinge,  
 four good plates of hare besides  
 ..... "4

yet  
 All of these dishes are ~~still~~ the staple diet of the country.  
 The foods even come from the same parts of the country in many

1. Aristoph., Peace, 1131 ff.
2. Hoppin, R.F. II, pp. 83, 45, 47
3. Aristoph., Ecclesezusai, 306
4. Aristoph., Peace, 1143





FIG IV  
ARCADIA.



cases. Hymettus still produces its famous honey, and Megara<sup>1</sup> is as well known for her garlic as she was in Aristophanes' day. And lamb, of course, is the chief meat of the country as it always was. In Epirus at Easter time we had our pascal lamb roasted on a spit, by our shepherd host, and carved and handed to us in hunks. First the entrails were served to us, then the roasted meat was drawn off of the spits and handed to us with chunks of bread. We literally put forth our hands to the good cheer before us, as the suitors of Penelope did in the absence of her lord:

"Then, going into the house of the godlike Odysseus, they laid their cloaks on the chairs and high seats, and men fell to slaying great sheep and fat goats, aye, and fatted swine, and the heifer of the herd. Then they roasted the entrails and served them out, and mixed wine in the bowls, and the swineherd handed out the cups. And Philoetius, a leader of men, handed them bread in a beautiful basket, and Melanthius poured them wine. So they put forth their hands to the good cheer before them:.....

.....  
But when they had roasted the outer flesh and drawn it off the spits, they divided the portions and feasted a glorious feast." 2

Our host was a rather wealthy sheep owner, and had pastured his flocks on the slopes of the hill where we were enjoying our Homeric feast. His shepherd was sitting on a rock nearby, a long crook in his hand, and his dog lying at his feet. The whole scene recalled a picture on a black-figured vase from Vulci, now in the Louvre.<sup>3</sup> Here the herdsman is driving a flock of sheep and goats. He has a leash in one hand and a crook in the other, while his dog follows on behind. The crook is exactly the same shape as the modern one. On the plains between

1. Aristoph., Peace, 242 ff. Also see footnote in Rogers ed.  
2. Homer, Od. XX, 248 ff.  
3. Hoppin, B.F. Vases, p. 352, Louvre, F. 69



Prebysa and Jannina I saw many rectangular sheepfolds, made of wattles, and probably like those which Homer describes on the famous shield of Achilles:

"Therein also the famed God of the two strong arms  
wrought a pasture of white fleeced sheep, and  
folds and roofed huts and pens." <sup>1</sup>

The shepherds of today, still love to pipe as did their forebears. In Arcadia one hears the shrill notes of the pipe above the tinkle of the bells, and in Epirus, too. It is as if Apollo had come again to tend the flocks of Admetus:

"Amid thine habitations, a shepherd of sheep,  
The flock of Admetus he scorned not to keep,  
While the shepherd's bridal strains soft swelling  
From his pipe, pealed over the slant sloped lea." <sup>2</sup>

There are a number of vase paintings with shepherds piping, usually with a two barreled pipe, while the modern one as a rule has only one. Whether the music is a descendant of the ancient is a moot question which I have not the knowledge to discuss. But it seems to come from Byzantine music which may be a survival of the ancient Greek music, or at least influenced by it.

Besides sheep and goats the modern herdsman often keeps cattle and swine. We know that this was true of Homer's time and on down:

"And therein he wrought a herd of straight-horned kine. The kine were fashioned of gold and tin and with lowing they hasted forth from byre to pasture, beside the sounding river, beside the waving reed. And golden were the herdsmen that walked beside the kine, four in number, and nine dogs swift of foot followed after them." <sup>3</sup>

And in the Odyssey the swineherd Eumaeus plays a prominent part. Besides this reference to swine, there is the well-known incident

1. Homer, Il., XVIII, 587
2. Eurip., Alceste, 568
3. Homer, Il. XVIII, 573
4. Homer, Od. XIV,





FIG V  
EPIRUS - HESIODIC TYPE OF PLOUGH -



FIG. VI  
EPIRUS - HESIODIC TYPE OF PLOUGH



of the unfortunate fate of Odysseus' companions who were turned into swine by Circe.<sup>1</sup> There are very few literary references after Homer to swine, but we know that they were used as propitiatory sacrifices to the gods. There are a few passing references to them as in Theocritus. Evidently they were never as important as other livestock. Today most of the farmers have one or two pigs but one seldom sees a larger number.

When we turn to the actual farming methods we find some of our most interesting and valuable comparisons. One of the most important of the farmer's activities is ploughing. Naturally it is one of the scenes on the shield of Achilles:

"Therein he set also soft fallow land, rich  
tithe and wide, that was three times plowed;  
the ploughers full many, therein, were wheel-  
ing their yokes and driving them this way and  
that, and whensoever after turning they came  
to the headland of the field, then would a man  
come forward and give into his hands a cup of  
honey-sweet wine; and the ploughman would turn  
in the furrows, eager to reach the headlands  
of the deep tithe and the field grew black be-  
hind and seemed verily, as if it had been  
ploughed for all that it was of gold."<sup>2</sup>

This tells us nothing of the type of plough employed in Homeric times, but there is a passage that mentions a jointed plough, "πικτὸν ἄροτρον",<sup>3</sup> not the most primitive form of plough which seems to have been made of one piece of wood. But probably it was difficult to find a piece of wood just the right shape, and the farmer found it was easier to make a plough out of several pieces, so the jointed plough was no doubt an early development.

It is from Hesiod that we get our first clear idea of what the plough looked like. According to the reconstruction of the Hesiodic plough given by Gow,<sup>4</sup> it consisted of the ἄροτρον the

1. Homer, Od. X, 229

2. Homer, Il. XVIII, 542

3. Homer, Od. XIII, 32

4. Gow, A. S. F., The Ancient Plow, J.H.S., 1914, pp. 249 ff.





FIG. VII  
NON-HEBLODIE PLOUGH



FIG. VIII  
NON-HEBLODIE PLOUGH.



Fig. VI

operating part of the plough, the  $\gamma\upsilon\gamma\varsigma$ , or curved beam projecting from the  $\epsilon\lambda\upsilon\mu\alpha$  and the  $\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\beta\omicron\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$  or front part of the pole and the  $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\tau\lambda\gamma$  or handle. In Epirus, near Jannina I saw a plough which was practically identical with this one, except that the share and the upright tail were of one piece of wood instead of two. But of more importance is the fact that the  $\gamma\upsilon\gamma\varsigma$  or pole of the plough was inserted separately and forward of the  $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\tau\lambda\gamma$ . In modern ploughs this is rather an unusual feature, for in the majority of cases the  $\gamma\upsilon\gamma\varsigma$  and the  $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\tau\lambda\gamma$  are set in the same socket or the  $\gamma\upsilon\gamma\varsigma$  comes directly out of the  $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\tau\lambda\gamma$  shaft. This latter type of all wood plough I saw on the island of Tenos and in Crete. The Epirus plough also corresponds to certain vase paintings. A black figured kylix by Nikosthenes in Berlin, shows a plough that is like the Hesiodic, and very similar is the plough on the Kleinmeister schale.<sup>2</sup> As I have already said, this type of plough is not common in Greece today. The common type is similar to that employed in Italy today and may very well be an importation from that country. But the Epirote plough type seems to be a descendant of the ancient. Not only are the ploughs similar in form but the kind of wood they are constructed of seems to be the same. Hesiod instructs Perseus to

"Hew also many bent timbers and bring home a plough tree, when you have found it, and look out on the mountain or in the field for one of holm oak, for this is the strongest for oxen to plough with, when one of Athena's handmen has fixed in the share and fastened to the share with dowels." <sup>3</sup>

Today the share is made of oak, where oak is scarce, and the rest is made of walnut, and if oak can be obtained easily the whole thing is made of it.

1. Hoppin, B.F. Vases, p. 184; Walters, II, fig. 136
2. Pfuhl, III, fig. 248
3. Hesiod, Works and Days, 427 ff.

Fig. VII





FIG. IX  
MELOS



Another spring operation which one sees in many parts of Greece is the breaking of the ground about the grapevines. The grape industry has existed in Greece from ancient times as one of the most important. Homer describes it on the shield of Achilles:

"Therein he set also a vineyard heavily laden with clusters, a vineyard fair and wrought of gold; black were the grapes and the vines were set up throughout on silver poles. And around it he clave a trench of cyanus and about that a fence of tin; and one single path led thereto, whereby the vintagers went and came, whensoever they gathered the vintage. And maidens and youths in childish glee were bearing the honey sweet fruit in wicker baskets. And in their midst a boy made pleasant music with a clear-toned lyre, and thereto sang sweetly the Linos-song with his delicate voice -----" <sup>1</sup>

The Odyssey gives us an even better picture of a vineyard belonging to Alcinous:

"There too is his fruitful vineyard planted, one part of which, a warm spot on the level ground is being dried in the sun, while other grapes men are gathering, and others too, they are treading; but in front are unripe grapes that are shedding the blossom, and others that are turning purple." <sup>2</sup>

Hesiod offers a few bits of advice about vineyards:

"After him (Arcturus) the chilly wailing daughter of Pandion the swallow, appears to men when spring is just beginning. Before she comes, prune the vine, for it is best so. But when the House-Carrier climbs up the plants from the earth to escape the Pleiades, then, is no longer the time for digging vineyards." <sup>3</sup>

"But when Orion and Sirius are come into mid-heaven, and rosy fingered dawn sees Arcturus then cut off all the grape clusters, Perses and bring them home. Show them to the sun for ten days and ten nights: then cover them over for five, and on the sixth day draw off into the vessels the gifts of joyous Dionysos." <sup>4</sup>

Aristophanes speaks of the breaking of the furrows with mattock and

1. Homer, Il. XVIII, 561 ff.
2. Homer, Od. VII, 125
3. Hesiod, Works and Days, 568 ff.
4. idem, 609 ff.
5. Aristoph., Peace, 566 ff.



pitchfork. From these references we can conclude that the grape culture of antiquity follows much the same line as that of today. First the breaking of the soil around the plants in the early spring, then the picking and the sunning of the grapes and lastly treading and pressing of the grapes.

We have further literary references to the treading of the grapes by some of the later lyric poets. Agathias in his *Vintage Song* speaks first of treading and then of the wine press.<sup>1</sup> Maccius sings the praises of Dionysos:

"Thou god, with airy footfall quickly leaping,  
Thou treader of the wine-press, hither come,  
And lead our merry work at night-time, dipping  
Thy light foot in the snowy grape-juice foam.  
With garment girt above thy nimble knee,  
Come cheer the dances on in praise of thee;  
Then draw the stream of sweetly-murmuring wine  
Into our vats, O blessed one-----"<sup>2</sup>

The treading of grapes may still be seen today in the process of wine manufacture. The peasant gets right into the container with his bare feet and stamps on the grapes. There is a vase painting of this process on the Wurzburg amphora attributed to Amasis. "The scene on the obverse is more unusual and interesting. Under a trellis of vines a large wicker basket has been placed in a flat trough resting on trestles, a Silenus is standing in the basket stamping the grapes which another throws into it out of a flat probably wooden tray, the end of which is seen above his neck; while a third Silenus to the right is gathering grapes off the vine. A large jug stands under the trough from which the must flows through a spout into a large pithos sunk deep into the earth. Next to the pithos a kantharos is standing on the ground and behind it a Silenus plays the flute, while another is pouring water from a hydria into a large pithos standing almost wholly above ground."<sup>3</sup>

1. Agathias, *Vintage Song*, trans. by Hardinge, William M.  
2. Maccius, Strettell, *Alma* trans. p. 145  
3. Pfuhl, III, fig. 287; J.H.S., 1889, p. 137, fig. v.



Grape picking is also a very common motif on vases of both the red and black figured periods,<sup>1</sup> which merely points to the importance of the industry in the sixth and fifth centuries.

Besides treading the grapes a press similar to the olive press seems to have been used on occasion. A wine press is mentioned by Agathias<sup>2</sup> but that is the only literary reference to one that I found. Near Cropus I saw a press which the man told me was used for both oil and wine. This may have been the case in ancient times, too, but there is no<sup>3</sup> evidence for it. However that may be, the olive and wine press must have been very similar.

When the wine had been completed it was put into pig skins with the hair turned in and the legs and neck sewed up. From a number of vase paintings showing Silens carrying wine skins<sup>3</sup> we can see that they are exactly like those employed now, for transporting wine.

Another industry that has existed from ancient times is that of olive culture. The literary sources, vase paintings and the stone bases of a few olive presses give us a fairly complete idea of what the ancient methods were, and show us how little difference there is in the modern process. In Homer there is no actual mention of olive culture, except that olive trees are mentioned as growing in the garden of Alcinous.<sup>4</sup> But no place is given to it on the shield of Achilles, which must mean that it was not of as great importance as other agricultural pursuits of the time. Hesiod does not mention olives at all in the Works and Days. Attica however seems to be traditionally the first seat of olive culture, and it still ranks

1. Hoppin, B.F.Vases, pp. 222, 263, 280  
2. Agathias, Vintage Song, trans. by Hardinge, William M., p. 4  
3. Hoppin, R.F.Vases, I, p. 242, 399; B.F.Vases, p. 82  
4. Homer, Od. VII, 116



among the foremost of the olive producing states of Greece. Herodotus tells us that when the Epidaurians consulted the Delphic oracle about the failure of their crops, they were told to set up images of garden olive to Damia and Auxesia: "Then the Epidaurians sent to Athens and asked leave to cut olive wood in Attica believing the Athenian olives to be the holiest; or according to Athens, because at that time there were no olives anywhere else in the world but Athens."<sup>1</sup> Though not literally true this points to a strong tradition that Attica was the first olive producer of Greece. Pausanias adds to this evidence, by calling the tree in the Pandroseum the most ancient tree in the world, and one in the Academy the second oldest.<sup>2</sup> And Sophocles says the olive grew spontaneously and to greater size in Attica than anywhere else.<sup>3</sup> So here we have the direct continuity of a crop from ancient to modern times.

Theophrastus gives us most of our information on the cultivation of olive by the ancients. Planting was done mostly with slips placed with the cut end pointing downwards and tended very carefully. In his own words: "All those trees which are propagated by pieces cut from the stem should be planted with the cut part downwards, and the pieces should not be more than a handsbreadth in length, as was said, and the bark should be left on. From such pieces new shoots grow, and as they grow one should keep heaping up earth about them, till the tree becomes strong."<sup>4</sup> The present day method of propagation is nearly always by cuttings, and with the exception of the size of the slips which today are usually longer than a handsbreadth, one could follow the above instructions for modern ones. Theophrastus was also cognisant of the fact that heavy manuring and

1. Herod. V, 82

2. Paus. I, XXX, 2

3. Soph., Oed. Col. 700

4. Theoph. II, 5. 4



constant pruning and heavy watering were all required for a good crop.<sup>1</sup>

The methods of gathering the fruit and preparing the oil are also surprisingly similar. There is a black figured amphora in the British Museum with a scene of olive gathering on one side of it. There are "three olive trees, in the branches of the center one is a nude youth seated to the left with a stick in his hands, with which he shakes down the olives. Two bearded figures, one on each side, with purple round the loins, are beating the trees with long sticks; the one on the right wears a pilos. At the foot of the tree is a nude youth kneeling to the right picking up the olives as they fall into a basket."<sup>2</sup> This inefficient and rather destructive method is still used in many parts of Greece. Although it is a well-known fact today that hand picking produces a much finer quality oil, tradition seems to be too strong to change. There are two processes in the extraction of the oil which were employed both in ancient and modern times, that of grinding and that of pressing. Of the two the processes of pressing have varied very little, the olives being crushed on a flat stone with a roller or in a stone trough with the edge of a millstone. Two reliefs from a sarcophagus in Rome show this very well. On one side of the sarcophagus the olives are being crushed in a large bowl by an upright millstone with a beam through its center so that a man could push it around. On the other side the olives are shown being pressed with rollers on flat stones.<sup>3</sup> In the museum at Delos there is a large bowl and a millstone pierced through the center for a beam which looks as if it might have been used for olive pressing. This latter type is the kind one usually

1. Theoph. II, 5

2. B.M. Cat., B 226 (b)

3. Arch. Zeit. 1877, tafel 7



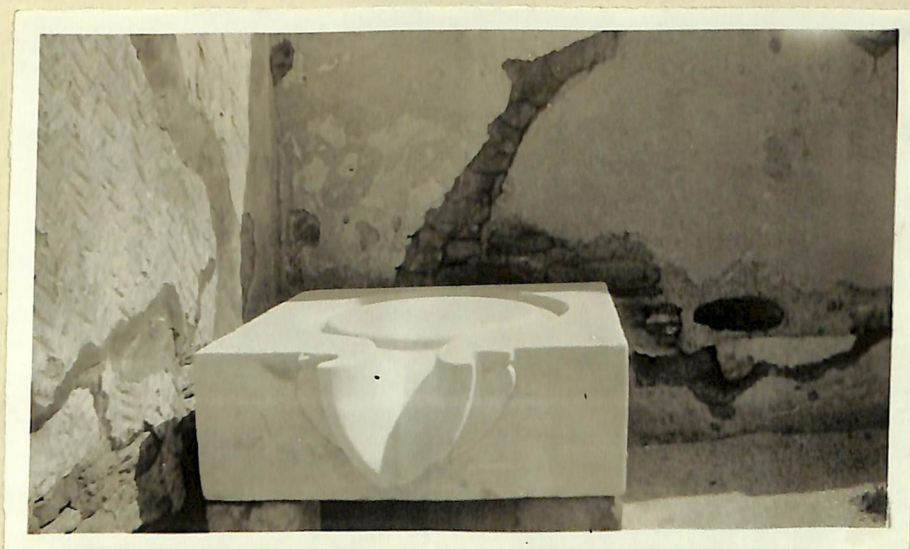


FIG. 7  
DEKOS



sees in use today, the chief difference being that horse power is used in place of man power. The pressing of the olives was a more varied and complicated process, but there are still similar methods in existence in a few out of the way places. In ancient times the screw press, which is in common use today seems to have been unknown. Instead they employed a type that is pictured on a skyphos of the late black figured style in the Boston Museum. "On the right is a press, a square construction painted with a series of parallel horizontal white lines; it rests on a four-legged stand, the upper part of which (separated from the press by a purple line) terminates on the right in a spout beneath which is placed on the ground a kelebe to receive the oil; across the upper part of the press is a long beam, extending across the design to the left; at the far end of it a nude youth is occupied in attaching two large weights to it with white and purple cords; and between them and the press a bearded man has leaped upon it to give more weight, supporting himself by clasping it with his legs and right arm....."<sup>1</sup> The press that I saw near Oropus was very similar to this one. The board that was laid across the bags of crushed olives had one end resting in a niche in the wall and the other end free. On the free end weights were placed, and under the bags of olives stood Standard Oil tins to receive the oil, the only modern touch to an otherwise ancient picture. They told me that it was customary to take off three grades of oil, the first oil being the best. The base on which the olives were pressed was very much like the one that is in one of the private houses at Delos, except that it lacked the artistic qualities of the latter.

<sup>1</sup>. Boston Mus. Annual Report, 1899, p. 68, N° 23



One last agricultural pursuit that Homer mentions on the shield of Achilles, which we see happening in very much the same way today is the reaping of the grain:

"Therein he set also a king's demesne and, wherein laborers were reaping, bearing sharp sickles in their hands. Some handfuls were falling in rows to the ground along the swathe, while others the binders of the sheaves were binding with twisted ropes of straw. Three binders stood hard by them, while behind them boys would gather handfuls, and bearing them in their arms give them to the binders." <sup>1</sup>

Sickles are still employed in reaping, and in the spring one can see the bundles of grain lying along the swathe. Threshing, on the other hand, is now becoming rapidly modernized by the introduction of the threshing machine, but within recent years a wooden sledge-like affair was used to bruise the grain on the threshing floor, which was moved around by a horse. In Homer's time bulls were employed to tread the grain. <sup>2</sup> But according to White, corn was threshed in Hesiod's time by a sleigh with two runners having three or four rollers between them, like a modern Egyptian nurag, <sup>3</sup> which must have been very much like the modern sledge. The winnowing of the grain seems to possess even more features in common with the ancient method, than either the reaping or threshing. Evidently the ancient way was to toss the grain in the air so that the wind would separate the grain from the chaff. Homer describes this, in a simile:

"And even as the wind carrieth chaff about the sacred threshing floors of men that are winnowing, when fair-haired Demeter amid the driving blasts of wind separates the grain from the chaff and the heaps of chaff grow white" <sup>4</sup>

Hesiod gives us similar evidence:

"Set your slaves to winnow Demeter's holy grain when strong Orion first appears, on a smooth threshing-floor in an airy place. Then measure it and store it in jars." <sup>5</sup>



The threshing floor itself must have been very much like the modern one - a circular paved area usually on the high slope of a hill in a windy place as prescribed by Hesiod. But the interesting question here is, what implement they used to toss the grain. Homer mentions the use of a "πτύοφιν" or a shovel in the threshing of beans.<sup>1</sup> Xenophon describes the process without mentioning the implement used. But he is clear that the grain is tossed in the air. He says: "The wind carries the chaff to a distance and the heavier grain falls short in growing heaps."<sup>2</sup> This seems to imply the use of a shovel. We know that the liknon or basket was also employed by the ancients, but I have seen nothing in use like it today. The peasants today, however, do use a shovel to toss the grain, in some parts of Greece. The shovel used by the ancients must have resembled an oar since Odysseus is instructed by Teiresias to carry a shapen oar with him until he came to a land where they had no knowledge of sea things and there a sign was to be given to him where he was to abide: "When another wayfarer on meeting thee shall say that thou hast a winnowing fan on thy stout shoulder, then do thou fix in the earth thy shapely oar and make goodly offerings."<sup>3</sup> Today in Crete a kind of wooden shovel is used for winnowing, according to Miss Harrison, which is called a θύρακι and which has five prongs. It is flat and somewhat like an oar in shape. The modern Greek

1. Homer, Il. XVIII, 550.

2. Homer, Il. XX, 495

3. See note by Hugh G. Evelyn-White on line 806, Hesiod, Works and Days, Loeb ed.

5. Hesiod, Works and Days, 597

4. Homer, Il. V, 499

1. Homer, Il. XIII, 588

2. Xen., Oec. XVIII

3. Homer, Od. XI, 126



name for it is probably derived from the word *διπνίκιον* the diminutive of *διπνός*, a word which as Miss Harrison points out Hesychius defines as a three or five pronged fork, which is either a shovel for grain or a trident. So in view of the evidence given by Miss Harrison this shovel is in all probability the same type as that used by the ancients for winnowing.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we have seen that with even a brief study of the ancient and modern Greek rural life a great many striking similarities can be found. And that in cases such as the plough, the olive press, the treading of the grapes, and the winnowing of the grain we probably have direct survivals of the ancient method or tool. However there are only a few years left in which a study of this kind can be of value because the invasion of Greece by western machinery has begun to wipe out the more primitive agricultural methods native to Greece. But in the less available villages there is still a wealth of material in this field which may yet be a valuable source of information in clarifying our picture of the ancient Greek farmer.

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1. Harrison, Jane E., *Mystica Vannus Tacchi*, J.H.S., 1903, p. 222



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