



Chiselling memories

ΣΤΟΙ ΤΟΤΤΟ ΜΟΥ...

**FOLKLORE COMPANY OF VARNAVA
MUNICIPALITY OF MARATHON**

- 6 - 40

Chiselling memories



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A SMALL INTRODUCTION FOR OUR ENGLISH-SPEAKING FRIENDS

Memories of Varnavas

Foreword

The book, you are now reading, was born out of the need to capture memories and pictures of the everyday life of the inhabitants of our village Varnavas, mainly the life of the generation born during the Interwar Years - a generation, which is gradually fading away and whose accomplishments, ethics and ways of life should be explored and preserved for younger generations.

The task was difficult. It started timidly ten years ago with the first interviews. The grandmothers and grandfathers of Varnavas were only too happy to participate when we informed them about our project. Everyone had something to say. Others came to the museum and others kindly invited us to their homes. The task was hard. Hundreds of hours of interviews had to be transcribed and analyzed. We had to work long hours, more often than not through the evening. But we never realized the passing of time, carried away by the eloquence of the descriptions that literally stopped the clock.

The German occupation and the hunger, the misery and the effort, the struggles and the joys were magnificently captured in the interviews. The youth of the past are still standing strong in their old years, feeling proud for their accomplishments. They faced their problems and overcame them both as individuals and as a united society. They farmed their hard and mountainous land, built their homes, raised their families, took care of their children's education, and are now holding their grandchildren in their arms. The difficult journey of their lives and their hard battles should work as a paradigm for today's youth.

For the completion of this difficult task we are deeply indebted to the pioneers of this project, our parents Maria and Pantelis Katsiki who provided us with valuable information for the past of Varnavas and encouraged us during our work. The journalist Georgios Faltaits, who has sadly passed away, and helped us with his knowledge and expertise in technical matters. Our children for the patience they showed during the time of the project. The teacher, Eleni Karagianni, whose contribution to our work is invaluable. She has travelled for hundreds of kilometers and recorded hundreds of interview hours, always with a smile.

Most of all, we need to thank the grandmothers and grandfathers of Varnavas who gladly participated in this long and often exhaustive process. We are sad because some of them are not among us today to see their stories captured among the pages of this book. We believe they would be glad with the result and with the fact that this book will be their own legacy to their children and grandchildren. Their own story is each little twig of the big tree with strong branches that will keep on growing with more twigs and more stories as the future unfolds.

Because the effort to preserve, maintain and search for our local folk heritage does not stop with this effort.

Petros Katsikis - Milea Pappa

Founders of the European Bread Museum and the Interactive, Agricultural and Folk Museum of the Varnavas Municipality, City of Marathon.

A short story of the village

Varnavas is the highest village of Attica, with an altitude of 613 meters. It is located in the Northeast of Attica, between the neighboring villages of Kapandriti and Grammatiko, 35 kilometers away from the centre of Athens.

The location and the altitude create the ideal and unique, for Attica, climate conditions of the village.

The municipality of Varnavas incorporates the beautiful beach, just 12 km away from the village. The village consists of five settlements: the village of Agia Paraskevi, the settlement of The Metamorfofi tou Sotiros Monastery, the settlement of the Varnavas beach (Lymnionas), the Pourithi settlement and the settlement of the Axion Esti Monastery.

It is said that the first settlement was located on the beach called Good Mother, but sunk after an earthquake which caused tsunami high waves. The residents who survived settled in the current areas of Agia Paraskevi, St. Anna and the Traleza area in Agia Sotira. Unfortunately, the Persian army which arrived in Marathon during the Persian wars destroyed the settlement. Later, in the post-Christian era, a large settlement developed in Agia Paraskevi. Then, under the threat of pirates, residents had to relocate to the current location of Varnavas

The villagers worked mainly in agriculture and farming. The production of cereals, wheat, barley and rye covered the immediate basic needs of the people and their animals for food. Additionally, they cultivated legumes: lentils, chickpeas, beans and vegetables: tomato, squash, etc. The village is famous for its grapevines, mainly the

white Savvatiano grapes and the red or rosé wine to satisfy every taste, because, as stated in the Bible, "wine gladdens the heart".

Since the village is mountainous and full of pine trees, the residents used the resin both as a commodity for additional income and to flavor their wine. Some of the villagers also became beekeepers since the forest is suitable for bees to collect their food. After the Asia Minor disaster in 1922 and the flee of thousands of Greeks from their ancient homes, refugees who ended up in the area introduced sericulture to the locals.

Of course, there were shepherds with goats and sheep. During the winter they descended lower to the beach, to go back in the mountains in the summer. During the German Occupation, i.e. from 1940-1941 onwards, because of hunger people in all households reared sheep brought from the Evia island. Breeding their own animal helped the locals survive the difficult period of the Occupation.

The name of the village

According to tradition the village was named after a disciple of the Apostle Paul called Apostle Varnavas. During one of his missions Apostle Varnavas visited the village and the residents named it after him. He also instigated the people of the village to build the church in the location it still holds today. The church is dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul.

Historical records, on the other hand, indicate that the village was named after a Byzantine landowner who lived in the area.

The Contents of the book

The book is aiming to present as many aspects of the locals' everyday life as possible. Its chapters cover a wide range of the Varnavas local history, from the religious and cultural life and traditions to the everyday medical and culinary practices.

- **The Churches and Monasteries of Varnavas:** A list of the churches and monasteries that still exist in the village and the surrounding areas and their history.
- **Folk and traditional medicine:** Living in an area full of nature's wonders, the people of Varnavas developed numerous remedies based upon local products (honey, herb, flower, tree, fruit and vegetable extracts). These remedies were used - and many people still use them today - for colds, coughing, hair thinning, eye sores, wounds, allergies, burns, even for fertility problems.

- **Traditional recipes:** The local cuisine was based almost exclusively on agricultural and dairy products of the area, but the imagination and the abilities of the cooks created many delicious recipes for meat and poultry, pies, vegetable dishes and pasta.
- **Local customs:** A big part of the book is dedicated to local customs that were accompanying everyday life and important festivities and celebrations of the villagers. In this chapter you will be able to learn about how the people of Varnavas celebrated Christmas and Easter, how they organized daily activities, local festivals, engagements, christenings and weddings, how they prepared funerals for their beloved.
- **Folk arts:** Rural Attica has produced interesting forms of local art and Varnavas could not be an exception to the rule. Weaving, coloring, sewing, embroidery, knitting, traditional clothing, coiffure, jewelry, cosmetics were part of a rich tradition in folk art that continues until today.
- **Toys:** The residents of Varnavas could not afford to buy toys for their children, so they either made their own, or they invented outdoor games that kept children occupied.
- **Agricultural and farming practices:** This chapter explains the ways people were cultivating their land and producing farming products (sowing, mowing, threshing, winnowing, treating pests and diseases, beekeeping, sericulture, wine growing, shepherd practices).
- **Lost professions:** The passing of time has wiped out traditional professions from today's modern economy. Some of them were practiced in Varnavas (shoemaker, crier, saddler).
- **Folk songs:** A part of folk art, folk songs have been an integral part of peoples' lives and accompanied all their happy and sad moments in life. Varnavas' folk songs dealt with varied topics, such as weddings, funerals, war, immigration, love, abandonment etc. They were written in both Greek and Arvanitika.
- **Oral tradition/stories and fairytales:** Stories and fairytales which often have their roots in the ancient Greek, Roman or proto-Christian era passed down from one generation to the other and managed to find their way into today, transformed by folk wisdom during this magical journey in time. The grandmothers and grandfathers from Varnavas told us stories of beautiful mermaids and beautiful women, scary tales about curses and ghosts, narrations about the Turkish occupation and the war.

A few words about the making of the book

This book is a "product" of the Grundtvig program, supervised in Greece by the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) and its main purpose is the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Folklore Society of Varnavas (Marathon Municipality) together with the two organizations it supervises (the European Bread Museum and Interactive Agricultural Folk Museum of Varnavas), approached and interviewed two hundred fifty (250) senior citizens of Varnavas during the program and recorded pieces of the invaluable cultural heritage of our wider region. The conduction of the research was preceded by meetings and workshops in Malta, Poland, Latvia about the exploration of innovative methods and approaches, so that senior citizens can play a leading role in the living communities. We believed that special support was needed in order to make them feel worthy and useful as they are a "living legacy" of the traditional lifestyle, arts and rituals.

In this book we managed to store fragments of the local wealth of knowledge and skills, manners and customs of our country through the testimonies of our older fellow citizens. Our main aim and ambition is that the testimonies of this book will create the spark that will give the organizations involved the incentive to work together for the preservation and the promotion of the intangible cultural heritage as a common European heritage through a process of an intercultural dialogue. The Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) represents a wealth of knowledge and skills that are transmitted from one generation to the next.

The contents of this book also included tangible and intangible cultural heritage, cultural infrastructure, sustainable development in terms of poverty reduction, gender equality issues, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. On the basis of the above actions we believe that our humble work will play its small part to promote tolerance, creativity and integration, and will add a little something to the richness of the European cultural diversity which we will strive to pass on to future generations.



Opening day for the new road Varnavas - Grammatiko
1946



Wine harvest - Varnavas



Agios Yiannis 1952

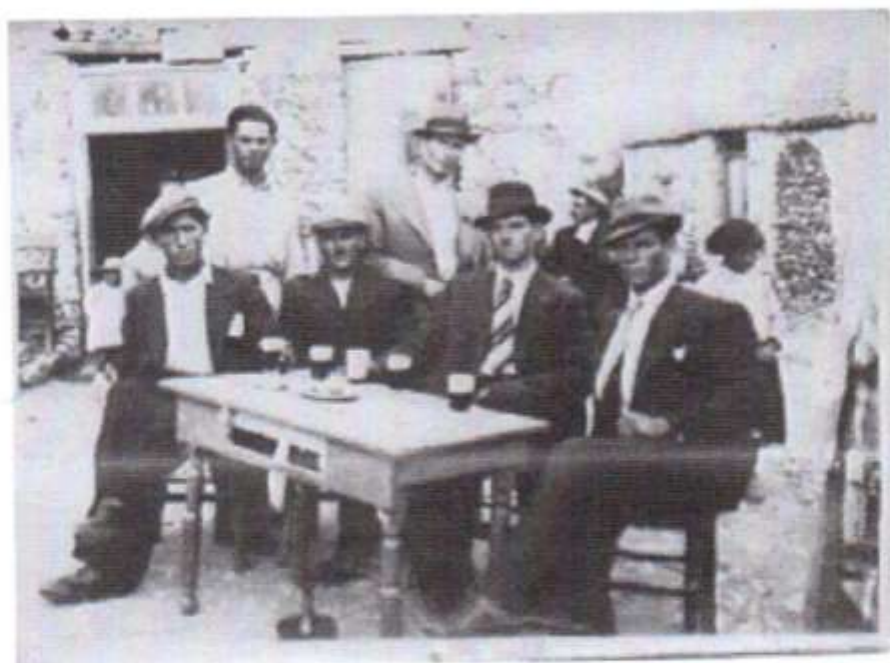


Day out in "Agios Georgios"

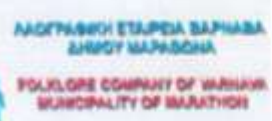
1972



Celebrating day of Apostle Petros & Pavlos
1956



Mexis's mini market-kafenio



Βερνίβη 29