

CHAPTER 8

Sponge stories in the island society of Symi, South-Eastern Aegean, in the late 19th and early 20th century. The case of Fotis Mastorides.

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Introduction

This research began with a traditional family story. It concerns my great-great-grandfather, Fotis (Fotios) Mastorides, a Symian,¹ who was the first to bring the *scaphandre*² [diving suit] to the Aegean, with a view to using it for sponge fishing. He had worked as a diver for an English salvage company in India, and with his experience in using the equipment he reckoned that it would be an excellent investment for sponge fishing, the traditional economy of his homeland. So the story goes that, most likely in the bay of Nimborios, Fotis arranged a practical display of the benefits of the *scaphandre*. But his fellow Symians did not trust this strange outfit, so nobody was willing to try it. At that point, my great-great-grandmother Vgenio (Eugenia), annoyed with the men for their hesitation, volunteered to try it. Assisted by her husband, she put on the diving suit. She dived to the seabed, took several steps, and brought up a large sponge. This so surprised the Symian men that they forgot their hesitation and decided to try it themselves. Once they realised the potential of the diving suit, they embraced it, and the invention was subsequently taken up in all the Aegean islands and coasts where sponge fishers lived.

Growing up, I found that this story is well known, especially in the Southern Aegean, and has remained vivid as a social memory to the present day.³ With greater or lesser detail, imprecision and variation, it is reproduced as oral history, but also in journals and books, and in printed bibliographies, as well as on the internet. The story is encountered in ethnography, local history, history of technology, economic history and the history of diving – generally as a *terminus post quem* for the introduction of the *scaphandre* technology that so radically changed the economy and history of sponge fishing, providing both good and bad times for the inhabitants of the islands. The story also highlights the first recorded woman diver in modern Greek history, and the pioneering nature of Symian society.⁴

Many accounts take up positions for or against its protagonist. In the context of Symi, the story usually exhibits a certain local pride, but later versions present Mastorides as having coopted his wife in order to deceive the divers, and to profiteer from the *scaphandre* trade.⁵ The “recall” of the episode of the display of the diving suit goes to the root of a social evil, an event which historically marks the beginning of a cycle of death, abuse and physical suffering,⁶ as the thousands of divers who used the *scaphandre* were worn out, had their health ruined, or lost their lives.

These conflicting dimensions, and variations in the narration of the “event”, spurred my curiosity and led me to research it further. Unfortunately, my grandmother Anna Mastoride-Stefanou, the younger granddaughter of Fotis Mastorides, died early, and I did not have the opportunity to ask her about Fotis and Vgenio. My grandparents survived a disastrous earthquake in Kos Island, and also the Italian occupation and WWII, but they had lost all material sources that might have informed me further on their past. The only remnants were scattered memories from faded stories, and discussions with elderly people in Symi, or Symian immigrants in the United States.⁷ Symi was a pearl lost in the past. It was eleven years after my grandparents’ death that I visited the island for the first time. Almost ten years later, the initial emotional interest transmuted into a historical research project – I decided to explore the life and times of Fotis Mastorides. The present

paper is based on the above research, which is still in progress. The information derives from oral history interviews with descendants, and from bibliographic, archival and material sources. It assesses the impact of Mastorides' activity, in order to illustrate aspects of his life that might contribute to a better understanding of the historical processes of the late 19th century society in Symi and other Greek island societies in the Aegean. The micro-history of Mastorides offers an insight into less studied aspects of the broader economic practices that these communities adopted in order to survive and prosper.

Sponge fishing and *scaphandre*

Apart from descendant and other oral testimonies, the main historical evidence on Mastorides to date derives from the texts of Demosthenes Chaviaras (1849-1922),⁸ a contemporary of Mastorides and a prolific scholar and expert on Mediterranean sponge-fishing issues,⁹ who held office as secretary of Symi's *Demogerontia* (a kind of Council of Elders) from 1867 to 1919.

In something of an obituary for his famous fellow-citizen in 1902, Chaviaras wrote an article entitled "*Tina peri spoggalieias*" ["Notes about sponge-fishing"] published in the *Imerologion* (Calendar) *Skokou* – the most popular pre-1918 journal in the Greek state and the Hellenic diaspora.¹⁰ The writer paid tribute to the skills, ingenuity and daring of Mastorides, whose introduction of the standard diving suit (the *scaphandre*) transformed the Aegean sponge-fishing industry into a booming economy.¹¹ The new technology allowed the long range exploration, mapping, and exploitation of virgin sponge-bearing sea territories, and made possible the expansion of the sponge trade into larger markets. The importation of the *scaphandre* also impacted on archaeological research, as witnessed in the discovery and salvaging of the Antikythera wreck¹² in 1900 to 1902, with its archaeological treasures of Hellenic culture, a moment that sparked patriotic feelings among Greeks. Chaviaras was enthusiastic in his view of Mastorides as a social benefactor.

In his article, Chaviaras does not underplay the negative aspects of the introduction of this technology, which were manifest and self-evident. He reports neutrally on the repercussions of the diving machine, detailing the huge backlash that resulted from the resulting unemployment of the naked divers, and the series of casualties and deaths of suited divers. He makes the point that all of this was about a struggle for survival, which explains the greedy profit-maximising practices and the lack of labour rights, effective labour policy and diver welfare. In a nutshell, he contextualises the tragedy unfolding behind the enormous social and economic gap that was created between the people of prosperity and the people of survival.¹³ In this polarised society, the *scaphandre* came to be identified with Mastorides, who was regarded as the person responsible and the starting point of it all: both the cause of prosperity and the root of evil.

Despite the above critique, Chaviaras acknowledges Mastorides's argument that the fatal errors derived from the persistent misuse of the equipment in question – namely in far greater depths than its technology afforded, with scant regard for safety regulations, and without proper arrangements as regards the divers' conditions of employment.¹⁴ Moreover, Chaviaras stresses that Mastorides was an experienced and skilled diver, and had used the *scaphandre* for many years, since his youth.

Chaviaras' views were modified fourteen years later, in 1916, when he published a book on sponges and sponge-fishing. In it he revisits the disastrous consequences of the use of *scaphandre* equipment in sponge-fishing. He reports on how deaths caused by suffocation were explained away as the pilot's clumsiness or unfortunate coincidence. He

factually describes the circumstances and outcomes of irresponsible sponge-fishing for both people and nature. He references the brave and tireless attempts of Karl Flégel¹⁵ on behalf of the sponge divers, and concludes with an account of the deadlock in the Greek sponge-fishing economy under the political circumstances of the time.¹⁶ This may be attributed to a combination of the stresses of the Great War, its limitations on fishing, and the crisis in the markets, in addition to the role of the then Italian authorities of the Dodecanese, who also interfered in the local economy, and the risks of long-range sponge-harvesting in such troubled times. Looking back over roughly fifty years, Chaviaras reflects upon the use of the *scaphandre* in the Aegean economy and the growth of public anxiety, and argues for a legal framework that would protect sponge-fishers' employment rights, and assure their physical safety, but would also protect the sponge beds and offer official support for their cultivation.¹⁷

At the same time, the scholar understands that his fellow citizens are struggling to survive. He appears to look favourably on emigration to the new and far-distant sponge-bearing seas where new markets were developing and new opportunities were opening, mainly for sponge-fishers using the diving suits.¹⁸ Mastorides' time is over, leaving sober memories and, in a sense, educating his people in the harsh realities of life. To arrive at a conclusion, one has to read the whole narration, mired as it is in thoughtless practices, exercised with no accountability and with a total lack of legal framework, and resulting in innumerable casualties and deaths. Social memory maintains the name of Mastorides, and shapes stories about him, seeking the words to articulate the risks involved in the quest for prosperity. It illustrates what went wrong and why.

The life and times of Fotis Mastorides

According to Demosthenis Chaviaras, Foti(o)s Mastorides was born long before 1820 in Symi. From his youth, he practised diving and he became an excellent diver. As a young man, he was hired as a naked / skin diver by an English salvage house engaged in wreck removal.¹⁹ This was in the mid-19th century, when English entrepreneurs – in Eastern India, Ceylon and elsewhere – were using the *scaphandre* for the refloating of sunken vessels. Among other Greek sailors, the company hired Fotis Mastorides, and for many years he sailed in the waters of the Far East. As testified by his family and others,²⁰ while aboard an English ship, he stopped at the island of Lemnos. He met and fell in love with a girl. He promised to marry her on his return. But his travels were long, and when he came back to Lemnos, he found that she was not to become his bride. She had become sick and died. Fotis was heartbroken, but then her younger sister Eugenia proposed to marry him – on condition, however, that he accepted to take one of her brothers to Symi with them. Fotis agreed and they all sailed for Symi to begin a new family life together.²¹

Fotis had to travel again. He joined an English company, working on salvage and wreck removal, as well as marine construction and offshore works. As with other Greek employees, he had been trained by the English in the use of the diving suit at shallow depths. He came to be in charge of his own team. When he finished working for the company and decided to return home, the supervisor offered him a present to reward him for his services.²² Mastorides chose the full equipment of a standard diving suit. He had realised that the “machine”, as most divers call it, could be used in sponge fishing, and reckoned that it could be used in his homeland.

In Chaviaras' account, after many years of absence Mastorides returned to the Aegean in 1862,²³ bringing the diving equipment with him. He made many successful tests of it before sharing his knowledge with others. Chaviaras says that the success of the tests was certain, because there was an abundant supply of sponges along the coastlines at that time, and their retrieval could be conducted at shallow depths and in leeward areas.

Otherwise, the ship would have to be used as an open sea platform exposed to wild waters, and the equipment was not yet suitable for use at large depths. It only came to be optimised gradually, and its eventual permitted limit reached 60 metres only much later.²⁴

After his wife's dive...

At this point, according to Chaviaras, and despite the general air of sarcasm and mistrust for this strange, complicated and expensive machine, Mastorides managed to convince some investors²⁵ that there would be great profit from the *scaphandre*, and he set about training a number of divers. His next step was to equip small boats and take the trained divers to go sponge-fishing. Very early on he acquired enthusiastic supporters but he also made definite enemies – the naked divers, who immediately perceived the risk of losing their jobs, and who banded together to protect their interests.²⁶ According to Chaviaras, the first *scaphandre* was used in Symi in 1863 and afterwards new orders were placed from Symi and Kalymnos, and the equipment was soon received from Europe. From 1863 until 1865, the spread of *scaphandre* usage far exceeded the expectations of Mastorides and his patrons. This explains why the *scaphandre* found more and more fans and protectors, even though there now began a series of fatal accidents – which were generally explained away as captains' clumsiness or regrettable bad luck.²⁷

Chaviaras gives a concise report of the major events of opposition to the *scaphandres* starting from the riots against its use, from about 1866 onwards. At the beginning, and for a limited period, this applied technology revitalised the sponge-fishing industry. But soon it became an instrument of vandalism and death. It was “overused”, ravaging the sponge-beds at certain depths, and it was definitely unsuitable for use at the greater depths of the newly explored sponge-bed territories. In a situation of high market demand, the efficiency of a naked diver was negligible. At a time of poverty in the small barren islands of the archipelago, there was no choice but to become a sponge-fisher; it was a question of life and death.²⁸ Divers were living on the edge, struggling for survival, while at the same time helping employers to build their fortunes. Modifications, and even a local “industry”, helped in moving towards an optimisation of the diving suits, but it was obvious that sponge-fishing had become an intractable issue.

Despite all the twists of misfortune, Chaviaras' view of Mastorides is of a brave but also righteous man, living an adventurous and generous life, making a large family and also a fortune, working as a diver, seaman and merchant, and earning respect from his fellow-citizens. At the end of his life, the divine providence of moral compensation reserved for Mastorides the achievement of salvaging the ancient sunken treasures in Antikythera,²⁹ a feat achieved by means of the diving suit that he had brought to his country, and this fed his sense of pride in his own contribution to Hellenism.

A further attestation to the status of Mastorides' family in the late 19th century is the 1899 inscription³⁰ on the elegant carved marble gravestone of Eugenia, Mastorides' wife, which is today attached to the family grave of their son Anastasios in the cemetery of Saint Elikonis³¹ in Symi. In the inscription Mastorides declares to the world as follows:³²

“In sea-girt Lemnos her first breath was instilled, and here [in Symi] Eugenia left her last. Among all other women she was distinguished by her gentle manners and her prudence. Faithful to her husband, a good mother, an upright and useful citizen and in piety a worshipper of Christ. But now she has gone away, and her children yearn for her in their *megaron* [mansion], as does her husband, Mastorides Fotios. She rested in the Lord on 21 October of the year 1899 at the age of 63.”³³

Expressing certain ideals of 19th century Symian society,³⁴ the language of the inscription is archaic, and the evocation of the Homeric epics is apparent.³⁵ Notable is the use of the term *megaron*, referencing the main palace building of the great Mycenaean rulers of prehistoric times; the term is chosen to attest to the high financial and social status of the Mastorides family.³⁶ The building³⁷ still exists, as does an old alleyway, known in local memory as the road of *Mastoriou*. The latter seems to be the nickname of Mastorides.

However, beyond the evidence of a happy family and a wealthy life, information for the long period of almost thirty years after 1863 has to be sought in archives and secondary written sources. The latter mention him as Mastoris, probably a version of Mastorides' aforementioned nickname, which may have been used instead of his formal surname, in line with local custom. In 1875, in his *History of the Island of Symi* (geographical, historical and statistical – although the latter could be better described as cultural), Michael S. Gregoropoulos, a teacher who had worked in Symi for eight years, describes vividly the atmosphere of that period, focusing on the effects of the new form of sponge-diving. In regard of Fotis Mastorides, Gregoropoulos reports the import of the *scaphandre* as follows: “The machine in question was first imported in Symi in 1864 by a Symian, a certain Fotios Mastoris, prompting strong opposition from the inhabitants. Stronger riots occurred in Kalymnos...”³⁸

Gregoropoulos' reference to Mastori(s) as the introducer of the *scaphandre* is not the only one. For example, Henry Hauttecoer, a merchant who lived for a while in the islands of the Aegean, in his *Notes sur l'Île de Symi* (Antwerp, 1901), discusses the island's flourishing sponge trade and mentions the man who made the change by importing the diving suit, naming him as Fotios Mastori. That name disappears in the early 20th century and the only name subsequently testified in sources is Foti(o)s Mastorides.

Mastorides in action

Successive delvings in the fragmentary archive of the Demogerontia in Symi have proved frustratingly fruitless. Although Mastorides' sons appear on a regular basis, participating actively in public life,³⁹ it has proved almost impossible to trace the activities of Fotis himself. However, some light has been shed following the discovery of the following two documents in the *Book of Debt Documents* of the Archeion Demogerontias Symis (Archive of the Demogerontia⁴⁰ of Symi) (1846-1863). The texts are published here, together with non-literal translations into English.⁴¹

Βιβλίον χρεωστικών εγγράφων Αρ.: 689

13 Ιουλίου

Ενώπιον εμού του νοταρίου/συμβολαιογράφου Σύμης, Φιλαρέτου Ιερομονάχου Μ. Π. Χαλκίτη, επί παρουσία και των κάτωθεν μνημονευομένων μαρτύρων πολιτών Συμίων, κατοίκων ενταύθα, γνωστών μοι και μη υπαγομένων εις καμμίαν του νόμου εξάρησιν, παρουσιασθείς αυτοπροσώπως ο κύριος Φώτιος Ν. Μαστορής, συνιδιοκτήτης, κατά το εν έκτον του υπό την οθωμανικήν σημαίαν πλοίου βρικίου, η Απελπισία, χωρητικότητος επτά χιλιάδων περίπου κοιλών, Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ως δηλούται δια της από της 10 Ιανουαρίου 1862 επί της ιδιοκτησίας του πλοίου τούτου πράξεως της ενταύθα Δημαρχίας, πλοιάρχου μενον ήδη, παρά του πλοιάρχου Βασιλείου Μ. Φακλή, κάτοικος Σύμης, ωμολόγησεν ότι εδανείσατο και έλαβε παρά του Κυρίου Γιουζέ Πασκουάλη εμπόρου Σμύρνης, δια του ενταύθα επιτρόπου του, Κυρίου Ιπποκράτου Μ. Γεράκη, θαλασσοδάνειον εκ Γροσίων εξ χιλιάδων, με ναυτικόν τόκον, δύο και ήμισυ τοις % κατά

μήνα. Υπόσχεται δε και υποχρεούται ο ρηθείς Φώτιος Ν. Μαστορίδης, να αποδόσει το διαληφθέν ποσόν μετά των τόκων εις τον Κύριον Γιουζέ Πασχουάλε ή εις την διαταγήν αυτού, μετά έξ μήνας από την σήμεραν ήτοι ήτοι την 13 Ιανουαρίου, 1864. Προς ασφάλειαν δε του θαλασσοδανείου τούτου και των τόκων, υπεγγυάται ο οφειλέτης ολόκληρον την εις το σκάφος άρμενα και τω λοιπώ του ρηθέντος πλοίου Απελπισία [διαγραμμένο] μετοχών του. Ο δανειστής δεν θέλει ανέχεται εις συνεισφοράν χάριν των μερικών ή γενικών αβαριών, και δεν υπόκειται εις τους κινδύνους, μετά την διαληφθείσαν προθεσίαν. Εν Σύμη τη 13 Ιουλίου 1863

Φώτιος Ν. Μαστορίδης

Οι μάρτυρες

Νικήτας Ζανής. Μάρτυς.
Ιωάννης Μ. Φακλής. Μάρτυς
ο Νοτ. Φιλάρ, Ι. Μ. Π. Χαλκίτη.

Translation:

In the presence of myself, the notary of Symi, Filaretos hieromonk M. P. Chalkitis, and in the presence of the undersigned witnesses, being Symian citizens, resident here, known to me and not subject to any legal exception; having present in person, Mr. Fotios N. Mastoris, co-owner, with a 1/6 share, of the brig⁴² *I Apelpisia*⁴³ ["Desperation" / "Despair"], under the Ottoman flag, with ship's tonnage of circa 7,000 Constantinople *koila* [Istanbul measurement unit]⁴⁴ as reported in the 10th January 1862 registration deeds of the ship herewith [in Symi], at the Demarchia, and already under the command of the sea captain Vasileios M. Faklis, resident of Symi; [he] stated that he borrowed and received from Mr Yuze Pascuale, merchant of Smyrna [Izmir], through his commissioner herein, Mr Hippocrates M. Gherakis, a seatrade loan of 6,000 piastres [monetary unit],⁴⁵ with maritime interest at the rate of 2.5% per month. The aforementioned Fotios N. Mastoris promises and is obliged to return the received amount and the interest to Mr Yuze Pascuale, or to his order, within six months from today, namely on 13 January 1864. As insurance of this sea loan and the interest, the debtor mortgages the entirety of the ship's fittings and the remaining shares of the said vessel *Apelpisia*. The lender does not wish to be involved in contribution in the event of partial or general damage and is not liable for perils after the agreed date.⁴⁶ Given in Symi, 13 July 1863.

Signed:
Fotios N. Mastorides

Witnesses:
Niketas Zannis, witness
Ioannis M. Faklis, witness
Notary: I. M. P. Chalkiti

Βιβλίον χρεωστικών εγγράφων Αρ. 690

Ενώπιον εμού του Νοταρίου/ Συμβολαιογράφου/ Σύμης φιλαρέτου Ιερομονάχου, και των κάτωθεν μνημονευομένων μαρτύρων πολιτών μαρτύρων πολιτών Συμαίων, κατοίκων ενταύθα, γνωστών μοι και μη υπαγομένων εις ουδεμίαν του νόμου εξαίρεσιν, παρουσιασθείς αυτοπροσώπως ο Κύριος Φώτιος Ν. Μαστορίδης, κάτοικος ενταύθα, γνωστός μοι, ωμολόγησεννά ότι υπόσχεται να πληρώσει να πληρώσει μετά δύο μήνας από

σήμερα, ήτοι την 13 Σεπτεμβρίου ε. ε. εις τον κύριον Γιουζέ πασχουάχε Γρόσια 5943 πέντε χιλιάδας και εννιακόσια σαράντα τρία, ομού και τόκον, εν και ήμισυ τοις εκατόν τον καθ' έκαστον μήνα. δι' άλλα τόσα έλαβε και έδυσαναγνωστονε προς αυτον χρεώστης από μίαν μηχανήν των δυτών, την οποίαν ο ρηθείς Γιουζές επρομήθευσε δια λογαριασμόν του ρηθέντος Φωτίου Ν. Μαστοριού, την οποίαν ούτος παρέλαβεν ενταύθα κατά την 25[7]/7 Ιουλίου του 1862. Το δάνειον τούτο εννοείται στερεόν, δηλαδή δάνειον της ξηράς. Προς περισσοτέραν δε ασφάλειαν του ρηθέντος δανειστού Γιουζέ Πασχουάλε του βάλλει [και/εις] υποθήκην μέχρι της εξοφλήσεως του παρόντος χρεωστικού, Α' την ίδίαν μηχανήν μάγκιναν/ την οποίαν επρομήθευσεν ο ρηθείς δανειστής. Β'ον ! Έν πλοιάριον (σκάφη), εκ πηχών επτά ονομαζομένην Ευδοκίαν ως δηλούται από της 27 Οκτωμβρίου, 1858, χίλια οκτακόσια πενήντα οκτώ. ιδιοκτησίας αυτού γενομένης ενώπιον της ενταύθα Δημαρχίας, χωρίς να ενέχηται ο δανειστής εις τους κινδύνους, και τα λοιπά των ενυποθήκων τούτων.

Αν όμως εις την πτώσιν της συμφωνηθείσης ανωτέρω προθεσμίας, ο χρεώστης, Φώτιος Ν. Μαστοριού δεν πληρώση το παρόν χρέος του, δίδει το δικαίωμα εις τον δανειστήν του Κύριον Γιουζέ Πασκουάλη, να εκθέση εις δημοπρασίαν δυνάμει του παρόντος συμβολαίου, άνευ άλλης δικαστικής αδειας, ή αποφάσεως, το αναφερόμενον εν υποθήκη προς εξόφλησιν, του ανωτέρου κεφαλαίου και τόκων.

Εάν δε τα εκ της δημοπρασίας συναχθησόμενα, δεν επαρκούν εις την τελείαν εξόφλησιν του παρόντος κεφαλαίου, και τόκου, ο ρηθείς χρεώστης, υπόσχεται την μέχρι λεπτού πληρωμήν, με την λοιπήν περιουσίαν του, ενεστώσαν και μέλλουσαν. Προς πίστωσιν όθεν και κατ' αίτησιν του ρηθέντος Φωτίου Ν. Μαστοριού, συνετάχθη το παρόν συμβόλαιον, σήμερα την 13 Ιουλίου 1863. Σύμη

Φώτιος Μαστορίδης

οι μάρτυρες

Νικήτας Νικλ. Ζαννής. Μάρτυς
Ιωάννης Μ. Φακλής Μάρτυς
ο Νοτ. Φιλάρ, Ι. Μ. Π. Χαλκίτη.

Translation:

Document no. 690

In the presence of myself, Filaretos, notary of Symi, and in the presence of the undersigned witnesses, being all Symiot citizens and resident herein, and known to me and not subject to any legal exception, Mr Fotios N. Mastoris, a resident herein and known to me, appearing in person, agrees and promises that in two months from today, that is on 13 September of the present year, he will pay to Mr Yuze Pascuale 5,943 (five thousand nine hundred and forty three) piastres, together with interest at the rate of 1.5 per cent per month.

Moreover, for the same amount of money, he received and became debtor to him for a machine for divers,⁴⁷ which the aforementioned Yuze Pascuale provided on behalf of the said Fotios N. Mastoris; the latter received it herein circa 25/7 July of 1862. This loan is considered a land loan, not a sea loan.⁴⁸ To augment insurance of the said lender Yuze Pascuale, he [Fotios] mortgages until the full payment of the present debt document [i] the machine itself that the said lender provided to him and [ii] one small boat (*skafe*)⁴⁹ of

seven cubits, named *Evdokia*, as declared in 27 October 1858 as being in his ownership, conducted in presence of the herein Demarchia, without engaging the lender in the risk or the rest of the mortgage.

But if by the above agreed date, the debtor, Fotios N. Mastoriou does not pay off his present debt, he gives the right to the creditor Mr Yuze Pascuale to put up for auction, under the present contract, and without further judicial licence or decision, the aforementioned mortgaged items, to pay off the above capital and interest.

And if the amount resulting from the auction does not suffice for the full repayment of the present capital and interest, the said debtor promises to pay the full amount of moneys out of his remaining present and future fortune. To the credit of, and at the request of the said Fotios N. Mastoris the present contract was concluded in Symi on this day, 13 July 1863.

Signed:
Fotios Mastorides

Witnesses:
Niketas Nikol. Zannis, witness
Ioannis M. Faklis, witness

Notary:
Hieromonk M. P. Chalkitis

The following points can be made:

The above documents clearly and explicitly confirm that Fotis signs as Fotios Mastorides, son of Nicholaos – following tradition, he gives his father's name to his first son, but at the same time he continues using as his surnames Mastoris or Mastoriou. On 27 October 1858 Fotis is testified to be in Symi where he signs the deeds of ownership for a small boat named *Evdokia*.⁵⁰ The boat is most likely dedicated to his (new-born?) daughter. In the period from 1858 to 1861 it is highly likely that Mastorides was away working with the *scaphandre* for the English company. Shortly thereafter, from early January 1862, Fotis is testified as being in Symi again, investing a significant sum of money in buying shares in a brig, and six months later he receives an expensive diving machine, paying for it by a large loan. He requests almost a year to pay it off (coinciding with the end of the summer sponge-fishing period). It seems that Fotis exhibits the diving suit, convinces the *xekinitades* (sponsors),⁵¹ trains divers, and uses the *scaphandre* within the same year. It is possible that the story of Fotis being rewarded by the English employer is fake, and, in fact, Fotis had bought the diving suit from Pascuale. But it would be equally possible that this particular diving suit is a second or third one, bought to expand his sponge-fishing investment. In this case the demonstration event should have taken place earlier than July 1862.

The fact that he was already in a position to buy shares in the brig from the beginning of 1862 suggests that Fotis had finished working for the English company in 1861. He would already have prepared his business plan and put it into effect. The necessity for a big boat capable of sailing on wild open seas, able to transfer loads, or engaged in implementing the model of the English company, should be the next stage of this present research.

The two debt documents complement each other in content. They connect Mastoris to Mastorides beyond doubt and prove how dynamically he engaged in the sponge-fishing trade. They evidence the ingenuity of his business model, and his determination to implement it, given the considerable risks of his successive major loans. He takes these risks with confidence because he has himself experienced the *scaphandre*'s effectiveness, and he has the know-how. In less than a year he manages to arrange and convince a supportive group to collaborate in his sponge-fishing and trading venture.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to document Mastorides and his activity. Going behind modern narrations and the noise produced around his name, it draws on the writings of two of his contemporaries who could have had relatively close contact with him – the prolific Symian scholar Demosthenis Chaviaras, the most reliable source and a person who knew Mastorides well; and Michael S. Gregoropoulos, a non-Symian teacher who worked in Symi for eight years, closely following local political controversies and discussing them in his writings.

The construction of social memory around Mastorides bears out the testimony of Chaviaras. He implicitly attributes the negative effects of sponge-fishing industrialisation in the Aegean to the fact that the societies in question were totally unprepared and unprotected for dealing with it. Nonetheless, the local economy boomed and Mastorides was not only part of this but he also benefited economically. Archival documents clearly reveal both his determination and his intense activity. The two debt contracts offer important evidence for the industrialisation of Symi, and for Mastorides' willingness to expose himself to the market. His success further resonates in the stable course he managed to steer in his personal and family life, according both to testimonies and to material evidence that offer an image of his family and social status during the latter period of his life. However, further work is required to deal with the problem of date imprecisions and the detailed periodisation of this story.

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NOTES

1. For Symi in general, see: a short introduction in Zahariou-Mamalingka 1986: 15-22, Farmakides and Karakatsani 1975, and Agapetides 1972; more specifically Chaviaras 1904 and 1984, Sakellarides 1969, Karanikolas (Νότιες Σποράδες...) 1971 and 1984, Kladakis 1974. and Agapetides 1989. Indicatively the travelogues in Enepekides 1994: 359, 430-432, Krumbacher 1886: 61-79 80-94, 113-127, 128-145, 146-169, 170-186, 347-374, 375-390, and Lindau 1900. Analytic bibliography in Mavris 1965.
2. For the history of the word *scaphandre* see Chaviaras 1903: 412 (Byzantius 1856: 371, Chaviaras 1870 and Koumanoudes 1886) and Chaviaras 1904. For the *scaphandre* see for instance Denayrouze 1865, Georgas 1937: 24-34, Kalafatas 2003:13, and Olympitou 2014: 111-124.
3. The striking and easily understandable story of the *scaphandre*'s introduction in the "recent past" of the sponge-fishers' society is preserved in people's memories. The content of the narration of the event – who did what – remains integral, reproduced in the majority of references on the history of sponge-fishing economy in the Aegean. But the parameters of "how", and even those of "when" and "where" are qualitative attributes that remain open to interpretation. (See for instance Vasileiades 1974:52, Zahariou-

Mamalingka 2018, Kalafatas 2003: 13. Georgas 1937: 28, as well as <https://www.rodiki.gr/article/53722/premiera-me-to-symiako-theatro>, <https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%A3%CE%BA%CE%AC%CF%86%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%BF> and <http://www.pontos-news.gr/article/13854/eygenia-mastoridi-i-proti-gynaika-poy-ekane-katadysi>)

4. The story of the introduction of the scaphandre is preserved over time. It has an impressive plot, and touches on a number of societal issues: the subject matter of a technological innovation, the ensuing tensions and fractures, and the vital importance of the approval of the major regulatory agent group of the Symian society, namely the women. Only with their consent could fundamental internally-oriented changes be established. Symian women are the real residents of the island, organising life in the island while their men are absent for almost half of the year. They are the animate stable reference point of the immigrant, the wanderer and the travelling man. Women usually retreat so that the men feel important, but at decisive moments their word acquires the power of people's law. Then they step in and pull the strings, giving solutions even in situations of political anomaly (see for instance Kladakes 1968). The basic narrative of the introduction of the scaphandre relates the presentation of a novelty and an individual's endeavour to find patrons for starting an enterprise. It includes a drama played in public, but also a challenge of collective reasoning and psychology; in this drama, the role of the wife (in some variations, the woman seen as weak because of pregnancy) proves crucial, solving the problem on behalf of the main character, her husband. Indicatively, see: Chalkidiou-Skylla 2009: 44-45. Georgas 1937: 28. Kalafatas 2003: 166-167, Agapetides 1989: 45.

5. Kalafatas 2003: 13, 105, Warn 2000:32, Chalkidiou-Skylla 2009.

6. See Kalafatas 2003.

7. Mastorides Moschatos 2009. As testified in her family tree, as sent by fax to Kyriakos Stefanou.

8. Chatzifotis 1967, 1989.

9. The flourishing oral culture of the traditional Dodecanesian society of sponge-fishers was only sparsely documented in written sources until the booming writing age of the 19th century, when literacy and the development of the press thrived even in the South-eastern Aegean islands. During that period, the sponge-fishing economy became the major issue in the Aegean. Conscious awareness of the unexpected financial success and affluence – even if temporary – in a social context of pursuing self-identification imposed writing and the ensuing debate. See: Bernardakis 1870, Caravokyros 1886, Flégel 1908, Chaviaras 1916, Georgas 1937: 17 (Georgas describes the passionate initiatives and the fruitful cooperation between D. Chaviaras and C. Flégel on the sponge-fishing issue), Karanikolas 1972, Chaviaras, N. 1974: 130-1, Karanastasis 1977:103.

10. Chaviaras 1903: 411-415. Chaviaras 1916: 48-49. For the *Imerologion Konstantinou F. Skokou* (the Calendar of K. F. Skokou) see http://kosmopolis.lis.upatras.gr/index.php/hmerologio_skokou .

11. See also Kalafatas 2003: 23-24, 168, Chatzifotis 1984

12. For the importance of the Antikythera wreck, see Svoronos 1903, Staes 1905, Rados 1910, Jian-Liang and Hong-Sen 2016.

13. Chaviaras 1903: 414

14. Chaviaras 1903: 413-14.

15. Flégel 1902, 1908.

16. Chaviaras 1916.

17. See Chaviaras 1916: 53-66 and the late Pizanias 1946 and ‘Nautical Sponge-fishing Regulation’ in *Kalymniaka Hronika* 5 (1985): 178-195.
18. See also Kalafatas 2003: 147.
19. Chaviaras 1903: 413. See also Kalafatas 2003: 13. For the British activity see Levi 1872 and Amrith 2013.
20. Anastasiades 2010.
21. The events took place before 1852 when Nikolaos Mastorides, the couple’s second child, was born. Information derived from Nikolaos’ gravestone; see note 50.
22. Chaviaras 1916: 49, Chaviaras 1903: 413, Kalafatas 2003: 13, Zahariou-Mamalingka: 2018.
23. For the Southern Sporades of the 1860s, see Tsalahoures 1989; for the Ottoman empire of that period see Collas 1861. See also Vakalopoulos 1981: 10-19 and Zesimatos 1984: 11-95.
24. Chaviaras 1903: 413.
25. For the “*xikinetades*” (investors), see the footnote in Chaviaras, N. 1974: 131
26. Kriezis 1935, Georgas 1937, Pizanias 1946, Genikis Dioikeseos Dodecanesou/First Panhellenic Sponge-fishing Conference 1951, Vergotis 1974, Agapetides 1977.
27. See indicatively Olympitou 2003: 172.
28. See also Chatzidakis 1999. Georgas 1937: 29-31. Chalkidiou-Skylla 2009, Olympitou 2014: 337-8.
29. The Antikythera wreck (note 12 above) is a significant element in the political thought of that period. See Zambelios 1857, Veloudes 1982, Diamantis 2003 and Karavas 2003, Augustinos 1977: 105, 1991:89, 1992.
30. The epigram in question seems to follow the tradition of ancient Hellenic epigrams and inscriptions, as well as Christian ones from nearby Anatolia. (Semantoni-Bournia 1988, Breytenbach and Zimmermann, 2017; see also Alexiou 1974/2008: 267-8, 281). On the other hand, the archaic language and the contained message bespeak an educated society which declares its identification with Ancient Greece. In 1899, the date of the epigram, Symian urban society has direct contacts with the cosmopolitan port cities, and is thirsty for education, and communication. The Demogerontia is concerned to provide the community with schools, good teachers and a rich library (see Vergotis 1993). The elite funds the writing of the history of the island, and it is clear that it knows how to use the power of the press (see Şiviloğlu 2018).
31. The graves of Mastorides’ family were in the cemetery of the cathedral church of St. John the Prodromos in Egialos. After the bombing and destruction of the cemetery, the surviving remains were taken to the new and much bigger cemetery of Santa Elikonis. For the churches, see in Karanikolas 1962: 13-28, 101-102.
32. «ΛΗΜΝΩτ EN ΑΜΦΙΡΥΤΗτ ΠΝΟΙΗΝ ΗΦΥΣΣΑΤΟ ΠΡΩΤΗΝ/ ΑΥΤΟΘΙ ΤΕ ΠΝΟΙΗΝ ΥΣΤΑΤΗΝ ΕΛΙΠΕΝ/ ΕΥΓΕΝΙΗ Ο ΠΑΣΗτΣΙ ΜΕΤΕΤΡΕΠΕ ΘΗΛΥΤΕΡΗτΣΙΝ/ ΗΘΕΣΙ ΜΕΙΛΙΧΙΟΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΝΥΤΟΦΡΟΣΥΝΗτ/ ΚΕΛΝΗ ΕΗΝ ΑΛΟΧΟΣ[,] ΜΗΤΗΡ ΕΣΘΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΗΤΙΣ/ ΧΡΗΣΤΗ ΚΑΙ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΛΑΤΡΙΣ EN ΕΥΣΕΒΙΗτ/ ΤΩτ ΜΙΝ ΑΠΟΙΧΟΜΕΝΗΝ ΠΟΘΕΟΥΣΙ ΤΕΚΝΑ, ΠΟΘΕΕΙ ΔΕ/ EN ΜΕΓΑΡΟΙΣΙ ΣΥΝΕΥΝΟΣ ΜΑΣΤΟΡΙΔΗΣ ΦΩΤΙΟΣ/ ΑΝΕΠΑΥΘΗ EN ΚΥΡΙΩτ ΤΗτ 21 ΟΚΤΩΒΡΙΟΥ ΤΟΥ/ ΧΙΛΙΟΣΤΟΥ ΟΚΤΑΚΟΣΙΟΣΤΟΥ ΕΝΕΝΗΚΟΣΤΟΥ ΕΝΑΤΟΥ ΕΤΟΥΣ/ EN ΗΛΙΚΙΑτ ΕΤΩΝ ΤΡΙΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΗΚΟΝΤΑ.» See also Volonakis 2004.

33. Since the precise date of her birth is not yet confirmed, the earlier date of Eugenia's arrival to Symi as a bride is most likely to have been around 1850 (in 1852 she gives birth to their second child Nikolaos, see note 50). In this case, Eugenia had lived all of her adult life in the island, duly enrolled as a citizen of Symian society. The date of her marriage and arrival on the island is a long way from 1863, the year which Chaviaras gives for the first formal use of the *scaphandre* in Symi. Consequently, by the time of the diving suit demonstration Eugenia must have been almost 27, and would have been regarded by Symians as a fellow citizen.

34. The inscription is revealing of cultural identities and historical continuities, and at the same time suggests the prevailing ideals of education, morality and active contribution to the public good and to the community's shared vision. To an extent, it conjures up an image of the exemplary notable bourgeois who combines radiating romanticism and nobility with the principles of a free and democratic society. But in the end the epigram is a narrative of survival and "success" in a capitalist economy.

35. As Symi was still part of the Ottoman Empire, the Symians expressed their need for self-identification and their eagerness for re-joining with Greece through explicitly recognisable Greek cultural references. This is evident in both the form and the content of the epigram in question, which has both direct and indirect connotations to the epics. The Symians are mentioned in the catalogue of ships that participated in the Trojan War (*Iliad*, Book 2, line 2671). Their three ships under the leadership of Nireus testified to their energetic activity, their mastery and power. Nireus denotes mythical origins. These points highlight their participation in one of the most popular enterprises of Greek prehistory, and are a means for affirming the Symians' Hellenic identity and the deep roots of their lineage. Moreover, while the *Iliad* promoted the ideal of a glorious death, the Symians are also quite obviously inspired by the *Odyssey*. Sponge-fishers are identified with Odysseus, inasmuch as they suffer the hardship of an extremely adventurous life, and long to return to their home island, and to live peacefully. Their ventures and their constant battle with the sea (Chaviaras Niketas 1977) were frequently without a happy ending, but Symi like Ithaca remains a haven for family happiness, and the place where social bonds and recognition are especially valued.

In a similar manner, Fotis Mastorides travelled for years, but his choices reveal sentimental priorities at each step. His sea travels were adventurous, as also was his *nostos* (homecoming). Fotis is pictured as ingenious and resourceful, cunning and enterprising. Towards the end of his life, like wise old Nestor in Pylos, he is presented as a venerable forefather in his *megaron*.

36. Karanikolas 1958 and 1971; Pissas 1975; Chaviaras 1977; Thomopoulos 1977; Zahariou-Mamalingka 1984.

37. For the "mansion" of Mastorides see Vasileiadis 1974: 52-58. For wealthy houses in 19th century Symi, see also Chaviaras 1972, Kladake-Vratsanou 1984, Mouzakis 1984.

38. Gregoropoulos 1880: 48. The present piece of information is preserved in all the editions of the *History of Symi*, see Gregoropoulos 1875, 1877, 1880. It is worth mentioning that in his work Gregoropoulos demonstrates his political preferences and dislikes, although in the second edition he becomes milder in his description of the political scene in Symi.

39. Indicatively see Vergotis 1993: 91-93, 111, 116. Mastorides Moschatos 2009, the testimony of her family tree in comparison with the archival sources.

40. For the Demogerontia of Symi, see Skiathites 1972, Agapetides 1974, Kapnoullas 1984.

41. General State Archives, digitised Archives of Dodecanese, Archeion Demogerontias Symis (the Archive of the Demogerontia of Symi), *Book of Debt Documents* (1846-

1863), No 689 and 690/take 795-797.

<http://arxeiomnimon.gak.gr/browse/index.html?code=GRGSA-DOD>

42. For the brig in the Aegean and the other aspects of ship-terminology, description, practices and law, flags, etc, see Kotsovillis 1919: 8, 40-45, 113-124, Konstantinidis 1954: 143,144, 146, and Vasileiou 1961. In general, see Harlaftis 1996.

43. On March 2018 a picture of the brig *Apelpisia* was exhibited in Athens but it was not published in the exhibition catalogue of the museum that hosted it.

44. For sizes and prices in a cession of a brig, and mortgages in this particular period, see Melahroinoudes 2008: 25-26, 55, 81 -105. See also Harlafti 1996 and Harlafti–Vlassopoulou 2002: 28 -29.

45. Paspates 1888, Vergotes 1974: 153-156, Pamuk 2000: 20, 159-171, 186-187, 212, 213.

46. For nautical law (loans and debts, interests, mortgages, insurance and damages as well as trade practices) see Desèze 1884; Flogaites and Chrysanthopoulos 1892; Melahroinoudes 2008.

47. See a comment on the cost of the scaphandres by Olympitou 2014: 121-122. The present paper confirms her observation.

48. About the differences in the land and sea trade practices according to Braudel 1977: 35, 47, see Diamantis 2007: 104-108, 118-119. Also Kremmydas 1993.

49. See indicatively Zouroudes 1974: 174,177, Kotsovillis 1919: 125.

50. See the Family Tree of Maria Mastorides Moschatos (at age 95 years) in 2009, a text received via fax. She was the great granddaughter of Fotis N. Mastorides and granddaughter of Nicholas F. Mastorides. She lived in the United States, where a large part of her family had emigrated. According to her, Fotis had five children: “Evyiania” (her name should be Evgenia but most probably Evdokia, later found as Virginia; according to the Maria Moschatos text she was married and lived in France), Nicholas (Nikolaos was the first son; in the Registers, he seems to be the richest of the sons. He is testified as paying high contributions and as protecting and introducing e a new member in the Symiot society. His austere but enormous grave in a prominent part of the old cemetery of the cathedral confirms his social status. The inscription on his grave simply states that he was a ship captain, and that he died in 1908 at the age of 56. According to the Family Tree he had seven children and an adopted daughter – Anastasis (Anastasios), Giannakos (Ioannis) and Yiakovos (Iakovos/Jacob). The latter was the youngest child, who was born in 1873 and died in 1941. My grandmother Anna was the daughter of Jacob. Members of the family were Secretaries of the Demogerontia and Iakovos continued his duty as a customs officer).

51. See above, note 23.

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