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THE VALIANT MAID (MOTHER OF DIGENIS) AND THE SARACEN¹

*There is fighting in the East and fighting in the West
Learning of this, a beautiful woman goes off to war.
Dressed as a man, the beautiful warrior takes up her arms.
The saddle of her horse is decorated with serpents,
The harness fastened with vipers.
With one prick of the spur, her horse covers forty leagues,
With a second, she is in the thick of the battle.
Elle moves on and they get out of her way. She emerges and no one
sees her.
As she turns about, the straps break
And reveal the gold apples hidden beneath the linen.*

*The Saracen sees her from the top of a mount.
'Do not be cowards, my gallant men,
War is feminine, the prize is a bride!'
La belle hears him and runs to seek refuge with Ai Girogi.
'My lord St George, hide me, virgin that I am.
And I will build you a gold door to go in
And a silver door to go out.
The wooden roof will soon be covered in pearls.'
The marble splits open and she goes in.*

*The Saracen comes to St George.
'Deliver the virgin unto me, St George the Christian.
By your grace, I will be baptised, and my soon too.
They will call me Constantine, and my son Yannis.'
The marble splits open and the damsel appears.*

The existence of 'shared' holy places in the Mediterranean, and more especially the post-Ottoman world, relates to one of the general questions raised by both ethnology and history: the tension between the two principles that organize society, namely kinship and territory. Is a social group attached to a particular locality and defined in relation to a territory, or is it primarily organized around ties of kinship, descent and alliance (Leach 1982; Goody 1990; Derouet 1995)? Is it possible that the distinction between *ius soli* and *ius sanguinis*, which operates elsewhere, ceases to be pertinent when we are dealing with holy places, or in other words with the sites of important cultural activities that presuppose the existence of culturally significant

¹ From Politis (1978 [1914]), 'Marching Songs', no 32, trans. Marianne Gokalp.

representations derived from a specific organization of time and space? And what of claims pertaining to such places in the current political context?

The starting point for this article was an ethnographic study of such a place during the annual feast of St George in contemporary Istanbul.² It very quickly became clear that an understanding of the ethnohistorical context, and especially of these practices in terms of the Ottoman tradition, could add to our ethnographic knowledge. This essay is therefore part of an on-going historical anthropological study of the Anatolian Greeks, and deals with a phenomenon that still remains largely unknown.³

The second aspect of this study concerns the symbolic world with which cultural practices centred on St George are inscribed. The existence of the saint is analysed as the organizing principle behind a space-time that is bound up with the local community and that supplies a representation of the relationship between men and nature, namely the calendar of the year's local feasts. These feasts often mark the seasons, that is to say the beginning and end of work in the fields and other important activities such as transhumance, navigation and war. Those activities take place in the summer months, and in this region their start and finished coincide with the cycle of the Pleiades, which is itself associated with a mythological set, elements of which are also found in ancient Greek traditions and in the traditions of the peoples of both Anatolia and the Middle East.

HOLY PLACES AND LIMINALITY

Anthropological analyses of religious rituals often make use of the concepts of *communitas* and *liminality*, which, Turner (1969) suggests, can be applied to the study of religious phenomena in an extension of Van Gennep's work on rites of passage. According to this analysis, individuals who take part in a common ritual form a *communitas* but place themselves outside society in a state of *liminality* in which the rules of everyday life are in a sense suspended or inverted. Turner also describes this state as an 'antistructure'. A *communitas* emerges when individuals either ignore the rules that organize their society or find themselves outside the established social structure, and organize community bonds around cultural practices. This theory, which has been criticised by many researchers, proves to be much more convincing when it is related to the ethnological data on Christian places of worship in those

² Earlier versions were presented to the European network REMSH's conference on 'Networks, Exchanges and Conflicts in the Mediterranean Area' (Athens, 26-28 May 2005), the Max Planck Institute's workshop on 'Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective' (Halle, 23-25 September 2005), and at the day conferences on shared shrines organized by the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie within the REMSH network (Nanterre, March 2006). My warmest thanks go to all those who took part for their comments and suggestions, and especially to Dionigi Albera, Jean-Pierre and Marlène Albert, Michèle Baussant, Chris Hann, Roger Just, Antoinette Molinié and Anna Poujeau.

³ The first anthropological study of Anatolian Greeks was carried out by Renée Hirschon in 1960-1970 in a refugee district of Piraeus, near Athens (Hirschon 1989).

regions of the East where Christians and Muslims have coexisted for centuries.⁴ Turner appears to know nothing of the practices of Eastern Christians, and still less of inter-confessional situations, yet it is precisely in such situations that the notions of *communitas* and liminality take on their full meaning (Brown 1981: 42; cf Pujeau's contribution to the present volume).

Turner regards religious cults as transitional phenomena characterized by a state of liminality. Because they are 'betwixt and between', they mark an ambiguous period that is conducive to the formation of a *communitas*, or a non-structured community whose members are all equal. To some extent, this analysis takes us back to the work of Hasluck, who carried out research into what he called 'ambiguous sanctuaries'—sanctuaries of Christian origin managed by Muslim brotherhoods, and especially the Bektashis—in the Balkans and Anatolia in the 1910s (Hasluck 1929). Hasluck, like Turner, thought that such 'shared' sanctuaries represented a transition from one stage to another: the transformation of a Christian holy place into a Muslim holy place was a transition within a broader process of Islamization in the Ottoman world.⁵

We will see later that this hypothesis does seem to be corroborated by recent research into the period of the Ottoman conquest of, for example, Thrace; at the same time, it seems difficult to assert that we are dealing with a place that is 'in transition' whenever we encounter a 'shared' holy place of a 'mixed' pilgrimage. What might be called the Byzantino-Ottoman zone is a vast territory in which the populations of various regions experienced many periods of Islamization over a period of more than one thousand years. It therefore seems to me that the phenomenon is more complex than a 'moment', or a mere changing of the guard, and that it would be more useful to

⁴ Turner's theories have recently been criticised by the many anthropologists who have been unable to confirm his theses about the liminal state or the establishment of the anti-structure (*communitas*) in the many cases of pilgrimage they have observed all over the world. Cf Morinis (1992), who refers to his studies of Bengal, and to the work of Eickelman in Morocco, Pruess in Thailand, of Messerschmidt and Qharma in Nepal, of Van der Veer in India, of Sallnow in Peru and of Pfaffenburg in Sri Lanka. Dubisch (1995), who has worked in Greece, is another critic who has doubts about the pertinence of the concept of *communitas*. All insist that pilgrimage is an individual affair, that it is experienced as such, and that there is no element of *communitas* in the process. In their critical introduction to theories of pilgrimage, Eade and Sallnow (1991) emphasize the anti-Durkheimian nature of Turner's theory; by placing the emphasis on the anti-structural nature of pilgrimage, they call into question the notions that its function is to reinforce social cohesion. Eade and Sallnow also stress that the phenomenon of pilgrimage is not uniform, which is why any theoretical discourse about 'pilgrimage' will inevitably be incomplete: 'If we can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of "pilgrimage" either' (1991: 3). Turner himself actually thought that pilgrimages are essentially intra-confessional activities, and paid almost no attention to inter-confessional pilgrimages: 'With rare and interesting exceptions, the pilgrims of different religions do not visit one another's shrines, and certainly do not find salvation *extra ecclesia*' (1978: 9).

⁵ Hasluck describes Bektashi cultural activity at these shared shrines as a 'superimposition' of religions. In his view, Bektashism spread through the local populations in non-violent ways: 'Either by process analogous to that known to the ancient world as the "reception" of the new god by the old, or simply by the identification of the two personalities. The "ambiguous" sanctuary, claimed and frequented by both religions, seems to represent a distinct stage of development—the period of equipoise, as it were—in the transition both from Christianity to Bektashism and, in the rare cases where political and other circumstances are favourable, from Bektashism to Christianity' (Hasluck 1929: 564).

examine in detail one instance and to contextualize our ethnographic observations with the help of the work of historians, if we wish to understand the nature of these strange phenomena. My analysis is inspired by the approach adopted by Peter Brown, the only person to have described the phenomena of the cult of saints throughout the Christian world, in both the east and the west, whilst paying particular attention to their historical contexts (Brown 1981; 1987).

The present study concerns St George, who is very popular throughout the Christian east from Egypt to Georgia. Several of the shrines dedicated to the saint in the eastern Mediterranean attract Muslim pilgrims (Voile 2004). My argument is based upon a series of ethnographic observations of the saint's feast in the sanctuary dedicated to him on Princes' Island (Prinkipo or Büyükada, meaning 'large island' in Turkish), which lies opposite Istanbul. They will be analysed in the light of a study of documents about the saint's feast days in the Black Sea region at the beginning of the twentieth century. They are drawn from the archives of Greeks who fled Anatolia in 1922.⁶

SYNGHENEIS AND SYNCHORIANOI: THE PRINCIPLES OF KINSHIP AND TERRITORIALITY

An analysis of the ethnographic data on the ways St George's day is celebrated in the eastern Mediterranean takes us back to two notions that are essential to the analysis of social facts: kinship and territory. Those notions relate to the principles of blood and soil which, whilst they are *a priori* antinomic, are associated in most societies (Kuper 1994). The complementary nature of the two principles is also evoked with reference to agrarian societies in Europe, where lineage on the one hand and residence on the other appear to determine the rights of individuals. Kinship and locality appear, in other words, to constitute the conflicting logics around which land-tenure, for example, is organized (Derouet 1995). Now, as Leach demonstrates, it is not easy to maintain the distinction between the two referents when we are analysing ethnographic data. Leach 'deconstructs' the concept of kinship and suggests that this type of relationship should be examined in terms of its material context, rather than as a behaviour that obeys a set of juridical rules. Kinship systems, long regarded as a basic 'structure' of social organization in the British tradition, 'have no "reality" at all except in relation to land and property' (Leach 1968: 305). We should not, in other words, confuse kinship organizations with representations relating to them.

The same type of 'deconstruction' might shed light on the study of 'shared' or 'common' holy places within the Ottoman world if we place the emphasis on the

⁶ I prefer to use the archaic 'Prinkipo' rather than the more common 'Büyükada' when referring to the island because it is more evocative of its multicultural past. The term is part of the local vocabulary, and is understood by old Stamboulites of all confessions. In Greek, the grammatically correct term is Prinkipos/Πριγκηπος and, for the islands as a whole, Prinkiponoisa/Πριγκηποσά, (Princes' Island). The reference is to the Byzantine princes (and subsequently the sons of the sultans) who lived there under house arrest. In modern Turkish, the islands are generally referred to as 'the Adlar' (islands), and tourist guides use both terms. See, for example, <http://www.guideofistanbul.net/en/adalar/html>; *Istanbul*, Guide bleue, Paris: Hachette 2002; *Istanbul*, Paris: Guide Gallimard 2002.

distinction between the analysis of social organization in relations to the religious communities (*millet*) that were established with the Ottoman juridical and administrative system, and the analysis of the religious practices and representations of local communities.⁷ This raises the question of the fit between juridical affiliation and religious practice, which underlies our investigation into ‘shared holy places’. The presence of Muslim pilgrims at the shrine of a Christian saint seems to contradict a certain conception of the *millet* that sees the cultural practices of individuals as being ‘in phase with’ their membership of a given religious community, which determines their juridical status. We will come back to this point. Now we cannot analyse this phenomenon without calling into question our understanding of the local categories involved: practising a ‘religion’, belonging to a ‘community’, ‘sharing’ an identity or holy places, and being from a ‘country’ [*pays*], in the sense of a locality, are concepts that must be contextualized within the historical and sociological space-time that concerns us here.

A study of the stories collected in the archives of Greek refugees from Anatolia reveals the presence of a strong local identity, and a feeling of belonging to a village community that crossed the frontiers between religious communities in the early twentieth century. That feeling of identity and belonging is the basis for the bonds of solidarity that are forged people who come from the same village, or who are regarded as *synchoriani*, from the same *chorio* (village). ‘When a Muslim took the decision to expatriate himself, he was given protection and help by his expatriate Christian *synchorianos*.’⁸ These strong ties have to be related to the entire population’s involvement in the annual commemorations of local saints that mark the transition from one season to the next. The fact that an entire population recognizes the sanctity of a holy place is, in other words, merely one aspect of the coexistence within the same territory of different religious communities, or an expression of the ties between individuals and their local community.

The local Anatolian population is a social reality that is not frozen in time: whether it be monoreligious or plurireligious, it is a product of centuries of population movements and religious conversions. When we come to look at the question of ‘sharing’ as a tradition, we will see the importance of ethno-historical studies, and

⁷ On Greek Orthodox *millet* see Anagnostopoulou’s recent study (1997).

⁸ CEAM, OD, 56/1959, Rapport de mission Tsalikoglu, p. 79. The archives in the Centre d’Etudes d’Asie Mineure (CEAM) were collected during the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey that followed the war between the two countries in 1919-1922, and which ended with the defeat of the Greek army. Both nation-states then pursued a policy of homogenization within their frontiers: some were ‘expatriated’ and others were ‘expelled’. 1,200,000 ‘Greeks’, or member of the Ottoman’s Empire’s Greek Orthodox minority, were repatriated to Greece, whilst 350,000 Muslims were sent to Anatolia. The departure of the Greeks marked the end of a process that began with the Armenian genocide of 1915. In 1913, one in five inhabitants of what is now Turkey was Greek; by the end of 1923, the proportion was no more than one in forty (Keyder 2002: 43). The historical context was that of the end of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the formation of the modern Turkish nation-state. Collecting the ethnographic data that make up CEAM’s archive was a scientific project carried out using the ethnographic methods of the day (1940-1970). The project was initiated by Melpo Merlier, an ethnomusicologist who was married to Octave Merlier, Director of the Institut français d’Athènes.

especially those of Hasluck, who studied heterodox Islamic practices in the Balkans and Anatolia in the early twentieth century. For the moment, we will simply note that Hasluck, whose analyses have inspired many recent studies of religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire, believed that heterodox religious practices should be related to the periods, which vary in length, over which the populations concerned were converted from Christianity to Islam (Hasluck 1913-1914; Shankland 2004).

COUSINS (*SYNGHENIS*) AND BLOOD RELATIONS (*OMOEMI*); TWO DISTINCT CATEGORIES

In the Ottoman Empire, religious communities coexisted in the context of a juridical and administrative system that implied several levels of segregation, that found mixed marriage inconceivable and that prescribed rights and duties that varied in accordance with the individual's ethnoreligious affiliations. According to the principles of Ottoman law, communitarian endogamy was an absolute rule, and mixed marriage resulted in the wife's conversion to her husband's religion and her exclusion from her community of origin. Under these conditions, marrying outside one's community meant defying all social logic; this could put an end to cycles of alliance, and represented a 'loss' for both the family groups concerned. The criteria applied during the population exchanges of 1923 followed the same rules: all those inhabitants of Anatolia who were included in Greek Orthodox parish registers when they were baptised were expelled to Greece; only those Christian women who had married Muslims had the right to remain by virtue of their conversion –they no longer belonged to the *Rum millet* or the Greek Orthodox 'nation'.⁹

It is well known that ties of biological kinship do not necessarily result in social bonds. In this case, the effect of the regulation of 'impossible exogamy' meant that ties of kinship were recorded in two registers with the local community. On the one hand, they left administrative traces in the parish registers of Christian churches, and in the registers of the *cadis* who represented the administration at the local level. On the other hand, they left traces in the collective memory of relations between men and women. In the Greek world, both registers were visible in the traditional distinction between the terms *synchorianos* ('from the same *chorio* or village) and *synghenis* (of the same *genos* or lineage): being from the same villages did not necessarily mean being of the same family. But in the case of mixed localities in Anatolia, a further distinction existed between individuals of the same parentage (*synghenis*) and individuals who shared the same blood (*omoemi*). The distinction took account of local social realities: it was possible for individuals to be biological

⁹ The passports of the *Rum* who were 'exchanged' were stamped (in French): '*Il ne peut retourner*' ('cannot return'). The refugees from Anatolia reached Greece in two waves. The first wave followed the fighting between the Greek and Turkish armies. It involved coastal populations who left in a hurry and often in tragic circumstances, including those who were evacuated after the burning of Smyrna in 1922. The second, and larger, wave involved populations from the interior, who left in more organized fashion in 1924. The Cappadocian populations mentioned in Tsalikoglu's report were part of the second wave (Anagnostakis and Balta 2004).

kinsmen without necessarily being related in the social sense.¹⁰ One example of this third referent—which appears to have been necessary in regions where Christians and Muslims lived side by side—can be found in Tsalioglu’s report, and more specifically in the passage describing his visit to his village of origin in Cappadocia in 1959. The author describes how a young Muslim man addressed him by calling him a ‘cousin’ without realizing that has was merely ‘of the same blood’

He introduced himself: I am the grandson of Katir Baba, and the son of Osman Cavoul Katir. We are cousins (he meant blood relations, ομάιμουέζ). On our father’s side we are descended from the Pinyatoglus, and on our mother’s side from the Karakasoglus in our village [...] Katir Baba was born in 1825, in the time of the janissaries. His tragic story is known to all Christians. [Descended from two great families], he lost his father when he was little and his mother married a Turk from our village and converted. She kept the boy with her. He grew up as a Muslim and was circumcised. But he knew about his Christian origins. It was not possible for him to revert to Christianity on pain of death [...]. The rich Pinyatoglus regarded him as one of their own. They helped him financially. When they came back to the village from trips abroad, they remembered him. They brought him presents [...] The Pinyatoglus had made the Muslims of the day an offer: they would keep the son of the converted mother and who buy him by paying his weight in gold. The janissary did not accept their offer, saying that when he grew up, he could earn more gold than the Pinyatoglus were offering. Young Katir (therefore) called me his cousin. We are not cousins (Συγγενεΐάυ δευ έχομεν). The poor boy probably meant to say that we were blood relatives (όμάιμουέυ) ... blood can never, never, turn into water. Today, more than ten of the forty Muslim families in Cincidere are of Greek origin. The third generation does not hide the fact (Tsalikoglu: 125-128).

SYNCRETIC¹¹ PRACTICES IN ISTANBUL: THE FEAST OF ST GEORGE

¹⁰ Tsaliogklu’s text gives an example from twentieth-century Cappadocia. This is comparable with the Cretan tradition in which the head of the family’s religious affiliation with the ‘dominant religion’ (the community of ‘Latin’ Catholics during the Venetian period, and the Muslim community after the island’s conquest) did not lead to the conversion of the rest of the family. According to Greene (2000: 108), the Cretan system functioned because of a ‘public religion’ (Catholic Christianity, Islam) transmitted through the agnatic line coexisted alongside a ‘private religion’ transmitted by the women of the family. In this society, people who found themselves astride the two communities stood a better chance of success (Greene 2000: 204). Having said that, the documents on which historians work (contemporary chronicles, local archives) tell us nothing about the cases that are of most interest to us for our present purpose. What about festive meals? Who shares which meal, and with whom? Which members of the family are invited to celebrate the head of the family’s name day when the family is bi-religious? But they certainly suggest that—in the broadest sense—Christians and Muslims were more likely to ‘share’—in the broadest sense—at religious feasts (Greene 2000: 106-108).

¹¹ Syncretism is used here to means mixed with Muslim traditions, and to describe practices that bring together elements from several religious traditions. On the etymology and various meanings of the word see Shaw (1994).

April 23 has been a public holiday in Turkey since 1929. It is ‘National Sovereignty and Children’s Day’ (*23 Nisan Ulusal Egemenlik ve Çocuk Bayramı*), and commemorates Kemal Ataturk’s seizure of power in 1920. According to the Christian calendar, this is St George’s Day, which is a traditional festival for Turkey’s *Rum*.¹² In the countryside, it is celebrated by masses in chapels or monasteries, followed by open air meals or picnics. In today’s Istanbul, impressive crowds of pilgrims—some 100,000 people—gather for the festival around the Greek Orthodox monastery at the highest point of the island of Prinkipo. The fact that almost all the pilgrims are, in cultural terms, Muslim means that the practices observed there are syncretic. The large number of pilgrims also raises the issue of the religious nature of the event: are we talking about the emergence of a *communitas* that exists for the duration of these symbolic practices, which are bound up with old sacred places? (Hertz 1970; Turner 199; Morinis 1992) How do the ‘communities’ concerned define their identity? How do tensions and passions whose roots lie in a shared history relate to contemporary issues pertaining to identity, recent modifications to representations, and national or nationalist stereotypes (Kechriotis 2002; Calotychos 2003; Pagaroufali 2005; Theodossopoulos 2006)? ‘Ritual time’ and ‘sacred place’ are fluid realities, and I propose to look at them by examining three calendar configurations, one corresponding to ‘communitarian’ time, and others to ‘shared’ or syncretic time.

The St George’s Day celebrations of 23 April are a well established local tradition that goes back to the multicultural past of Ottoman society. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Christians, most of them living in Istanbul and towns on the western coast, made up 20% of the population. The population of the city of Istanbul has now risen to some ten million and is 99% Muslim. This situation contrasts sharply with the early twentieth century, when the city had a population of scarcely one million people who spoke several languages and belonged to several religious communities. This was *la belle époque* and it has often been described as ‘cosmopolitan’ (Driessen 2005; Ors 2006): rich urban families of all religions shared the same way of life in a city where half the population consisted of Greek (*Rum*), Jewish or Armenian ‘minorities’ (Alexandris 1983; Berktaç 1998). Princes’ Island, which one hour away from the centre of Istanbul by steamboat, is where, amongst other places, where the Stamboulite bourgeoisie spent their holidays in the nineteenth century.¹³ Most of the inhabitants were from ‘minorities’, and the majority were Greek Orthodox, which explains why there are two Orthodox parish churches, a cemetery and a monastery dedicated to St George on Prinkipo. It was already both a popular place of pilgrimage and a playground visited by wealthy people from all walks of life on Sundays. The monastery, known as St George Koudounas (‘decorated

¹² The term *Rum* (Turkish for roman) refers to Turkey’s Greek Orthodox Christians, or the Christian heir to the Byzantine Empire (the Eastern Roman Empire). They refer to themselves as *Romii*, which derives from *Romaios* (‘Romans’ in Greek)

¹³ Prinkipo is the largest of a string of islands to the south-east of Istanbul. The others are Heybeliada (Chalki), Burgazada (Antigôni) and Kinaliada (Prôti).

with bells’) because of the little bells that adorn the armour worn by the saint depicted in the church’s main icon, was both a tourist attraction and a place of pilgrimage:

At least once a year, every family went together to the mountain to venerate the saint, to sprinkle themselves with holy water and to fill the bottles they kept for difficult moments. Whilst ordinary people went for the patronal feast, more ‘well to do’ families often went on excursions to St George’s and held parties in the open air. On special occasions, tables were set up on the square behind the monastery, and it was the higoimene (who acted as host) who took charge of the proceedings. The society pages of the Greek newspapers of the day bear witness to the fact ... there were always crowds at St George’s on Sundays (Millas 1988).

When the Christians have left, Prinkipo is still the preserve of Istanbul’s high society. This is where the rich have their villas and their local sports clubs. Here, the modern elite enjoy a way of life that is very different from that of ordinary Stamboulites. Even the pilgrims who visit the island on 23 April are townspeople who were born in Istanbul and they do not share the same way of life as the populations from the countryside that have recently settled there.

We are in a city with an old tradition of syncretism where the chapels and holy places of Christians have always been visited by Muslims. For the *Rum*, or Istanbul’s Greek Orthodox Christians, this ‘sharing’ is part of the normal life of the capital. A woman attending Sunday mass at the Church of the Trinity near Taksim Square in April 2004 confirmed that this is still the case: ‘A lot of them go to St George’s on Prinkipo because the saint gives them everything they ask for: houses, jobs, good health. He gives everything.’ According to her, more and more Muslims were going because the saint had a ‘good reputation’ and because the priests were welcoming. According to the priest who was welcoming the pilgrims to the church when I first visited St George’s sanctuary in 1992: ‘The Ottomans (Οθωμάνοι) come with faith. If I refuse to say prayers for them (for their health, houses and jobs), I would be the one who was committing a sin, a blasphemy [...] They are the same prayers that we say for the *Romii* (Rum), prayers from [the book] that protects against the evil eye [Vaskania]. When they come with faith, we cannot turn them away. They [the pilgrims] have faith.’

The usual visitors to these holy places are Turkish-speaking women of Muslim tradition who belong to the city’s educated middle classes; they do not wear headscarves, or at least not Islamic headscarves. Having been born in Istanbul, they are familiar with the sacred geography the city, in which there are other sanctuaries and miraculous springs. These are either Christian or Muslim holy places, and people visit them in search of a cure for their illnesses or malaise (Yerasimos 1992). The pilgrims share this local feeling of belonging or autochtony with the *Rum*, who were

also born and brought up in Istanbul. Syncretic practices are also part of the city's tradition of coexistence, parallel lives and shared religious beliefs.

These traditional customs, which date back to the Ottoman era, are the symbolic basis for the syncretic practices that can still be observed today on Prinkipo. The boundaries between religions are also blurred by other 'mixed' ritual practices, such as the tradition of going to St Anthony's Catholic church in Istiklâl for midnight mass on Christmas Eve. Once again, this is an urban tradition observed by Istanbul's Muslim bourgeoisie, and it is still very much alive (see Albera and Fliche's contribution to the present volume).

THREE RITUAL TEMPORALITIES

Both the eastern and western Christian calendars make a distinction between moveable and immovable feasts. Feasts determined by the date of Easter (Shrove Tuesday, Easter and Pentecost, for example) observe a solar-lunar calendar that changes every year, whilst the other feasts (such as Christmas; cf. Couderc 1946) are determined by a strictly solar calendar and do not change. St George's day falls between the two configurations: it is celebrated on 23 April unless that date falls during Lent or Holy Week, in which case it is moved to Easter Monday.

The specificity of the calendar gives rise to three possible configurations. According to the Church calendar, St George's day actually falls on 23 April, and the pilgrims who visit the island belong, at least in theory, to both the Christian and the Muslim communities. When St George's day falls before Easter, the saint's feast is not celebrated on 23 April, but tens of thousands of pilgrims still go to the monastery on Prinkipo because they do not know that. When this happens, it is not the mass for St George's day that is celebrated but the mass for the day in the church calendar (the Thursday of Holy Week, for example). As we have seen, the priests, who know that the vast majority of pilgrims are Muslim, welcome them to the monastery with their usual hospitality. 'The Muslims have faith, and when they come to us we welcome them, they come with faith. And we read the prayer to them.'¹⁴

There is, finally, a third ritual time. When Easter Monday, which by definition never falls on 23 April, is St George's day, it is a Greek Orthodox festival, and is not 'mixed'. When this is the case, the *Rum* community celebrates St George's day in accordance with its community tradition; after mass, a shared meal, provided either by the monks from the monastery or the faithful, is served.

The last two configurations are very different. Christians now avoid going to the monastery for the pilgrimage on 23 April, which they call 'the Muslims' festival'. In 2004, three young women from Istanbul's Armenian community explained to me that they did visit the island, but not in order to go to church: 'The Muslims go on 23 April; Christians go on the Sunday, when there are not so many people.'

¹⁴ Interview recorded on Prinkipo, 28 February 1997

The other configuration is the festival of the *Rum*, which takes place on Easter Monday. This is a rare occurrence, and provides the opportunity for a special feast. It allows the community to come together in a space-time that exists outside time, with a mass, a meal and singing and dancing. On one such occasion, observed in 1997, the Greek Consul was the guest of honour, and most guests arrive after mass for the agapes. That year, 23 April fell during Holy Week, and the monks and popes welcomed the pilgrims in the usual way. The Muslims come to the saint, they explained, because he has the power to cure: ‘Even the imam sends his priests to us to be cured; they [in the mosques] do not bring about cures. They also come to the churches. St Georges is famous for his power to give help at home or in business. They come to make *tamata*.’¹⁵

The offerings and the ritual gestures observed in these places by pilgrims evoke the most common requests. St Georges cures illnesses, and especially mental illness or malaise.¹⁶ He is a shepherd, and he guards his flock. In the time of the Greeks, the island’s children, who were all dedicated to the saint, were also called the ‘little slaves of St George’ (*ta sklavakia tou Agiou*). They wore little bells around their necks until they reached adulthood, and often until they were of an age to be married. Before they could be ‘set free’, they had to offer the saint a candle that was as tall as they were, and have the liberation prayer read. Incubation was also practised: the sick were brought to lie on the floor of the church for one or more nights, and had very specific thaumaturgical expectations: if the saint appeared to them in a dream, they were sure to be cured.

The Muslims who visit the saint rarely accept the bells, even though the Orthodox officiants offer them free of charge. Accepting a bell means giving something in exchange or even entering into negotiations with the saint through the intermediary of the priest: saying a prayer, or having one said, puts the petitioner under the saint’s protection. Accepting the bell is equivalent to signing a pact with him: when the wish is granted, the bell is returned, together with a gift whose size varies depending on the donor’s ability to give and whatever has been promised.¹⁷

It is obvious that such negotiations cannot take place between the officiant and everyone in the huge crowds that visit the sanctuary on feast days. Rather than adopting this personal approach, pilgrims perform ritual gestures outside the monastery precincts. They tie threads –preferably white threads- to trees and bushes at the bottom of the hill and unreel them as they climb the path to the top, getting as near to the shrine as they can. Strips of cloth are tied to the trees to ‘ties down’ the illness

¹⁵ *Tama* (*tamata* is the plural) means both a wish or the request the pilgrim makes of the saint, and the ex-voto representing it, which is often placed on the icon in the church.

¹⁶ This is one of St George’s specialities. See Hasluck, who also mentions practices of incubation in a quest for a cure for mental illness in the church of St George in Cairo (Hasluck 1929: 293, 693). See also Yannakopoulos (1995) on Anatolia (Erenköy), Bowman (in the present volume) and Voile (2004: 152, 255).

¹⁷ On forms of intercession in the practices of Christian pilgrims, see Brown (1981), Chélini and Branthome (1992) and Maraval (2004).

and make it go away.¹⁸ They light candles outside the church and rub coins against the walls (and the frescoes, if they can): if the coins stick, their wish will be granted. Small brick, and sometime stone, edifices are built to evoke a house and marriage. Strange little constructions can be seen by the path leading to the monastery at the top of the hill. Made of precariously balanced stones, they represent houses and sometimes even a hearth, as branches are arranged on top of the stones to form a cross. These little constructions used to be built on the flat area by the monastery, on the little walls de protection overlooking the sea. It is as though the saint of the *Rum* could help the pilgrim to look like the stereotypical Stamboulite *Rum*: a shopkeeper who is quite well off, and who owns a house and a shop.

SHARED SANCTUARIES

Shared sanctuaries were part of Ottoman folk culture in the Balkans and Anatolia. Those that were 'claimed and frequented by both religions' are described by Hasluck as 'shared sanctuaries' and in his view they represented a 'transitional stage' between Christianity and Bektashism'. They were found in areas where the population had been converted in the past.¹⁹ A recent study of Bektashism in western Thrace reaches similar conclusions, and associates the formation of that religious order with the Ottoman advance across the region in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and with the establishment of the corps of janissaries. These places of worship (*tekke*) were also religious centres, or 'monasteries' for the holy men (Baba or mere dervishes) who played a major role in converting the local populations to Islam en masse (Zegginis 2001). According to the author, some dervishes first settled in abandoned Byzantine monasteries, sometimes living alongside heretical Christian monks. This facilitated conversion, which was seen as replacing one form of heterodoxy with another. The Bektashis prospered in the region over a long period, until they were banned in 1826, the year in which the corps of janissaries was disbanded. Some of the *tekke* that had been demolished during the crisis were later rebuilt or converted into churches after 1913, when Thrace became part of the Greek state. The *tekke* near the village of Potamos, now a shrine dedicated to St George, is one example. A chapel dedicated to the Christian Sts George and Constantine stands on land that once belonged to Isiklar-Nefes Baba, one of the greatest *tekke* of the Ottoman period. It is still a place of pilgrimage. Hasluck, who visited it in the 1910s, says that it was reportedly founded by the son of the king of Fez in about 1361. The monastic establishment had some fifty resident 'dervishes' when the Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi visited it as a

¹⁸ The little strips of cloth that are tied to the trees correspond to a ritual gesture performed elsewhere in the Graeco-Anatolian world. A piece of cloth is cut from the clothes of the person who is 'carrying the illness' and hung on the saint's tree. The saint then keeps the illness away from the patient. For a detailed description of these gestures in the Black Sea region in the early twentieth century, see CEAM, P) 965. The threads are used in similar ways: the body of the patient measured, and the thread is tied to a tree. This keeps the illness far away from its victim.

¹⁹ See the recent studies collected in Shankland (2004)

pilgrim in 1688, and he himself carved a poem on the internal wall of the mausoleum (Zegginis 2001: 199-202). Now part of Greece, western Thrace still has a sizeable Muslim minority. It is surely no coincidence that it is precisely here that we find many traces of cultural practices common to the Christian and Bektashi populations, culminating in pilgrimages to the chapels and shrines of St George on 6 May (following the old calendar), some of them involving animal sacrifice (Zegginis 2001: 231-243; see also Georgoudi 1979).

BLACK SEA MEMORIES

Recent research carried out at the Centre d'Etudes d'Asie Mineure (which has a major ethnographic archive based on interviews with Greek refugees who left Anatolia in 1924) has revealed the existence of a recurrent schema relating to St George's day celebrations in Turkey, and especially the Black Sea region, in the early twentieth century.²⁰ On the basis of this data, a distinction can be made between two situations. The ritual activities are sometimes associated with a town or village and reflect the organization of the *Rum millet* (Romans' nation), or in other words the official community of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. On the saint's feast day, the parishioners gather in the church, where they are sometimes joined by Christians from neighbouring villages. Traders also sometimes come to sell their wares and, mention is sometimes made of celebrations that take place after mass, though these are unusual. People invite their family and friends into their homes, and the visitors stay for the night. The Turks sometimes go to mass or watch the processions as the icon is carried through the region's streets. There is also mention of Turks visiting Christian homes on the day of the feast; this custom seems to be restricted to the local notables of both communities (CEAM, PO 757, PO 1-3).

In the countryside, St George's day is celebrated in different ways. The celebrations take place near Christian chapels or the 'ruins' of a chapel, or in places in the forest where there are no buildings, and always provide an opportunity to tell stories about the legend of the saint, or about how he appeared there. It is here, away from parishes and communitarian institutions, that the syncretic practices are to be observed. The same story is often repeated: St Georges is venerated by the Turks. They call him *Hidrellez* and they fear him, because he is strong and punishes those who do not respect him.²¹ We identified the sites of forty-two parishes, chapels or monasteries dedicated to St George in CEAM's archives in Athens. Shared practices are recorded in five of them. All the celebrations take place in the countryside, in the presence of both Christians and Muslims, and blood sacrifices (*kurban*) are mentioned

²⁰ The choice of this region was dictated by two factors: the quality and quantity of the 'village files' in CEAM's archives, and the existence of a recent bibliography on churches dedicated to St Georges. This made it easier to cross-check the data in the archive, which had yet to be digitized. For a recent ethnographic study of the area, see Beller-Hann and Hann (2001).

²¹ The 'punitive' nature of St George's miracles and apparitions is mentioned in several of the stories told by Egypt's Copts (Voile 2004: 141-149).

in two cases.²² If these sanctuaries are no longer Christian chapels (if, that is, the building is in ruins and has neither an altar nor a roof), a priest cannot be called in to say mass, and only the villagers go there. But even when that is the case, the stories in the archives tell of votive practices such as incubation, or the custom of rubbing a coin against the wall to make it 'stick'. The church in Ladik, for example, has become a *tekke* (Bektashi place of worship). The informant's grandfather recalled:

The Turks celebrated St George's day too. They called him Hitirelez [...] Both the Turks and the Greeks used to go, tear strips from their clothes and tied them to the branches of the trees. Then they asked the saint la grace. And they took small pebbles or coins and try to make them stick to stones. If they stuck, their wishes were granted. The Turks had a tomb inside the *tekke*, covered with a green cloth, and said that there were bones inside it.²³

That there are similarities between the practices recalled by Greeks from Anatolia and those observed in Istanbul today is obvious, but for the moment we do not have enough material to draw any comparisons. Islam was the dominant religion in Ottoman society, but tolerated the presence of other religions, and the syncretic practices appear to be old; the Christian minority lived alongside the Muslim majority for centuries. For the majority, the other was at once familiar and inferior, and there was therefore no danger that Muslims who visited Christian sanctuaries would be polluted (Couroucli 2003; Mayeur-Jaouen 2002). The Empire's Christian minorities, on the other hand, were not permitted to enter the mosques that were the majority's places of worship. They became accessible to Christian visitors after the secular reforms of the regime of Kemal Atatürk, which designated them as historical monuments open to visitors (Tsalikoglu 1959).

ST GEORGES AND HIDRELLEZ

St George is often identified with legendary figures from both the Christian and Muslim worlds in the documentation on the feast of St George in the Turko-Anatolian region: Hidr, who evokes springtime and rebirth, the prophet St Elias, who is associated with the sun, and Hidrellez, who is present in the Turko-Anatolian region, in the stories told by Greek refugees from Anatolia, in studies of western Thrace

²² For a detailed description of the sacrifices made to St George in western Thrace, see Saranti-Stamouli (1931). Two animals are offered to the saint, and both are blessed by the priest. One is sacrificed and served up during the shared meal that is served after mass; the other is given as a prize to the winner of the Turkish wrestling matches that follow the meal. All the young men in the village, both 'Greek' and 'Turkish', take part.

²³ Centre d'Etudes d'Asie Mineure, Archives de la tradition orale (CEAM, PO 965). Many documents in the archives mention that the Turks call St Georges Hitirelles, Hidirelias or similar names, and venerate him as a major and 'powerful' saint. Cf Ormonos in Pafra, PO 178; Dikencik, PO 177; Aksag, PO 16; Gülük, PO 734; Agrid, PO 757; Saraicuk, PO 41; Kayasar, PO 57; Kavelar, PO 133; Oinoi, PO 105. See also the historical and ethnographic studies of western Thrace by Saranti-Stamouli (1931) and Yannakopoulos (1995).

(Zegginis 2001; Tsibiridou 2000), and in studies of Turkish folklore (Bazin 1972; Boratav 1955).

Hasluck was the first to note that Hid was identified with St Georges in Anatolia, and with St Elias, as early as the Byzantine era. He cites the sixteenth-century author Cantacusensus, who mentions that Muslims venerated St Georges and called him ‘Hetir Elias’ (Χέτηρ ήλίάς), and Georges le Hongrois, who was held prisoner in the Asia Minor in the early sixteenth century and who reported ‘the extraordinary vogue for Khidr’ at that time (1929: 321-322). More recently, the historian Zegginis makes it quite clear that St George is still the favourite saint of the Bektashis of western Thrace today, and that they identify him with St Elias and call him Hidrellez (2001: 234-235).

Many studies of the folklore of Anatolia and the Balkans mention celebrations known as *Hirdrellez*, which appear to date back to pre-Islamic Turkish practices. Hidrellez is now celebrated between 2 and 6 May, and only scholars remember the link with St George. According to Louis Bazin’s study of ancient and medieval Turkish calendars, there is nonetheless a link between the two feasts. Old Anatolian calendars divide the year into a cold season that begins on 26 October according to the Julian calendar (8 November according to the Gregorian calendar) and a god season beginning on 23 April (6 May). The first date is called *Kasim* (the Turkish word for November) and coincides with the feast of St Dimitri in the Christian calendar: it marks the beginning of the winter’s agricultural work, the return of the flocks from their transhumance, and the end of the fishing season. The second date is called *Hidrellez* (Hidir Ilyas in old Turkish) and coincides with the feast of St George in the Christian calendar. It marks the beginning of spring and the beginning of summer, when the rivers become navigable again, and when the transhumant flocks are returned to the high pastures. The same dates coincide with the cycle of the Pleiades: the constellation is visible only during the cold season, between its achronycal rising in October and its heliacal setting in April.²⁴ It should be recalled that the Greek name Georgis (Georges) is a homonym of *georgos* (ploughman) and that St George is regarded as the protector of shepherds. It should also be noted that Dimitri is the male –and Christian—equivalent to Demeter, the goddess of the earth and agriculture whose daughter Persephone spent part of the year living with her husband, who was king of the underworld, in Hades – the season when the Pleiades can be seen in the sky in the Mediterranean.

The name Hidir alludes to that of an Islamic prophet whose Arabic name (from the root *h-d-r*) expresses the idea of ‘verdure’. The figure appears to be descended from a ‘pre-Islamic god of the rebirth of plants’ that the Arab-Christian

²⁴ ‘That Hidrellez’s day coincides with St George’s, that *Kasim*’s day coincides with St Demetrios’s, and that the popular festivities in which the Muslims and Christians of the Ottoman Empire (and then Turkey) coincide with St George-Hidrellez is in itself enough to indicate that the Ottomans, whose civilization tended to be syncretic, simply took over, in their way, a earlier (Christian and probably pre-Christian) local tradition and partly Islamized it (ave the prophets Hızir and Ilyas interveant on St George’s day’ (Bazin 1972: 727).

tradition identified with St George. The term Ilyas is said to be the Islamic (Arabic) name for the prophet Elias (who is confused with Hidr –the Turkish *Hizir*- in Turkish folk tradition).²⁵ We appear to be talking about ‘a Turkish folk tradition in Arabo-Islamic guise that is closely associated with a Christianized Greek tradition in which St George plays the same role as Hizir-Ilyas (with St Demetrios playing the symmetrical role). The dragon slain by the Hellenic saint ... is probably the dragon of winter. As for St Demetrios, whose name derives from Demeter [...] he probably appears here because this is the time of year when the autumn’s seeds are entrusted to the earth’ (Bazin 1972: 721).

That the feasts of St George and St Dimitri are important dates in the calendar is well documented in the ethnographic archival material on the Greeks of Asia Minor. In some places, St George seems to be the local saint *par excellence* as he has two churches: a parish church inside the village and a chapel outside it, or even in the mountains. In such cases, St George’s day was celebrated in the countryside in spring, and in the village church in winter, and the corresponding months were known as *Agiorghita*.²⁶ The Greek Orthodox calendar also follows this chronology: the martyrdom of the saint is commemorated on 23 April, and the translation of his relics and the building of his first church on 3 November.²⁷

FROM MYTH TO HISTORY

It has been emphasized that St George is in many respects similar to the other mythological slayers of dragons and monsters. According to one version of his life, he was the son of a pagan father and was born in either Armenia or Persia. As he travelled through Cappadocia, he met a pious Christian woman and married her. There are analogies between this legend and the novel of Alexander and the poem de Digenis Akritis, the hero of the marches of the Byzantine Empire. The theme of the *digenis* (born of two races) is very common in the legends of the Sassanid and Shiite era in Persia. The theme of the *digenis* also appears, with some variations, in the Arabic novels of Antar and Delhemma, the Turkish novel by Sayyid Battal, and in Omar al-Neman’s story in the *Arabian Nights*. Influenced by ancient Persian stories and legends about Alexander, the myth of the hero who is descended from two races is repeated and embellished with many hagiographic elements in the story of the Thirteenth Imam, who was born in 868. According to legend, Hasan Askari married

²⁵ According to Bazin, it is because of the almost perfect homonymy with the Turkish *il(k)-yaz* (‘early spring’) that the prophet is associated with springtime, as there is no Koranic evidence to suggest that he is ‘the herald of summer’. Bazin does not mention the Greek *χιδρά νεά χιδρά* (young shoots of corn), and nor does he mention the ancient Christian tradition of taking them to church to be blessed, probably at about the same time of year.

²⁶ See Akoglou (1939: 261-263); the files in CEAM’s archives in Sürmeli in Pafra, CEAM, PO 186; Akdagaden and CEAM, PO 724; Adamantidis’s study of Kotyora (1934), and Prokopi’s study of Cappadocia (1988). On the importance of these dates for the agricultural calendar, see also Yannakopoulos (1995), and Saranti-Stamouli (1931) on the Thrace region.

²⁷ The reference is to the translation of the saint’s relics, and the founding of the first church in Lydda.

the granddaughter of the Emperor of Byzantium, who was descended from ‘the apostles and Christ; their child was the Thirteenth Imam, who is the great prophet of the Shiite religion. The theme of the hero of mixed origins is common in the hagiographic literature and legends of the peoples of the medieval Middle East, including the Shiites (Anagnostakis and Balta 1994).

We find the same motif in the legend of Sheikh Beddredin, the founder of the ‘Semavite’ order in Adrianopolis (Edirne) in western Thrace (Zegginis 2001). The same mythological motif, which is even more similar to the legend of St George, is associated with the figure of Sari Saltik in Albania. He was the founder of the local order of Bektashis, and large crowds of pilgrims still visit his cave on 6 May (St George’s day). Sari Saltik is said to have been a holy man who saved the life of the daughter of a (Christian) prince and caused water to gush forth for the people of the region by killing the dragon that was terrorizing them (Clayer 1996). Another story belonging to the same cycle of legends appears in the Greek folk song about St George.²⁸ The saint is described as the protector of a mixed couple (was the bride abducted?) and thus ‘blesses’ the only form of exogamy possible in the Ottoman world: marriage between a Muslim man and a Christian woman.

This brings us to the heart of the ambiguity surrounding the saint: who does he protect? Or rather, what does he protect? He protects neither a group insofar as it is an exclusive religious group, nor an ethno-religious identity. He appears to have more to do with syncretism, hybridity and non-exclusion, or even a life lived in the margins of institutions and official power. And he thus becomes the protector of the local community or of all the inhabitants of a territory, and there is a cultural continuity between him and the great Byzantine saints, whose main characteristic is they are associated with local cults locally around a cult that make them famous, and therefore powerful (Mango 1980; Mayeur-Jaouen 2005).

SYNCRETISM AS HERITAGE

As we have seen, representations of a multicultural identity are associated in Turkey both with bourgeois culture and modernity, and the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, Prinkipo’s St George might be described as a ‘deterritorialized’ saint: the shrine gradually lost its privileged ties with its community of origin, but at the same time became part of the heritage of old Istanbul. The shared practices, or what remains of them, add substance to a contemporary story about the Ottoman past. It is the story of a multicultural society and a polyglot elite living in a cosmopolitan city. The three ritual temporalities that characterize the different lived experiences of the diverse groups of worshippers to visit the monastery of St Georges symbolize modern Istanbul which, like any megapolis, offers an alternative to the national model of a

²⁸ Folklorists class the song as one of the marching songs of medieval Greek literature (Politis 1978 [1914]). A distant echo of the song can be heard in the story told by a Greek refugee from the Black Sea: The Turks called him ‘mad (*deli*) St Georges’ and regarded him as their son-in-law.

homogeneous society. Greek and Turkish historical narratives intersect here but do not merge into one. The Greek narrative has to do with a nation-state that retains an ambiguous memory of its past as a minority religious community within the Empire, and the Turkish narrative with a nation-state that increasingly looks to its imperial past as it searches for its identity.

This article set out to demonstrate that the saint's non-exclusive nature is the corollary of his local identity. This is because the two basic principles of social organization –kinship and territory- retained a relative autonomy in Ottoman society, but not in post-Ottoman society, which is organized around a homogeneous conception of its population. The tradition of hybridity and syncretism is based upon a basic opposition which, in the local context, to some extent protects society from institutional interference. In that sense, the heritage of syncretism contradicts the national project, which advocates ethnic, cultural and religion homogeneity and which therefore has difficulty in adapting to a narrative about the 'tolerant' past of a multicultural society.

We begin here to see the outline of the vast symbolic structure that underlies the popularity of St George and the existence of the shared religious practices centred on his shrines. St George is a figure related to the legends that structure to the organization of time and human labour.²⁹ A study of the historical and symbolic context in which the unusual pilgrimage to St George's church on Prinkipo suggests that we should re-examine the notions of religious 'tolerance' and 'sharing', which are now ill-defined, in the context of detailed situations that have been studied with the tools of ethnography and ethno-history. This approach reveals the important role played by the notion of a local community in the construction of individual identities, the reality of mixed marriages, both real and legendary, even though they are 'banned', the porosity of frontiers, and the importance of frontiers in the collective imaginary. The rich symbolism of St George flourishes in the margins of communities that are on the move; by protecting mixed marriages, the saint guarantees the symbolic survival of the local community (thanks to either mixed marriages or, as we have seen, conversion). This local and truly Chthonian spirit (specific to the earth and its [sub-]soil) also intervenes in the life of the community: he establishes the agricultural calendar by helping people in their day to day lives and gives them succour in times of misfortune (by curing illnesses, or even alienation). The saint is invoked insofar as he is an all-powerful local spirit, and as part of an 'ordinary' thaumaturgic quest that is at one serious and light-hearted.³⁰ The places inhabited by this supernatural being are sacred and inviolable and, as we have seen,

²⁹ It is not the intention of this study to take in the Christian west, but one parallel example should be mentioned. The 'pagan' cult of the English Mummers, which is also bound up with the agricultural calendar, makes direct reference to the legend and imagery of St George.

³⁰ The labels on the ex-votos sold at the bottom of the hill the pilgrims climb on the saint's day in Istanbul are eloquent testimony to the nature of the quest. They pray for everything: for good luck (*sans*), health (*saglik*), work (*is*), a lover (*sevgili*), a good parti (*kismet icin*), marriage (*evlilik*), a house (*ev*), a baby (*bebek*), money (*para*), a good education (*okul*).

many legends refer to his ability to punish those who do not respect his dwelling or *oikos* by making them ill or even bringing about their death (Magdalino 1989). As we have also seen, the saint is polyvalent: he crosses the frontiers between religions when his churches are turned into *tekke* and, sometimes, back into churches; he is ‘confused’ with other figures in eastern Christianity, such as St Dimitri, in both legendary representations and in the calendar—adds to his universal character and great popularity.

St Georges’ shrines in the Balkans and Anatolia, which draw pilgrims from all confessions, structure the local culture’s world and symbolic space-time. As we have seen, these shared sacred spaces are often found ‘in the wilds’ and outside institutional society. They are found outside the territories of ethno-religious communities, in a no man’s land that is open to all, and that allowed syncretic³¹ practices to flourish in the post-Ottoman world, just as they did elsewhere.³² Whilst St George, whose legend is part of a symbolic ensemble that is shared by all the peoples of the ancient East (Delehay 1909), is at home everywhere, he is still a unique figure. And his irreducible singularity is the fact that is, like some permanent outside, he is at home in frontier spaces, in the interstices. Ultimately, he represents the unity of the local community of *omoemi* (those who share the same blood), and that unity transcends the loyalties those religious groups that have become separate communities.

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³¹ Sabbatucci (2008) dates the shift of meaning that allows the word ‘syncretic’ (from the Greek *sygkritismos*, the association or federation of the Cretans) to go from meaning ‘agreement’ or ‘concord’ to meaning mixture, as though it derived from the verb *sygkerannymi* (to mix), to the Reformation. Erasmus reportedly uses the word when he calls upon the humanists to form a confederation, as the Cretans did, in the face of Catholic reaction. He notes that the term became pejorative ‘because of the rigorism of both sides, and came to mean confusion or hybridity.’

³² As we saw earlier, other shrines ‘in the wilds’ in the Balkans still attract ‘pluriconfessional’ crowds today, just as they did in the past.

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