

Friends of Tsamantas - Newsletter December 2016



News from Tsamantas

During the first week of December, I visited the village for the fourth time this year. Spread across the slopes of Mount Mourgana, and as beautiful as ever, it sparkled under the bright winter sun. One could hear the occasional cry of a bird of prey, the soporific sound of distant goat bells, and the continuous murmur of two streams, Xera and Platanakis, rushing to form the River Pavlas before disappearing into the magnificent Koziakas gorge.

The reason for my visit was the distribution, for a third year running, of foodstuff donated by **the St. George's Hellenic Benefit of Tsamanta(s), Inc, in Worcester, MA**, in the United States. The generous donation of US\$1,000 by the Society was used to provide a small bursary to four pupils who live permanently in the village, enabling them to gain access to the internet, and to distribute a bag of basic groceries, olive oil and meat for the Christmas dinner to nine households, benefiting a total of 23 individuals.

The few remaining inhabitants of Tsamantas, like other Greeks, continue to feel the humiliation and pain of the ongoing austerity measures imposed by the government, the European Union, and the International Monetary Fund. Their meagre pensions have been further reduced, while indirect taxes and utility bills have increased substantially (for instance, the water rates in Tsamantas went up 20% during the current year). In addition, the ailing Greek health and social services system is facing meltdown. It is not surprising that 2016 has been a cruel year for the community of Tsamantas, with the passing away of a larger than average number of its elderly inhabitants. We remember those residents who sadly died this year, along with others in the diasporic Tsamantiot community. I learned of the following losses during the course of the year:

John and Andromache Goulas (Tsamantas), **Anna Ntente** (Tsamantas), **Chrysanthi Katsiari** (Tsamantas), **Aggeliki Ntente** (Athens), **Basiliki Pitsaris** (Athens), **Theophilos (Ted) Raptis** (Worcester, MA), **Dinos Kiratsis** (Worcester, MA), **Peter Gogororis** (Melbourne, VIC) and **Athanasios Athanasiou** (Worcester, MA).



Fundraising Appeal for Urgent Repairs to the Parish Church of the Dormition of the Virgin(Ιερός Ναός Κοιμήσεως της Θεοτόκου) in Tsamantas

The historic Church of the Dormition of the Virgin – built in 1784, and ever since the main place of worship in Tsamantas – was the first building in the village to have its traditional roof of heavy slate replaced with modern tiles, shortly after the destruction of the civil war. Now, that roof is in need of urgent repairs, as confirmed by structural engineers. The tiled roof is leaking badly, and a number of its rafters are rotting away. The cost of replacement is estimated at €35,000.

Unfortunately, this far outstrips the church's income, which is derived mostly from the annual mid-August festivities (Πανηγύρι) and donations from its dwindling congregation. From the Πανηγύρι of 2016, the Church earned some €700, but this was used straightaway in replacing the church's guttering and downpipes, and in repairs to the pointing.

Unlike St George's in Kamitsiani, the church is not a designated archaeological monument, so it is unlikely to receive state funding. The Community of Tsamantas would therefore welcome contributions from anyone associated with the village, in support of the appeal for replacing the church's roof. You can donate directly to the bank account of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin Tsamanta(s) using the International **IBAN** account: **GR4301104590000045929605322**.

The bank may ask you for the SWIFT code, which is **(BIC) ETHNGRAA**. They may also ask for the church's account number, at the National Bank of Greece, which is **459/296053-22** (this number is incorporated in the IBAN account number above).

The name of the account is **ΙΕΡΟΣ ΝΑΟΣ ΚΟΙΜ. ΘΕΟΤ. ΤΣΑΜΑΝΤΑ** (Holy Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Tsamanta(s)).



Recent Successful Projects

During the present decade, two major projects, costing almost half a million euros in total, have been completed – mainly with the help of European funding, money from the Liagos and Bellos legacies, and individual donations. I am pleased to report that the restoration and conservation of the priceless murals in the Church of St. George's in Kamitsiani is near completion. There is now a suggestion – as yet unconfirmed – that the Region of Epirus will approve the funds for structurally securing the foundations of St. George's.

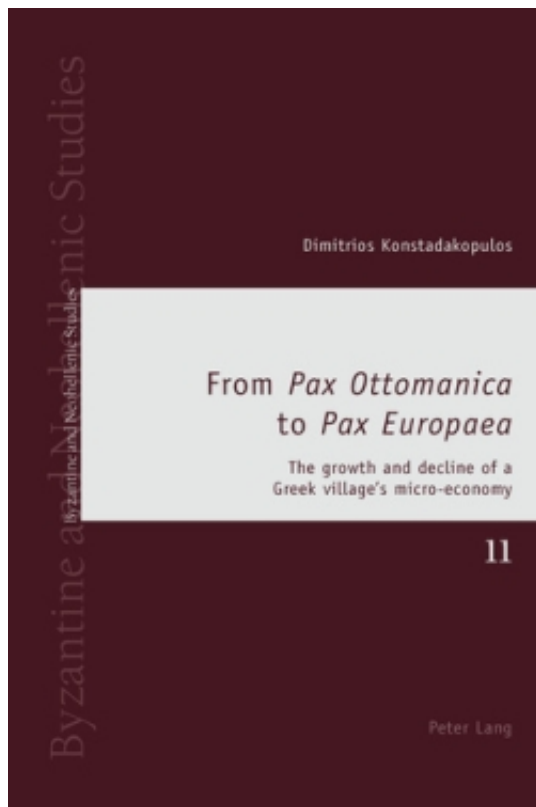
Secondly, the Parish Hall on the first floor of the old school/museum, next to the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, is now fully functioning.

The Unresolved Status of Tsamantas and the Challenges of the Bellos Legacy

You might be aware that the community of Tsamantas is one of the beneficiaries of the Bellos legacy. Prior to his death in 1999, the wealthy expatriate Stavros Bellos generously donated two lots of shares in American companies, and in his will he left to the village a further substantial amount (the Bellos Fund. Regrettably, recent administrative changes in Greece have resulted in the village of Tsamantas, like all other communities in Greece, ceasing to be legal entities per se, and instead becoming a part of larger municipalities. Now, Tsamantas – together with 40 other villages in Thesprotia – is part of the Municipality of Filiates. In addition, in-fighting and accusations of mismanagement among the Tsamantiots themselves have led to the postponement of the remittance of funds from the USA to the village, and the freezing of its bank account.

At the same time, the question has arisen of who is going to manage the Bellos Trust funds and pay any taxes due: the village itself, or the Mayor of Filiates. The community's lawyers took the issue to the Ministry of the Economy in Athens. In October, after a long delay, the deputy minister Mr Alexiadis announced that he was unable to make a decision, and referred the case to the regional court (εφετεριον), based in Corfu. However, there is an extensive backlog of cases in the Greek legal system: according to the World Bank (2016), a Greek plaintiff has to wait an average of four and a half years for his case to be heard by the relevant court. As a result, the people of Tsamantas will be denied the village's annual income of approximately US\$3,000-4,000 – accrued from the Bellos Fund and the shares – for years to come.

I am aware of this situation through my own involvement in attempting to resolve the matter. Last July, the head of the St. George's Society in Worcester – in his concern about economic hardship in Tsamantas – asked me to assist the newly elected representative of the village, Soterios Lagaris. We are trying, on many fronts, to resolve the various issues as soon as we can, in order to release funds from the legacy for the benefit of the community.



Other matters

I am delighted to report that I shall be visiting the Tsamantiot Community in **Melbourne, Australia** from the 15th to 17th of February and the Tsamantiot Community in **Worcester, MA, USA** from the 29th to the 31st of May 2017.

A reminder of the two recent books on Tsamantas:

a) D. Konstadakopulos (2014), '**From Pax Ottomanica to Pax Europaea: the growth and decline of a Greek village's micro-economy**', Vol. 11 of Byzantine and Neohellenic Studies, University of Durham and King's College London, Peter Lang, Oxford.

Available at Amazon:

https://www.amazon.com/Pax-Ottomanica-Europaea-micro-economy-Neohellenic/dp/3034317492/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1482479968&sr=1-1&keywords=pax+ottomanica+to+pax+Europaea

For an academic review in the Journal of Modern Greek Studies see:

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/602025>

b) N. Nitsos [1926] (2015), 'Tales, Rituals and Songs: Exploring the Unknown Popular Culture of a Greek Mountain Village.' Translated by Panayotis League, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA.

Available at the Holy Cross Bookstore:

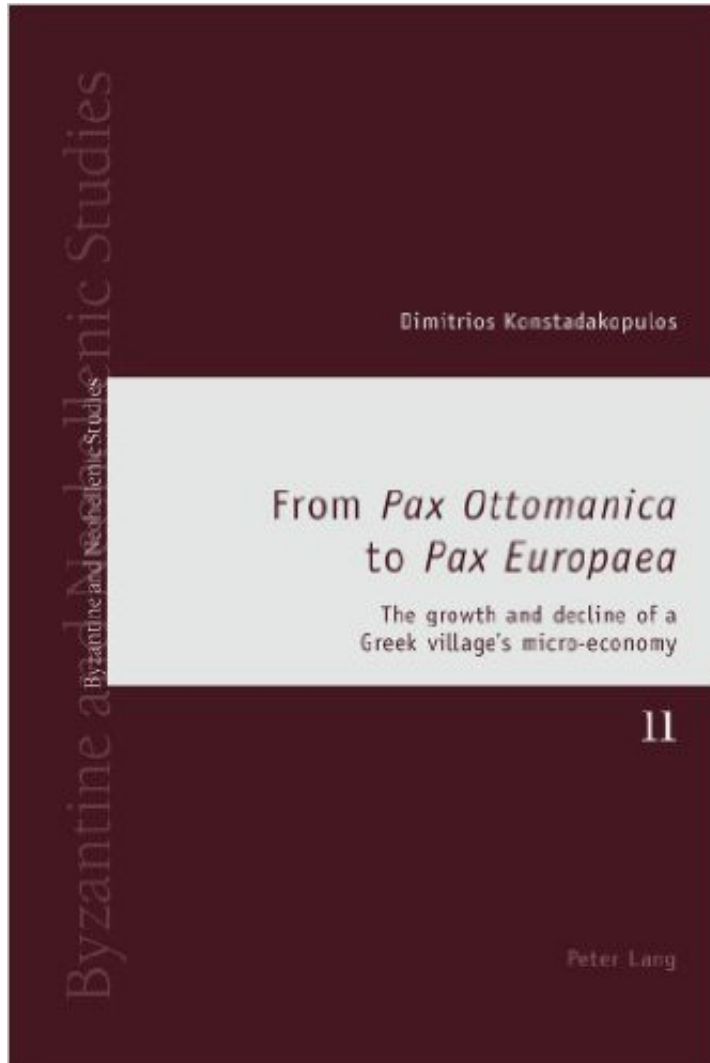
<https://holycrossbookstore.com/products/tales-rituals-and-songs-exploring-the-unknown-popular-culture-of-a-greek-mountain-village?variant=8150213379>

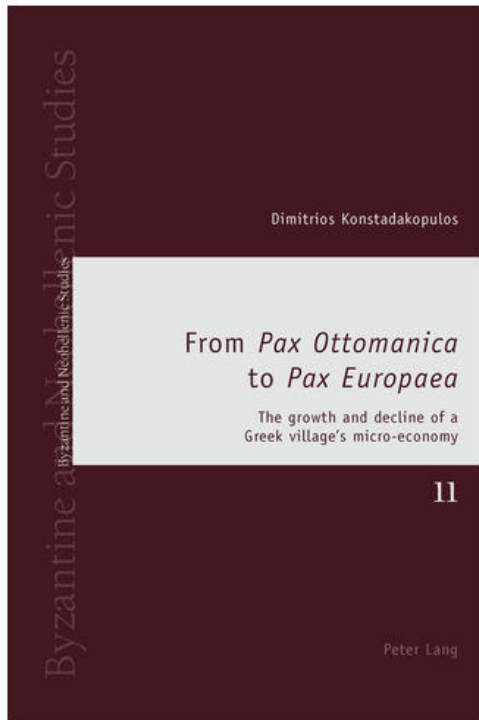
Available at Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Tales-Rituals-Songs-Exploring-Mountain/dp/1935317547>

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a
Prosperous New Year

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The macroeconomic development of south-eastern Europe has been profoundly affected not only by the region's major historical events – for example, liberation from the Ottoman Empire, the outbreak of civil wars, and the birth of new nations – but also by global events, such as the world-wide conflicts of the twentieth century, and the recent transnational processes of globalisation and European integration. The rationale of this book is to employ a comprehensive micro-history – that is, the history of one particular community: in this case, the village of Tsamantas, in north-western Greece – as a means of providing a detailed picture that will permit extrapolation to a wider context. Situated in one of the most isolated parts of the region of Epirus, Tsamantas has a complex history and a rich folk culture. At times, it has been a textbook example of how decision-making within a community can impact upon the success of the local economy. Its inhabitants have been rational problem-

solvers, with a sense of what is in their family's best interests, rather than passive victims of circumstance, and their choices at critical points in the village's history have resulted either in growth or decline. The author focuses his groundbreaking analysis on these choices, drawing upon publications, archived materials, and illuminating oral accounts of local events.

Available for purchase [here](#).

[Dimitrios Konstadakopoulos](#) is Senior Lecturer in Strategic Management in the Cardiff School of Management at Cardiff Metropolitan University. He has spent over ten years researching the mountain community of Tsamantas, in north-western Greece, as well as its diaspora in the United States, Australia and elsewhere. In addition to conducting various research projects in Europe, South East Asia and North America, he has published books, chapters in books, and several articles and reports on innovation, knowledge and learning, local and regional development, and policies on environment and technology.



Tales, Rituals and Songs:

Exploring the Unknown Popular
Culture of a Greek Mountain Village



Nikolaos Nitsos

Translated by Panayotis League

A History of Greeks Revealed through Tsamantas

By Constantinos E. Scaros

Most Greeks cannot point to the village of Tsamantas on a map. The tiny village, with barely 100 residents, is situated in Northern Greece close to the Albanian border. And unless a Greek-American hails from there or for whatever reason has passed through, he or she would have no reason to know Tsamantas.

Yet this tiny speck on the map of Greece is resplendent in history and tradition that has been richly chronicled the book *Tales, Rituals and Songs*, a book that has a remarkable history itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tales, Rituals and Songs was written by Nikolaos Nitsos and first published in 1926. Nitsos was in 1865 in Tsamantas, the son of a priest, Stavros, who was involved in a longstanding dispute with Turkish officials, protesting against the feudal system they had imposed upon the inhabitants of the village and surrounding areas.

Barely an adult but already the victim of several assassination attempts, the young Nitsos fled to Constantinople, where he could survive in the safety of anonymity in such a large city, and took his family with him.

He studied at the Ecumenical Patriarchate's prestigious Phanar Greek Orthodox College, and became a scholar in many fields: history, folklore, linguistics, environmentalism, and journalism. For many years, he served as a journalist in Constantinople, writing for the Greek newspapers there.

He returned to Tsamantas in 1914, which had since been liberated from Ottoman oppression,



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but eventually planned to return to Constantinople eventually.

But in 1917, during World War I, when the Italians occupied the region of Epirus in which Tsamantas is situated, they cut off mail service and newspaper circulation. For a historian and journalist like Nitsos, this was devastating.

To keep his mind active and to feed his fervent desire to write, Nitsos began compiling materials on his fellow villagers' customs, language, expressions, including the way of life of Tsamantas' previous generations. About this endeavor, Nitsos wrote: "the more I collected and studied, the more interested I became."

By 1920, Nitsos completed the first draft of *Tales* and after securing a bank loan to cover publishing costs, the book was published in 1926.

Nitsos lived out his remaining years in his hometown of Tsamantas quietly, until his death in 1940 at age 75.

FLEA MARKET RENAISSANCE
Tales remained lost for almost

70 years, apparently discovered at a flea market in Monastiraki in Athens in 1992.

As Dr. Dimitrios Konstadakopoulos, Senior Research Fellow at the University of the West of England in Bristol, who wrote the book's Foreword and contributed to its translation in English, explains, "consistent with Nitsos' determination to prove connections with the Ancient Greeks, his monograph was written in katharevousa," a literary version of Modern Greek devised in the early 19th century as an amalgam of Ancient and Modern (Demotic) Greek. But because Tsamantas' villagers knew little or no katharevousa, the book was not widely-read and relegated to history's dustbin, until its renaissance.

Tales was apparently discovered at the flea market by a member of the St. Dimitrios Brotherhood of Tsamantas and donated to the Brotherhood accordingly. The book was thereby republished by the brotherhood.

NITSOS IN ENGLISH

Soterios Zoulas, Nitsos grand-nephew, was the Executive Effort of the multiyear effort to translate *Tales* into English. The project was made possible by a grant from the Worcester, MA-based St. George Benefit Society of Tsamantas. The Panayiotis League of Hellenic College, along with Dr. Konstadakopoulos, translated the book, which was published this year, the 75th anniversary of the author's death, by Holy Cross Orthodox Press.

The collaborators emphasize that the countless components that comprise this anthology are by no means limited to Tsamantas, but are more broadly reflective of Greek culture as a whole.

Among them, the following passage from a song:

*When I was young and I could sing,
I was first and led the dance.
Now I've aged, the poor thing,
And they've put me at the end of the line!
Girls, I beg you, put me in the middle,
So I can kiss the one I like!*

And one of the book's more amusing if irreverent passages is a collection of the villagers' curses upon various animals: to a dog: "na ton faei i lissa!" (may he be eaten by rage! [or rabies]). To chickens: "na tis parei to geraki!" (may the hawk take them!). And to sheep and goats: "na ta faei o likos!" (may the wolf eat them!) and "na ta skisei" (may he tear them apart!).

"CLEAR THREAT" WARNING

Zoulas told TNH of his great uncle's desire to communicate with the Greek-American community. Indeed, in January, 1940, a month before his death and nine months before October 28, which became the day of Greece's historic OXI, Nitsos wrote what became among his last recorded words anywhere, to a newspaper, warning of the impending danger to Greece by Benito Mussolini's Fascist Italian forces, with World War II well underway: "The horizon is turning darker and darker, foretelling the coming storm. The provocative activities of the Italian invaders along the border, in blatant cooperation with the Albanians, are a clear threat to the independence and territorial integrity of our fatherland."

The newspaper to which Nitsos wrote those words 75 years ago was our sister publication, National Herald-Ethnikos Kyrix.