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The Meaning of Dowry: Changing Values in Rural Greece

Juliet du Boulay

Much of the work on dowry in Greece to the present date has been focused on its function as a means of transferring property from the family of the bride to that of the new couple, thus categorizing it as an aspect of inheritance.¹ This paper concentrates on a different aspect of dowry—that is, dowry as an expression of attitudes toward women. Dowry does not, of course, offer a comprehensive picture of these attitudes; thus, although one set of attitudes discussed in this paper comprises a general view of women throughout their lives, the embodiment of these attitudes in the institution of dowry reveals a perspective on women at marriage which is not necessarily shown in the way in which men consciously think of them or treat them in the day-to-day running of the house. However, the perspective offered by the symbolism of the dowry, occurring as it does at a critical moment in the life of a woman, and uniting as it does her place in her family of origin with her place in her family of procreation, provides what is probably the most general level of understanding about women which is present in the culture.

The form of dowry has changed considerably in recent years, however, and the attitudes to women revealed by the dowry have changed with it. This paper is concerned with dowry both past and present in the small mountain village of Ambéli in North Euboea. In this area the forms of the dowry belong, broadly speaking, to two distinct periods: the earlier time, when a traditional way of life and thought continued to mold the lives of all the villagers, and the later period when a distinct watershed had been reached and passed, and beyond which there is noticeable a continuing and ever-increasing decline in these traditional values. 1950–55 is the turning point between these two periods, for 1950 marks the end of the civil war and

¹A useful recent review of this literature is given in: P. Allen, "Internal Migration and the Changing Dowry in Modern Greece," *Indiana Social Studies Quarterly*, 32(1979):142–56.

the return of the mountain villagers to their own homes after a year of enforced residence in the local market town while the last of the communist guerillas were being defeated. Thus, this study of dowry must be taken in two parts, one referring to the situation before 1950 and the other to the period after it.²

The first part of my analysis concentrates on the relationships which used to be involved between the dowry and the birth of baby girls, which were both seen as cause for lamentation. I hope to demonstrate that, in spite of appearances, these relationships were, paradoxically, closely related to a system of values which at marriage reversed the evaluation put on a female child at birth and recognized her as a key figure in the family to which she had come as a bride. The second part shows, too, that in contrast with these traditional values expressed at marriage, the way in which dowry has been changing since the 1960s seems to indicate an evaluation of women on marriage which is very different. Some evidence of very recent years seems to offer the possibility of further change, but it is too early at this stage to predict which direction this change will ultimately take.

I. THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN IN THE OLD PATTERN

a) *The undesirability of girls.*

There is a tale told in the village of a particular woman many years ago who, when she gave birth to a series of girls, wept and screamed at each one, "Ochoo, Ochoo, another girl!"—as a result of which they all died. A daughter-in-law of hers, however, benefited from this example, and when she gave birth to four girls said, at each one, remembering her mother-in-law, "I am happy with girls." More recently, in 1964, when a village woman, having had one son, bore a fourth daughter, her husband upbraided her so much that she spent the days in tears, while he, crestfallen in the coffee house, said, "What shame to have four girls." The men in the coffee house attempted to comfort him, saying, "Everything is from God," but it was only time and the growth of real affection for his last daughter that finally consoled him. And in the same year another woman, having already had one son, gave birth to a daughter. Her husband was furious, and

²My last period of prolonged residence in Ambéli ended in 1973, and my most detailed evidence ends at that date. However, several trips back to the village since then have provided a general level of continuing information, and intimations of a further twist to the pattern of marriages from the village were evidence in my latest visit in the spring of 1980. (See below, Section IIIc.)

her comment on the situation was, "It was lucky the baby was a quiet one; otherwise, it would have got thrown out of the window."

The shame of having too many girls in a family—the worry, in certain circumstances, of having any girls at all—is therefore a recurrent theme in traditional village life, and is sometimes seen in stark terms. There are two extreme cases within the last twenty-five years, in one of which, so gossip relates, a baby girl was "thrown away," that is to say, cast out into a ditch to die. In this case it is said that the mother-in-law, a hard woman, worked on her rather foolish daughter-in-law to get rid of her sickly second daughter, saying, "What do we want with her?" In the second, a young woman, recently widowed and having just given birth to a girl, is reported to have listened to counselors who persuaded her that as a widow with one son she should not encumber herself with the responsibilities of a daughter, and as a result of this advice she is said to have neglected the baby so that it died.

The evidence for both these stories is extremely circumstantial, but the fact that such stories should circulate at all is evidence of the light in which girls were regarded, and the temptations to which mothers might be subjected when they bore too many girls, or indeed any girls at all at a time when circumstances were difficult. These stories reveal continuing attitudes to daughters, whether or not these attitudes were, in particular cases, acted upon or not.

However, there is a basic equilibrium in village attitudes, even on this emotive subject, which is illustrated by these stories. In the first story the death of the girls whose birth was so lamented is, in fact, seen not as a blessing but as a punishment. Boys may have been preferred above girls, but the girls, once the shock of their arrival had been absorbed, were wanted. In the second case, while the afflicted father was consumed with shame, the people in the coffee house saw, with the greater philosophy and impartiality of the non-involved, the fact that this—shameful or not—was what had been assigned to him by God.

The reason for girls being less desirable than boys, and in certain cases not wanted at all, was often represented in the village as lying in the necessity for them to have a dowry, thus draining away the strength and the resources of the house. "Girls are a trouble" (*tá korítsia einai belás*), were words which were often used when the endless labor of preparing the work of spinning, weaving, sewing and embroidering was commented on. Once when I speculated on the possibility of the daughter of the house giving birth to a girl, I was answered: "What do we want with girls? Girls are trouble—dowry . . . trousseau. . . ."

Temptations to mothers to get rid of unwanted girls in the past have been reported to me as being phrased both in general terms such as "What do you want with a girl?" and once, specifically, "What do you want with another girl? Girls need a dowry, they need to marry." However, in spite of the apparent conclusiveness of these statements, the fundamental reason for the unwanted nature of girls lay, as further discussion invariably elicited, in the fact that they were the "weak link" (*adínato méros*), and "weakness" (*adinamía*)—that is to say that because of their sexual nature they were vulnerable, and the chief means through which the family could be rendered vulnerable.

There was plainly, then, a link between the lamentation of the dowry and the lamentation of the potential threat to the family which lay in the moral nature of girls; for although it was dowry which was often presented as if it initiated, on its own, the attitudes to girls, the vulnerability of girls was accepted by all the villagers as being fundamental. The nature of this link between dowry and this ascribed nature of girls can be clarified by looking at the traditional forms of inheritance which obtained before 1950, both for daughters and sons.

b) The financial burden of dowry—a paradox.

The villagers' attitude to the dowry might make it appear at first sight as if the daughters received a proportionately greater share of the family wealth than did the sons, but in fact the reverse is the case. In all cases of dowries before 1960, the girls regularly received, unless by default,³ a share of the property very much less than that allotted to the sons, and by the same token very much less than that proportion of the property which was legally their right.⁴ In addition to this, although it was true that a girl needed a dowry in order to find a husband, a man needed far more than the equivalent value of this in order to get a bride—a fact attested to by the saying: "No one who

³The system (up to 1968, at any rate) was that, as each girl received her dowry, she would sign a paper of disinheritance accepting that she had no further claim on the property. But if for some reason this was not done, or if the father died intestate before his daughters married, then all the children would share again on equal terms in the property. In earlier times this is said to have happened from time to time, because of the expense of making the papers of disinheritance, and because parents were said to dislike facing the idea of their own death while they were still relatively young.

⁴In Greek law all the children should inherit equally, but the daughters in Ambéli regularly received very much less than their brothers. In the case of an extremely inequitable apportionment of the property on a daughter's marriage, the bridegroom could technically sue the heirs after his father-in-law's death, for a fairer distribution, but I was told that this was not often done.

hasn't had a boy child knows what expense is" (*Aftós pou dén éhei paidí dén ksérei éksoda*).

To marry a son in pre-war Ambéli used to be a formidable proposition indeed. The traditional pattern of marriage was that a joint family, formed as the various sons brought their brides into the parental home, usually dispersed into their own establishments after some years because of the development of quarrels or the birth of more children than the house could adequately contain. The sons, as they left, took with them their "share" (*merída*, literally "portion") of property or its equivalent in cash value.⁵ Thus in order to marry, a son needed to possess—or to have some hope in the future of possessing—a farm of not less than 75 *strémmata*⁶ of arable land (about 19 acres), usually some forest land as well, a barn, a vineyard, possibly a garden and a threshing floor, as well as farm implements and farm animals.

This expense on sons may be compared with the ideal dowry for a girl, which consisted then, as later, of two parts. One, the dowry (*proika*), was in property (land or animals) or cash; the other, the trousseau (*proikiá*), consisted of rugs, blankets, and household implements. The dowry was normally composed of one—or any combination—of the following: a few *strémmata*—usually two, very rarely more than ten—which were invariably taken from arable land, leaving the forest for the sons; a cow or two; five sheep; ten goats; perhaps a garden of about two *strémmata*; a vineyard, or a small barn; and/or whatever cash the household could spare, of which 10,000 drachmas was considered a very large sum. The full trousseau consisted of the following: three thick felted rugs (*velléntzes*); three mattresses; three pairs of sheets; three woven goat-hair rugs (*stigádia*) for the farm; five blankets of sheep's wool (*htipités*) and five goat-hair rugs (*kilímia*) for the house; one big iron tripod for cooking and one small one; six sacks for corn and two smaller ones for flour; a big copper cooking pot with two handles (*davás*); a big and a small copper cooking pot without handles (*téntzeris*); a copper baking dish (*tapσί*); a copper cauldron (*kazáni*); a sieve; a quern; a scraper for getting the dough off the bread trough; thirty small woven goat-hair bags (*tagária*); ten large woven goat-hair bags (*terástres*); and a large trunk in which to store unused and particularly precious articles. A girl also needed a set of

⁵From this point of view the distinction between usufruct and ownership made by Allen ("Internal Migration," 143, 150) did not reduce the demands on the parents though the distinction could be useful in preserving the right of the parents to care in their old age.

⁶1 *strémma* = 0.2471 acres = 0.10 hectares.

costumes that would last her for life, at least three of which had to be deeply embroidered at the hem giving a border of six or eight inches.

A girl's dowry, therefore, consisted of whatever could be spared from the farm and from the reserves of money which the house possessed, and from the blankets and coverings which were the result of many years' patient toil on the yearly harvest of wool from sheep and goats. It was a dowry which consisted more of labor on the surplus of the house than of the property and goods which actually comprised the house's essential security. Very often the full complement of desired objects was not reached and more than once it has been said to me that girls took as their dowry, "Whatever the house could give."

Whereas, therefore, the bride brought to her husband the furniture of a home, the cooking pots and blankets which equip a house, the husband had to provide not only the house itself but also the circumstances to create and support a family, and provide in his turn suitable endowment for his children. The woman provided the comfort and adornment of the house, the man its basic existence; and it was presumably in symbolic acknowledgement of this fact that the two objects for the house which in earlier years were provided by the bridegroom were the little low table (*sofás*) round which the family ate and the long trough (*panakoúti*) in which the bread was set to rise, for these two objects reflected the traditional role of the husband as provider for the house.

More than this, however, the bridegroom also had to give his bride a number of traditional feminine adornments worn in the village—adornments which ideally should have included the following: a pair of earrings (*skoularikia*); two bracelets (*vrahiólía*); a choker type necklace with coins dangling from it (*yiordáni mé flouriá kremasména*); three to five rows of coins made up on chains and worn across the breast; a big buckle which was pinned at the waist in the middle of the apron with coins dangling from it (*kleidotári mé flouriá kremasména*); worked pins (*karfítses*) which attached the edges of the apron to the half-belt which was worn at the back of the waist; a long silk headscarf with tassels which came down, at the back, as far as the waist (*sálpa*); a long belt of red silk which encircled the waist once and reached to the ground on one side (*kadém*); an embroidered apron and a pair of shoes. All the ornaments had to be freshly plated with gold, work which was done by a man in a nearby village. Several women said that these things "had" (*éprepe*) to be given, and "had" to be bought new, rather than passed on by the groom's mother; and although on occasions some item might be given by the mother-in-law—and even,

as I heard of on one occasion, taken back again later—such a presentation nevertheless amounted to a considerable expense.

The relation of the value of these gifts to that of the dowry is in many cases obscure, but there were cases in which it is clear that the value of the ornaments was equal to or exceeded that of the dowry. Living in the village today are two women, one of whom says that she brought with her “virtually nothing” (*típote*), because she had been very poor, but that she had been given the finest range of ornaments of any girl who married at that time; another told me that she married “with the trousseau only,” her proposed husband using the familiar words “whatever you have” (*óti éheis*). But she also had received the bridal adornments, although, because, as her husband said, “We were poor,” the bracelets, and one other item, were missing from the ideal number.

Indeed, while the dowry was variable, the requirement for the bridal gifts allowed few concessions to poverty. Although there may have been a rough equilibrium struck in the society between the ornaments given and the dowry received, owing to the tendency for the more wealthy families to seek for matches from similar houses, there was no prescription governing the size of the dowry. On the contrary, the prescription appears to have been firmly in favor of the bride: the bridegroom “had” to give his bride as full a set of bridal gifts as possible, whereas the bride—chosen for her known qualities and for those of her kindred as well as for her wealth—was very often taken with “whatever she had.” And it was presumably a reflection of these values that, as I was told by many villagers, whereas the families of girls had to work hard to provide the dowries for their daughters, it was not infrequent for the family of sons to be forced temporarily to mortgage some fields in order to obtain the money necessary for the bridal gifts.

The frequency with which, so it is said, the families of boys would mortgage fields in this way is of considerable importance in the present context, for it was also frequent for girls to marry with a negligible dowry. It is universally attested that, in the days up to 1940 and beyond, it was very common for a girl to be given in marriage with, in addition to her trousseau, a dowry of only a few sheep or goats, a cow or two, or a few *strémmata* of land. It is similarly said that it was by no means unheard of for men to take girls with no dowry at all, and I was given as examples two cases during the years covering the turn of the century up to the 1930s, of a father and a son who both married such women. The father owned a house, a threshing floor, a barn, a vineyard in a field of three *strémmata*, and seventy-five *strém-*

mata of land. He took a bride who had no dowry for the reason, so I was told by his grandson, that they had decided among themselves that this particular girl was a good girl who would look after her father-in-law and do what they all wanted. While one of this man's sons married a girl with a dowry of seventy-five *strémmata* which they eventually sold for 7,000 drachmas, another son took a girl "for love" who not only had no dowry, but also no trousseau, coming to her new home merely with one thick tasselled blanket (*velléntza*). These statements draw a picture of village life in which marriages were contracted not in response to one single overwhelming pressure—the need for money—but out of a complex and vital situation in which a number of different factors could all bear crucially on the choice of a bride. They are neatly summed up in the story of a man who, in the 1920s, is said to have married off all his five daughters with 500 drachmas which he retrieved from each son-in-law, in turn, to give as a dowry to the next. The story concludes that in the end this man took offense with his final son-in-law when he asked to borrow the 500 drachmas again and was refused.

It seems, then, that in an important sense the crucial strain on the family resources was not imposed by the dowry, but by the acquisition of the bridal gifts. First, these ornaments were given even in cases where little or no dowry was received. Secondly, although the trousseau and the dowry—which all but the poorest girls would bring with them to marriage—had a financial value, these were composed of the surplus of the house and were a matter for negotiation, while the bridal gifts had to be bought and were a matter of necessity. And money, as people still say, tellingly, "was expensive in those days." Finally, there is the consideration that it was frequent in those days for girls to be married with very small dowries, and not unheard of for them to marry with none at all.

The lamentation over the girl's dowry, therefore, as opposed to the lack of grief expressed over the boy's inheritance, cannot be said to be related primarily to the quantity of the household's prosperity which that dowry involved. Nor can it be related to any difference in the predicted time in the family's life cycle at which it had to be given, for in Ambéli the sons fell heir to their inheritance at a period corresponding to the dowering of their sisters, either on their marriage, on their permanent emigration or on the final separation of brothers with their brides from the joint family.

It might be argued that whereas girls had to be married and each one furnished with a dowry, sons could, and often did, leave the family inheritance, in those cases where it was not large enough to support all of them, and marry as *esógambri* (men who marry "in" to their

bride's houses and cultivate their land) in their own or in other villages. However, such men did not renounce their share of the inheritance, but "sold" it to the brother or brothers who remained. Similarly, although ideally all girls needed a dowry and a trousseau of some size, the many families not rich enough to furnish all this do not provide one instance that I have been able to discover of a girl who was prevented from marrying because of poverty. A poor girl would, in the past as in the present, tend to find a poor husband; only a girl who had lost her honor would actually be forced to marry into a family that was destitute or irredeemably sick. Worry about the dowry, therefore, was not centered upon whether or not the daughters would be able to marry, but only upon whether they would be able to marry well.

Economically, then, it could be said that girls were in a similar position to boys, for the marriage of a man as an *esógambros* was more or less the equivalent of the marriage of a girl into a poor family. Dishonor was not involved, merely an aspect of reputation relating to the financial strength of the house. In both cases the social ideal was not reached, but the social values were not infringed either, and in both cases the essential prerequisite of society was attained—a marriage with honor providing the basis for a new family.

The question therefore remains: why is it that the daughter's dowry was picked out for lamentation, rather than the son's inheritance and the gift of bridal adornments that went with marriage? More basically, why was it that the daughter's share in the patrimony was so much less than that of the son? To answer these questions we must turn to the traditional pattern within which this distribution of dowry and inheritance was made.

c) Dowry and the moral nature of girls.

Traditional morality placed crucial importance on the family and, by extension, on the continuity of the family in terms of the birth of children. There are two main aspects in which this continuity was revealed—one in the children themselves who represented the generations that preceded them and were the fulfillment of the family line up to the present moment; the other in the male element of the family who bore the name of the family and who thus, in a unique aspect, re-incorporated the past members of the family into the present. Christian names were, by traditional custom, those of the grandparents, the first son being called after the husband's father, the first daughter after the husband's mother, the second son and daughter after the mother's parents. Thus the parents of a male child were

assured, in the event of his having any children at all, of the perpetuation of at least one of their Christian names, and, if the child was a son, of the name in its entirety being reiterated. Village thinking identified, and still identifies, in a very positive sense, the family with the name, the extinction of a family line in the death or childlessness of its male members being related in the words "the name was extinguished" (*ézvise tó ónoma*) and its perpetuation in the phrase "the name is heard again" (*akoúyetai tó ónoma páli*). Girls cannot perform this function for the family, and the significance of boys over girls in this respect is revealed in the saying "Only the boys are heard" (*móno tá agória akoúgondai*). It is in the sons, therefore, that the parents find what they look for most in life, namely a kind of immortality.

This especial significance of boys in perpetuating the family line is reflected in the customs relating to marriage and inheritance. The boys are thought of as being "in the house" (*mésa stó spíti*), and this phrase was still being used even in more recent years when the separation of the married sons from the parents' home was anticipated and the sons married into their own establishments right from the start, leaving only the youngest to follow the ancient custom and bring his bride into the house to care for and inherit from the old people.

The entry of the strange element, the bride, into the husband's house was an event laden with ambiguity, and many of the older marriage customs reveal an awareness of the latent hostility and division which could be brought by the bride into her new home. Nevertheless, the gradual incorporation of the bride into her new family, and the altered focus of her old loyalties onto the interests of her husband's house, was an event which was virtually inevitable in the village, granting the passage of time and the unconditional demands that were made on the bride in this respect from the day of her marriage. As late as 1966 there were two men in Ambéli who, having quarreled with their in-laws, forbade their wives to see their own mothers, who lived only a few houses away. In the event of any trouble between two families related by marriage, it was normal practice to prevent the bride from seeing her parents until the trouble had blown over and until any conversation between them could be assumed to be favorable to her new relatives once again. However, this sort of surveillance merely reinforced the already overwhelming pressures on the new bride to accept her husband's family as her own, since, having left her own house and come to that of her husband, there was literally nothing else she could do. To fail to transplant her loyalties, to fail to root them in the house from which her own inheritance was to come, and out of which her own children would grow, would have been an act of sheer self-destruction. This knowledge of the

transitory nature of girls' loyalties to their own homes is reflected in the fact that they were traditionally described as destined to a "strange hearth" (*ksenogoniá*). Even their own blood mother was sometimes referred to as a "temporary mother" (*prosoriní mánnna*), since the woman with whom they would spend most of their life and to whom they would give most of their loyalty was their mother-in-law. And it is because of this that the following rhyme illustrates so aptly the conventional attitudes of those women who, in the past, had just become mothers:

Eho agóri kaí ého hará
 Pou thá káno petherá.
 Eho kóri kaí ého píkra
 Pou thá gnétho méra níhta.

I've got a boy and I'm full of joy
 Because I shall become a mother-in-law.
 I've got a girl and I'm full of bitterness
 Because I shall be spinning day and night.

This rhyme uses images of gain and loss which are expressed in terms of the girl's trousseau and the boy's lack of it, but it also encompasses a further range of gain and loss through the two sexes in which the situation of dowry should properly be seen: The joy of the mother who will become a mother-in-law lies not just in the fact that for a son she does not have to collect a dowry, but also in the fact that through a son she acquires a daughter-in-law who will *work for her*.

However, the perceived superiority of the male principle in the context of marriage and in the continuance of the identity of the family, rested in its turn on more fundamental categories of village thought which lay in the villagers' religious understanding. These categories, to state the position briefly, asserted an unchanging order of reality according to which man, closer to the divine principle from which all creation depends, is superior to woman in intelligence (he is *logikós*), and, since intelligence is *par excellence* the faculty which distinguishes man from the beasts and relates him to God (the *Lógos*), he is consequently superior in all other characteristics as well. Woman was not thought to be unintelligent or irrational and was coupled with man together with the whole of the human race when seen in opposition to the animals and to the natural world; but she was nevertheless by her nature placed in a category which made her subordinate to man, since, less intelligent in this sense by nature, she was also, by nature though not necessarily by character, less strong, less virtuous, less wise and less good. While men were "independent" and could "do as they liked," women would never be free from both internal

and external constraints on their innate weaknesses. It was through the women, chiefly, that the family might be endangered, through the women that honor might be lost.

There was a relation between this weakness of women, the corresponding superiority of men, and the pattern of marriage according to which boys were "in the house" and daughters were "destined for a strange hearth." It was a relation that was never categorical or universal, for men could also, and often did, marry as *esógambri*, an arrangement which, though not without tension, did not ideally cause any diminution of their superiority. Similarly, the superiority of men has not precluded the development in recent years of a pattern of marriage according to which men, when they marry, consistently go to live in houses and on land belonging to their wives.⁷ Nevertheless in the agricultural context of places like Ambéli, male superiority normally meant that men were the principle of continuity in the house, for since the vital economic matters over which men rule were indivisible from the house, it seems that as a result the men similarly were indivisible from it. The women on the whole moved to the men, and for a man to marry as an *esógambros* was a deviation from the norm. By contrast, in situations in which the economic sphere of activity was divisible from the house, as has occurred in some maritime and some urban communities,⁸ the principle of continuity embodied in the house and land—no longer being inevitably identified with the men—might, under pressure of circumstances, shift to the women, and in these circumstances a pattern of marriages according to which men lived in their wives' houses could then become common while still retaining its essential consistency with the values of male superiority.

In Ambéli, however, men, being superior, were characteristically "in the house," and women, being weak, became the mobile element. When one considers the importance of the house, which is an image not only of the family but also of the church and the heavenly world itself—the microcosm where all the most positive social and religious values of the villagers are lived out—something may be understood of the importance of sons, who carry on the name and inherit the

⁷R. Hirschon makes clear that there is a crucial distinction between the institution of the *esógambros* and this new pattern of marriage. See: R. Hirschon, "Under One Roof—Marriage and Family Relations in Piraeus, Greece," *Urban Life in Mediterranean Europe*, eds. M. Kenny and P. Kertzer, University of Illinois Press, forthcoming.

⁸Houses and land often pass down the female line in the Cyclades and the Dodecanese, and in urban centers the considerable in-migration of people from the country is being attended by the increasing pressure on brides to provide the house. See: P. Allen ("Internal Migration," 146–47, 150, and n. 43); E. Friedl, "Kinship, Class and Selective Migration," *Mediterranean Family Structures*, ed. P.G. Peristiany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 365.

house and land, over daughters, through whom the family honor may be endangered, in whom the name is lost, and who are destined to take their qualities to enrich other men's hearths and foster strange kindreds.

The answer, then, to the questions of why the dowry given to daughters was so much less than the inheritance given to sons, and why, nevertheless, it was the giving of the dowry that was so lamented, is that anything given to girls was thought of as being given away to a strange house, while anything given to boys was thought of as being preserved still within the family. Since the preservation of the family and the continuation of individual existence in the family is an overwhelming theme of Greek rural life, it may be seen how dear to the villagers' hearts was this keeping of family possessions in the family and what an anathema it was to see the house being emptied for another man's good. It is also plain, in this context, why land was given to the sons but movable objects and money to the daughters. Land "has a name" (literally "is heard," *akoustó*); that is, it is something which endures. On the other hand, "money disperses" (*tá hrímata skorpáne*). Thus to the sons, the abiding element in the family history, was given the "undying" (*apéthandi*) earth, to the daughters the transitory aspect of family wealth.

This attitude to daughters, which regards them as emptying the house when they marry, is illustrated by a folk tale in which a girl, after the marriage ceremony and when she was on her way to her new home surrounded by beasts loaded with her dowry, turned to her mother and said, "Let me go back and fetch the stone for grinding salt which I have forgotten." Stones for grinding salt have in fact no value and may be found in any river bed, and it is plain that the daughter's request symbolized the fact that having already taken with her everything that was of value, she still looked for more. So the response of the mother, which was to curse her and all the bridegroom's company, was understandable: "May you be turned to marble and all those with you, because you have not been satisfied with all you have taken." In Greek mythology curses take effect only if they are justified, and the fact that the bride and bridegroom, the beasts and all the company, turned immediately to marble and have remained so to this day, shows undeniably who was in the right. Daughters, then, however much or little they took with them, threatened the house because they threatened the perpetuity and the conservation on which the house was founded. Village life is traditionally conservative, for, in the village, land was won by toil—gained piece by piece from the stony hillside, foot by foot from others who laid claim to it with equal urgency; the harvest was brought in grain by

grain from the threshing floor, the house filled slowly by the unending labor of the entire family. Even money, though considered a commodity for exchange in many societies, was by the villagers kept, stored in trunks, and given away only in some emergency. Most significantly of all, it was *worn*. Village life was a process of gathering together, of keeping, of passing on—possessions, memories, customs. Boys, conserving the family wealth and the family name, imaged this tradition; girls, taking with them, prodigally, so much of the household wealth, shattered it.

The lamentation of the dowry which girls entailed was, then, only a part of a much wider picture according to which girls themselves were lamented; the burden of the dowry did not itself cause girls to be a burden, it merely reflected the burden they were anyway. Girls, thought of as weakening the family by their propensity for carrying away so much of the household wealth in their dowry, were in fact caused to do this by the initial classification of them as inferior and morally vulnerable. The dowry revealed attitudes to daughters; it did not initiate those attitudes.

The dowry did not, however, reveal only the attitudes to girls in their family of origin, and illumine the cultural definition of women on which these were based; it also revealed the attitude to them of the family into which they married, and cast light on the manner in which these original cultural definitions were transcended and transfigured.

II. THE RECEIVING FAMILY IN THE OLD PATTERN

One important way in which the institution of dowry revealed the attitudes of the receiving family lay, paradoxically, in the frequency, already shown, with which the dowry was apparently a matter of relative insignificance. The explanation for the small dowries of those days was put succinctly by one old woman: "Then, marriage was kindred with kindred. You would say: 'I'll take a bride from such and such a kindred.' People looked to the kindred then. Now the kindred is nothing and money is everything." People were prepared to receive less in a dowry if they felt they were getting a girl from a "good" kindred, and a "good" kindred, though sometimes seen as synonymous with wealth and associated with the ownership of property, was also seen in terms which differentiated moral qualities from the sheer fact of wealth, and included as separate evaluations the reputation for keeping good faith (*embistosíni*), and the possession of honor (*timí*).

One of the questions a prospective bridegroom might ask was, "Is there a thief in the kindred?" Thus, if the qualities of a particular kindred were wanted by a particular family, it seems that this fact could often outweigh the relative poverty of the girl in question, who was accepted with "whatever she had," both with her own individual reputation and as the embodiment, it was hoped, of the desired characteristics of her kindred. In the bride which a particular family took to itself lay that family's own identity and continuity, and thus in looking for a bride a family looked, above all, for honor: and honor was a quality which, while it was seen as residing individually in the virtue of the girl herself, was made apparent also, and in a sense guaranteed, by the kindred and the blood from which she came. This was not a question of alliances or the search for affinal support, but purely the knowledge that the blood and the characteristics of the chosen kindred ran in the veins of its descendants. *Sõi*, the word used for "kindred," is also used in the village to designate a type or species, and as such is applied to animals and plants as well. Choosing a bride from such and such a kindred meant choosing a woman of a certain type which one knew to be good. The girl who, chosen according to such criteria, was being brought into the house as a bride, was, in her own person, regardless of what she brought with her, her own preëminent value.

It appears, then, that the value placed on the girl by her family of origin was very different from that placed on her by her family of marriage, for while on the one hand girls were objects to be bewailed at birth and given away in marriage with whatever the house could spare, they were on the other hand people who were chosen by the houses into which they married as creatures of value in themselves—of such value in some cases that no particular regard was paid to the dowry they brought with them. A custom according to which girls are given away with only a small proportion of the wealth of their houses may reveal, culturally, a lack of esteem placed on girls in the context of their own original families; but a girl received into a strange family with correspondingly little of the family wealth reveals a cultural evaluation of her great worth in the context of marriage; and it is presumably a reflection of these priorities that in the old days the offer of marriage came invariably from the man's family, never from the girl's. Similarly, the possibility for the disproportion existing in the society between the value of the trousseau and the dowry, and the value of the bridal gifts, is explicable in the same terms: The families of girls were not forced into impossible and self-destructive giving in order to marry off their daughters; those with sons could afford to

mortgage a field or two because they were acquiring for this sacrifice an incalculable good.

It may seem paradoxical that a society which assigns such unambiguous value to male superiority should, in connection with its most crucial institution, make such a clear statement about the value of women. But this is, I suggest, one of the points at which rural Greek society established its essential equilibrium. For in spite of all indications to the contrary, there is in the traditional village view an ideal equality between the sexes which enabled the villagers to see marriage as a symbiosis, and enabled a woman within marriage, while still remaining a woman, to transcend her fallen nature by means of her spiritual nature and create with her husband a relationship of equals. This equality was not something expressed in the rational and economic affairs of life, nor yet in the majority of personal encounters between men and women either within marriage or out of it; it was primarily a symbolic understanding rather than a literal one. But this is in no way to devalue the symbolic world of meanings by representing it as an ethereal world of unrealized ideals, nor as a sop to women by which men kept them under control. It is rather to say that the Greek understanding places women at the center of the life force contained within the family, and that this position, while it does not give women any form of crude authority or power in the world in which physical strength operates, nevertheless provides them—and their men also—with an inalienable sense of their own value. It is a sense which takes a lifetime to work through, and the symbiosis which is the product is seen more often between the old than the young. Nevertheless it is, I think, one of the prime contributors to the undeniable stature of the women in the Greek villages—a stature which provides them with an abiding strength in the face of adversity, and enables them to stand up to instances of ill treatment from their men with an unshakeable knowledge of their own essential dignity.

This position of women as the center of the family is revealed in numerous respects in the symbolism of the house, but finds one of its clearest illustrations in the way in which the villagers understand descent. Here, although the continuity of the family is achieved through the male line, and the name is all-important, this does not exclude the woman from being the author of a different essential element. Half-siblings from the same mother are said to be closer than those from the same father, for they come from “the same womb” (*apó tîn idia koiliá*). “One mother many fathers” (*mía mánnā pollí paterádes*) is an expression used to signify the centrality of the woman to the family. It is the mother who “tears herself apart” (*shízetai*) to bring her children

into the world, and who therefore “feels” (*ponáei*) more for them; and it is she who looks after them in their formative years while the man is frequently said to be “a guest in the house” (*mousafiris mésa stó spíti*). The principle of life in its generative aspect, as opposed to the principle of its survival through time, is a feminine principle, and as such is uniquely important to the very existence of the family at all. Thus it was natural that at marriage the disproportion between the view of women by their families of origin and the view of them by their family of marriage should be polarized, for the family which gave its daughters in marriage got rid of, in a sense, an unwanted element, and revealed this in the disproportion of the inheritance which it gave to them as opposed to that which it gave to the sons; but the family which received the bride received something beyond price, for it received in her the hope of the future and the assurance of the continuity which their house existed to create and to protect. The dowry that she brought with her, therefore, was something which was accessory to her value, for this existed quite independent of wealth. The essential function of dowry in the days before 1950 was not so much to confer, as to reveal, worth.

In this context, then, it seems that the gift of the bridegroom to the bride was a symbolic statement of this understanding of the ideal capabilities of feminine nature, and not only indicated the acceptance by the house of the new woman but also, by adorning her with the regalia of the married state, raised her to the status of potential mistress of the house. And because the earthly family is in the rural Greek tradition conceived as the image of the archetypical Holy Family,⁹ the conversion of a girl from the unmarried state to become a wife and mother had as its archetype the removal of a woman from the state of symbolic neutrality which virgin girls (*korítsia*) are accorded, to become instead the representative on earth of the Mother of God. It was this potential function of the new bride in the house, more than any material possessions which she brought with her—important though these might have been—which seems to have been symbolized in the cultural insistence on the bridal gifts and the relatively lesser insistence on the quantity of the dowry; for these gifts, creating and confirming the bride in her new status, were, if one may put it like this, a coronation of the new source of life within the house.

⁹See Campbell, who discovered in the Sarakatsani a conscious understanding of the family along these lines. J.K. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 35. Although the villagers of Ambéli no longer subscribed consciously to this tradition, there was nevertheless much to indicate that their responses to the family were framed on the basis of principles involved in it.

III. THE NEW PATTERN

a) *The context of change.*

After 1950, with an economic and cultural situation changing with increasing rapidity, both the form and the function of dowry and of the bridegroom's marriage gift began to alter.

The nature of this change was put most clearly by the old woman, quoted earlier,¹⁰ who ended by saying, "People looked to the kindred then. Now the kindred is nothing and money is everything. It was the war that destroyed everything, and when the *sengoúnia* began to be left off." *Sengoúni* is the word for a particular item of the North Euboean costume, and is used in its collective sense to represent the costume in its entirety. So in these sentences we are given a correspondence between: before the war/the traditional costume/dowry equals the good name of the kindred, whereas after the war/modern dress/dowry equals money. The idea of the *sengoúnia* here is the most important, for traditional costume in many respects indicates the traditional way of life and the values incorporated in it, and thus there is stated by this old woman a direct connection between the loss of the old way of life and the increasing emphasis on cash.

In the earlier way of life the community was highly inter-dependent and relatively isolated from the outside world. Joint families and a system of patronage linked the family groups to the outside community by relationships of marriage and obligation. The preëminence of the kindred, marriage into a hierarchy of prestige and wealth associated with the possession of land, and the unquestioning acceptance of the agricultural and pastoral life and of the related values of independence and honor were all values which kept the community solidly rooted in itself and its environment. These factors created a system in which girls were taken as representatives of a particular line, worthy in themselves to perpetuate the traditional way of life according to time-honored values. In such a society, also, it was natural that there should be, as there was, preference toward marriage within the village, since in that situation the qualities of the girls were more likely to be accurately known.

After the war, the adoption of Western dress indicated along with it the adoption also of the values of the outside world, involving preëminently the desire for a more modern way of life attainable only by an emigration which was both general and permanent. This emigration both overseas to Belgium, Canada, Germany and Australia, and via the Merchant Navy, had more scope than the earlier return

¹⁰See Section II.

migrations and was a more universal and ultimately more permanent movement than anything that had preceded it. It began in Ambéli in 1960 and rapidly became a wave that overtook all the young unmarried men in the village so that by 1966 only two such men remained. Life within the village, doubly hit by the loss of its young men and by the dissatisfaction with it among the younger of those who remained, lost its previous equilibrium, and began more and more to be pulled apart by its own internal strains and by those imposed on it by this situation. Ambitions, previously commonly held and commonly realized among all the community, became more separatist and related to urban values. The value of the land decreased and the dependence on cash grew greater; the family group fragmented, the flocks were sold, the fields began to remain fallow; individualism, both in a personal and in a familial sense, increased, and the traditional ties between the family, its kin and its land, weakened. And as these tendencies strengthened, so also the desire to leave the village strengthened, not only among the men, but also among the women. The large-scale emigration was thus accompanied by a diminution in marriages within the village, both because of the increasing scarcity of men, and because the women, too, began to fix their ambitions on a life in the lowlands.¹¹ This change seems to have occurred very rapidly, and by 1966 virtually all the young people in the village were seeking to enter more urbanized life and the cash economy that went with it. The men of Ambéli were effectively lost to the village as possible bridegrooms since they tended to marry Greek girls they met abroad or to take girls from lower and more sophisticated villages on one of their visits home. The girls, refusing the few chances that remained of marriage to a villager who intended to remain in the village, turned to seek husbands from plains villages, simply for the hope they held out to them of a more modern life. A situation had emerged in which ambitions for men, as for women, had become virtually unbounded, one in which the old notions of the good life were totally rejected.

The emergence of this situation was created by two factors—first,

¹¹By 1956 it is evident that there were stirrings of discontent from the young, although these were not echoed by their parents, and a girl, offered the chance of marriage into a lowland village in that year, and wishing to take it, was prevented by her father "Because it hasn't got cold water," and she married in Ambéli instead. But 1964 was to see the last marriage to occur in the village; by 1966 there was not one girl prepared to accept marriage within the village and not one parent prepared even to wish, still less to force, this on her, and in 1968 the two remaining young unmarried men in Ambéli, failing to find any girl from the village willing to accept them, had both to marry as *esógambri* into other villages.

by the encroachment on the earlier subsistence society of a consumer society offering wage labor, together with the chance to set up as tradesmen, merchants and small businessmen; secondly, by the growing value placed on education and the possibility for village children of getting a place in high school and thus fitting themselves for independence and prestige in the urban middle class. "Advancement" or "progress" (*prokopfi*) thus became detached from the traditional values which saw much advancement in terms of the perpetuation of the house, coming instead to involve exclusively notions of progress into modernity. Because of the enormous drive that traditionally went into the preservation and advancement of the family, the impetus to the scramble for social advancement was enormous also.

Of these two routes to advancement, that through education was the slowest to be taken up. Here I deal with the emigration of the '60s and early '70s and the corresponding growth in wage labor and small cash enterprises in the plains.

b) The change to wage labor and cash profits.

The pattern of emigration began in 1960 and had become an epidemic by 1964. By 1966, when I first went to the village, the only two unmarried men who remained were considered to be "stupid" (*hazt*)—a damning epithet—because they had preferred village life to emigration. Many of these emigrés settled abroad, and since they married either in the plains or abroad they did not affect the dowry in Ambéli other than by their absence. The chances for Ambéli girls thus lay with the men on the plains. These men were well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities presented by roads and mechanization in the lowlands, but these opportunities, where they involved setting up trades and small businesses or buying tractors and other farm machinery, often also required capital. For this capital, in both cases, the dowry was an obvious mechanism. Similarly, these opportunities, whether for small businesses or for wage labor, enlarged the general demand for cash commodities, and the dowry, as a source of additional cash, became a vehicle for the expression of this demand.

These uses of the dowry became as attractive to village girls as to their suitors, for the cash economy would, they assumed, permit them, as wife of the family, to "sit" (*ná kátso*)—an expression which summed up their manifold ambitions, since it released them from outside work and limited their contribution to work inside the house. Thus the opportunities for wage labor and small cash enterprises in the plains created a corresponding change in the dowry, making it a vehicle for entry into a consumer society.

The possibility was thus created, in this situation, of treating the dowry not so much as an equal proportion of the family inheritance of movables—"whatever we have"—but rather as a resource to be maximized by the bridal couple—in fact as a market commodity—thus duplicating the very behavior which, in the story quoted earlier, caused a wedding procession to be turned to stone. The possibility would not, however, have been turned to account very easily, if the supply of bridegrooms had been roughly equivalent to the demand for them, for in the nature of the case, marital negotiations are not amenable to collective action by prospective grooms or fathers-in-law, and individual attempts to bid up the dowry would reach a natural limit set by the competition. However, the supply of grooms was less than the demand, first because of the emigration of the young men from the mountains, and secondly because in any case the definition of a "good" bridegroom had shifted to include only plainsmen. Thus grooms were well known to be "few" (*ligostî*). The temptation which this scarcity provided for forcing up the dowry, so treating it as a market commodity, was too much both for the anxieties of the fathers and the ambitions of the suitors. Fathers began to provide, although in many cases reluctantly, increasingly large dowries, and grooms revealed only too easily their susceptibility to this form of persuasion, rather than one based on the girl's intrinsic qualities.

In this way, various pressures were produced which tended to emphasize the importance of cash dowries, and, because of this, to let the emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of the bride go, in a sense, by default. However subtly, there crept in the sort of reckoning according to which a woman was worth whatever her dowry was worth, and according to which the important element in the marriage transaction was no longer honor or the intrinsic characteristics inherited from the kindred, but cash.

c) *The commercialization of the dowry.*

The change in cash values which thus arose is revealed by comparing marital preferences and dowries in both Ambéli and in the plains in the '50s with those later in the '60s. The comparison is simplified by the fact that after 1964 marriage within Ambéli was so devalued that no Ambéli girl would entertain the idea of it. In the early '50s, though, the plains villages and the mountains had enjoyed a broad parity of esteem, and although I do not have details of plains dowries in those years, the parity is clearly enough indicated by the pattern of marital migration.

Before 1955, there was a definite preference, for both men and

women, to choose partners from within the village, for thus the characters of either would be known to the other family, and, in addition, the girl would have the proximity of her relatives as both company and support. There was even in those days a considerable outward flow of girls into other villages, but this was a matter of chance rather than deliberation, and there was also a countermovement of women from other villages—both mountain and lowland—into Ambéli. As late as 1952 a woman from the local market town married into Ambéli because, as she said, “We thought of the villages as all the same (*ólo éna*) then.” Thus dowries within Ambéli during the 1950s can be taken as an indication of the general level for the area as a whole; the dowries of the later 1960s, which were all given to plains villagers, are likewise representative of the area at the later date.

The norm for marriages within the village throughout the period 1950–60 was in the area of 15,000 drachmas, with 20,000 being considered a “good” dowry.¹² During the same period, in 1955, the marriage of a girl from Ambéli into a sizable market town with a “good” dowry of 25,000 drachmas indicates that the plains had by then little edge over the mountains, especially when we realize that a year later it was arranged for a girl in the village with a similar amount in cash to be endowed also with a house and land and to take in a fellow villager as *esógambros*. Already, therefore, a substantial dowry was a regular feature of marriage, but the pressures sustaining this were fairly generally distributed throughout plains and mountain villages. In 1961, however, dowries began to rise and also to fluctuate according to the ability of the Ambéli houses to meet the financial demands now rising even more rapidly in the plains;¹³ 1964 saw the last en-

¹²In the following figures, values are given in drachmas, ignoring inflation which, over this period, was negligible in relation to the variations being discussed. Sixteen marriages took place within the village during this time, of which I have seven definite instances of dowries, and a postulated two more. These are as follows: in 1950: land and animals totalling 15,000 drachmas. 1952: 15,000 drachmas. 1956: 25,000 drachmas, a house and some land. 1957: 10,000 drachmas, two big fields and one mule. 1958: 15,000 drachmas. 1959: 15,000 drachmas, and five or six *stremmata*. 1960: 15,000 drachmas. Two more cases were of girls from a family which had four daughters to marry and who in 1968 could only afford 20,000 drachmas for their last daughter, so it is therefore unlikely that these two girls got more than 15,000 drachmas and probably less. The one unstable instance in 1956 deserves some comment. This dowry was given to the daughter of a family with five girls to marry, by an unmarried uncle who had made money in America. This man in 1960 dowered one of his nieces with 80,000 drachmas, marrying her to a priest in an upland village some distance from Ambéli; he gave most of his own inheritance to the niece mentioned here on condition that they named their first son after him and that he adopted the boy as his own son (*psychopaidi*). This girl took a fellow villager as *esógambros*.

¹³Three dowries which were given to girls who married within the village between 1960 and 1964 were as follows: 30,000 drachmas, 40,000 drachmas and 10,000 drach-

dogamous marriage ever to be celebrated in the village. By 1966, 20,000 drachmas was considered to be a poor dowry, and 50,000 drachmas relatively good. In that year it was said to me that "50,000 drachmas and more" was the dowry required by a farmer in the local market town, with slightly less being adequate for farmers in other lowland villages; but by 1968, 50,000 drachmas had come to be seen as mediocre, even for men from small lowland villages. These norms were approached with difficulty by the families of Ambéli girls, whose dowries during this period rose painfully to sums varying ultimately from a low of 20,000 to a high of what the family concerned claimed to be 60,000 drachmas, without achieving what were generally agreed to be good marriages.¹⁴ In 1968, a girl with, reputedly, 100,000 drachmas (a sum which even the community agreed was 80,000 drachmas) as well as a large property, said to me that in her opinion none of the recent marriages made by village girls had been "good," and this girl was in fact married in 1970—two years after marriage negotiations had first been started on her behalf—to the owner of a small shop in a lowland village. This dowry was the largest to be produced by the village in those years, and was in 1968 accepted by all to be "good"; but even this dowry did not achieve immediate marriage to the type of person or into the type of situation that the owner of it desired.

Another indication of the escalation of dowries in relatively recent years has been the great disproportion between the dowries given to different daughters over the years. The principle of equality had never been strictly observed among the various daughters, for the principle of "whatever the family had" meant more or less literally what it said, and at different periods of its history a family would be able to spare differing quantities of its wealth. Nevertheless, the difference between the relative dowries given in the case of several families is marked. In every case but one the dowry given to the daughter who married later is larger than that given to the one who married earlier, and in one case a considerably increased dowry in fact achieved a marriage of less status than that of a sister who had married seven years earlier.

This escalation of dowries was a serious matter for the village

mas. The first figure was given to a girl who wanted to marry away from Ambéli but whose parents wanted to keep her near them; the second for a girl who became pregnant by her second cousin and was only married with great difficulty; the third for a girl from a poor family who eloped with a fellow villager.

¹⁴The figures for these years were: 1966: 20,000 drachmas and a further 6,000—7,000 drachmas spent on furniture. 1967: 20,000 drachmas, 1967: 40,000 drachmas. 1968: a claimed 60,000 drachmas which others in the village reported, however, as only 50,000 drachmas.

families, which were thus faced with a double financial burden. The property which had traditionally been guarded with such fidelity and, on occasion, with such strife was now of no use either to sons or to daughters; in addition, an increasing amount of cash for dowries needed to be found. For a village which, in 1966–69, had a *per capita* level of cash income which varied between 20,000 drachmas and 40,000 drachmas *per annum* and in which even the wealthy families found it difficult to save 40,000 drachmas to 50,000 drachmas for a dowry, this situation imposed a severe financial strain.

While, however, girls were becoming an increasing financial burden to their families of origin, their cultural evaluation in the family of marriage was altering correspondingly from one which was vitally concerned with the intrinsic qualities of the girl, to one which was vitally concerned with the capital she represented. This dual devaluation in the position of women was symbolized in a number of ways. Whereas formerly it was the custom that proposals of marriage should stem always from the man's house, it now became normal, with the increased anxiety of families which had daughters, for proposals to come from the girl's house as well. Again, when an engagement was confirmed, the former purchase of the costly bridal adornments (which had been abandoned after the war when the *sengoúnia* began to be left off) had been replaced by the ritual of "going shopping," and this by 1966 consisted of the pair going with their respective groups of relatives to a nearby town where the man bought for his bride one of each article of clothing she might need, material for a coat and skirt, and finally a watch, bracelet and brooch which were all meant to be of gold. The total expenditure, however, on these things, was, in 1966–68, about 8,000 drachmas, a proportion of the dowry which was to become ever smaller, and in no way comparable, even then, with the necessity, in so many families before the war, of mortgaging fields to pay for the finery of the bride.

Finally, it is possible that change in the personal estimation of the bride may also be implied in the change in the traditional code of modesty. The change in sexual mores which has begun to sweep through these Euboean villages is undoubtedly a complex one, involving in part Western notions of romantic love and sexual freedom. But in a society still closely bound, through economic as well as spiritual ties, to marriage, and still more in one for which the dowry has assumed so important a financial role, romantic love can be a deceptive notion. In earlier times it was apparently uncommon for a man to demand an increase of the dowry after the engagement had been celebrated, but not so rare for a man to attempt to "fix things up" with a girl before the engagement, so that he would then have a lever on the family for a higher dowry. The present time—with its growing

tendency to produce marriages which have been arranged by the couple themselves; in which no woman expects to accompany a man, unchaperoned, without being, as they put it, "approached" by him; and in which the bride is often two months pregnant when the couple decide to marry—is a time which leaves girls increasingly defenseless in the face of an attempt by their man—or his family—to extract a large quantity of money. The evidence I possess does not indicate how often there occurs such exploitation of the girl's family by that of the man, but the means for such exploitation are certainly present.

At the same time, however, as women are finding themselves in an increasingly weak position vis-à-vis men, the position of men in the marriage market has become over the years so strong that by 1966 the parents of the girl dared not refuse considerable concessions to the ethos of romance without running the risk either of losing the groom or of paying for their values with an augmented dowry. The traditional form of marriage had taken the pattern of "one and one" (*éna éna*) as it was called—engaged one week and married the next. The aim of this was to preserve the girl's reputation, so that if for any reason the marriage failed to take place, it could not be claimed that the girl was no longer, or had not been in the first place, "good." In the late 1950s, however, one particular family deferred to the groom and permitted its daughter to go, chaperoned, for a short visit to his village; after this, the villagers say, it became increasingly frequent for lowland youths to expect to bring their fiancées down to their home village for a *volta*—a showing-off session which lasted usually for a week-end, and which, although chaperoned by the girl's father, allowed all the world to draw the inevitable conclusions. By 1968 the situation had got to such a pass that one particular girl, after her engagement, was compelled by her in-laws to spend as much as a fortnight on their farm helping them with the harvest, and with matters still to be decided as to who should have the legal ownership of the purchases made with the dowry money, everybody was in a ferment, anticipating disaster. At the same time it was the refusal of this privilege which was a key factor in making an attractive girl with a good dowry unacceptable to many men of the district. In the present day there is still one family in Ambéli holding out for just such a marriage for its only daughter. The girl is twenty-eight and is still unmarried.

In all these ways, then, the displacement of peasant life in North Euboea by a cash economy has led, perhaps paradoxically in the light of what is usually assumed about the life of women in the peasantry, to an increasing symbolic devaluation of women both as daughters and as brides. Three important qualifications, however, must be added to this conclusion. The first, as stated at the outset, is that I have

discussed only the attitudes to women implicit in that one critical aspect: the prospect and arrangement of their marriages, and more particularly in the institution of dowry. Whether these women gain elsewhere in their married life, in authority, or at any rate in freedom from violence, has not been discussed, for that would form too large a topic to be dealt with here. The second qualification concerns that part of the recently grown-up generation of villagers, who, in the late 1970s, moved from the educational system into the middle class. Men from this group of villagers, and husbands who married into it, have expressed the view that a girl's education is her dowry, and although this may be understood in part as a statement relating to the power of an educated girl to make money in paid employment, it is also a statement which indicates that a girl's personal qualities are what matter. One girl from the village who had become a teacher has certainly made a marriage in which a mutual sympathy and community of interest is evident; and a man from the village, also a teacher, has expressed himself forcibly on the matter of a dowry, saying that when he married it would be for love, and turning down an offer of marriage from a girl in the market town who was relatively uneducated, but who had one million drachmas, five hundred olive trees, a building site by the sea, a house in the town, and whose parents had promised to present the bridegroom with a car on the completion of the engagement. Even so, this girl has since got the teacher she wanted, so the signs at this early stage in the experience of this group do not all point to unanimity. However, it is possible that the attitude expressed above will, for a significant portion of the educated population, win out, and that for men and girls from North Euboea the symbolism of the dowry will take yet a third pattern.

Finally, the third qualification is that the modern pattern which has been described here, involving the process of making the change from the land to wage labor and small cash enterprises, may itself be a transitional phenomenon—though one which is widespread in Greece, today, and which will be widespread for some years to come. The symbolism of the dowry which corresponds to this process of change, with its implied devaluation of women, may similarly be a phenomenon which, while at present massive in its scope, will ultimately evolve into something different.

IV. CONCLUSION—CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

In conclusion, there emerge from this analysis of dowry some reflections on the nature of continuity and change in Greek culture.

There are very many village customs in Greece which, if one

follows them through their existence in the older society to their appearance in the new, changing situation, appear to have remained unchanged, together with the values they represent. The elements of dowry, for instance, may seem at a first glance to be identical in 1970 with what they were in 1930, for in both times girls were married with dowries, and the dowry was a subject for bargaining and great endeavor on both sides. The idea of each party was to get a "good" partner, and this value was enhanced by what material possessions either had to offer. In both cases the husband had to provide the livelihood, the bride bringing with her what she could to make the house beautiful and to contribute her share to the establishment of a new family. Even when the *sengoúnia* were left off after the war and the traditional gift from the bridegroom to the bride was abandoned, this was replaced with the ritual of "going shopping," which is the indication of a ratified engagement.

However, the very fact that certain more external elements have remained unchanged through the years is, paradoxically, in itself the reason for the internal shift of emphasis which the more modern years represent; for values which have a particular manifestation in a particular kind of situation may not, in a different situation, be lived out in exactly the same way, without changing their nature. "Concentration on the family," for instance, in the situation of traditional rural Greece with all the checks to unlimited self-seeking which such a society held, does in a less interdependent and communally self-sufficient situation become a social phenomenon quite different from the one as which it first started out. Similarly, the desire to get a "good" husband, when such a value is seen in terms of the good reputation demanded by the heroic culture of an isolated mountain village, manifests itself in quite a different way from that when a "good" husband is sought in a situation in which both men and women are desperately scrambling into the cash economy. Traditional values expressed in a modern situation must, if they are to remain true to their more esoteric significance, alter in a very complex and subtle way, adapting themselves not only in form but in meaning to the changed circumstances. Thus for the phenomenon of dowry to have remained consistent over the years between 1930 and 1970, there was needed not the mere shift from goats to money, from traditional jewelry to clothes and watches, in which a purely factitious and more or less meaningless type of correspondence is observed. What was needed was that the emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of the bride, in earlier days represented in symbolic terms and revealed particularly in her purity and in the reputation of her family, should be again the focus of the marriage bargaining, but should, in the changed circum-

stances of cultural awareness, be seen less in symbolic terms and more in personal ones. This, however, is not what seems to be indicated by the majority of marriages contracted in and from the village from the '50s to the early '70s. What does seem to have happened is an increasingly agonizing struggle of women for husbands who, in order to believe that a girl is worthy of them, require first and foremost a large amount of cash.

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