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# High-Season Piety: An Ethnographic Account of Community, Commensality, and Ritual in Anafi Island's Summertime Orthodox Christian Religious Practices

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the material culture of religious life on the Greek island of Anafi during the peak tourism season of summer 2023. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the paper examines the public celebration of a number of feasts coinciding with the summer high season: the Transfiguration of Christ, one of the Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church, celebrated on the sixth of August; the Dormition of the Theotokos (Mary the "Birthgiver of God") on the fifteenth, with evening Supplications to the Theotokos in church on every August weekday leading up to the feast; the feast and commemoration of the immensely popular Saint Fanourios on the twenty-seventh of August, with the main celebration centering on the preceding day's vespers; and, in September, the major feast of the island: the Nativity of the Theotokos (8 September), which unfolds into four-days-long festivities, due to the main shrine of the island being dedicated to the protectress of Anafi, Panayia Kalamiotissa. This paper focuses especially on the role of commensality and shared meals in maintaining kinship ties and social communion. Ritualized festive eating emerges as a way of consolidating the community of permanent island residents and diasporic islanders returning for summer. The continuity of these embodied practices provides insight into Anafiot identity and lived religion. Ultimately, this paper reflects on how contemporary Orthodox theologians have re-discovered the priority of materiality and the senses in ecclesial life.

**Keywords:** Anafi; Orthodox Christianity; Greece; kinship; commensality; material culture; artoklasia; Kalamiotissa



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## 1. Introduction

This paper results from ethnographic fieldwork on the island of Anafi, Cyclades, Greece, from the first of August 2023 until the thirteenth of September 2023; its aim is the exploration of Anafi's religious life during the high tourist season, with particular attention to communal piety's material culture, and its interaction—or lack thereof—with the multitudes brought to the island by high season tourism. During this period, a number of feasts dot the Orthodox liturgical calendar: the Transfiguration of Christ, one of the Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church,[1] celebrated on the sixth of August; the Dormition of the Theotokos (Mary the "Birthgiver of God", the title most usually employed by Greeks for the Virgin Mary after *Panayia*, "All-Holy") on the fifteenth,[2] with evening Supplications to the Theotokos in church on every August weekday leading up to the feast commemorating the repose and assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven; the feast and commemoration of the immensely popular Saint Fanourios[3] on the twenty-seventh

of August, with the main celebration centering on the preceding day's vespers; and, in September, the major feast of the island. This is the Nativity, i.e., the birth of the Theotokos (8 September), which unfolds into four days of festivities due to the main shrine of the island dedicated to the protectress of Anafi, *Panayia Kalamiotissa* (more on which below), commemorating the Nativity. My fieldwork encompasses these feasts, and concerning ethnographic field methods, a mixed-methods approach has been employed, including participant and nonparticipant observation, unstructured fieldwork interviews, "deep hanging out", and archival research on the island; a total of 43 interlocutors have been interviewed (21 Anafiots, 17 Athenian Anafiots, and five tourists with no other connection to Anafi) from all adult age groups, with the majority being 55+ years old. No difficulties in terms of access or informant wariness were encountered.

The present paper results from what is anything but the first ethnographic fieldwork on the island; Margaret E. Kenna has dedicated decades of fieldwork and research to Anafi (indicatively, Kenna 2001, 2017) and to the island migrants' life in Athens, together with the causes of their migration and their involvement in the tourism development of the island,[4] with reference to Anafi's religious life as well (Kenna 1976, 1985, 2005, 2009, 2015). However, it is this interplay between Anafi's transformation during the high tourism season, Anafiot collective piety, and material culture (particularly of the edible variety, i.e., commensality) that serves as the focus of the present paper. The ways in which Anafiots engage with matter in their collective religious life are anything but unique to the island since similar rituals prescribed by the Greek Orthodox Church's order of services take place in most Cycladic islands and throughout Greek Orthodoxy; the paper will not focus on the immediately obvious, e.g., candles, incense, or icons in general, but primarily on ritualized commensality and Anafiot's relationship with the primary icon of the protectress of the island, *Panayia Kalamiotissa* of Mount Kalamos, more on which below.

A number of theses are central to this paper. Highlighting the particular kind of effervescent materiality in Anafi's religious practices, together with their ritualized commensality, certainly forms one of them; the commensal religious practices in Anafi play a crucial role in (re-)constituting the Anafiot community and reinforcing kinship ties. The interplay, or lack thereof, between high-season tourism and local religious practices (by each pretending that the other does not exist) is also discussed in this paper. An implicit dialogue with, and Orthodox contribution to, the ongoing discussion on the possibility of anthropology's dialogue with theology (indicatively, what I have in mind here includes Robbins 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2013; Lemons 2018, 2021 for a wealth of contributions, and the John Templeton Foundation project "Theologically-Engaged Anthropology" at large; and on the Orthodox context in particular, Carroll 2017, 2018) is one of the aims of this paper.

There has been a recent surge in studies bridging material culture and religion—indeed a 'material turn in the study of religion' (Hazard 2013), or 'material religion' (Meyer et al. 2010). Edited collections comprising ethnographies of religion via material cultures, such as *Materiality and the Study of Religion* (Hutchings and McKenzie 2017) or slightly more theologically-oriented undertakings, such as *Religious Experience and New Materialism: Movement Matters* (Rieger and Waggoner 2016, with illuminating introduction by Jones 2016) testify to this, as well as numerous papers (examples include Burchardt and Höhne 2015; Burchardt and Westendorp 2018; Keane 2008; Seremetakis 2019). The present paper aspires to form a contribution to this field. However, the central argument of this paper consists of another finding emerging in the final section: that 20th-century Greek theological intellectual pursuits, prompted by Russian diaspora thinkers, with Christos Yannaras (prosopocentric ontology, 1935–2024) being the main representative alongside John Zizioulas (Eucharistic ecclesiology, 1931–2023), form a *return to Anafi*, to speak figuratively:

a re-appreciation of the materiality of popular piety, over and against an intellectualized form of Christianity that prevailed theretofore. Late 20th-century Greek theological thought, and the work of Yannaras in particular, integrated popular stances toward materiality, sensorial dimensions, and religion-based commensality, putting an emphasis on the fact that the very materiality of worship creates a religious community, rather than abstract spiritual or theological reflection—i.e., precisely what we encounter in, for example, Anafi. Thus, in this case, intellectual reflection on religion, theology, and church ritual has come to terms with a long-standing Orthodox practice in which materiality is absolutely central: said reflection has "returned to Anafi", so to speak. Thus, we see that the embodied, material, and communal aspects of Orthodox piety, as practiced on the island and elsewhere, are not influenced by modern Greek theological developments but instead inform them in a rediscovery of the enduring Orthodox materiality of traditional piety.

Much more so than other larger Greek islands that form tourist destinations, Anafi leads a double life. During its comparatively short "high season", spanning most of July and all of August, the islet is inundated with thousands of tourists enjoying its beaches and night life. During most of the year, less than two hundred, mostly aged islanders stay on the main settlement of the island, the Chora—which, during the winter, sports only one restaurant/taverna, the occasional and quasi-celebratory opening of one souvlaki shop, and no pharmacy. The possibility of physical contact with the outside world is occasional, as ships from/to Athens' Piraeus or the neighboring Santorini arrive once or twice a week, sea and weather permitting. Rather obviously, these two "lives" of Anafi are strikingly different in almost every respect. Apart from tourists, the summer sees an influx of seasonal workers and Anafiots (*Anafiotes*) living in Athens during wintertime and returning during the summer in order to operate their tourist businesses (on this, see also Kenna 1993; for the reasons why many Anafiots migrated to Athens in the first place, see Kenna 2017; as well as, to a certain extent, Kenna 2001). Permanent residents are either working frantically during the summer, as tourism is now the primary revenue source for the island, or have less appetite for resuming their wintertime habits of socializing, particularly outdoors, given the sudden annual influx of travelers. However, their communal religious life—normally during more serene low- or no-season months—cannot but resume or even peak during the high season, particularly given the number and importance of ecclesiastical feasts listed by the Orthodox liturgical calendar for August and the first half of September.

## 2. High-Season Piety in Anafi

Before I move on to the Anafi feasts in question, I want to turn my attention to a naturally ubiquitous protagonist in Anafi's religious rituals: the only priest of the island, Father Nicolas, who officiated the services studied herein. To start with, how come this small island indeed has a native priest today—which, as we shall see, was not always the case?

### *2.1. An Island Priest's Story*

As is often the case, it begins with a dream. A dream dreamt by Anafi's current and sole parish priest, Father Nicolas, about forty years ago. A dream that demonstrates the intrinsic intertwining between the islanders' piety and Anafi's monolith, Mount Kalamos, "one of the most terrifying rocks in the world" (Tournefort 1717, p. 276), which houses the island's main monastery, *Panayia Kalamiotissa.* The story has been relayed to me both by the priest and by other Anafiot interlocutors, as they consider it embedded in the collective piety of Anafiots toward *Panayia Kalamiotissa*, underscoring the islanders' special relationship with her. At the time of writing this, father Nicolas is sixty-four years old; the story took place about forty years ago, in the early '80s, when he was a young and married

builder of elementary school education—prior to tourism transforming the islanders' ways of subsistence, Anafi was famous for its stonemasons and builders (stone *per se* is less and less used nowadays, having been substituted with brick and mortar-based methods). Back then and still today, most, if not all Anafiots hold varying degrees of piety, faith, and particularly reverence for the *Panayia Kalamiotissa*, although the young builder is seldom seen in church, even during great religious feasts. Before the event described below, the abbot of the then-male monastery would serve as the island's priest,[5] yet after his death, the island was left with no resident priest; different priests from Santorini would arrive by boat from time to time—not every Sunday—to celebrate liturgy and services.

One night when he was twenty-five years old, the young Nicolas had an uncommonly vivid dream while sleeping next to his wife in the village:[6] he was at the "lower monastery" together with a certain Maria and a certain Panayiotis—actual Anafiots, whose names however derive from the Virgin Mary, the *Panayia*—who wanted to get married. However, in the absence of a priest, there was no one to officiate the ecclesiastical wedding ceremony; Nicolas assured them in his dream, that he would officiate it. The young builder woke up visibly distressed and shaken and relayed his particularly vivid dream to his wife, who assured him that the cause of his dream was not metaphysical but physical and rather mundane: most of his body parts were uncovered during that cold night, leading to curious dreams. Yet explaining the dream away via temperature would not suffice for the young builder's temperament: he became convinced that this nocturnal vision was a genuine priestly calling. He took the boat to Santorini, where the local diocese overseeing Anafi confirmed that a local priest was needed in Anafi, yet his level of education—if not also his familiarity with the church—would not suffice. Nicolas persevered, and he was ordained after what seemed like an innumerable litany of days and nights involving hard studying and frantic reading. His wife's consent to his ordination was required, and other Anafiot women had warned her, as a female Anafiot interlocutor in her sixties told me: "beware, for the cassock is heavy", meaning that a priestly couple's wife is difficult and more challenging that what they had been accustomed to.[7] Unaware of the phrase's subtext and nuance and the nuances of ecclesiastical parlance at large, upon lifting up the newly-shipped cassock, she thought to herself: "well, this seems quite light to me". Today, father Nicolas is the universally beloved and respected priest of Anafi, parish priest of the central square's St Nicolas church, a priest popularly believed to be a gift to Anafiots by Mount Kalamos' *Panayia Kalamiotissa*, and the heart of every religious feast on the island.

### *2.2. Toward 15 August, Toward the Dormition*

While, like all Cycladic islands, Anafi boasts a very large number of small churches and chapels, its religious life is served by one parish priest and hence one parish: the St Nicolaos church situated in Chora's main square. The other epicenter of Anafi's piety, the monastery at the foothills of Mount Kalamos hosting the icon of *Panayia Kalamiotissa*, has no priest and, until recently, had no resident monastics for many decades. It is during the last decade that two nuns were allowed to reside in the monastery, initially a pre-Christian temple for Apollo (Kenna 2009) and now officially an outpost (*metochion*) of Santorini's Prophet Elias Monastery dedicated to the Mother of God of the Life-giving Spring or Life-giving Font (*Zoodhohos Piyi*), although colloquially called either simply *the monastery* or *the lower monastery* or the *Kalamiotissa monastery*. The nuns travel to Chora to attend liturgy and certain other services, as well as to visit the elderly, while the priest occasionally travels to the monastery for services.

Local interlocutors estimate that, during winter, about twenty to twenty-five out of the less than two hundred permanent residents attend Chora's parish church liturgy on an average Sunday, mostly in an informal rotation, and mostly women, with a few exceptions.

A different picture emerges on the daily evening Supplications to the Theotokos during the first half of August: at no time were more than ten people in the church, most of them men. Apart from the weekly liturgy, the islanders gather in church primarily during *feasts*, and the Supplications are not a feast *per se*, I was informed; further, those attending "pray for the whole of the island, rather than just for themselves"—hence the prayer of all resident Anafiots is "outsourced" to the few faithful actually attending, as it were. Despite the importance of the feast in the Orthodox liturgical calendar, a similarly counter-climactic picture and flock size emerged on the feast of the Transfiguration of Christ, which fell on a Sunday; the blessing of the grapes liturgically prescribed for that feast did not take place, yet an *artoklasia*[8] was celebrated and offered—which gives us the opportunity to witness how a "usual" *artoklasia* is celebrated (Figure 1), in contrast to the properly festive one on the feast of the Dormition, as discussed below.

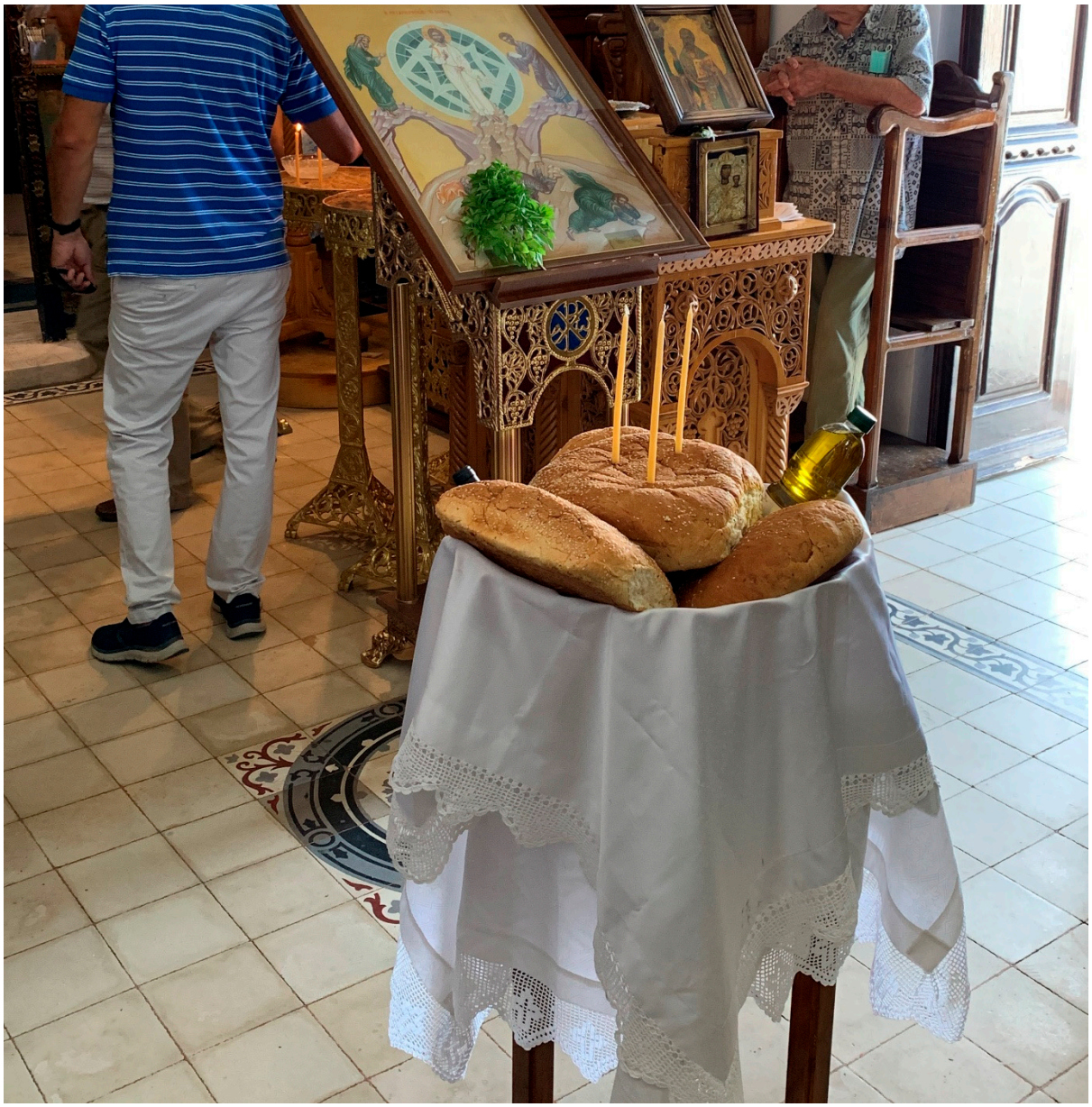

**Figure 1.** Artoklasia loaves during the liturgy of the Transfiguration, 6 August 2023.

Although in theory, the same service is celebrated, in practice, we have encountered two quite different events, at least in terms of quantity. Typically, and in the "usual"

*artoklasia* witnessed on the 6th of August in Anafi between matins and liturgy, five loaves of a type of sweetish and aromatic bread are offered to the church, usually by one family; the five loaves recall the miracle where Christ fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes (a 1905 description of an artoklasia ritual in Crete may be found in Xanthoudides 1905, pp. 20–21). Together with a bottle of oil, a bottle of red wine, and five lit candles,[9] the offered loaves are placed on a table in the middle of the church and are blessed, touched, and kissed by the priest, the service concludes with the chanters (and, usually, most of the congregation) thrice singing "The wealthy have become poor and gone hungry, but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing", slightly paraphrasing Psalm 34:10 and Mary's "Magnificat".[10] Importantly, during the short service the priest audibly prays for the well-being and health of all people present—this is a prayer only for the living, not for the dead—, but first commemorates by name the family members offering the loaves, wine, and oil and prays for them; this is performed by reading aloud the first names of relatives and loved ones written on a piece of paper handed to the priest together with the loaves. After the liturgy, the *artos* bread is broken and distributed to the congregation; traditionally, the family offering the loaves keeps one loaf while the remaining four are cut into pieces and distributed to those in attendance, yet often all five loaves are distributed. This bread, though blessed, is different from the Eucharistic bread used during the liturgy or from the *antidhoro* distributed to the faithful. It is considered blessed bread, not sacramental *per se*, and may be consumed by anyone present, not just by baptized Orthodox Christians. In contrast to the *antidhoro*, *artos* is cut into big chunks, roughly the size of a human hand, and hence truly *nourishes* (while serving as quite an excellent breakfast) rather than merely *symbolizes*, as is the case with the comparatively quasi-dematerialized, smaller pieces of *antidhoro*.

While the liturgical performance of the very same text was present, the *artoklasia* of the Feast of the Dormition was quite a different matter, as we shall see. Yet before embarking on this, I would like to mention another potentially interesting *leitmotif* of ecclesiastical services on Anafi: a pattern of apparent dislocation. As is the case with many services, in the Supplications to the Theotokos or in the *artoklasia,* the priest repeatedly asks the congregation to also pray for those living or temporarily staying in the service's city, village, island, or settlement: those living, either temporarily or permanently, in the service's *here*, in Anafi in our case. Interestingly, in the case of Anafi, a curious dislocation is taking place: the congregation is asked to pray "for those temporarily staying in this island, *and* for the Anafaeans, *wherever they might be*"—"Anafaeans", *Anafaioi*, being a more formal word for what is called in the vernacular "Anafiots", *Anafiotes*.[11] That is, a prayer for the temporal community in the here-and-now is offered, as well as one for the imagined community, in which even those Anafeans who have left are still considered part of the communal whole. That is, one for tourists and pilgrims (those currently and temporarily finding themselves in Anafi), and one *primarily* for the Anafiots who are *not* on the island: it is as if only the temporary ones and the travelers (the παρεπιδημοῦντες) have a pinpointed location and thus can be prayed for on the basis of this location, them currently being in Anafi, whereas the prayer for the Anafiots themselves is articulated on the basis of their Anafiot provenance and pedigree, taking for granted that the majority of Anafiots do not live on the island; the island prays for *them,* wherever they might be—and also for tourists and pilgrims who are *here, now.* This dislocated "double prayer", one for those present in the flesh and one for the Anafiots overseas, featured in all ecclesiastical services in Anafi where normally a prayer for the "ones residing here" would have been offered, as the latter is what is prescribed in the liturgical books and service manuals.

### 2.3. The Feast(s) of the Dormition of the Theotokos

The feast of the Dormition essentially consisted of *two* feasts: festal vespers on the preceding day, the evening of Monday the fourteenth of August already belonging to the next day, according to the ecclesiastical and Byzantine "clock" (of Hebrew pedigree), and liturgy on the morning of Tuesday August fifteenth. Both the vespers and the liturgy were celebrated in the *Koimisi* church dedicated to the Dormition of the Theotokos in the center of Chora, rather than in the St Nicholas church. Vespers were marked by an *artoklasia* (Figure 2) of considerably different proportions (Figure 3); the liturgy was marked by a procession, *litany*, of the Dormition icon through the Chora, as well as by the "Lamentations" for the Dormition (Figure 4). On both occasions, the *Koimisi* church—which is of a similar, if not perhaps slightly bigger, size than the parish church of St Nicholas—was packed, overflowing with people who would also sit outside at the church's perimeter in order to be close to the service.

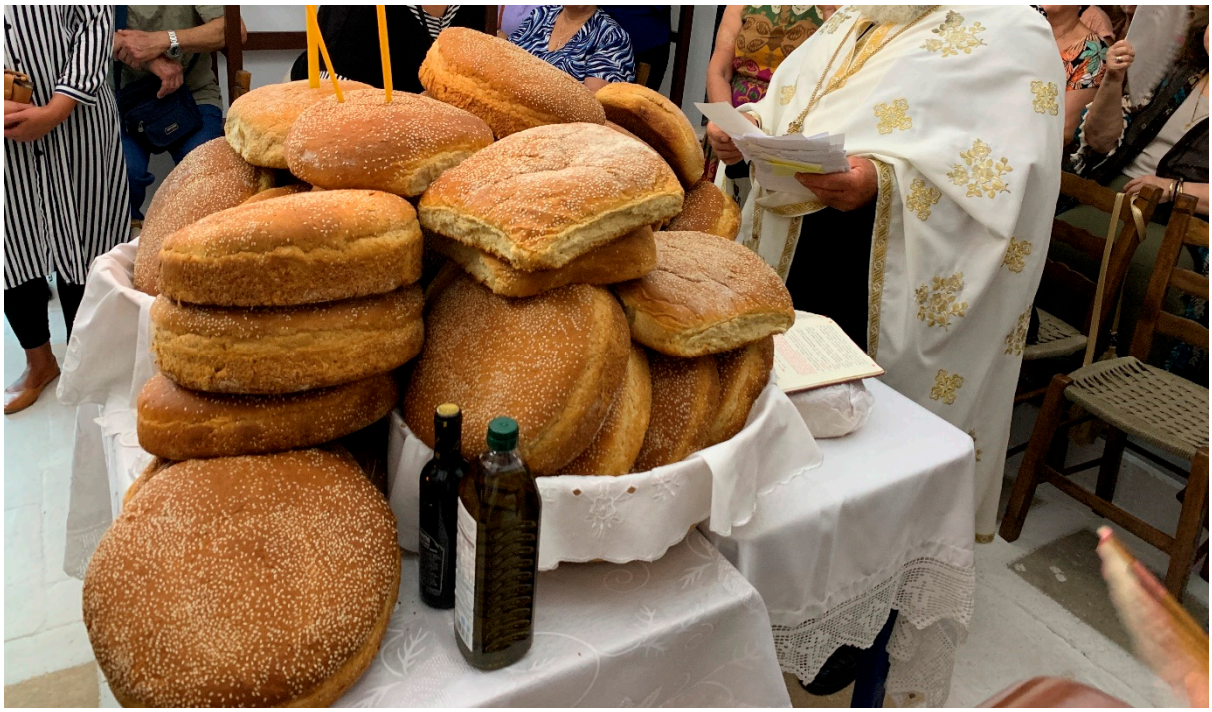

**Figure 2.** Artoklasia loaves during the Dormition vespers, 14 August 2023.

In the midst of August, at the very apex of the high tourism season, it was quite apparent that virtually no tourists, Greeks or otherwise, were in attendance—a slightly bizarre spectacle forming a small parallel Anafiot universe centering on the church, given that every single other aspect of visible, public life in Anafi's Chora was exhaustively defined by a number of tourists greater than what the island can normally accommodate during this period. In the midst of August and in the very center of Chora, a tourist-free zone in the context of a public, crowded celebration materialized on that Monday evening and Tuesday morning. Does this mean that almost everyone in attendance was a year-long resident of Anafi? In contrast, as my interlocutors assured me, the majority of the congregation, particularly the younger generation, consisted of *Athenian* Anafiots returning to the island for vacations or seasonal work. Yet the community seemed homogeneous to the eye of the beholder; in these august August ecclesiastical services, the Anafiot community is "made whole" again. Athenian Anafiots re-join the community of their home island, a fair share of the "Anafaeans, *wherever they might be*" are now *here*, a younger generation of Anafiots manifests itself by participating in the ecclesiastical celebration that

discloses them as Anafiots *in* Anafi re-enacting and performing their Anafiot provenance by virtue of their incorporation in the ecclesiastical body that celebrates the feasts prescribed in the calendar year.

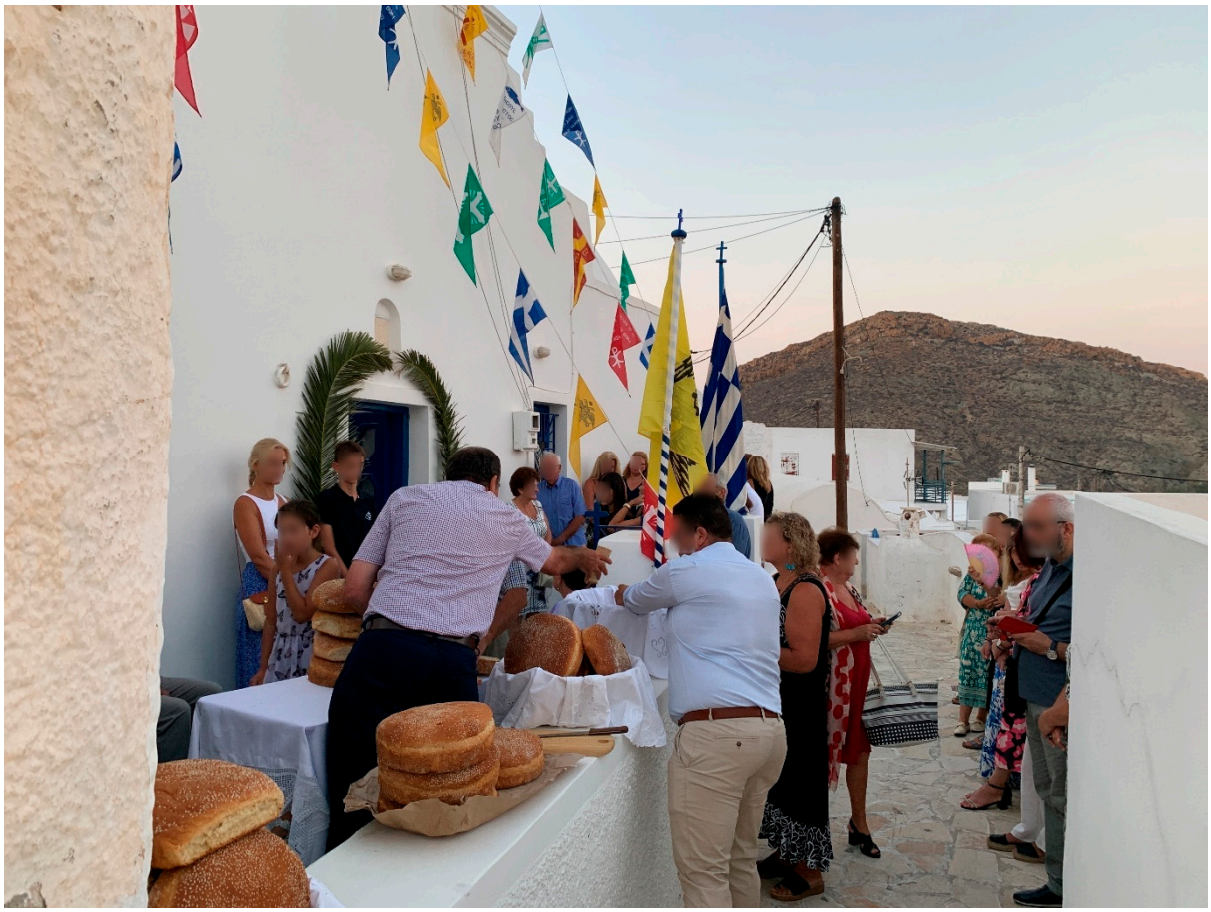

**Figure 3.** Cutting and distributing the artos, 14 August 2023.

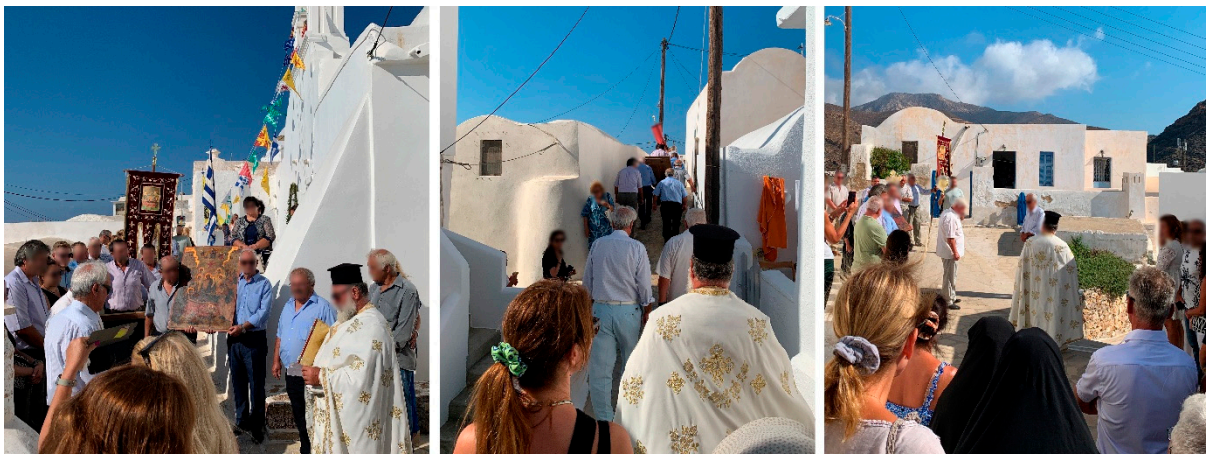

**Figure 4.** The procession of the Dormition icon, 15 August 2023.

Forming the heart and apex of the vespers service, the *artoklasia* here is not a "normal" artoklasia of five loaves, but rather reminiscent of the Gospel story describing loaves that could feed five thousand people: a pile of over thirty sizable loaves (plus wine, oil, and candles), testing the stability of the table supporting them, is placed in the middle of the church for the *artoklasia* blessing. In a vespers-cum-*artoklasia* service lasting slightly over

an hour, the priest's mere recitation of the litany of names written on the pieces of paper offered together with the loaves lasted more than twelve full minutes—and reciting given names for twelve minutes can be quite a duration under the Greek August temperatures. This duration was in spite of the magnanimous (yet also theologically poignant) provision by certain offerors of the artos loaves to write, after their names, all-encompassing phrases such as "... and relatives" or "...and children and grandchildren" for short, rather than providing a full list of given names for all relatives, children, and grandchildren—the emphasis on children and grandchildren also denoting that it is the senior generation that will usually prepare and offer the ceremonial *artos* loaves.

The sheer volume of names and loaves gives one the impression that *the whole of the island* is commemorated in this service, year-long resident Anafiots and Anafiots overseas alike, and that the congregation that is also largely the community of Anafiots publicly pray by name (or, in the case of the "...and relatives" clause, by shortcut) for almost every Anafiot.

Just after the conclusion of the service, the *artos* chunks are cut and distributed to everyone present; some people take two or three chunks, presumably also for members of the family who could not attend but would desire to be incorporated into the festive community by virtue of eating the *artos*.

There is a detail worth mentioning. In Athens, bakeries often prepare and sell liturgical *prosfora* breads, stamped with the appropriate seal, and *artoklasia* loaves to those who would like to offer them to their parish—in spite of the fact that the faithful are usually encouraged to prepare and bake them on their own, with the explicit mention that this entails a very welcome kind of embodied prayer. There is indeed one bakery in Anafi. Yet, apart from the fact that I have never seen either *prosfora* or *artoi* on offer at the bakery (without this entailing that one would be barred from ordering one), the different *artos* chunks I tasted during the same *artoklasia* session had different tastes and recipes (some with anise and others without, for example, or having varying degrees of sweetness). This means that the *artoi*—big, messy loaves in sets of five, rather than a cake or a pie—were homemade by each family independently. While this makes perfect sense in the case of year-long Anafiots, it acquires added significance when one remembers that perhaps most attendants were *Athenian* Anafiots, having an abode on Anafi for the summer months. That these *Athenian* Anafiots would go the extra mile to prepare such sets of *artos* loaves in their summer kitchens on the island indicates an awareness of the importance that these loaves be homemade, i.e., entailing the physical toil in preparing them—or that this is a custom to an extent that makes the alternative nearly unthinkable.

The next day, on the morning of the fifteenth (with the church equally packed), a procession ensued after the liturgy throughout Chora (*litaneia*, litany), led by the priest, the chanters, and the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos, with the congregation following and chanting. Much to their surprise, some tourists would wake up and look out of their windows, discombobulated by the spectacle—one of most tourists' very few interactions with Anafi's high-season piety, as their main destinations after leaving their rooms are Anafi's beaches, tavernas, cafés, and nightlife. A 19th-century tradition, the "Lamentations of the Dormition of the Theotokos", were chanted during the procession (as they were after the previous day's vespers, albeit much more briefly), modeled on Good Friday's Lamentations (*Engomia*) for Christ. These Dormition Lamentations are essentially a paraphrase of the Good Friday verses on the same melody and are a popular tradition that is not described in the official liturgical books of Greece's Orthodox Church; the context here is a popular representation of the Dormition feast as a "second Easter", a "summer *Pascha*" with Mary in place of Jesus.

### 2.4. Cake Time: St Fanourios' Vespers

Almost between the two great Theotokos feasts, the Dormition on the fifteenth of August and the Nativity on the eighth of September, stands the feast of St. Fanourios on the twenty-seventh of August—with festal vespers at the *Koimisi* church again,[12] the evening before. This is also a major and church-packing event in Anafi's community, owing both to St Fanourios' popularity among the faithful in Greek Orthodoxy and to the tradition of baking a particular cake, the *fanouropita* (literally, Fanourios' cake or pie). Despite any indication that this relates in any way to the saint's life, or any theological justification at large, and most probably due to a paretymological connection between the name *Fanourios* and the verb *fanerono* meaning "to disclose/to reveal", St Fanourios looms large in the Greek imaginary as the manager of Orthodoxy's "Lost & Found" department; he is known, and loved, as the patron saint of finding lost things and is often invoked by people seeking the recovery of lost belongings or the disclosure of things hidden—from lost keys or sometimes bodily health to the identity of a future spouse or the solution to a pressing quandary. (A church chanter in Anafi quipped that acknowledging the failure of every other method, perhaps the Hellenic Republic should bake a Brobdingnagian *fanouropita* to help manifest the country's missing fiscal surplus). Following the joke, I wondered whether the method had been tested for such ends heretofore. Almost unironically, now with a straight face, the chanter retorted that, of course, the method had not been tested in such a way; otherwise, the country would not have a fiscal deficit).

It is in this context that the faithful will bake a *fanouropita* whenever required—either, and primarily, in order to ask for the intercession of the saint in order to disclose things hidden or as a demonstration of gratitude to St. Fanourios for his successful intercession *post eventum*. The ingredients of the *fanouropita* cake—traditionally either seven or nine in number, with eleven being a rarer variety—are simple, usually including flour, sugar, oil, cinnamon, cloves, walnuts, and raisins. It does not contain milk, butter, or other dairy products, thus making it suitable for periods of Orthodox fasting. Sharing the *fanouropita* is a *sine qua non*: when the cake is baked, it is usually taken to church to be blessed by the priest and is subsequently shared with others in the congregation.

However, the baking of *fanouropites* for Saint Fanourios' vespers on the twenty-sixth of August was not primarily prompted by religious utilitarianism but rather prepared as a testament to the faithful's relationship with the saint. The *fanouropita*-baking women—for it was exclusively ladies—explained to me that, of course, they would bake a cake for the feast, irrespective of whether they were looking for something that had been poignantly lost. This time, and in contrast to other *fanouropita*-baking occasions of a more practical twist (i.e., finding stuff), the cake is *first* baked apropos of the saint's vespers, and the baker will only *subsequently*, or at least *during* its preparation, try to think whether there is *maybe* something for which the saint's intercession would be more than welcome, given it is his festal day.

While there is a special prayer for St. Fanourios' cakes, different from the *artoklasia* one, are recited by the priest toward the conclusion of the service (Figure 5); all else follows a familiar pattern. With a lit candle on each of them, the cakes are placed on a table in the middle of the church, some cut in advance in individual portions enclosed in aluminum foil or plastic wrap and some whole, and the priest recites the special *fanouropita* blessing together with a seemingly unending litany of first names provided by the ladies together with the cakes. After the conclusion of the service, each lady offers portions of her own *fanouropita* to the congregants, who are expected to sample more than one in an implicit contest that practically amounts to a cake-tasting tour.[13] While eating the *fanouropita*, one is invited to ask for the intercession of Saint Fanourios, should they have lost something

they would be eager to recover—or to simply eat the delicious cake(s) together with the congregants.

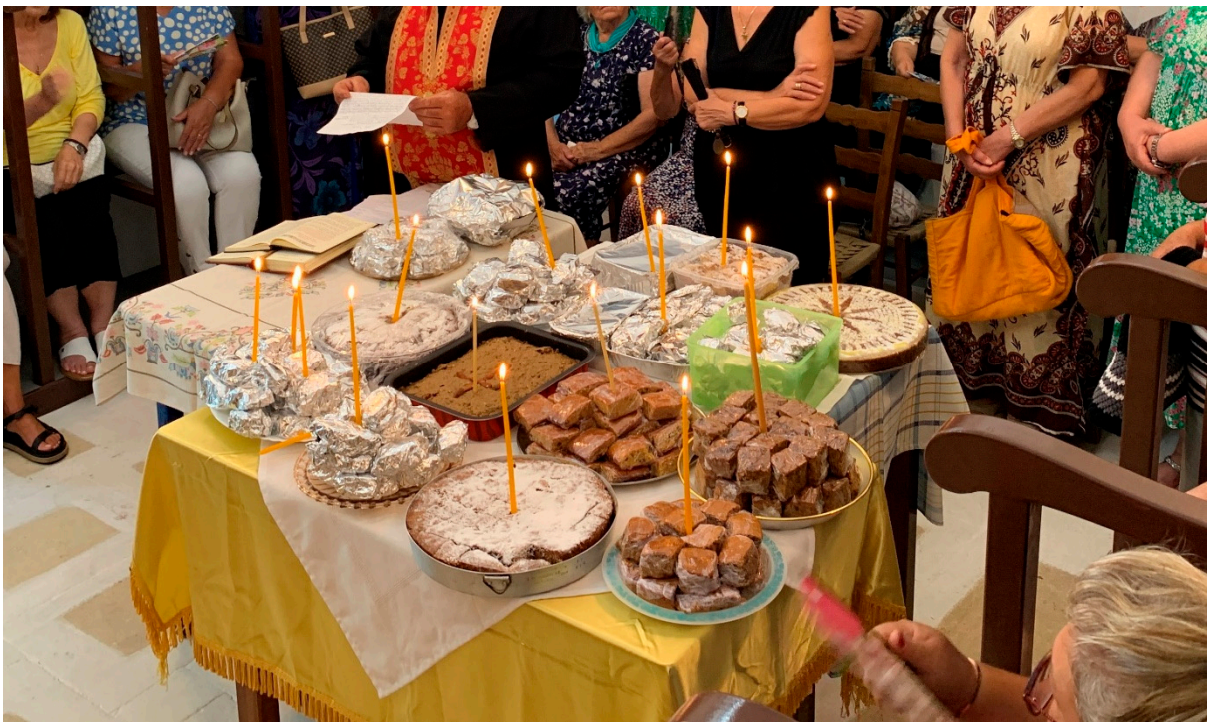

**Figure 5.** Fanouropites during their blessing by the priest, 26 August 2023.

### *2.5. A Four-Day Feast: Kalamiotissa and the Nativity of the Theotokos*

While tourists were hardly anywhere to be seen in Anafi's high-season piety, the same does not hold true for the four-day feast of the island's patron, *Panayia Kalamiotissa*, on the Feast of the Theotokos' Nativity (8 September). Of course, Anafi is anything but the sole island in the Aegean, sporting a *Panayia* church or monastery of particular importance and reverence to the islanders. Celebrating on either the Dormition (15 August) the Annunciation (25 March) or the Nativity (8 September) or the Presentation (21 November) of the Theotokos, most Aegean islands have one, which is often though not always the patron of the island: *Panayia Megalohari* in Tinos; *Portaitissa* in Astypalea; *Hrisopigi* in Sifnos; *Hozoviotissa* in Amorgos; *Koimisi* in Folegandros; *Ekatodapyliani* in Paros; *Harou* in Lipsi; *Krimniotissa* in Samothrace; *Kanala* in Kythnos; *Paraportiani* in Mykonos; *Thalassitra* in Milos; *Kastriani* in Kea; *Akathi* in Schinoussa; *Kakaviotissa* in Lemnos; *Pantohara* in Sikinos; and the list goes on. It is often the case that these churches are built around a centuries-old and emphatically revered local icon of the Theotokos, which may or may not have been miraculously discovered and credited as "not having been made by a human hands" (ἀχειροποίητος)—but which is always recognized as *miraculous*, i.e., there is a substantial track record of miracles having been effected by the Theotokos following prayer addressed to her via this particular icon and asking for *Panayia*'s intercession and intervention.

The question emerges: how are we to reconcile the fact that, for Orthodox theology, the person of Mary is one and singular, irrespective of how many different icons picture her, and to explain why and how each of these *Panayies* is understood in a somewhat distinctive manner? (For example, an Anafiot at home or in Athens—and not only when physically in front of the *Kalamiotissa* icon at the monastery—may pray to *Panayia Kalamiotissa*, to the Theotokos of the island in particular, rather than to a "generic" Theotokos, or Theotokos-at-large). The local icon is not a mere particular, material, and localized *gateway* to the Virgin Mary; it seems as if the Theotokos *of the icon* is the distinctive person(ality), although every

Anafiot, and most probably every Orthodox in general, would strongly protest the idea that these are *different persons*. Are the local *Panayies* different from the Theotokos proper? If not, where is the distinction?

Combining the feedback from my Anafiot interlocutors with a knowledge of Orthodox theology,[14] I would opine that the focus is on the *way* of (according to pious islanders, reciprocally) relating to the Theotokos, thus rendering this relationship collective and, at the same time, particular and certainly *embodied*. Thus, the person the islanders claim to relate to is the singular person of the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, but they come to know her *as* the *Panayia* of the *Kalamiotissa* icon, and, by extension of the island—as a local *Panayia* that is, in a sense, their co-islander (Figure 6). To put this in a different way, in a parable, I (do not) know "Reviewer 2" of this paper as an anonymous peer-reviewer. Our relationship consists of my receiving their feedback and report and responding to it, usually in fervent supplication for their mercy and goodwill and in the promise that the paper's shortcomings, or sins, shall be rectified (for no paper is without sin). In the bakery shop, this person is known by the owner as a customer, by their partner as their partner, by their colleagues as a colleague, by their mother as her child, and so on. All these ways of relating to "Reviewer 2" are different, yielding different kinds of relationships, and everybody is aware that there are other ways of relating to that person besides their own way, thus discovering a different part of their personality. Yet the person of "Reviewer 2" remains one and singular—and it is not the case that one would need to know that person in *all possible* ways cumulatively (as a partner, colleague, customer, *and* offspring, etc.) in order to claim actual knowledge of them, relationship to them, and communion with them. *Mutatis mutandis*, one may approach the singularity of the Theotokos and the diversity of different local *Panayies* in a similar way; every analogy has its limits, and this one is no exception.

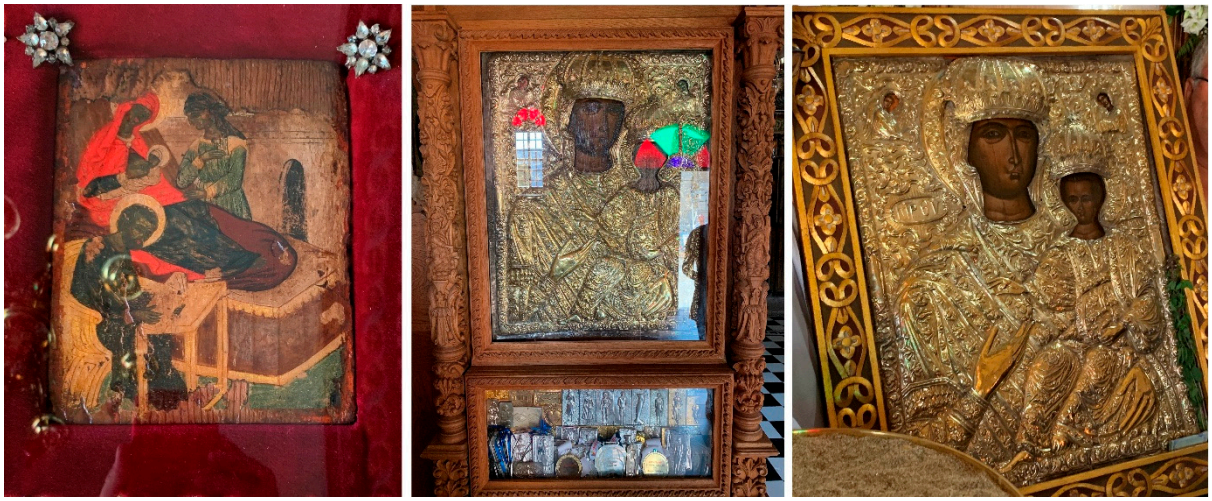

**Figure 6.** The original Kalamiotissa icon depicting the Nativity of the Theotokos, on display in the lower monastery's main churc (left). The Kalamiotissa "icon of the island", on its stand, with an array of oblations/τάματα below it (middle); The Kalamiotissa icon held for the procession, 5 September 2023 (right).

In Anafi's case, a curious complication emerges: the miracle-working icon, the material object that is the *locus* of the islanders' reverence, and the actual *Kalamiotissa* icon that prompted the building of the monastery on Mount Kalamos are two different objects. According to the Anafiot tradition, the *Panayia Kalamiotissa* icon[15] was miraculously found "on top of a reed" or "on top of a bamboo cane" (*kalamos*, today *kalamia* and *kalami*, respectively), hence its title. I have heard different versions concerning whether this sixteenth-century

event took place on the peak of Mount Kalamos or at its foothills. Margaret Kenna records this tradition as follows:

> Local oral history of the Christian site states that an ikon of the Panayia (Virgin Mary) was found, hanging from a bamboo cane (*kalamos*), on the peak of Mount Kalamos by a shepherd. He took it to the village priest, who placed it on the altar of the village church, from where it vanished and was found once more on the mountain peak. This happened three times, and the inference was drawn that the Panayia wished to have a chapel built to house her ikon on the peak. This particular manifestation of the Panayia, and the ikon, were named Panayia Kalamiotissa, the Virgin of the Reed (or bamboo cane, or even, the grain stalk). (Kenna 2009, pp. 496–97)

The icon everybody knows and reveres as the *Panayia Kalamiotissa* is a slightly more than one-meter-high crowned *Panayia* with a Christ portrait, today with a silver layer (*poukamiso*, "shirt") covering everything apart from the depicted faces. However, it has been relayed to me that the *actual* "Virgin of the Reed" icon is much smaller, slightly bigger than a human hand, which indeed depicts the Nativity of the Theotokos. At some point, perhaps during the late eighteenth century, this was stolen, and the Anafiots' reverence for *Panayia Kalamiotissa* was "transferred" to another *Panayia* icon, the one primarily revered today. Years later, the original icon somehow resurfaced, yet by now, the Anafiots held the "new" icon as the *locus* of their reverence to the Theotokos, and there was no turning back. Today, both icons stand side-by-side in the lower monastery's main church, but the icon recognized by everyone as the *Kalamiotissa* icon is *not* the actual icon that, according to tradition, was miraculously discovered "on a reed"—which now humbly stands beside the island's main icon in relative anonymity. Not every Anafiot is familiar with this differentiation between the two icons.

I am not absolutely confident in relaying this story, as I have failed to find it in the relevant literature on Anafi, including Kenna's extensive published work on the island, and my only source is one of the monastery's nuns. However, it does seem to make some sense, as the purported original icon does indeed clearly depict the Nativity of the Theotokos, thus corresponding to a feast and date that held no additional significance to Anafi and Anafiots (besides the significance it, either way, has in the Orthodox liturgical calendar as one of its Great Feasts) before the surfacing of the icon "on top of a reed". Whereas what is now recognized as the *Kalamiotissa* icon is of the standard *Odhiyitria* iconographic style, a portrait of the *Panayia* holding Christ with her left hand and pointing at him with her right hand, rather than an icon of the Theotokos' birth. The discovery of the "Mother of God *of the Reed*" icon prompted the islanders to choose the Nativity feast as Anafi's main *paniyiri*, and the current *Kalamiotissa* icon bears no connection with the Theotokos' birth.

On the evening of the fifth of September, this year a Tuesday, the *Panayia Kalamiotissa* icon is brought, in procession and pilgrimage, from the lower monastery at the foothills of Mount Kalamos to the upper monastery where it originally belonged,[16] at the peak of the Mediterranean's tallest monolith with an altitude of 460 m.[17] A crowd of about sixty people, the pilgrims gather at the lower monastery at 5.30 pm, monks from Santorini's "mother monastery" take out the *Kalamiotissa* icon, and the group commences with a physically challenging hike lasting slightly more than one hour and a half, dotted with breaks during which the monks chant the *Supplications to Panayia Kalamiotissa*, a special *paraklisi* service for Our Lady of the Reed—chanting verses such as: "*God-bearer Virgin Kalamiotissa, aegis, protector, guardian and refuge of the Cycladic islands, and most of all Anafi's great pride . . . Kalamiotissa Lady Virgin, helper and healer/savior of the island of Anafi, glorious majesty of the faithful, favorably accept the supplication prayer of those seeking refuge in you, and as we kiss your icon with utmost piety, swiftly burn our passions as if these were reeds and weeds*". The

primary smell in the air is not incense but thyme and oregano, as these ubiquitous bushes are occasionally stomped by the hiking pilgrims, releasing their aroma.

Studying the pilgrimage to the upper monastery in 1966, 1973, and 1987, Kenna observes that the pilgrims "consisted of a number of categories: resident islanders; migrants from the island who were now living and working in Athens, and frequently at the end of their summer holidays on the island; a small number of people from the neighboring island of Santorini; and a very few people who had no links with the island through kinship or association" (Kenna 2009, p. 500). The same mostly holds true in 2023: the group consists of Anafiots—Athenian and islander alike—the occasional summer tourist, and a particular group of tourists/pilgrims arriving at the island for the explicit purpose of participating in the island's feast: these are mostly middle-aged islanders from Santorini and, to a lesser degree, other Cycladic islands in the vicinity (Figure 7). There is a very easy way to differentiate between tourists from Santorini and Anafiots: the former document everything with their smartphones. Some older people, for whom the hike is particularly challenging, come on pilgrimage as a *tama*: either in order to ask for the intercession of *Panayia Kalamiotissa* in a particular context or to thank her *a posteriori* for her intervention. Stories of such miraculous interventions are abundant. Pairs of pilgrims carry the *Kalamiotissa* icon in rotation while hiking: apart from being physically challenging, it is considered a blessing and an honor.

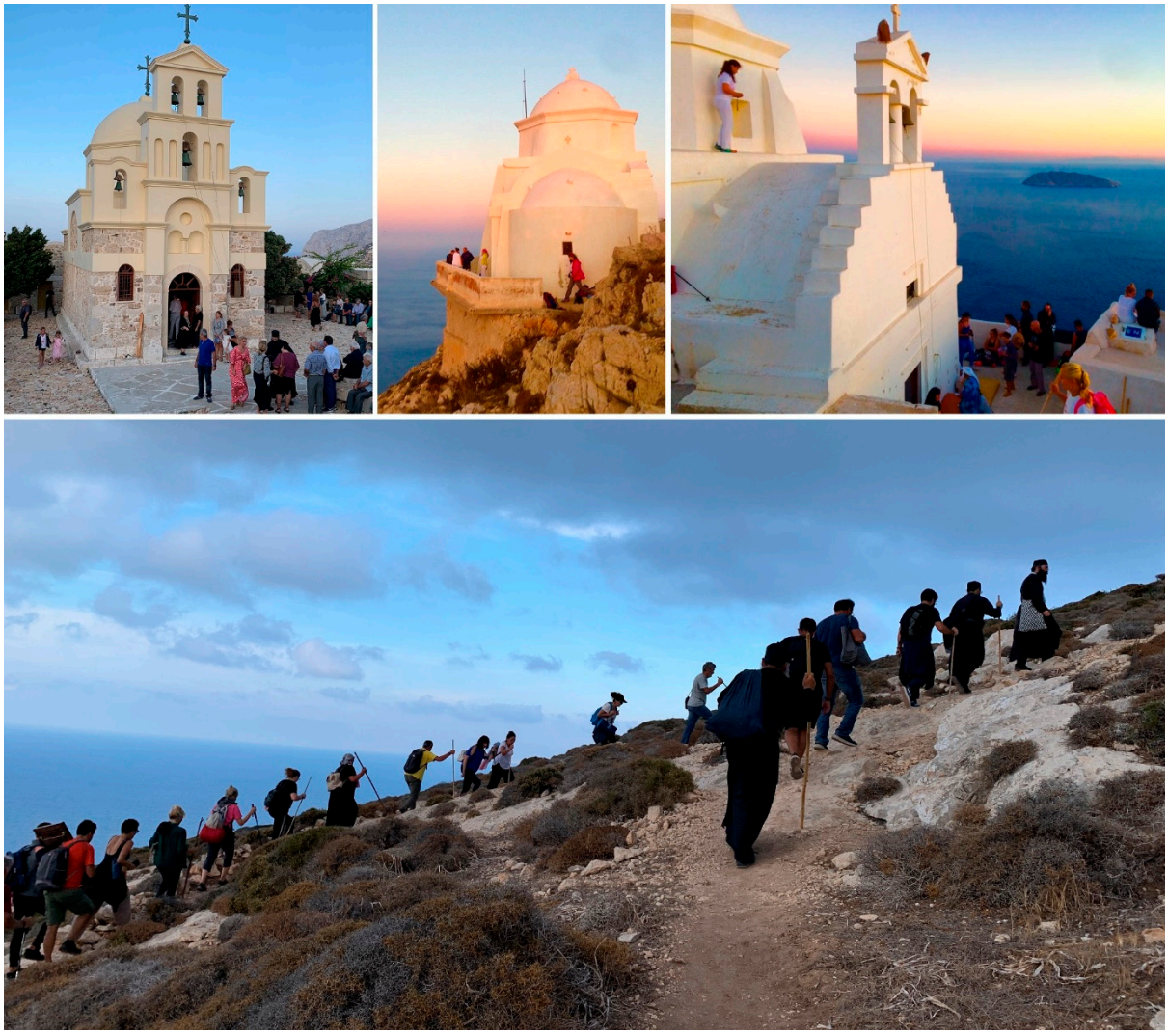

**Figure 7.** The "lower" (left-top) and the "upper" (middle-top and right-top) monastery; pilgrims and monks hiking from the former to the latter on 5 September 2023 (bottom).

All the way to the upper monastery and with all the difficulty that this entails, a man in his late forties carries with him a heavy, freshly made icon of the Theotokos, about sixty centimeters in height: not a "proper", painted icon, but a framed digital reproduction of an *Odighitria*-styled icon—not of the *Kalamiotissa* per se.[18] I ask him why. It is an *evloghia*, a blessing, he responds: he bought a new icon for his apartment, but in a way, it is an anonymous, lifeless, store-bought icon before the pilgrimage: should he carry it along with him in the Kalamiotissa pilgrimage to the upper monastery, it will be connected to *Panayia Kalamiotissa*'s grace upon return. It will be enlivened, in a sense: the icon will act as an anchor for *Panayia*'s presence. Anthropologists Carroll, Lackenby, and Gorbanenko offer a suitable framework for understanding this when writing about "contagious grace" in Orthodoxy (Carroll et al. 2023). Another man in his late forties hiked barefoot, possibly in the context of a specific personal *tama*, an offering in thanksgiving for a prayer request to come true.

Shortly before sunset, the pilgrims arrive at the bell-tolling upper monastery after hiking all the way to the top (Figure 8). After the installation of the icon in the church, they light candles and kiss the *Kalamiotissa* icon while the monks chant the Supplication. About thirty pilgrims will stay overnight, while the rest start to climb down the monolith. At nine o'clock, the vigil commences, culminating with matins, liturgy, and yet another *artoklasia*; it concludes at one in the morning, and after eating the *artos* together, the group sleeps in the church. They wake up at about 5.30 am and, together with the monks, return to the lower monastery.

**Figure 8.** Mount Kalamos, Anafi's 460 m-high monolith, photographed from the sea; the upper monastery is the white dot at its peak.

The next day, Wednesday the sixth of September, is rather uneventful, but on the eve of the Nativity of the Theotokos, on the evening of the seventh, festal vespers take place at the lower monastery, celebrated by the bishop of Santorini together with *papa-Nicolas* and the Santorini monks. The reader should expect that an *artoklasia* would be celebrated on the occasion, which is indeed correct: a crowd including most of the locals, many "pilgrim tourists" from Santorini, and a few "regular tourists" of Anafi share the sweet *artos* bread. The next morning, the feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos proper takes place—matins and liturgy with the bishop presiding. At its conclusion, and in view of the festal luncheon that would follow at the monastery's yard outdoors[19] with everyone invited, a "sample" tray of the luncheon's elements was brought to the bishop for blessing: octopus pasta (since the feast fell on Friday, a fasting day, otherwise it would have been spaghetti with meat), bread, white wine, and a dessert with local honey and sesame. After the conclusion of the service and the distribution of cotton swabs infused with a bit of oil from *Panayia Kalamiotissa*'s vigil oil lamp for the faithful to cross themselves with it at home as a blessing and protection, everyone in attendance rushed to the yard's *paniyiri* tables for their portion of the blessed, festive luncheon, cooked by Anafiot volunteers overnight in big cauldrons (Figure 9). As far as the Anafiots are concerned, this is also a prime opportunity for the circulation of all the news from their Athenian Anafiot counterparts, since many came to the island exclusively for its *paniyiri,* and it is only now that the community is in situ to the extent possible.

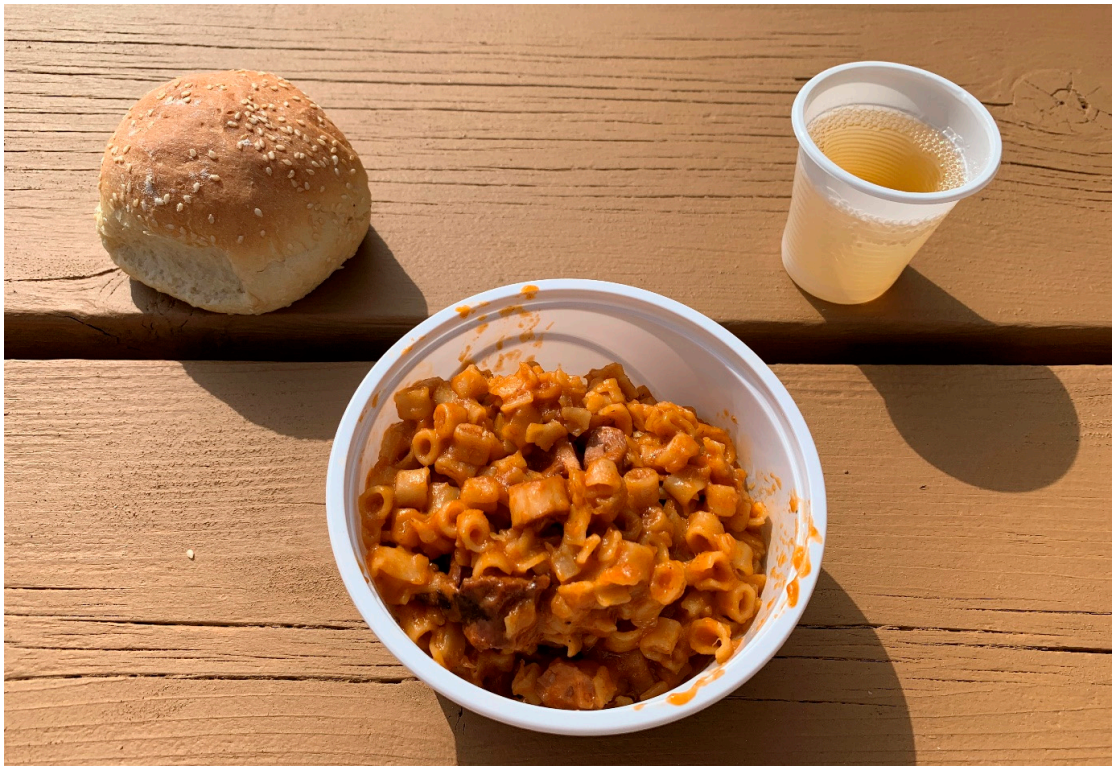

**Figure 9.** The festal luncheon: octopus pasta, white wine and bread.

Festivities would transfer to the Chora in the evening of the same day (on all these locations, see Figure 10), with many more non-pilgrim tourists alongside the locals, live traditional *nissiotika* music ("island music"), circular Greek dances, and an abundance of beer, wine, and non-fasting pork *souvlaki*. I sheepishly asked why we had a fasting lunch in the morning but a non-fasting one a few hours later. One interlocutor pointed out that now that the piercing gaze of the bishop had returned, together with the bishop himself, to

Santorini, the complication of not upholding the fast had been duly relativized. A more educated take would emanate from one of the parish church's chanters: since it is now evening, after vespers, and after sunset, it is already the next day according to the Hebraic, Byzantine, and ecclesial "clock". Our smartphones may assure us that it is Friday the eighth, but ecclesiastically, it is indeed already Saturday the ninth, and hence no fasting rules apply: it is right and just that pork souvlaki be joyfully devoured here. (Theologians championing the practical applicability of their discipline would certainly approve of this).

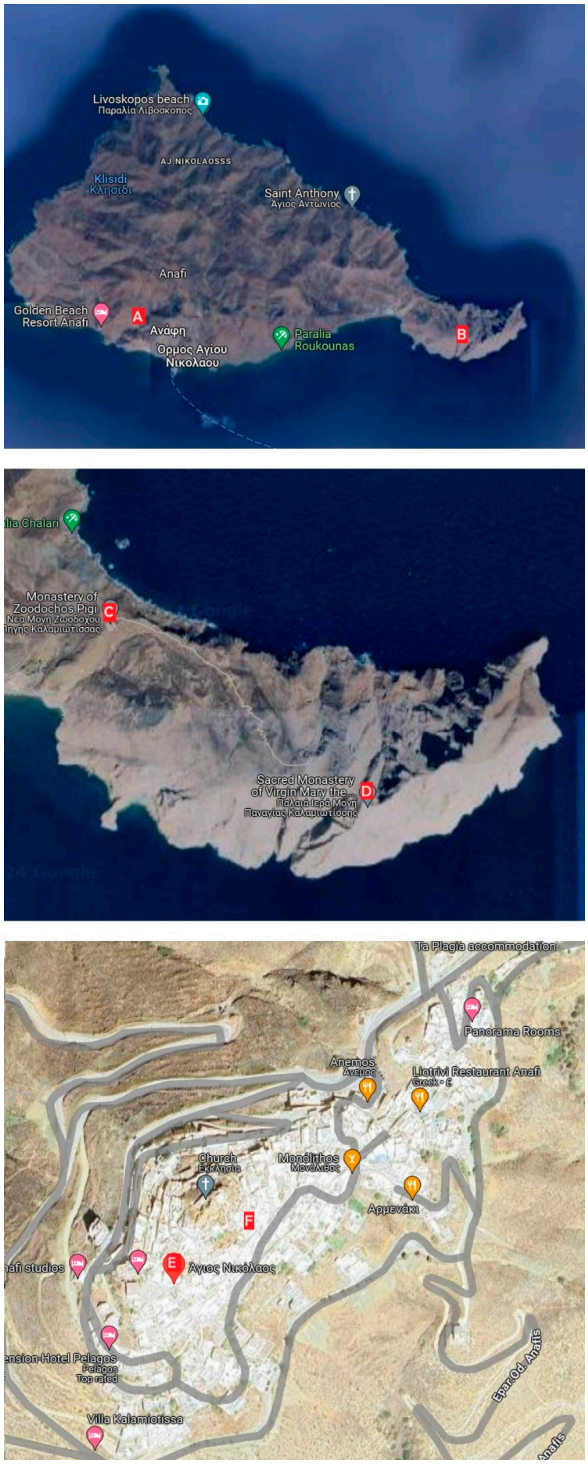


**Figure 10.** *A map of the sites mentioned.* A: *Chora*, the "capital" of Anafi. B: The monolith *Kalamos*. C: The lower monastery. D: The upper monastery. E: *Ayios Nikolaos* church. F: *Koimisi* (Dormition) church.

Before engaging with theoretical considerations, I must note that during my fieldwork, I encountered a joyful, embodied, material, life-affirming, and quite laid-back rather than stern and moralizing mode of religiosity in Anafi. Be that as it may, this might be indicated by what was *not* a major no-no during the island's high-season piety: during the summer, two restaurants (*Armenaki* and *Steki*) would host live Greek music every night. Locals and tourists—often the very same people that were attending church earlier on that day—would sing many popular songs together with the band, including certain well-known songs, the lyrics of which could be conceivably thought of as being off-tune at a time of serial religious celebrations: for example, the *rembetiko* "Oh God omnipotent" (*Thee mou megalodhyname*), relaying the story and prayer of a party of *rembetes* smoking a hashish-infused waterpipe inside a church (and, predictably, seeing the faces of saints on murals as being slightly more elated than usual, according to the lyrics), or the *laiko* "One thing is of essence" (*Mia einai i ousia*) declaring that "one thing is of the essence: there is no immortality" and expressing the wish that God was a drunkard so that while being intoxicated he might stab Death to death and thus save humankind ("*na souna Thee mou potis, na sothei i anthropotis, sto methysi sou apano na mahairones to Haro*"). In Anafi, it seems inconceivable that someone might be offended by the co-existence of religious celebrations and the nocturnal abundance of lyrics, which, in other contexts and by other people, might be seen as blasphemous.

## 3. Eating Together Makes an Anafiot: Commensality and Kinship

It would be rather superfluous to point out the centrality of a particular sacramental *communal meal*, the Eucharist, for Orthodox Christians (e.g., see Schmemann 2004). Apart from this constitutive event for ecclesial life, commensality seems to emphatically underscore almost every instance of collective piety in Orthodox Christianity, as observed in Anafi. As far as religious events are concerned, during the span of this fieldwork, Anafiots would (i) share and eat sizable chunks of sweet *artoklasia* bread on every feast: after the Transfiguration morning liturgy (6 August), the Dormition vespers (14 August), and the Nativity of the Theotokos vespers (7 September); (ii) share and eat the St Fanourios cakes after the saint's festal vespers on the 26th of August; (iii) eat together at the festive luncheon after the Nativity of the Theotokos liturgy on the 8th of September, this year consisting of octopus pasta, bread, white wine, and sesame in honey; (iv) share memorial service *kolyva* (or, when too difficult to prepare for the bereaved family, bakery muffins) after short post-liturgy memorial services, and so on—not to mention the *antidhoro* bread given to everybody after each liturgy.

This is more than merely a custom and certainly not primarily a way to satisfy the biological need for food. The ubiquity of sharing food and eating together following greater and lesser religious feasts in Anafi is indeed constitutive of the community, at least of the *religious* community; adding to this that it is also a public and communal way for the community to be *made whole again*, since both year-long Anafiots/permanent residents and "expat", Athenian Anafiots partake in it in an undifferentiated manner, thus disclosing a community of Anafiots that is considered to be "partial" during the winter, points to a practice that consolidates and manifests ties of kinship.

Commensality, or eating together, has been studied across disciplines and is often seen as important for social communion, order, and well-being (Jönsson et al. 2021; Seremetakis 1996, pp. 3–11, 37–41), and its relationship with kinship is not a new topic in anthropology. Marshall Sahlins argues against kinship definitions based on biological relatedness or genealogy; kinship cannot be reduced to biological facts since it is a symbolic and cultural system of intersubjective relations. Sahlins marshals extensive ethnographic evidence across cultures to demonstrate that kin relations are culturally constituted in diverse ways, both through birth and social practices, and argues for an understanding of kinship centered

on mutuality of being and intersubjective participation (including food sharing) rather than biological relatedness or genealogy (Sahlins 2011a, 2011b, 2021). Sahlins' mention of "transpersonal eating", i.e., eating not in order to serve individual subsistence but as a nexus of relationships (Sahlins 2021, p. 52), seems particularly apt here. Beyond Sahlins, there is currently a rich and recent anthropological literature on commensality (ritual, festive, and otherwise), kinship, and religion—ranging from Kerner et al.'s (2015) edited volume offering a global perspective across vast historical eras to Bender's (2003) ethnographic account of a *particular* New York non-profit community of volunteers preparing meals for people with severe illnesses and the forms of spirituality involved in the process.

The Anafiot context shares many similarities with other kinship-making processes via commensality and rhymes with them in many ways; however, it also retains its unique characteristics. Of course, kinship bonds formed through commensality can coexist with kin categories and terminologies that are independent of commensal relations and the cultural (or, in our case, the religious) values and meanings attached to commensality, rather than just the act itself, shape whether it produces kinship in a given context. For example, critiques of Sahlins' thesis on kinship being primarily based on performative criteria such as (*inter alia*) commensality rather than just biological procreation underscore the distinction between primary (e.g., parents/children) and secondary ties across many cultures (Shapiro 2014). While it would be uncontroversial to argue that kinship stemming from nuclear family ties is a priority among Anafiots, this is but one mode of kinship and is somehow made relative by the fact that the majority of Anafiots are aware of varying degrees of extended family ties between many of them; asking around, one readily learns that almost everyone is some sort of *syngenis* or *ksadhelfos*, relative or cousin ("Anafi is four big families", as an interlocutor put it). "Expat", Athens Anafiots are usually thought of by permanent residents to be *fully* Anafiots, *true* Anafiots in every sense, also due to biological ties of kinship; it is everybody else that is a *ksenos*, a "foreigner", irrespective of whether they are Greeks or non-Greeks. Going beyond biological facts, however, it is interesting to see how this repeated emphasis on ritualized commensality constitutes the community of Anafiots (always making a point of commemorating the *apandahou Anafaioi*, the "Anafaeans, *wherever they might be*") both as a religious community and as the community of islanders *made whole.* Hence, commensality as one common way that kinship bonds can be formed through sharing substance, life, and fellowship, as an "intersubjective mutuality of being", fully resonates with the centrality and frequent repetition of ritualized, festal, religious commensality from the sweet *artos* to the *paniyiri*'s banquet.

## 4. In Lieu of a Coda: Anafi's Material Piety and the Itineraries of Modern Greek Theology

> "We studied the warmth of the sun on our bodies and its light with our eyes, gaining the first truths of things directly, with the senses" (Yannaras 2005, p. 112). . . . "Under the Attic sun, in the heat and the saltiness [of Aegina], I began to rediscover my senses, i.e., my Orthodoxy. I began to know my land, to touch and learn the Byzantine buildings [and architecture], to articulate the language of the icons, to taste the world as a communion of life. . . . The religious people are [nowadays] gradually losing sense of their senses—i.e., of their Orthodoxy". (Yannaras 2005, pp. 127–28)

Is Anafi's piety connected to, if not causally related to, modern and contemporary theological developments in the Greek Orthodox world? It would arguably be too fanciful to suggest anything of the sort; although, interestingly, during the Transfiguration liturgy on the 6th of August[20] and the apex of the Holy Oblation,[21] the congregation would respond with an audible and collective "Amen" to the audible prayers.[22] This reflects a wider and

global Orthodox theological discussion on this trend and an issue of great debate in the West since the mid-20th century when it was first promoted by the "Paris school" of Russian theologians. As far as the Greek context, in particular, within the wider discussion, is concerned, this is a relatively recent custom—or a return to tradition, perhaps—originating in Athens and Thessaloniki, greatly owing to twentieth century theological and liturgical trends and subtle reforms, particularly those prompted by contacts with the aforementioned "Paris school". Prior to this, and as still must be the case in the majority of Greek parishes, the priest (or the deacon) would respond with this "Amen" to himself since the very prayers for the sacramental transformation of the Gifts would be articulated inaudibly. While the older ones of my interlocutors could not remember when this changed in Anafi, i.e., when these prayers started being heard audibly during the liturgy, prompting a collective "Amen" in response as prescribed in the liturgy books, the fact remains that as a break from the previous custom, it had to somehow be imported from Athens, via Santorini (the seat of the diocese) or otherwise. Importing this new way of celebrating a crucial part of the liturgy to Anafi need not have been accompanied by sophisticated theoretical and theological arguments, a theological "instructions manual" as it were, yet it remains true that this relatively new custom must have been imported from places (i.e., Athens) where it had originally been prompted in the context of theological debates.

Despite examples like the one above, however, it would be challenging to substantiate a causal relationship between theological theory in Greece and Anafi's piety. Given the emphasis of the latter—and of Orthodox Christianity in general—on materiality, however, examining how this emphasis on materiality is (re-)discovered in modern Greek theology would indeed be interesting.

Arguably, the most prominent senior figures of twentieth century Greek Orthodox theology—and particularly of the impactful "theology of the '60s"—are Christos Yannaras (Athens, 1935–2024) and Metropolitan of Pergamon John D. Zizioulas (Kozani, 1931–2003); the latter's impact was mainly abroad and internationally, but Yannaras' thought and presence changed the landscape of Greek theological discourse, even if not mainly in its institutional academic iteration (Louth 2015; Mitralexis forthcoming). The most defining event in Yannaras' life, engendering his impactful theological language, was his rupture with the Zoë Brotherhood of celibate theologians (on this, consult Maczewski 1970; Makrides 1988; Logotheti 2017), of which he had been an active and prominent member; a pietistic "Christian movement" centering on moral improvement, an intellectual Christian life, and moralist social engagement. Yannaras came to see this as a distorted version of Christianity, and of Orthodoxy in particular: in rediscovering the Orthodoxy of his roots, Yannaras would have to turn away from the disembodied, moral spirituality of the "Christian movement" and re-affirm the embodied (and, as such, incarnational), "Eucharistic" materiality of the Orthodox Church, as he has described it in his thoroughly impactful memoir on the matter (Yannaras 2011). This seems to have been a collective rediscovery in Greece, prompted by studying Russian diaspora thinkers emphasizing the materiality of sacraments, such as Schmemann's *For the Life of the World* (Schmemann 2004; translated as Schmemann 1970; on the wider reception of Russian diaspora ideas with Yannaras as a focal point, see Mitralexis 2020), prompting what has been (somewhat inaccurately) called the "Neo-Orthodox" movement (Mitralexis 2019). Yannaras' theoretical work on the full breadth of this rediscovery of Orthodoxy, from its "upside-down" morality to its embodied relational personalism (with books such as Yannaras 1984, 1991, 2007), has much to say about Orthodoxy's material culture. Here, I would like to focus on how he remembers this exit from a primarily intellectual version of Christianity as an entry into the properly *material* world of Orthodoxy. In an early text dated "Paris, May 1968" (Yannaras 2005), and in narrative form, Yannaras reminisces about a 1962 journey to the island of Aegina with

his friend Steryos while still being a member of the Zoë Brotherhood—and describes a certain epiphany of finding God, and of finding out where God was *not* (i.e., in the world of disembodied ideas), in the disclosure of the sheer materiality of the world *as* the disclosure of God and his church; Yannaras describes finding the Orthodox Church *as* tracing its sheer materiality:

> We must find God anew, Steryo, again, from square one, truly study and learn him, with our bodies, as the church transmits him as eating and drinking, as diving in and rising from the living water of the world, as one crosses themselves and prostrates to the floor and as a fragrant beeswax candle and as incense, as fasting and as abolishing the fast, as a feast and festivity in keeping with the season and the time. The church is a tangible body, accessible to the senses. She is the building with the inclined heavens in its vaults and arches, which makes the Incorporeal corporeal and contains the Uncontainable. She is the living people of God in its bosom, the tax collectors and the saints, the harlots and the ascetics. She is the painted, i.e., tangible and immediate presence of the dead. She is us, and life, and the world, when contemplated properly. (Yannaras 2005, p. 119)

This is juxtaposed to the *im*-material Christianity that Yannaras was engaged in theretofore, an *im*-material Christianity that was also shown to be *un*-Orthodox:

> Steryos and myself belonged for years to a common refuge for ideas; religious ideas. We had learned there, from our early years, to explain the world, life and God with sharp thinking, with key ideas that solved all those riddles. . . . Two hours [walking in Aegina] daily without calculations, ideas and arguments, with only the senses sucking in the heat and light. It was a kind of emancipation. The sun, the sweat, the scent of earth and pine, and then the sea water, the saltiness, the hot sand, the texture of the earth, the salt on the lips and the eyes. Things simple, obvious to many, seemed to us like first truths from an alphabet we had never been taught. We clung to the senses in the drunkenness of the summer like limpets on a rock, without filters of reason, in tune with the life of the rock, with the life of the world. . . . Thus, simply and imperceptibly, Aegina's midday road began to form a boundary in our lives. A boundary between the intellect and actual things, between life and thought, between our religiosity and the truth of the world. (Yannaras 2005, pp. 113–14)

What is also interesting for our purposes here is how Yannaras writes of the near impossibility of appreciating this Orthodox material piety if it manifests as a self-evident given in one's life, if it belongs to the "factory settings" of one's piety that are always there, thus prompting no reason to articulate it as such and to distinguish it from its opposite (if one is, e.g., an Anafiot, that is). It is experiencing the opposite that makes the distinction possible:

> Let's leave, Steryo, let's leave. To the sea, where else—to study the water, the saltiness, the hot sand, the relentless sun. We tried our steps as if these were our first ones, as if we had been walking with our heads down and our feet up for years. Life was reversing, taking its proper shape again. . . . *Of course, all that I am recounting must be incomprehensible to people who have never fully subscribed to ideas, who have known themselves from the beginning in their real, worldly dimension, like the limpet on the rock.* Steryo and I never had a worldly dimension, *in our language the "worldly" man was the opposite of the man of God.* . . . I was once told by an industrialist who sponsored religious ideas: "For us worldly people, you who serve religious ideas are something else, people without senses". . . . So the God of our religious ideas had nothing to do with the world, he only completed

> the schematizations of morality. He too was an idea, wonderful for "practical" exploitation. (Yannaras 2005, pp. 115–17 emphasis added)

Following this logic, it is the entry into a decisively non-material (or rather, dematerialized) piety, the subsequent exit therefrom, and the re-entry into traditional, ecclesial, embodied, material piety that grants the *voice*, the criteria, and the juxtapositions that make the articulation of the perceived alterity of ecclesial material piety possible, thus manifesting its theological priorities:

> In my homeland, the church has always been an affirmation of the world and its visible reality, a new life and not a new religion. This means that communion with God was not through ideas and metaphysics, but through the proper relationship with the world. Harvesting the fruits, building a house, opening a well, sowing seeds, sailing with a newly-built boat for the first time was an act of communion with God—a day's work, the proper use of the world, the reception of the world as a blessing from God and as the priestly reference of the world to God by each person. Such is the religiosity of my homeland, which is recapitulated in the liturgy and transforms the relationship with the world into a Eucharist. (Yannaras 2005, p. 123)[23]

One could find many passages from modern Greek theology books on the importance of materiality, of the senses, of the Incarnation *in practice*, as it were, but none would be more emphatic than Yannaras' testimony of discovering Orthodoxy *as* discovering the church's sheer materiality—a shared, communal, embodied, incarnational, Eucharistic materiality spilling over into all aspects of everyday life and toil—*over and against* mental constructions and moral imperatives, which circumscribed the only Christianity he knew, and was devoted to, theretofore. Yet these are not theological developments that *influenced* Anafi's piety; rather, these formed, and still form, attempts at (re-)*discovering* Orthodox popular piety, such as the one that was either way all along the case in communities such as Anafi's.

It is hardly the case that an inundation with a heavily intellectualized version of Christianity, over and against its embodied materiality, ever reached communities such as the one in Anafi's Chora. What Yannaras and others in the "theology of the '60 s" attempted to re-articulate was already the lived practice of popular piety. For example, commensality is emphatically central to Anafi's religious life and constitutive thereof, in contrast to theoretical pursuits or an intellectualist spirituality, seems never to have had any need to be *taught* in Anafi; only *observed* or participated in. Thus, it is as if the popular piety of communities like Anafi's informs modern Greek theological theory—rather than the other way around. Anafi (or rather, places of lingering traditional Orthodox piety such as Anafi) is not so much *taught* by modern Orthodox thinking on religion but rather *teaches it* in practice.

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## Notes

1 Theologically, this feast commemorates the revelation of Jesus Christ's divine glory to three of his disciples on Mount Tabor (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36) and, according to the Orthodox Church, forms a primary scriptural basis for the doctrine of the uncreated light and, by extension, divine uncreated activities (often translated as uncreated energies).

2 The Dormition of the Theotokos is a significant feast in the Eastern Orthodox Church that commemorates the peaceful repose and postmortem bodily assumption of Mary into heaven; in Greece, it is the religious climax of summer.

3 Explanation of St Fanourios' popularity comes later in this paper.

4 It should also be noted that a pioneering work of native anthropology and religion in Greece is Seremetakis (1997). Apart from many other germane works and papers by Seremetakis, elements on religion in *today's* Greece can be found in her most recent book (Seremetakis 2019). Of interest to our discussion here is also a testimony on Anafiot migrant women from a priest's family (Hayes 2010).

5 Himself previously a builder who had undergone a fast-track course to become a priest and a monk; it seems that no monks were under him, so he was the sole monastic of the monastery and hence its abbot.

6 For a fascinating treatise on dreams (primarily based on fieldwork at the neighboring Cycladic isle of Naxos), see (Stewart 2017; reviewed by Kenna 2014).

7 In a small village community, being a priest's wife is also akin to a public office, and certainly entails being constantly in the public eye: furthermore, fasting regulations dictate frequent restrictions on food, intercourse, and so on—regulations that a priest's wife is expected to uphold more strictly than the average layperson.

8 Literally: the breaking of the bread. *Artoklasia*, is a service involving the blessing of five loaves of bread, along with wine, and oil, which are then distributed to the faithful. It commemorates the miracles of Christ feeding the multitudes with loaves and fishes, and the blessed bread, wine, and oil are symbolic of the material blessings that are shared among the community. It should be noted that this is *not* a type of Eucharistic celebration.

9 Since wheat is associated with death and resurrection, while wine and oil are commonly used in sacraments and are symbolic of joy and healing respectively, as one of the chanters put it to me afterwards.

10 On the latter, see Luke 1:52–53, "he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (ESV). (A description of the service and an English translation of the liturgical text for artoklasia currently in use may be found in Artoklasia—The Blessing of the Five Loaves n.d.).

11 The "formal" title is also used in the title of the Athens-based Migrant's Association, "*Syndhesmos ton Apandahou Anafaion*" (https://sindesmosanafis.gr, accessed 23 February 2025).

12 In spite of the fact that there is a small chapel dedicated to the saint outside Chora, which would normally be the church where his feast would be celebrated: the fact that the considerably bigger *Koimisi* church has to be used speaks for the popularity of the saint.

13 In the context of this fieldwork and research, the ethnographer had seven portions from seven different *fanouropites* and, while concluding that the Orthodox fast can be quite enjoyable if one is not ascetically disposed, has formed a non-publishable opinion on whose was the best.

14 For a germane reflection on the relationship between theology and quotidian religious practice, see (Kenna 1995).

15 Either an ἀχειροποίητος icon, "not having been made by a human hands", or painted by an unknown painter; there is no consensus among my interlocutors on what Anafiot tradition has to say on this.

16 While the four-day feast of *Kalamiotissa* and the Nativity of the Theotokos is by far the most important religious feast not only of my fieldwork's period, but also of Anafi's year cycle as a whole, Kenna has already described this feast on the basis of fieldtrips in 1966, 1973, and 1987; in spite of the decades that elapsed, quite much has remained unchanged, which I will strive not to merely repeat since the path has been already trodden. Thus, while the feast would deserve more coverage than other feasts in the present paper, I shall restrict myself. See (Kenna 2009, 2017, pp. 131–34, 196–201). (Kenna 2009) includes much information that will not be repeated here; for example, on when the upper and lower monasteries were built, or on the fact that while the lower monastery is dedicated to the feast of *Zoödhohos Piyi*—the Theotokos as the Life-Giving Spring—celebrated on the Friday after Easter, in practice the monastery's major feast is on the Nativity of the Theotokos precisely because it acts, for all intents and purposes, as a more approachable extension of the upper monastery.

17 It is worth noting that while the description of Mount Kalamos as "the second largest monolith in the Mediterranean after Gibraltar" is ubiquitous and always repeated by the Anafiots themselves, it seems that Mount Kalamos is indeed *higher* than the Rock of Gibraltar, the highest point of which is reported as standing at 426 m. "Largest", of course, might mean many things, not necessarily "highest", yet my local interlocutors were not aware that Mount Kalamos is, indeed, of a slightly higher altitude than the Rock of Gibraltar.

[18] Nowadays, and in a country with no shortage of either professional or amateur icon painters, digital reproductions of icons have proliferated: as a result, one might see e.g., the very same John the Baptist, St Nectarios or Christ as the Vine/*Ambelos* icons in the most distant of places in Greece. It is interesting that, to my knowledge, no Greek church hierarch has ever publicly called for at least a *preference* for hand-made, "real" icons in the everyday life of the faithful, despite the fact that, apart from its artistic value, a *painted* icon is an artifact of material piety that is more suitable for prayer and reverence than a lifeless digital reproduction of "actual" icons, the former having been hand-made in prayer and over a considerable amount of time. Kenna notes that color print icons were at one time the most commonly seen and used icons—rather than the other way around (Kenna 1985). Judging from my observations, the Orthodox—clergy and laity alike—do not treat hand-painted and printed icons differently: these are all equally treated as icons worthy of reverence. Specific and usually older icons have their history, of course (often a miraculous one), granting additional importance to them; yet incidents of icons being reported as miracle-working ones have surfaced concerning ready-made, store-bought, printed ones as well.

[19] In previous decades held in the monastery refectory, with local women cooking meat from the monastery's flocks (which no longer exist) after slaughtering the animals; In 1966, Kenna photographically documented this (Kenna 2009, p. 501).

[20] The same was the case in all Anafi liturgies I attended, yet I am singling this liturgy out because more local Anafiots than Athenian Anafiots were present, compared to e.g., the Dormition liturgy; hence, it is trickier to suppose that this was "just" due to the overwhelming presence of Athenian Anafiots.

[21] That is, the *anaphora* prayer, during which the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine are consecrated.

[22] "And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ; [Amen;] And that which is in this Cup, the precious Blood of Your Christ; [Amen;] Changing them by Your Holy Spirit [Amen. Amen. Amen.]".

[23] All passages by Yannaras are translated here in English for the purposes of the present paper by its author, and highlight a facet of Yannaras' thought that is not immediately accessible in Yannaras' works currently translated into English. It is worth noting that Juliet du Boulay offers similar interpretations in her ethnographic work on a Greek Orthodox village (Du Boulay 2009).

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