FATHERS AND FATHERS-IN-LAW[1]

In his recent and polemical review of the state of Mediterranean
anthropology, John Davis is especially critical of achievements
in the study of family and kinship, decrying throughout the loose-
ness and vagueness which pervade the subject and particularly so
when reference is made to 'the importance of the family'. Indeed,
so ill does Davis take the imprecision of accounts dealing with
the family's importance that he proposes largely to ignore that
question, concentrating instead, for purposes of comparison, on
the 'kinds of family, kinds of kinship, kinds of family-like tie'
to be found in the Mediterranean, and defining such 'kinds' by
reference to modes of residence and inheritance and, in general,
to the structural variants of Mediterranean family and kinship
organization.[2]

Since the two best books on Greece, John Campbell's *Honour,
Family and Patronage* (Oxford 1964) and Juliet du Boulay's *Portrait
of a Greek Mountain Village* (Oxford 1974),could both fairly be
described as essentially concerned with family and kinship, or
rather, with the household (and it is a significant ethnographic
fact that in northern Mediterranean societies family and kinship
tend to reduce to the latter), some may feel Davis' judgement to
be a little harsh. Nevertheless I think he has a point. The
imprecision of which Davis complains results not only from the
professional inadequacies of Mediterranean ethnographers, but
also from the actual nature of Mediterranean kinship and the part
it plays (or fails to play) in social organization. For while
it is an easy matter impressionistically to register the import-
ance of the family and of family ties within Mediterranean

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[1] Text of a paper delivered at the Institute of Social Anthro-
pology, Oxford, on 17 October 1980.

[2] J. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean*, London: Routledge and
Kegan Paul 1977, pp. 167.

societies, it is by no means so easy to specify what part they
play in determining social behaviour or in structuring social
life.

There can be little argument with Davis' suggestion that
there are differences to be found between the 'experiences' of
people whose domestic arrangements are variously nuclear or ex-
tended, uxorilocal or virilocal, or who inherit at marriage or
at the death of parents. What is more problematic is whether
these 'experiences', as they relate to kinship and family, are
either exhausted by, reducible to, or comprehensible predominantly
in terms of, 'the application of rules of residence and inheri-
tance', or whether we must enter somewhat murkier fields.   In
fact it is arguable that Mediterranean kinship studies appear to
lack the precision and perhaps even the interest of those con-
ducted in, say, South America or South-East Asia. This is for a
combination of reasons which are partly relative, partly absolute,
but which in both cases result from the limited extent to which
Mediterranean kinship is capable of being viewed in terms of
rules, or of structure: relative, in that the familiar bilateral
kindreds and descriptive cognatic terminologies of Mediterranean
Europe do not allow us to dwell on the formal aspects of kinship
with the same degree of fascination as that aroused by the alien
intricacies of, for example, Crow-Omaha terminologies, or the
practice of asymmetrical exchange; absolute, in that the general
absence of any kinship-based corporate groups other than the
nuclear or extended nuclear family, and equally the paucity of
positive rules regulating or determining conduct between various
categories of kin beyond those which might better be seen as a
series of predispositions in accordance with a shared notion of
'good behaviour', effectively prevent the identity of kinship
organization and social organization of the sort often claimed
for 'primitive' or 'tribal' societies.[3]

And yet family and kinship remain important, both phenomeno-
logically to the members of Mediterranean societies themselves,
and, objectively I think, for any understanding of the nature of
Mediterranean societies. But in that case what one is dealing
with is predominantly a series of values, attitudes, and even -
to use a word not popular in anthropology - sentiments, rather
than a series of social rules or a variety of social structure.
And whilst these may exhibit regularities (indeed, if they did
not we should have to admit that they lay outside the bounds of
sociological analysis), they are nevertheless by their nature
uncertain, labile, and sometimes, from context to context,
contradictory. Thus, although I would claim that Campbell,
du Boulay, and others have described them quite successfully,
it is not surprising that they have also generated those 'loose

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[3] Cf. J. Pitt-Rivers, 'The Moral Foundations of the Family', in
J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Schechem,or the Politics of Sex*,
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977, pp. 71-93.

and vague' remarks about which Davis justifiably complains - for
the attempt to specify with precision (or at least with brevity)
things which are not precise is bound to lead to generalizations
which are either vacuous or trite. On the other hand, to ignore
the accretions of sentiment in favour solely of an account of
modes of residence, inheritance, and whatever else can unequivo-
cally be described, seems to me to leave the better part of what
constitutes Mediterranean kinship unsaid, and consequently to
leave a great deal of what constitutes Mediterranean societies
unsaid.

Let me now turn to some few ethnographic observations, per-
haps in themselves quite trivial, but which will, I think, ill-
ustrate the difficulties involved in studying Mediterranean kin-
ship - at least I find them difficult to deal with.

When I arrived in Spartohori - one of the three villages
on the tiny island (*pace* its name) of Meganisi, a dependency of
the Ionian Island of Lefkas or Lefkada in Western Greece - I
started to collect genealogies; or, if genealogies is too high-
flown a word, since what I collected have no generational depth,
and the Spartohorites themselves do not keep genealogies, I set
about finding out who was related to whom and how. I did this
partly as an act of faith - that something interesting might
come of it; partly because I did not know what else to do and it
seemed an anthropological sort of thing to be getting on with;
but mostly because, whatever the intrinsic value of the exercise,
I thought it not a bad idea to find out as quickly as possible
who everybody was.

The task was not as easy as I had been educated to assume.
First, politeness imposes in a Greek village roughly the same
constraints on inquisitiveness that it does in our own society.
One cannot expect to sit down for a drink with somebody and demand
to be told the number of his siblings, the age of his spouse, and
the extent of his cousinhood. At the very least it does not make
for sparkling conversation and one is either a bit of an irri-
tant or a bit of a bore. But, secondly, I have said 'roughly'
the same constraints. In fact they are greater, for in rural
Greece information is collected continually, but it is never
collected innocently.[4] When matters touch on oneself or one's
own, evasion is an almost instinctive reflex. Lastly, and
somewhat more specifically, if people seemed generally less than
enthralled at the prospect of recounting all their numerous
cousins, nephews and nieces (I do not mean to imply that such
matters were unimportant; they were very important, but reference
to them occurred in what we might call 'strategic circumstances'),
or if they seemed less than enthusiastic about revealing details

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[4] On this point cf. J. du Boulay, *Portrait of a Greek Mountain
Village,op. cit.*, and, by the same author, 'Lies, Mockery and
Deceit', in J.Peristiany (ed.), *Mediterranean Family Structures,*
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [in association with the
Social Research Centre, Cyprus] 1976.

concerning their immediate family, in some cases and with refer-
ence to some categories of relative (notably fathers and married
brothers), responses were so dismissive as to make me think that
what I was encountering was the particular avoidance of certain
subjects rather than the generalized suspicion of all inquiries.
        In the light of these difficulties I began to supplement
increasingly indirect questions with direct observation - simply
noticing who regularly associated with whom, and then checking
on a presumed relationship when some conveniently casual oppor-
tunity arose. In the process I came across what seemed to me a
rather odd phenomenon. The one exception to the general reluct-
ance to talk spontaneously about family matters was to be found
in connection with direct descendants. People were always ready
to talk about their children, or rather about their sons. Old
men continually regaled me with accounts of their offspring's
virtues and of their wordly success (the two were not unrelated).
And yet I suddenly realized that no amount of observation of public
behaviour alone would ever have led me to suspect the existence
of most father/son relationships. I would be told by some fond
parent that his son, Georgos, was shortly to return from the
ships; that he was an incomparable boy; and that certainly I
should make his acquaintance. Days would pass. The old man
would still be sitting in the *kapheneion* with his old cronies,
or, more significantly, even with younger men; but no Georgos.
'Is your son back yet?' I would enquire. 'Yes, days ago,' would
say the old man. And then, very quietly, 'That's him over there,'
discreetly indicating someone at the other side of the room.
'Why don't you go across and talk to him?' But no effort was ever
made actually to introduce me, and the father and son seemed to
maintain a curious distance.
        This sort of situation occurred so frequently that eventua-
lly I was led to ask a number of my old friends why it was that
they never associated with their sons of whom, quite obviously,
they were so proud. Interestingly, my assertion that they did
not was always denied. On some occasions I persisted and adduced
enough evidence of their avoidance to provoke some more elaborate
reply. Generally this consisted of two remarks: inasmuch as
they did not publicly associate with their sons, make a *parea*,
a 'company', with them, then this was because (a) they saw quite
enough of each other at home anyway, or (b) no doubt their sons
preferred to form a *parea* with friends of their own age. All
very reasonable too.
        It is difficult for me to judge how far the first remark
might be correct. Domestic arrangements in Spartohori vary
greatly. Once, patrilocal residence and the importation of
wives under the paternal roof where all lived as an extended
family had been the rule. Nowadays neolocal residence upon
marriage is the more common arrangement. But all sorts of perm-
utations exist in-between: a single house from the outside
internally divided into separate *spitia;* a new house built next
door to and adjoining the paternal *spiti;* an entirely separate
residence at the other end of the village. Degrees of commen-

sality also vary accordingly. Certainly when sons were unmarried and living with their parents, then no doubt they did see a lot of each other; but equally, there were many married sons who, so far as I could gather, saw precious little of their fathers even in the privacy of their respective homes.

The second comment, that sons preferred to associate in public with friends of their own age, was a very plausible evasion. On the whole it was true, and not surprising, that younger men had their younger friends and older men their older friends; but on Meganisi there is no radical generational split. Nor is there, as Margaret Kenna reports for 'Nisi' in the Aegean, an old men's cafe and a young men's cafe.[5] In any case, what generational split one does find is between unmarried men and those who are married with a family, not simply between young and old on a purely age basis. Married men of thirty and married men of sixty or seventy would drink together happily, and this spans the ages of fathers and sons who nevertheless avoided each other. Indeed, when a group of younger men - say, in their thirties - decided really to celebrate, to make a *parea* and to pile the tables with beer (which frequently they did), then there very often was an older man with them, who appeared to be in every sense 'one of the boys', who laughed with them, joked with them, drank with them, danced with them, and who was their very intimate. Almost invariably this older man would be one of the company's fathers-in-law. The fathers, if they were there at all, would be at other tables. At the most they would look on indulgently. But they were never part of the proceedings. The contrast between the two, between parent and affine, between father and father-in-law, could hardly have been greater.

Now we can widen the context of this in the most general way. It is one of the commonplaces of Greek anthropology that the nuclear family, or the extended nuclear family, more simply the *spiti*, the house, containing a married couple, their children, and perhaps a grandparent or -parents, is the basic social, economic and moral unit of rural society. But for all the much-vaunted closeness of this unit, public exhibition of family solidarity is minimal. Indeed, external appearances would almost deny it; for however close and closed the family might be behind its doors (and certainly I am not denying this), in public it immediately fragments. Family unity is replaced by other orderings and groupings virtually as soon as the house's threshold is passed - and the more public the context, the greater the degree of family dispersal. Conventions of the public realm seem almost the converse of the private.

The pre-dawn caique from Meganisi to Lefkada provides a convenient setting. Families exit from their houses together. They even walk together through the night down the steep zig-zag road

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[5] M. Kenna, *Property and Ritual Relationships on a Greek Island*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent 1971.

cut into the face of the cliff on which Spartohori perches to the
molos, the quay, some three or four hundred feet below. Passing
families greet each other. But once the caique is reached, which,
for a couple of hours becomes a sort of floating microcosm of the
village, another ordering takes effect. Sexual division, of course,
is primary. Even with fifty people packed into a fifteen-metre
caique one never finds husband and wife together. The women con-
gregate in huddled groups, knitting, gossiping, or being sea-sick;
the men sit or stand together, talking, smoking cigarettes, or
pacing from one end of the boat to the other. Little children
pass between. But if the caique compresses the village into the
confines of a few feet so that the two worlds of men and women,
the *kapheneion* and the door-step, are revealed with fresh clarity
as a result of their proximity, so too are other divisions.
Brothers will congregate; brothers and brothers-in-law will con-
gregate; fathers-in-law and sons-in-law will congregate, all as
part of the general male mêlée. But, once again, one will never
find father and son together. Somehow they contrive to be at
opposite ends of the boat. Only when it docks in Lefkada will
there be a reformation as the family reunites to go about its
(commercial) business.

We might note briefly in passing that there is a sense in
which the church contributes to these separations. In fact the
Spartohorites are not church-goers and are staunchly anti-
clerical. Only a handful of old women attend regular services.
But when there are full or reasonably full congregations - at
weddings, baptisms, or at Easter - then, in accordance with tradi-
tional Orthodox practice everywhere, men and women are separated
in the body of the church, even entering by separate doors.
Equally there tend to be separations within the sexes: young
unmarried men, older married men, matrons and maidens, gather
apart. Despite the fact that so much of Orthodox ritual, symbol-
ism and morality is directed towards the maintenance and sanctity
of the family, the church itself, belonging to the public sphere,
is not a place of united worship. A family that stays together
nevertheless prays separately.

Only on quite exceptional public occasions does the family
present itself to the world as the unity it doubtless is: at
the *panayiria,* the festivals celebrating one village saint or
another, or at Christmas. Then the family is on show. In or
outside the *kapheneion* generally reserved for men, families now
sit in groups, each at its own table, the women dressed in their
best, their children ranged around them, one family sending
bottles of beer to another, but always through the medium of the
waiter who names the donor to be acknowledged across the room.
The men may become a little boisterous as drinking and dancing
progress, but it seems that the more staid the proceedings manage
to remain, the more people congratulate themselves afterwards.
'It was a very nice *panayiri*. All the families together. This
is *politismos,* "civilisation".' I suspect that this attitude
is in part a result of Spartohori's growing *embourgeoisement*.

Nevertheless, in a more low-key way, formality is of the
essence of Spartohorian social life. This may not be immediately

evident, for it does not consist of pomp and circumstance. But,
throughout, an undeniable etiquette is in force. The constitu-
tion of the *parea*, the group of friends drinking together, is a
case in point. There are some seven places in Spartohori where
one might drink, referred to simply as *ta magazia*, 'the shops',
and in a village where, to be frank, there is not usually a great
deal to do, sitting in the shops approaches for many a full-time
occupation. Men casually drift from one to the other throughout
the day. But not *so* casually. In fact, on entering a shop,
only one of three things can happen: either there is an empty
table, in which case one may sit down; or else those already
seated at a table will cry *'katse na pioume'*('sit down [with us]
that we may drink'); or else, if all tables are occupied, even by
one man, and no invitation is forthcoming, one must leave. I do
not mean to imply that this last alternative creates a continual
series of social *impasses*. Since people are always wandering in,
wandering out, standing in doorways, rocking on their heels and
walking in small circles as the day slowly passes, no obvious
social embarrassment is caused (though in fact the degree to
which one is or is not invited, greeted or not greeted, does enter
into the never-ending computation of one's social worth). But
what is certainly the case is that on no account may one simply
sit down with others uninvited.

   Such behaviour will not seem entirely strange to us. But in
Spartohori the etiquette is carried further, or never relaxed.
There are, after all, only about two hundred adult males permanently
in the village, all of whom have known each other from birth, some-
times for seventy years; further, they may have been drinking
together elsewhere not half an hour before. But on each occasion
the invitation must be extended - and one of the resultant oddi-
ties is that one may enter a shop to find a dozen tables and a
dozen men, one man at each table, all joined in mutual conversa-
tion, but everyone with, as it were, his inviolable space around
him. It is this situation which makes so apparent the associa-
tions and avoidances of certain categories of kin. Father and
son may well be at the same time in the same shop. They may even
be engaged in the same conversation. But they will never be at
same table. And if one analyses the composition of the larger
parees, then they are very likely to consist of brothers, brothers-
in-law, and sons-in-law and fathers-in-law.[6]

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[6] In the light of the discussion which followed the original pre-
sentation of this paper it is perhaps necessary to clarify a
possible confusion. If a man will not make company with his father,
then it follows that he cannot simultaneously make company with
(a) his sister's husband and (b) his sister's husband's father-in-
law, since that father-in-law will be his own father. He can, how-
ever, make company simultaneously with his sister's husband and his
own father-in-law. Merely to put matters the other way round, he
cannot simultaneously make company with his wife's brother and his
own father-in-law, but he can simultaneously make company with his
wife's brother and his wife's brother's father-in-law.

The fragmentation of the family in public, the etiquette by
which it is apparent, forms the most general context for our
purposes. But let us now consider what Davis emphasizes: the rules
of residence and inheritance. The Spartohorites adhere to an
arrangement quite familiar, though not absolutely standard, through-
out Greece. Daughters receive dowries, usually monetary, at the
time of their marriage; sons inherit the paternal property by
equal division at the time of their father's death, of which the
most important element is the family house. Furthermore, as I
have mentioned, in the past sons brought their wives under the
paternal roof until the time of their father's death and the
division of the estate. This practice is dying out as neolocal
residence on marriage becomes more the norm, and it was always,
I think, a practice modified by the exigencies of poverty and
emigration. But, as Davis suggests, the arrangement is a recipe
for tension. Sons tended to remain economically dependent on
aged or ageing fathers well into the time when their own families
were making economic demands on their resources; they remained
to an extent under his authority well into the time when, as grown
men, their desire to assert their independence was imperative.
Brothers, equally, found themselves with conflicting interests
as their respective families grew. Resentment bred.
        The effects of these traditional rules of inheritance are, I
think, well documented. But before one asserts, following Davis,
that such rules are always the crux of the matter, one should
note that they have the effect they do only because they are at
odds with something else less tangible but equally powerful (and
of which, to be fair, Davis is fully aware): the desire of each
man to stand independently at the head of his own household in a
community of isolated individuals and equals where everyone is
striving to be more equal than anyone else. The rules of inheri-
tance and residence hold together by force what otherwise would
fragment, and does fragment, as soon as the constraints are re-
moved. The situation is paradoxical because each 'nuclear'
family, whose integrity is writ large by accepted morality, con-
tains within it the seeds of other nuclear families which must
burst it asunder. The son is father to the man.
        But one must not see this simply in terms of a conflict
between 'practice' on the one hand and 'ideology' or 'values' on
the other, as if the former were merely a doomed attempt to em-
body the latter. Values themselves are contradictory; or at least,
since 'values' cover a multitude of sins, one would want to dis-
tinguish between values in the sense of what is held to be right,
proper, and good, and values in the sense of what continually
inform a person's apperception and expectancy of the world. It
is right and proper that fathers and sons should be close and
cherish each other. 'To love someone like a son' is a standard
simile. An uncle may say it of his nephew. Similarly, brothers
are held to be the paradigm of the affectionate masculine rela-
tionship of equality. *'Imaste philoi; imaste adherphia,'* 'We are
friends; we are brothers,' is a standard coupling. And yet on
other occasions men have little compunction about rueing the

absence of daughters, for a daughter will always care for you,
while as for sons - what are they good for? Only the house and
the name. And while brothers do fulfil their role as mutual
friends and companions when younger, everyone waits for them to
fall out. A screaming match takes place in the village over the
infringement of property, and an old woman simply shrugs her
shoulders and comments, 'Hah, brothers again!'

At this point it is worth recalling that all my informants
at first denied that they did not keep company with their sons,
for whatever it is that the rules of residence and inheritance
create, it is not a set of ritualized, rule-governed actions or
unambiguous concepts of social roles and requirements. Rather,
they create a set of tensions and predispositions - sentiments
which find their concrete expression within the possibilities
supplied by the norms of good conduct or social etiquette. This
being the case, the old men were not necessarily lying to me.
There was no rule, there is no rule, concealed from me which
states that father and son must not sit together or drink to-
gether or associate in public together. Rather, they feel a
certain unease in each other's presence, an unease borne of a
contradiction which, in public, places them simultaneously in
both a hierarchial and an equal relationship: hierarchial in
that they are father and son, equal in that they are both adult
males of the village. This sensitivity to the situation, which,
like a sensitivity to language, always exceeds the comprehension
of its underlying structure or grammar, drives them to adopt a
stance, or perhaps we should say a chair, whose isolation is
already sanctioned by the daily practices of social intercourse.
The assertion 'You never make company with your sons' could thus
be denied, because there was no explicit formulation, no 'coll-
ective representation', which matched the generalization I had
arrived at by the process of observation. If reflection on what
I had presented to them as an account of their behaviour could
in the end result in a modified form of assent, it was never-
theless modified because it might seem to challenge what was a
deeply held moral idea - that fathers and sons should enjoy a
close relationship. After all, the counter-instances of amity
and cooperation within the household and even, on certain occa-
sions, the public presentation of the family in its unity, could
always and truthfully be adduced, even if, in other cases, tensions,
quarrels and bad-feeling were real enough.

The existence of observable regularities on the one hand,
and on the other hand their failure to congeal into a set of
codified practices or explicit ideological statements of the sort
we are pleased to call 'collective representations' is what, to
my mind, makes the study of Mediterranean kinship both difficult
and uncertain. For these regularities are but the manifestations
of certain collectively-held and collectively-endorsed emotions,
persuasions, predispositions, which, however much they may be
nurtured within a particular social structure, are neither its
necessary consequences nor, as organizing or basic 'concepts',
its integral parts. The question of father and son, for example,

can be taken the other way around from the point of view of the
latter. If traditionally, and as in so many parts of Greece,
young men on Meganisi do not smoke in front of their fathers even
within the house, nowadays many are beginning to do so, asserting
all the time that they 'respect' their fathers and that it is
precisely the closeness of their relationship with their father
and his confidence in their affection and respect which allows
them to do so. In the relationships between kin one approaches a
morality which, like any morality, manifests itself in behaviour;
but one does not encounter a series of rules which categorically
determine the precise forms of that behaviour. If a father is
offended by his son's smoking, then no good son will smoke in his
presence; but if he is not, then smoking is permitted. What
remains basic is the question of respect. And further, while
there may be a definable 'concept' of respect, it is not the con-
cept, but the sentiment, which informs behaviour.

Such sentiments are, as I have been ready to admit, nurtured
within the context of specific social structures,within, for
example, the rules of residence and inheritance. The degree of
their autonomy, however, might be considerable. One can at least
argue that they are capable of persisting historically beyond the
desuetude of those rules. As I have already mentioned, neolocal
residence upon marriage is now the norm; furthermore, except in
very rare instances, on Meganisi sons are no longer economically
dependent on their fathers or on their inheritances. They are
now wealthy in their own right, and wealthy from an early age,
as a result of their employment in shipping. It is their fathers,
the generation of agriculturalists and fishermen, who are the poor,
and very few young Meganisiotes have any intention of returning
to their parents' way of life. Such an economic shift has its
social correlates, notably a remarkable drop in the age of marr-
iage, which, in turn, might be construed as involving a change
in the nature of the relationship between father and son. For it
is not only the case that men are now financially secure enough
to marry young, but also that they feel the right to choose their
own bride rather than to attend their father's choice. There is
little doubt that some old men thus feel their authority to have
been eroded and that some young men are frankly embarrassed by
their fathers, but 'respect' for one's father, along with the
habits of distance that I have described, still remain the idiom
of the relationship. And if at times an element of hypocrisy on
the one side and of self-deception on the other side have crept
into that relationship, one might hazard that respect is somewhat
easier to feign than love - which, of course, might always have
been the case.

But for all that, it is not difficult to construct a quite
plausible and neat explanation in terms of traditional social
structure and the rules of residence and inheritance for the
contrasting relationship of a man and his father-in-law. First,
except in slightly abnormal instances, the case of the *'sogambros,*
the man who marries an heiress, a brotherless daughter, and works
her land and resides in her family's house, men were neither

economically dependent on nor under the authority of their
fathers-in-law. Actually, during the nineteenth century and
earlier part of this century the number of *'sogambroi* must have
been quite high, for one of the ways in which Meganisi's popula-
tion built up was the gradual settlement there of shepherds from
the mountain villages of Lefkada who seasonally transferred their
flocks to the little island for winter pasturage. Such settlements
seem usually to have involved a marriage. But in most cases of
'sogambroi which I know of, the father of the girl (or girls) was
already dead by the time of the marriage. In any case it seems
unlikely that the number of *'sogambroi* would ever have been
sufficient to alter the prevalent pattern of inheritance and
residence, which was, of course, the importation of brides into
the paternal household or, to put it another way, the exchange
of women between agnatic households. Further, not only was a man
not economically dependent on his father-in-law for his long-term
wealth, his inheritance; he was also the recipient of an imme-
diate prestation from his father-in-law: to wit, a dowry.
     But there are, I think, factors more important than this,
though still pertaining to the traditional 'social structure' of
the village; for it would be a somewhat shaky general sociological
law that proposed inheritance from a father to engender a dis-
tanced relationship while the immediate effect of receiving a
dowry would be to create a relationship of affectionate and
familiar amity. After all, why should not one feel beholden to
one's father-in-law for both dowry and daughter, that feeling also
being translated into a public attitude of respect? Rather, I
think, we must reconsider the independence, economic and moral,
of each male-headed *spiti* or household.
     All Spartohori's village ritual of marriage, from the wedding
songs and the pattern of after-service feastings to the bride's
formal reception at the door of her new house by her father- and
mother-in-law (a somewhat faked procedure these days given the
prevalence of neolocal residence), not to mention the weeping,
spontaneous enough, of the bride's mother, stresses the bride's
departure from one closely-knit world, that of her parents'
spiti, and her entry into a new and strange one, that of her
husband's family. In fact the whole shift might be considered
rather more 'conceptual' than actual, since the move might be no
more than twenty-five yards down the road, and daughters continue
to have a very close relationship with their natal family, both
parents and siblings. Younger sisters turn out to be ideal
baby-minders, and, as I have already mentioned, it is one of the
clichés of at least one genre of discourse that daughters are
better than sons because they continue to care for their parents
while sons often do not. That mother and daughter never become
estranged is a firm belief, and true also - for all I know.
Indeed kinship reckoning is thoroughly bilateral, and with res-
pect to the terminology, more so than our own. In practice,
grandparents dote on and see as much of their daughters' children
as of their sons' children, and the purpose of the dowry is often
explained in terms of a benefit to one's daughter's children.

There is perhaps something of a contradiction between the bilat-
erality of Greek kinship reckoning and the agnatic composition
of the individual *spitia*. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt
that marriage is seen as representing the departure of a woman
from one household and her entry into a new and 'foreign' one.

Taking that situation at face value, one could, in the best
structural-functionalist tradition, see the amity between father-
in-law and son-in-law as an attempt to deny, or at least mitigate,
the loss that the one household and the gain that the other house-
hold have incurred. Their friendship forms, as it were, a bridge
between their respective and self-contained families, between two
of those independent economic and moral unities which Peristiany
has termed 'social isolates moving in a field of common values'.[7]
The antagonism which always exists not far beneath the surface
between one family and another, between one *spiti* and another, is
ostentatiously suspended by the formation of a relationship which,
though it overlays one of kinship (for the respective parties are,
after all, affines, *sympetheroi*), nevertheless must take on an
additional social form in order to unite entities whose isolation
in general takes little account of the extensiveness of bilateral
kinship: namely, the form of 'friendship'.

Here we should note that despite the manifold importance of
kinship in many contexts, there is a strong and often articulated
feeling that,at least as soon as one moves beyond the confines of
the household, 'friends' are better than relatives. This lauding
of friendship over and above kinship has as its basis the fact
that one can after all *choose* one's friends, whereas one is stuck
with one's relatives. However, if only to disconcert the literal-
minded, the idiom of kinship shortly reappears. I discovered
that two old men, fast friends throughout their lives, were in
fact related. I reproached them for never having mentioned this
fact, and was told that the omission was entirely justifiable
since what was important was that they were friends, not that they
were in some way related. 'Why, we're friends,' they said.
'Indeed, we're brothers.' By a permutation of the logic of this
discourse, one could perhaps claim that affines, fathers-in-law
and sons-in-law, can, owing to the weak nature of their actual
kinship connection (for it extends beyond the household), thus
approach through 'friendship' that ideal egalitarian relation-
ship of 'brotherhood', whereas fathers and sons are doomed to be
what they are: i.e. you can be a brother to your wife's father,
but you're always just a son to your dad. Admittedly I never did
hear things taken quite so far, but that a larger drinking *parea,*
it will be recalled, did often comprise precisely brothers,
brothers-in-law, and a father-in-law.

Indeed, in this context we might note the usage of some fur-
ther extended or honorific kinship terms. For if it would be

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[7] J.G. Peristiany, 'Honour and Shame in a Cypriot Village', in
J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame,* London: Weidenfeld and
Nicolson 1965, p. 179.

frankly impertinent to greet a stranger as a brother (that would be
to imply indecent familiarity), one can greet a stranger, as I
myself was greeted on a number of occasions, with the words
'koumbare mou' or *'sympethere mou'*, 'my godfather' or 'my affine'
- both kinship terms of course, but both implying or proffering
friendship, and implying or proffering friendship not, I think,
only as a reflection of the actual state of affairs, i.e. that one
usually is on good terms with a god-parent or affine, but, to
reverse the logic, because both god-parenthood and affinity are
by definition contractual relationships, relationships of choice;
and in Greece at least, one neither baptizes nor marries one's
enemies. In fact it was always said that, in the days before
young men and women made up their own minds about such matters
(something dubiously stressed to me in the interests of 'modernism'),
it was the father-in-law who chose his son-in-law. They were the
contracting parties. So if by definition one gave one's daughter
to a 'friend', even nowadays, or in the face of what I suspect
always to have been the truth of the matter - that women played
the major role in match-making - one might still be well-advised
to be a friend to one's daughter's husband. Indeed, in a society
where there are no systematic marriages and no prescribed marriage
partners, but where marriage is still deemed to involve more than
the romance of a couple, affinity is the interface *par excellence*
between friendship and kinship.

Such then, I hope, would be a plausible account of the re-
lationship in traditional anthropological terms. But in the end
I cannot help wondering if there is not yet more in play: further
murky areas into which we are advised not to stray and about which,
in any case, my villagers would not conceivably talk - the feelings
that a man might have towards the person who sleeps with his
daughter; even perhaps his own feelings towards the daughter her-
self. Less dangerously, our own saying at marriage might be even
more apt for the (Meganisiote) Greeks: 'Don't think of it as losing
a daughter, but of gaining a son'; that a man might enjoy with his
son-in-law precisely the relationship which is at once enjoined
and denied him with his son.

ROGER JUST