

# MEDITERRANEAN VALUES: The Honour and the sShame of Hospitality<sup>1</sup>

ANGELIKA ERGAVER

---

## Abstract

The social historians and anthropologists presented the concept of honour and shame as the values of Mediterranean society. However, the concepts of honour and shame can be detected in various spheres of social interaction as well as in different cultures around the world. Traditional customs of hospitality are a sphere where one can experience honour or suffer shame and dishonour. The customs of hospitality include traditional legal institutions, the asylum and the safe escort. Although the institutions of asylum and escort are now in the domain of the international law, they are also a part of the common legal tradition.

## Honour and Shame as Values of the Mediterranean in the Domain of Social and Historical Anthropology

The concept of honour and shame as Meditteranean Values was introduced in the late 1950's and early 1960's with a volume edited by John

Angelika Ergaver, Institute of Nova Revija, Ljubljana

---

1 Izlaganje na konferenciji "Europa regija i mediteran. Kamo ide Hrvatska?", Split, 23. listopada 2015. (Paper presented an the conference "Europa regija i mediteran. Kamo ide Hrvatska?", Split, 23 October 2015).

G. Peristiany titled precisely *Honour and Shame, The Values of the Mediterranean society* (Peristiany, 1965). The volume includes papers of prominent social historians and social anthropologists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Ahmed Abou-Zeid, Julian Pitt-Rives, J. K. Campbell who each researched the phenomenon of honour and shame within their chosen society within the Mediterranean region (Peristiany, 1965.a: 16). In his research on social structure and dynamics amongst the Sarakatsani people<sup>2</sup> in Greece, conducted in the mid 1950's, John K. Campbell noticed that "*Sarakatsani were deeply concerned about three things: sheep, children ...and honour*" (Horden & Purcell 2000: 489).

Introducing the concept of honour as the leading pair of values in the society as such, J. G. Peristiany states: "Honour is the apex of the social pyramid of temporal social values and it conditions their hierarchical order. Cutting across all other social classifications it divides social beings into two fundamental categories, those endowed with honour and those deprived of it" (Peristiany 1965.a: 10). According to this concept, each society had an internal division of its population. There were people who were honourable and people who had no honour. However, the honour as a type of social prestige was fragile and was easily threatened by verbal insults. In some cases, even subtle gestures could indicate mockery. Therefore, honour was something one had to compete for constantly. The fight for honour and fear of shame was present at various levels of private and public social interaction and it affected both men and women. Although the research of social anthropologists confirmed that women in patriarchal, pastoral or primordial communities had their own honour and chastity, it was the role of the men to fight for honour, protect it, sustain it and recover it, not just for themselves but also for the women in their protection (Horden & Purcell 2000: 498-490). One, who failed to protect his honour or the honour of those under his protection, was dishonoured. Therefore, one was forced to constantly prove and assert himself (Peristiany 1965: 11). Peristiany also noted that all societies have their own forms of honour and shame, where one gains his honour by following the socially acceptable norms, however, one's disability or refusal to follow the norms, results in shame (Peristiany 1965: 10).

---

2 Campbell, J.K. (1964.): *Honour, Family and Patronage. A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* Oxford (Horden P. & Purcell, N., 2000: 659).

Therefore, the concept of honour and shame as values of the Mediterranean unity suggests that the polarity between honour and shame presents one of the key driving forces of social dynamics. Furthermore, the concept indicates that honour and shame as polar opposite values or anti-values originate or are somehow endemic to the Mediterranean region, subtly implying that the region has no other common elements of unity (Horden & Purcell 2000: 488).

Later, the concept of honour and shame as values that would contribute to the unification of the Mediterranean was critically scientifically re-evaluated by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in one of the chapters of their monograph, *The Corrupting Sea* (Horden & Purcell 2000: 485-523). The authors stressed that the honour and shame by no means have any proven exclusively Mediterranean origin or originality, as similar notions of honour and shame can be found in different societies across the world (Horden & Purcell 2000: 489-522). Nonetheless, the notions of honour and shame are still present in our subconscious and can manifest themselves in various aspects of human interaction, one of which is also hospitality.

### **The Ancient Link Between the Concept of Honour and Shame and the Hospitality**

When trying to link the concepts of honour and shame in the Mediterranean area with the customs of hospitality, there is no particular need of some in-depth field research to prove that these links in fact exist. In this case, some introspection and reflection is necessary to come up with a practical example that supports it. The Mediterranean region is renowned by its hospitality. Even in the region of Dalmatia, where there is not, I dare to say, one local inhabitant who would be completely unfamiliar with the practical side of honour and shame in hospitality in the modern era of growing tourism.

If guests are pleased with the arrangements, provided by the tourist agencies and the hospitality of the local hosts, the guest's satisfaction brings great amount of pride and honour to the local hosts. If, however, there is a slightest incident, especially where guests are harmed or are being unjustly treated by the locals, it brings dishonour and shame to the hosts. Furthermore, the shame practically shows itself in a form of bad reputation, which is precisely what the men in societies that were

researched by social historians and anthropologists, feared (Peristiany, 1965: 11; Horden & Purcell 2000: 498-490).

The customs of hospitality, as well as the notions of honour and shame, exist in many cultures across the world. However, some of the oldest traces of customs of hospitality come from the ancient Mediterranean. According to the archaeological research, the ancient Mesopotamians' houses had possible guest chambers. In the epic poem of Gilgamesh, the guest was accompanied a prayer on his departure, which seems to have been a custom. The refusal of the guest, who asked for a place to stay over the night, was considered as an extremely hostile gesture and a deep insult that could potentially trigger the wrath and revenge of the gods. The refusal of a guest was perceived identical to Gilgamesh refusing the goddess Ishtar. (Skok 2011: 23). As Martina Skok compared, similar customs of hospitality are found all across the Mediterranean, as the ancient Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Romans followed similar traditions regarding honorary hospitality (Skok, 2011 26-53).

The Greek tradition reports that each traveller was under the protection of god Zeus Xenios, who is also known regarding other epithets such as *Philoxenon*, or *Hospites*. Within this ancient Greek tradition "*Zeus was the patron of hospitality (gr.xenia) and guests as well as the avenger of wrongs done to strangers*" (Zeus Xenios: URL source), which means each traveller was under the divine protection of the highest of the Greek gods.

In the ancient times, it was unusual for merchants to travel alone. People who were seeking hospitality of the locals in the area, through which they were travelling, were usually people who for whatever reason had to travel alone. Such individuals were most likely those who had been exiled or had fled from their communities of origin. Banishment was common social repercussion for the wrong someone had had inflicted to another person, breaking the norms of peaceful coexistence within their own groups of origin, which consequently meant that lone travellers were possible targets of the blood revenge and could possibly be on a flea from blood (Rovinskij 1994: 247-250).

Therefore, it was also a custom when accepting a person into the house not to ask them about where they were from, what their names were and where they were going. By offering housing to a stranger, the master of the house was aware that his guest was a potential wrongdoer,



Jupiter and Mercurius in the House of Philemon and Baucis (1630–33) by the workshop of Peter Paul Rubens (Graphic material 1: URL Source)

but he nonetheless offered him his hospitality, being afraid of the divine punishment if he declined the customs of hospitality.

The painting by the workshop of Peter Paul Rubens, titled *Jupiter and Mercurius in the house of Philemon and Baucis* (1630-1633) represents the Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes who were testing the hospitality of villagers and punished the ones who declined their hospitality and rewarded those who selflessly offered their home to them (Xenia (Greek): URL Source).

According to the customs of hospitality, a traveller humbly asked the master of the house to accept him as a guest. If the master of the house accepted guest's humble request, he then promised to offered the guest housing, food, shelter and protection to a stranger (Hospitium: URL Source).

Customary traditions of the Albanians as well as the Montenegrins as late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century indicate the exact same rules of hos-

pitality. The person in trouble asked for protection and housing at someone's home with honest and humble request for help and a plea to enter into a pact of protection in accordance to the custom of god-fatherhood (Medaković 1860, 62-63). By accepting the guest into his home, the master of the house took the responsibility of the guest's well-being as well as the guest's behaviour during his stay. If something was to happen to the guest, the custom of the hospitality was violated and the honour of the house was shamed and the master of the house was to avenge the damage done to the guest. If however the guest harmed another person during the time of the hospitality, the master of the house had to take the responsibility for the behaviour of his guest, as the guest in the Albanian tradition is considered untouchable (KLD, KLD, § 602 – § 666; Pupovci 2011, 12). Concerning God and hospitality there is a particular phrase in Albanian customary tradition, namely, that the Albanian house belongs to god and the guest (KLD, § 602). The hospitality in itself was not only an honorary act but also a god like-behaviour.

### **Hospitality and Housing (Asylum, Sanctuary) in the Religious Domain of the Divine Hospitality**

The divine quality of hospitality is presented also in the Christian tradition. The texts of the Old Testament such as Deutonomy testify that the offering of sanctuary existed in the common law. It was not unusual for the killers or criminals to seek sanctuary in private houses or in public buildings such as courts and markets. This common law practice was later incorporated into the written law. It became a formal legal principle and it influenced the idea of sanctuary in Medieval Europe (Smail&Gibson 2009: 7; doc. 4).

Some of the earliest monasteries were placed in the vast lands (Stopar, 2009). In accordance with the idea of God's Mercy, they often offered shelter, housing and protection for the pilgrims (Lonzi&Lonzi 2007: 18). Since the majority of monk orders were closed and strict orders (Stopar, 2009: 24) and no civilian could enter the premises of the monastery, the monasteries gradually built attached complexes in the immediate surroundings of the monastery or the outer walls of the monastery. The Cistercian monastery of Stična had a guesthouse for guests of the nobility with a stable for horses on the ground floor (Stopar 2009: 21). These types of buildings were called hospitiums, which is obviously a word



Hospitium at the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey. (Graphic material 2.: URL Source)

that has a similar ethimological root as the hospitality (Hospitium: URL Source). In the year of our Lord of 1259, the Carthusian friar order of Žiče was given the privileges to look after the hospitium (or hospice) on a mountain passage of Semering in Austria (Stopar 2009: 46).

Another very famous medieval hospitium is located at the ruins of the St. Mary's Abbey in York in Britain. The abbey was destroyed in the Middle ages, but the hospitium remained. (St. Mary's Abbey of York: URL Source).

Russian ethnographer Pavel Apolonović Rovinski who did his research in Montenegro in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and published his work in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, said that the Montenegrin customs of hospitality include two institutions, the asylum (shelter) and the safe conduct (escort) (Rovinski-Vukčević 1994; 248, 252). The asylum is a term that derives from the ancient Greek tradition, from where it transmitted to the ancient Romans. The asylum referred to as a place for people to seek refuge when facing persecution. These locations were predominately sacred, such as temples and other religious sites (Asylum: URL Source). This note confirms the continuation of the traditions of hospitality, carried out by religious institutions from the antiquity onwards. By being granted the customs of hospitality by the master of the house (or the monastery in this case), the exiled or the banned person received the institution of asylum that includes shelter, food and protection (Rovinski-Vukčević 1994; 248, 252).

The position of the monasteries and their role in hospitality began to change throughout the early modern period. As the cities started to de-



velop, the clergy also moved closer to the city. In the Republic of Ragusa, for example, there were two more influential friar orders, each placed at the opposite side of the city walls where they provided protection for the city, but they also provided hospitium for the travellers. The monk orders in Dubrovnik also organized quarantines for the travellers and sailors who came from the sea to make sure they were not carrying any illnesses (Voje 2011:117-133). Consequently, the medieval hospitium as a building gradually became a term for a present day hospital, a place where people received shelter, food, protection and medical attention.

In Slovenian language, there is a particular germanised term for a hospice, namely "špital". The hospices were placed within the city walls and were in the domain of the imperial, state and city authorities as well as in the domain of the church orders (Vrhovec 1898). The word "špital" later became a synonym (SSKJ: špital) for a poor house where marginalized social groups, the beggars and the orphans could receive food, shelter and basic medical attention (Vrhovec 1898: 73-75; 82-94).

It is interesting how the hospitality and its institutions are closely linked and intertwined into the common European tradition. The root of the word hospitality is found in medieval hospitiums that were later transformed into hospices, hospitals and "špitals". The asylum, the legal institution that was provided to a traveller based on the customs of hospitality, is now known as an international institution for protection of foreign citizens. The asylum, however, is also an expression for an institution for (semi)permanent confinement of individuals that had gone insane or are of some sort of threat to the society and therefore marginalized (Asylum 1: URL Source).

All these terms show how closely the terms surrounding the customs of hospitality are intertwined into our present day life and testify of the common customary legal traditions.

## **Hospitality and Safe Conduct**

The second legal institution that was granted to the guest upon his arrival or acceptance into the home or better yet, upon his departure from the host's house was, according to the customs of hospitality, safe conduct, as mentioned earlier. According to the customs of hospitality that were recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Albania and are found in the collection of customary norms, Kanun of Leke Dukagjin (KLD) (Vukčević



2011) guests were given special privileges in the house of their host. Upon their departure, however, the guests were offered safe conduct at least to the property borderline of host, or to whatever place the guest himself wished or asked to be escorted to (KLD, § 621-§ 624). These privileges of hospitality were given to the guest upon his acceptance into the house and were not to be violated or the honour of the house and the master of the house was shamed (KLD, §601-§ 620).

There is a particular case of the violation of hospitality and the custom of safe conduct that was recorded in the tales of the Montenegrin people by before mentioned Russian ethnographer Pavel A. Rovinski. The story talks about an Albanian tribesman from the Hoti tribe. The man from the Hoti tribe offered his hospitality to a man from the Kuči tribe of the Montenegrin Highlands, the area also known as the Crnogorska Brda. The host, in this case the Albanian Hoti tribesman, was unable to provide his guest with safe conduct personally, and nor were any of his house members. Therefore, the Hoti man offered the Kuči man his dog as a mean of safe conduct. According to the Albanian tradition, the dog itself represented the hospitality of the master of the house and showed exactly under whose protection the person with a particular dog was. The man from the Kuči tribe was apparently someone who had fled to Hoti tribe due to blood revenge and was killed after he had departed his host's house. His escort, the dog, was killed as well. Since the customs of hospitality are not to be broken and the guest's life has to be avenged for (KLD, §640-§652), the Hoti man, the master of the house in this case, had to take his revenge by custom. Therefore, he killed four men to compensate for his honour. The first was for the life and honour of his guest who had been killed. The second was for the dog that was his property; the third revenge was also for the dog, as the dog in the Albanian tradition is a member of the household, and the fourth blood revenge was for the violation of hospitality and the honour of the household (Rovinski-Vukčević 1994: 252)

The customary legal institution of safe conduct that is recorded in the customs of hospitality developed other meanings over the course of the centuries in accordance with the development of the society, the state law and the international law. The following picture represents a safe conduct document that was issued for the safe conduct of the surrendering German soldiers after the capitulation of Germany in the Second World War. The German soldier carrying this document offered



Safe conduct document for German soldiers in 1944  
(Graphic material 3: URL Source)

himself to surrender to the opponent. According to this document the surrendering German soldier was to be unarmed, that means he was to give up his weapons and give himself to the mercy of the victorious army, in this particular case to the British or the US army, since this document is issued in English.

As we see further from this document, the surrendering soldier was to receive some benefits. He is to be well look after, receive food, shelter and medical attention. Meaning, he is to enjoy all the components of the hospitality we have already seen in other cases of hospitality. This indicates that the customs of hospitality are a part of the common legal tradition and are found in many similar forms throughout the centuries and in different communities. Therefore, the customs of hospitality, along with the customary legal institutions that are its key components, could represent a better case for unity, not only within the Mediterranean, but globally.

### **Test of Hospitality and Common Mediterranean Traditions**

As the entire Europe is facing an extreme emigrant crisis, it is important to stress, that the countries of the Mediterranean have shown their hospitality to immense masses of people. The acceptance of large number of emigrants was encouraged by the leading authorities of the European

Union. The member states showed their hospitality by offering shelter, food and medical attention to the emigrants, which coincides with the ancient customary institution of asylum. The asylum as an international institution of protection of foreign citizens also falls into the same concept of hospitality. Furthermore, the emigrants had a possibility to be safely escorted through the unknown areas and were in some cases transported precisely up to the borders of each country, which is similar to the customary institution of safe conduct.

Although the asylum and the safe conduct are nowadays international legal terms and institutions that are based on the international agreements and treaties, I cannot but stress that these are actually traditions of customary law that derive from the customs of hospitality and are a part of common cultural and legal heritage.

The ancient Greeks accepted guests because they were afraid of the wrath, the anger and the punishment of the god Zeus Xenios. Nowadays, we are accepting masses of emigrants (guests) being aware that the roles of the host and the guest could someday be reversed and the present hosts are going to be the ones in need of someone's hospitality. Hospitality is a part of the common tradition, connected to high standard of moral values of an individual and the society.

The traditional customs of hospitality were perceived as divine, highly moral and god-like behaviour and they are designed to bring great honour and perhaps also some sense of karmic satisfaction to the ones who decide to honour the tradition and the hospitality itself. The ancient traditions of hospitality indicate that each traveller who asked for the sanctuary had to do so humbly and with respect for the master of the house. However, not all people are the same, not everyone is inclined towards honouring of the traditional values and not everyone respects the customs of hospitality. In regards to the emigrant wave, we were able to see some cases of violation of the customs of hospitality, and I am referring to the guests as well as the hosts.

The future of the areas connected by the Mediterranean Sea often seems uncertain and looking into the future can be frightening. In the present, each region of the European Union is trying to preserve its uniqueness and originality. The unity is in commonness and the respect for diversity, stressing the importance of the preservation of cultural heritage. As I have managed to show, the common legal traditions,

connected with the customs of hospitality are also a part of common cultural heritage and perhaps a better case of the Mediterranean unity.

## Resume

The social anthropologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century presented the concept of honour and shame as values of the Mediterranean unity. Further interpretation and evaluation of this concept reveals the honour and shame as one of the key driving forces in the social dynamics within various types of societies across the world. Since the concept of honour and shame is detectable in different spheres of social interaction, I briefly examine it in the customs of hospitality. The ancient customs of hospitality included two common legal institutions, the providing of sanctuary (the asylum) to the guest upon his arrival and the safe conduct upon the guest's departure. Throughout the centuries, these legal common legal institutions left their traces in many spheres of our cultural existence and we can detect various indications of terms connected to hospitality in the current way of life. Although the customary legal institutions of sanctuary (the asylum) and the safe conduct are today within the domain of international law, they are in fact common legal institutions derived from the customs of hospitality and representing a part of common cultural heritage that should be nourished.

## Bibliography

### Monographs:

- Horden, P. and Purcell, N.** 2000. *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*. Blackwell Publishers. Oxford-Malden.
- Lanzi, F. & Lanzi, G.** 2007. *Kršćanska božjepotna svetišča vsega sveta*. Ognjišče. Koper.
- Peristiany, J. G.** 1965.a. Introduction. In: Peristiany, J. G., ed. *Honour and Shame. The Values of the Mediterranean Society*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London.
- Peristiany, J. G. (ed.)** 1965. *Honour and Shame. The Values of the Mediterranean Society*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London.
- Pupovci, S.** 2011. Kanon Leke Dukađinija. Porijeklo, razvoj i karakteristike. In: Vukčević, D. K., ed. *Kanon Leke Dukađina*. Podgorica. CID. 7-58.

- Rovinskij, P. A. and Vukčević, D. K. (eds.)** 1994. *Crna Gora u prošlosti i sadašnjosti. Tom III. Etnografija – Književnost i jezik*. Izdavački centar "Cetinje". Cetinje.
- Skok, M.** 2011. *Gostoljubje v Starodavnem Sredozemlju. Sprejemanje gostov in obiskovanje od starega veka do 12. stoletja, nekateri primeri*. Triartes, Prografika. Petrovče, Ljubljana.
- Smail, Lord, D. & Gibson, K.** 2009. *Vengeance in Medieval Europe. A Reader*. In: Dutton P. E., ed. *Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures: XIII*. Toronto University Press. Toronto.
- Stopar, I.** 2009. *Hrami tišine. Življenje v srednjeveških samostanih*. Viharnik. Ljubljana.
- Voje, I.** 2011. *Starodavni Dubrovnik v besedi in sliki*. Celjska Mohorjeva družba. Celje-Ljubljana.
- Vrhovec, I.** 1898. *Meščanski špital*. V. Bartel, A. (ed.). *Letopis matice Slovenske* (1869-1912). Ljubljana, Matica Slovenska. 17/2 1-112.
- Vukčević, D. K. (ed.)** 2011. *Kanon Leke Dukadžina*. CID. Podgorica.

#### Articles and web sources:

- Asylum 1: URL = <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/asylum> (25.11.2015).
- Asylum 2: URL = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asylum\\_%28antiquity%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asylum_%28antiquity%29) (25.11.2015).
- Hospitium: URL = <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospitium> (29.11.2015).
- Inštitut za slovenski jezik Frana Ramovša ZRC SAZU – Portal BOS. Slovar Slovenskega knjižnega jezika SSKJ: špital: URL= [http://bos.zrcsazu.si/cgi/a03.exe?name=sskj\\_testa&expression=%C5%A1pital&hs=1](http://bos.zrcsazu.si/cgi/a03.exe?name=sskj_testa&expression=%C5%A1pital&hs=1) (25.11.2015).
- St. Mary's Abbey of York: URL= [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St\\_Mary's\\_Abbey,\\_York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mary's_Abbey,_York) (25.11.2015)
- Zeus Xenios: URL = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus#Roles\\_and\\_epithets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus#Roles_and_epithets) (25.11.2015).
- Xenia (Greek): URL = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenia\\_%28Greek%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenia_%28Greek%29) (25.11.2015).

#### Graphic Material:

1. Jupiter and Mercurius in the House of Philemon and Baucis (1630–33) by the workshop of Peter Paul Rubens. URL = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenia\\_%28Greek%29#/media/File:Peter\\_Paul\\_Rubens17.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenia_%28Greek%29#/media/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens17.jpg) (26.11.2015).
2. Hospitium at the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey in York URL = <http://www.docbrown.info/docspics/yorkscenes/P4163482.jpg> (26.11.2015.)
3. Safe conduct document for German soldiers in 1944: URL = <https://d1rde5anzutevo.cloudfront.net/catalog-24/SafeConduct367.jpg> (26.11.2015.)

