

## KERASMA. ONE WAY OF MORAL CONFIRMATION IN GREECE

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It is not unusual in a Greek tavern for a stranger to have his coffee paid by one of the autochthonous people. This behaviour is signified as *kerasma* in the Greek vocabulary. Which is the profound anthropological meaning of *kerasma*? An analysis made by ways of hospitality, kindness, of concepts of debt and gift, touches only partially the core of significance. In the end, also guided by excessive use of *kalos* adjectives, this core could not be more than the act of giving from the beginning of a moral credit to the person envisaged by *kerasma*.

**Keywords:** *kerasma*, hospitality, gift, debt, reciprocity, *parea*, moral confirmation

Motto: “All men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you... as by sort of lottery” (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1: 28).

The first and the most frequently visited places by an anthropologist in the field are those with thick informational load. In the villages of Greece, one of these places is the coffee house (το καφενείο). Here, in the evening hours, usually men<sup>1</sup> gather παρέα, a small group of socialization, and consume coffee and tiny quantities of alcohol. Evzonoi – a village close to the border customs with the state of whose name is still an object of controversies with the Greek state, the international documents using the clumsy formula Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M) until a unanimous agreement – is not an exception. In πλατεία („the public square”), at the corner of a wall painted with a Hellenic harbor

<sup>1</sup> Although it takes into account the Greek population in general my study is based on observations and discussions with men. This was inevitable, since the coffee house, the tavern, the *ouzeri* are as a rule frequented by men. The remark which Stephanie Garret takes from P. Willmott (from *Friendship Networks and Social Support*, London: Policy Studies Institute, 1987), “The commonest meeting places for male friends were pubs, often after work, or sports and social clubs”, valid for western societies – represented in the case of P. Willmott by the Anglo-Saxon space –, is entirely valid for the Greek too. In the same time, it is also valid the observation that “Women tended to see their friends more on a one-to-one basis than men, and were more likely to meet them in the home than men” (Garret, 1989: 137).

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landscape, some hours in the morning and some in the afternoon and evening, the doors of Hristos's coffee house are open to a few clients who evening by evening are usually the same. One day, in quite the moment when I stretched 1 euro to pay my coffee, Hristos says to me: „Το έχεις πληρωμένο.” (“You have been paid.”). I asked amazedly why as I had not entered in his coffee house more than twice and without talking with anyone of the ordinary clients, my level of linguistic competence being sufficient only for a few minutes of very tiresome conversation. Το αφεντικό (“the patron”) looked at me and smiling, answered „Είσαι ξένος.” (“You are a stranger.”), showing with his eyes the man who “had paid” me, to whom I had never talked to. Although it was not for the first time when I was meeting *kerasma*<sup>2</sup> from my arrival in *Ellada*, the unusual circumstances for me in which it occurred were calling my attention to a research theme which I patiently<sup>3</sup> was to follow until the end of the Hellenic fieldwork, and, of course, after that.<sup>4</sup> For an aspirant-anthropologist came in *Ellada* to perfect his training by following the canons of initiations in social and cultural anthropology, without being particularly interested in a certain theme<sup>5</sup>, *kerasma* was beginning to stand for one of the significant social facts which the field itself takes them up in the surface. The observations were to accumulate one by one mostly in the fieldwork journal, and were to be supplemented with conversations kept more or less on this topic, so that, if the case may be, from an impulse of bigger *precision*, they are numerous enough to be used quite by a malinowskian method of *statistic documentation by concrete evidence*<sup>6</sup>, an intermediate method between what we are calling today *quantitative* and *qualitative* research orientations in humanities. However, the way of treating *kerasma* in this study approaches rather the so-called method of “thick

<sup>2</sup> I did not find an exact equivalent in English for *kerasma*. It seems to me that „the fact of paying honor” best approximates the Greek term. I was suggested to translate with “treat”. I don't know the exact meaning of “treat”, so I prefer a rather indirect way of translation to conserve as much as possible of the Hellenic meaning.

<sup>3</sup> *Patience* is one of the leading epistemological virtues which an anthropologist has to develop, unlike the sociologist who is led by *precision* (obtained by using certain instruments) (Mihăilescu, 2007: 92).

<sup>4</sup> The Hellenic fieldwork took place between 13<sup>th</sup> of September 2011 – 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2012. I lived in Evzonoi and Skra, the second village being situated at 25 km from the first, along the border. The observations related to *kerasma* have continued also by way of short coming back periods into the field, as well as in Romania, accompanying Hellenic groups.

<sup>5</sup> Even if the anthropologist might have in his mind a certain theme, the good malinowskian tradition suggests that this theme should to be treated by giving an equal attention to the whole socio-cultural context which frames it (Malinowski, 1987: 10–11).

<sup>6</sup> “To summarize the first, cardinal point of method, I may say each phenomenon ought to be studied through the broadest range possible of its concrete manifestations; each studied by an exhaustive survey of detailed examples. If possible, the results ought to be tabulated into some sort of synoptic chart, both to be used as an instrument of study, and to be presented as an ethnological document. With the help of such documents and such study of actualities the clear outline of the framework of the native's culture in the widest sense of the word, and the constitution of their society, can be presented. This method could be called *the method of statistic documentation by concrete evidence*” (Malinowski, 1987: 17).

descriptions”, exposed by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz<sup>7</sup>, the study therefore having a qualitative color. Step by step, I began to ask myself if *kerasma* does not somehow have the dimensions of a *total social fact*. Surely, by the definition of Marcel Mauss<sup>8</sup>, it would not be the case, if we understand *ad-litteram* the definition<sup>9</sup>. But, as I hope that my analysis will convince, we truly may talk of a “total social fact” related to the *moral confirmation*<sup>10</sup>.

### NOTIONS AND CONCEPTS RELATED TO *KERASMA*

*Kerasma*, in its phenomenality, has multiple instances. Thus, a person may declare from the beginning its intention to pay honour; a fortuitous meeting at the same table in a tavern between two persons who are old acquaintances or they are meeting for the first time, might have the same consequence; a visit or an invitation to a coffee at somebody’s home is accompanied by offering coffee and *κουλουράκια* (biscuits, pretzels etc.) from the part of the host (most meetings of this type are accidental, under the pretext of an invitation to a coffee); and finally, the case described in the introduction, when somebody pays for another person, known or not, without having been found together at the same table and without talking to each other, the person who pays revealing his identity or not. There is not required a certain moment, neither at least a certain place, for initiating these behaviors.

<sup>7</sup> „A repertoire of very general, made-in-the-academy concepts and systems of concepts – ,integration’, ,rationalization’, ,symbol’, ,ideology’, ,ethos’, ,revolution’, ,identity’, ,metaphor’, ,structure’, ,ritual’, ,world view’, ,actor’, ,function’, ,sacred’, and, of course, ,culture’ itself – is woven into the body of thick description ethnography in the hope of rendering mere occurrences scientifically eloquent. The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely structured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them with complex specifics” (Geertz, 973: 28).

<sup>8</sup> “In these total social phenomena, as we propose to call them, all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic. In addition, the phenomena have their aesthetic aspect and they reveal morphological types” (Mauss, 1967: 1).

<sup>9</sup> Leaving aside for the moment this hypothetical meaning of *kerasma*, the observation reveals that the *kerasma* is inseparable from other social facts. At the funeral rites, for example. At a *μνημόσυνο* (requiem) in the village of Koupa, a village close to Skra, at the exit of the church *κόλλυβα* (funeral wheat porridge) and *κουλουράκια* (biscuits) are shared to all the participants. The belittling of the prestige of the thanksgiving ritual formulas, which to invoke the memory of the dead, draws the behaviour nearer to *kerasma*. As a funeral rite too, but with a manifest intention of protecting the livings, may be interpreted the religious procession from the second day of Easter, the so-called *λάβαρα* (flags). The tradition is that the youths who carried the flags to be honoured (with food and drink) at the end of the procession („Να κερνάμε τα λάβαρα! – “Let us honour the flags!”), was heard at the end).

<sup>10</sup> Marcel Mauss, in his renowned essay *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, when defining the total social fact is thinking to the institution of *potlatch*. We shall observe that the *potlatch* too is related to a confirmation, this time a confirmation of *status*.

To all the instances described we may associate some terms which are attitudinally supporting the proclivity of paying honour. But the association is not exclusive since every instance could be successfully characterized by the interpenetration of many more terms. For the first of them, the notion of “φιλοτιμία” is the more appropriate. By the words of Evripidis from *Evzanoi*, “[The *philotim* man] respects the other, does not disturb him, neither troubles him in their discussion. He is φιλότιμος, and is striving to make the other to be content (...) Round a table, from *philotimia*, in order not to sadden the other, he says at the end of the joint meal: «Leave it, I shall pay you honour, I shall pay!»” The meaning of *philotimia* extracted from this context is opposed to the first meaning which we are finding in the dictionary, “self loved” (Brad-Chisacov [coord.], 2007: 586). “Philotimia” unifies the famous particle “philo”, meaning “love”, “attachment” of something, and the noun “τιμή”<sup>11</sup>, among the meanings of which we are discovering “honour, homage, appreciation, respect” (ibidem, 549). From the words of Evripidis clearly emerges the meaning of “tendency towards showing respect and appreciation to the *other*“. We are approaching here the meaning of the Romanian phrase “to make honour”. For both cultural idioms, the concrete expression of the tendency of showing to the other honour and respect is to propose and to pay for his consummation. The *philotim* man is one who has a ceaseless tendency toward *kerasma*.

The second instance – now the persons fortuitously meet at a table, sometimes for the first time – is attitudinally supported both of *philotimia*, and of φιλοξενία, especially when in the equation of *kerasma* is introduced the “unknown” person. Literally, *philoxenia* means “love of strangers”. The “stranger” represents an institution with deep roots, the strangers having their own god, Xenios Zevs, in the old-Greek mythology. But the stranger does not benefit of unconditioned *philotimia*, particularly when it is about to be showed through *kerasma*, he has to pass some tests. “There must exist a certain relation, to know each other a bit. Especially at villages, if someone goes there, not only for one time, if he comes back, once, twice, for three times, and they have heard about him, and he has a proper behaviour (...), is a quiet man, correct, he will be loved by all. By all! There is no exception. And further more he might be honoured every evening”<sup>12</sup> (Dimitris from Lepura, a village on the island of Euboia). Moreover, the stranger may be fed and hosted overnight, this time approaching ourselves by the local meaning of *philoxenia*, that of “hospitality”. The meaning is able to characterize the third instance of *kerasma* too, when somebody invites other person(s) to his home for a coffee” for example, a pretext with a frequent

<sup>11</sup> This is a question why “η” from “τιμή” changes in “ι” from “φιλοτιμία”. The answer is of the competence of linguistics.

<sup>12</sup> Here the discussion would need a sociological treating; quickly enough I understood that my legitimating as “professor” was creating a substantial advantage in the face of legitimating as, let’s say, “worker” in passing the tests for the access to *kerasma*.

occurrence. The institution of hospitality certainly represents one of the universals of the human culture, having an adequate treating in the anthropologic literature. Far away, in Mongolia, we find the hospitality in the same form and content and with the same nuances as those mentioned in our case. Thus, “Old friend or complete stranger, any visitor to a herding household may expect to receive tea, dried curds and other snacks, at the absolute minimum, and usually a meal and night’s stay if needed” (Sneath, 2012: 459).

*Philotimia* and *philoxenia* are coming to attitudinally support the last instance of *kerasma* too, one in which somebody honours somebody else (sometimes, this “somebody else” may be an entire group), without the two to have ever been to the same table, without to have ever entered in any kind of relation, sometimes in complete anonymity. The tendency toward *παρέα* is what the other instances supplementary have, but is lacking here. A perfect *parea* asks at least three persons to be present. “Three. At least three (...) they are staying together, they talk on different topics, of course which are known to all of them. One of them is leading the dialogue, usually to the good. A good *parea* is made in order to have all a perfect time together” (Evipridis). *Parea* is representing an end in itself, and when this end is reached, the good bye formula is “Ευχαριστώ για την παρέα!” (“Thank you for your company!”), “because it is very important for me that you have come in my company without having any kind of interest” (Iorgos from Skra)<sup>13</sup>.

### DOES KERASMA INDEBT?

The analysis of *kerasma* may be placed on the background of the economic anthropology too. Actually, small quantities of food and drink are offered in *kerasma*. In its turn, the gift, beginning with Marcel Mauss’s seminal essay *The Gift*, is considered the most primitive form of exchange. By saying “form of exchange” there is put forth the idea that the gift, although it, seems gratuitous, draws the contra-gift, therefore indebts. The whole maussian essay is glossing on the brim of this idea. Then “the debt” imposes itself as a key concept in anthropology so that a lot of anthropologists (among them Claude Lévi-Strauss) come to consider it the glue of the social life. Being a key concept in the economic anthropology, the “debt” seems to penetrate every other domain of anthropological thinking, as Holly High observes: “(...) there is a temptation to apply debt reasoning to almost every other relationship one can think of: it is uncommon to think of politicians in terms of what they owe to their constituents, knowledge in terms of intellectual debt,

<sup>13</sup> So another instance when the *kerasma* is related to honour. This time the one honoured is quite the one who pays honour. It is interesting that in the semantic universe of *kerasma* we do not find directly the meaning of “honour”, “virtue” as it appears in the Romanian “cinste”. About the semantic universe of the last of the terms and the richness of its ethnographic phenomenality, see Ofelia Văduva, *Magia darului*, București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997, pp. 160–162.

morality in terms of a debt to society, and family relationship in terms owed to one's care-givers. Even the culture itself has been thought of as a 'symbolic debt' permanently owed to others, with social relations founded on a kind of permanent IOU" (High, 2012, 363–364).

The answer to the title-question of the sub-chapter is "no" in the manifest aspects and "yes" in the latent. However, this "yes" implies nuances which make it to be difficult to understand, and requires for *kerasma* not a simple logic of reciprocity but one which often directs towards a general reciprocity<sup>14</sup>. In any case, it is a long way from the latent debts created by *kerasma* to the debts lying at the border that separates the conceptual couple "latent / manifest" from the circumstances in which the possible clients of one supermarket are "honoured" by product promoters. Sometimes, the indebteding is manifest, even if they are honoured *post-factum*: as Gareth E. Hamilton (2012: 152–153) noticed, the stickers which were establishing the value of the product at 0.25 euro were given to the clients who already had bought. A promotion based on the fact of honouring everyone is transformed in a simple way to reward a desirable behaviour.

The observational facts resonate at unison: my attempts of paying honour, guided by the pure logic of reciprocity, were met with firm and prolonged refusals. If I was having success, each time without to announce my intention, my behaviour was received with big satisfaction. From discussions and dialogues, the way by which the debt is woven in the fabric of *kerasma* may be disclosed by covering many more stages: 1) Manifest assertion of the debt implied by *kerasma* is strongly denied. To say that you are indebted equates to offense the one who paid you honour, as offence too is 2) to give back *kerasma* in the same day. 3) The accidental meetings, especially with the strangers, unpaired by their reiteration, do not create any kind of obligation for the one honored. 4) The proclivity toward *kerasma* is also related to the financial resources of the partners: "There is a case when I see somebody at the restaurant, at the tavern, at the coffee house, and I know his economical possibilities. He is a good man, but hardly earns. I do not wait to be honored by him (...) but if he wants to do it, I shall accept with pleasure" (Dimitris). 5) To never honor, irrespective of your financial resources, the one who paid you repeatedly honour, means to profane a virtue which *kerasma* has the role to continuously maintain: *ανθρωπιά*, the „humanness". "It is not obligatory [for the one whom you honoured to honour you back]. But humanly... he has to honour you" (Iorgos).

<sup>14</sup> The ideal form of this type of reciprocity is extracted from the study of the marriage rules. These assure "the circulation of women inside the social group", replacing "a system of consanguineous relations, of biologic origin, with a sociological system of alliances". The ideal form is "nothing is taken from the person to whom you give; nothing is given to the person from whom you receive" (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 74–75).

The inequality involved by the reciprocity specific to *kerasma*<sup>15</sup> is probably the factor that influences the most intensively the vivid maintaining of *anthropia*. A perfect equivalence would have as a consequence the disappearance of this. *Anthropia* has the significance of a debt which, no matter how much is paid, may not (and, many times, must not) be settled. It is the debt specific to that kind of economy which David Graeber properly characterizes it as “human economy”, a concept applicable to that sort of economy in which “the primary focus of economic life is on reconfiguring relations between people, rather than the allocation of commodities (Graeber, 2012: 411)<sup>16</sup>.

Coming back to the observation, *kerasma* does not seem to be neutral in the face of the implied hierarchy status, and an analysis could be deployed only on this topic (in my opinion, superficial if it remains only at this level). Stavridis from Thessalonica earns 2,800 euros in the wake of two jobs. He does not want “to enter in a tavern and to wait to be honoured”. Κυρία (“miss”) Vasiliki from Skra, being invited to be honoured at Axioupoli, a nearby small city whence the inhabitants of Skra make their supplies, answers “I’ll go everywhere, but on my own money”, pulling out in the same time a hand of coins from her pocket. The hints of prestige and status are clear; for our preoccupations, we actually are running into the consistency of universal moral appreciating of the credit (so of the possibility of “crediting” by *kerasma*) as opposed to the negative moral evaluation of the debt (so to be indebted by *kerasma*) (G. Peebles<sup>17</sup>, referred by Gregory, 2012: 380).

### KERASMA AND IDENTITY

In August 2012, I accompanied the Evrites’ Ensemble from Nea Kavala „Ο Εβρος” at the International Folkloric Festival “Doina Covurluiului” from Galați, the VII<sup>th</sup> edition. We were told that we would have a surprise when the ensemble would begin its performance. The surprise to follow was... *kerasma*. As soon as the dancers appeared on the stage, women dressed in costumes from the region of the Eastern Macedonia went into the audience with trays on which little glasses full

<sup>15</sup> Beside of “reciprocity”, the “redistribution” is another perennial concept from the vocabulary of economic anthropology (Friedl and Pfeiffer, 1977: 459–467). To be *kerasma* closer by “redistribution” rather than by “reciprocity”?

<sup>16</sup> The author proposes to rename the currencies used in this case (shells, feathers, whale teeth, iron bars etc.), traditionally called “primitive money”, “social currencies”. This new concept is more appropriate to the human economy (Graeber, 2012: 411–412) (which would not without fail be more human than the other, David Graeber using the slavery at Tiv in order to illustrate the concept). I was mentioning the calling “to a coffee”. Certainly, the coffee consumption is penetrating the whole social life of the Greeks, in *kerasma* or in other circumstances. The general-European tendency is the same. We may classify the coffee in a category of social currencies beside of, for example, betel in Indonesia (Howel, 1997: 164), which currencies although do not have the exchange power of “primitive money”, by their omnipresence directly relates to a function of social glue.

<sup>17</sup> G. Peebles, „The anthropology of credit and debt”, in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39: 225–240, 2010.

of *tsipuro* – the famous Greek grape brandy – and *κουραμπιέδες*, the equivalent of which in English would be “little croissants with almond kernel”. That festival was created to present and promote aspects of choreographic and folkloric traditions of the peoples in Balkans and around Balkan region, their truly conspicuous identity marks<sup>18</sup>. So the Greek ensemble was to display not only costumes, dances, songs established by a long tradition, but *kerasma* too. Let us make a small break in our study and to observe that the behaviour could be interpreted not only from an ethnological perspective, but also as an answer of the Greek *people* to the financial crisis which disturbs the nations of Europe, especially the Greek nation. The pressures posed by the European and extra-European institutions over the Hellenic *state* are transfigured by the Hellenic *people* in a *kerasma* directed to the whole Europe. Which is the significance of *kerasma*? “All together”, answers Trifon from Koupa, a small village close to Skra. Always the antithetic paradigm referred to is the German paradigm. For our Hellenic interlocutors could not be but a strange thing that in a German group – especially when the group is one family – everyone, even the children, pays for his own consumption at a tavern from a seacoast resort of Halkidiki county. This is a *kerasma* for myself, which means its dissolution and of all the associated values: *philoxenia*, *philotimia*, *anthropia* etc.

The German paradigm of relating with “your neighbour” – I am referring to a neighbour in the literal meaning, not of a neighbour in a universal-impersonal meaning – seems to win more and more ground in the competition with the paradigm proposed by *kerasma*. In any case, according to Dimitris, who is established in Romania, this is already done for the Greeks from Diaspora: “Formerly, when I was a child in my village [Lepura, from Euboia island], I saw German tourists, one at a table and the other at another table. And they were not talking... «Is it possible?!», I was thinking, «They are Germans and they do not talk to each other?!» We, the Greeks from Diaspora, are like them.” For the Greeks from inside, the *philoxenia* is diminishing day by day, regardless of the reasons by which this process is explained. I repeatedly asked about the „παλιά” (“formerly”) *philoxenia*, from a period when the standards of living were much lower than today. I was thinking to be a direct correlation between one’s financial resources and his proclivity toward *kerasma*. According to Dimitris too, more money means more and bigger wishes, and symbolic competition with your neighbour. This has a destroying effect on the whole universe of values and behaviours implied by *kerasma*. “The neighbour” does not represent an interest for what he is (as human) but for what he possesses so as to be overcome. Here opens the gate of hypocrisy in *kerasma*, of envy and of a work ethics taken for granted in the Western capitalism: “But do not envy the other, work, in order not to envy him! If there was no envy, it wouldn’t be life” (Tasos from Skra). We can also understand Tasos’s statement in the following way: You get rid of envy from the moment in which you

<sup>18</sup> We are grasping the ethnological-anthropological significance of this type of festival, in so far as ethnology is one of the disciplines “preoccupied by the main *identity elements of a people*” (Moise, 2009: 18).



overtake the other, and these ceaseless strives, effects of envy, are just the engine of the endless progress.

The prolonged break has carried us toward the analysis of *kerasma* in the Hellenic identity equation just by what is to diminish its role of the first thing known – as the scenic program of Kavala’s ensemble suggests –, to be reduced (although it is a long way until there) to the status of unimportant unknown thing. This means to become a kind of “survival”, as it is named starting from James Frazer till now in the anthropologic literature any kind of long ago superannuated social manifestation or technological invention, but having reached miraculously nowadays (Geană, 2005: 43). But for the moment, the opinions regarding the bases of *philotimia*, *philoxenia* and *kerasma* are once more in agreement: the *tradition*. But, as we shall understand from the last chapter, it is not a dead tradition which does not find again its resonance in the ψυχή<sup>19</sup> of the contemporary Greek.

We may withdraw the involvement of *kerasma* in the description and analysis of some problems of identity nuance behind the national boundary, toward its local anchorage. This particularly since I declared the intimacy with the “thick description” at Clifford Geertz, where “the cultures are symbolic systems which may be read as texts, but which the anthropologist has to read «over the shoulders» of their [as many as possible] performers” (Mihăilescu, 2007: 81). Thus, *kerasma* and *philoxenia* are fully utilized in order to sustain stereotypes regarding populations. The population of *vláhoi* seems not to have a good prestige in the representations of *póntioi*. In any case, this is true for the *póntioi* from Evzonoi when they refer to the *vláhoi* from Skra: “Do they honour you there?” (Thanasis) “Still it’s better here!” (Andronicos). They asked me this kind of questions with ready answer any time I was coming back to Evzonoi (the village where I had stayed for two and a half months), after I had established myself to Skra for two months. In other words, *philoxenia* it would not be a proper term to characterize the *vláhoi* population, or at least not in the same extent as would be proper for the *póntioi*.

### **MORAL CONFIRMATION, THE DEEP CORE OF THE MEANING OF KERASMA**

The covered route until this last part of our study, in which I intend to tackle directly the grounds of meaning of *kerasma*, has passed through some perspectives of analysis – of the types of *kerasma* and the related attitudes, of the concept of “debt” and “reciprocity”, of the identity phenomena to which *kerasma* is associated. These are in the same time arguments thoroughgoing study of which could determine us to give to *kerasma* the dignity of a “total social fact” on the way of moral confirmation.

<sup>19</sup> “Soul”, but “soul” in the meaning of modern psychology, as a systematical integration of all psychical processes (cognitive, affective, volitional).

An ethnical tendency toward friendship touches only indirectly the sought for core of meaning, even if the phenomenon we are interested in has a perfect compatibility with this tendency, which denotes “maturity in the individual, and suggest a basic decency about the society at large” (Roy și Tomaselli, 1989: 3); even if, Pat Easterling commenting upon G. Herman observes,<sup>20</sup> from the times of old Greeks the gift exchange was transforming ξένια (“the institution of stranger”) in φιλία (“friendship”) (Easterling, 1985: 15). At least three reasons may be invoked here: the friendship implies a relationship projected on a long axis of time; *kerasma*, as I mentioned, is as well compatible with an accidental meeting, without chances to be repeated. Secondly, within friendship some persons are favored at the expense of others, regardless of the fundamentals of this preference<sup>21</sup>. And the last reason, for nowadays western society, from which Greece has only a geographical separation, the friendship hardly transgresses the social stratification, making friends usually happening inside the social classes, as we are guided by Garret Stephanie’s sociological study (1989). At least until the moment of this study, I was not able to establish a direct relation between *kerasma* and social classes.

The Christian-orthodox background of “loving the neighbour” is too much general and impersonal to form a core of significance. It is undoubtedly a ground on which *kerasma* stands out, but is also a ground for other behaviours and manifestations. Moreover, *kerasma*, although is more impersonal than the friendship, is not so much impersonal as the principle of “loving the neighbour” asks. From the emics perspective, the background we are talking to about is not stated, but rather discovered, as if the researcher would be a modern Socrates who leads his interlocutors toward the discovery of some things at which some of them had never thought.

Neither to invoke tradition is sufficient. The tradition and the education in the spirit of behaviours of “to honour” are strong impulses in supporting them, but not their profound essence. At a simple question “Why do you pay honour?” Dimitris is answering “Βγαίνει από μέσα”, meaning “Comes from inside.” That is, from an uncontrolled impulse which obliterates the whole etiquette imposed by tradition. To explain *kerasma* only by a reverence toward tradition or *philotimia* by a respect toward the other, is a half way. A Kantian ethics of duty, of a behaviour made by respecting moral law, would be entirely inappropriate to *kerasma*. “To come from the inside” means to have *inclination*, affective resonance which outruns in the end

<sup>20</sup> G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the bases of preferences, Gillian Clark and R. L. Stephen have the following remark: [in the Roman-Greek world] “Friendship was much more extensive than the freely-chosen, affective relationship we now call friendship, though such friendship were known and enjoyed. Friends were the people with whom you were connected: the Greek word *philos*, commonly translated <<friend>>, means <<one who belongs to you>>. The connection might be by blood or marriage or country, shared political beliefs or philosophy of life or personal pleasures, favours given and received; it might or might not include warm feelings; it certainly involved a commitment” (Gillian and Stephen, 1989: 26–27). In the same place we may put the whole discussion from the „Eighth Book” of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, with the three species of friendship, based on interest, pleasure and virtue.

the behaviour inspired by a pure rational taking into account of duty. With much pleasure – I must recognize – I noticed many times the art by which our subjects were painting with informal nuances<sup>22</sup> the most official circumstances.

Therefore, the core of significance which to unify the directions of interpretation and explanation mentioned before and to completely circumscribe the universe of exposed behaviours must be sought elsewhere. It was impossible for me not to notice the high frequency with which the adjective „καλός” (“good”) is used in the daily discourse. Moreover, the wishes – and for the Hellenic people there are almost no circumstances in which a wish not to correspond them – are moulded most frequently using this adjective. “Καλή συνέχεια!” (literally, “A good going on!”), somebody might wish me in the writing of this study. With the passing of time, the relation between *kerasma* and *kalos* was becoming clear. I am on the point to affirm that *kerasma* is a ritual behaviour by moral (re)confirmation of the other, of (re)granting of the moral mark “καλός άνθρωπος” (“good man”)<sup>23</sup>. Usually, this mark is easily given, and the features of the face are often a sign in this process. This thing is explained by Dimitris by a proclivity toward “positive thinking”, by which the other, ο ξένος (or the others, *kerasma* does not hint at one-to-one circumstance), is invested from the beginning with a confidence capital rather than with one resulted from suspicion. I consider that from the interpretation in this manner has to begin any profound analysis of *kerasma*. Now, the previous directions of interpretation are consistent. The moral confirmation, *undoubtedly the most significant social glue*, is penetrating by its nature all areas of socio-cultural manifestations, so that *kerasma* could not have but the dimension of a total social fact. Without having had this intention I am now resonating with the current interpretative directions<sup>24</sup> of some famous total social facts, as *potlatch* or *kula*. Thus, in the issue from November 2012 of *Social Anthropology*, the edition

<sup>22</sup> This means that they are closer to a *personalist* understanding of “loving the neighbour” principle rather than a Kantian *impersonalist* one. The difference between the two is well illustrated by an event narrated by father Bogdan-Costin Georgescu, a priest from Blejoi, Prahova. Being sometime together with father Jonathan Hemmings, an orthodox-Christian priest from Lancaster, England, at Suzana Monastery, Prahova a beggar approached them. Father Jonathan did not seem to be interested by him. Moreover, he was disapproving any behaviour of this kind (that would bring out a personalist manner of “loving the neighbour”). The problem of beggars, father Jonathan was motivating, is a problem of the special appointed institutions.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, in the seminary *On hospitality* (1999), deploys a hermeneutics of hospitality, vacillating between a *law* of hospitality, a categorical imperative which would impose to give food and shelter to the stranger in an unconditional way, and *laws* of hospitality, which establish limits, rights and duties, for both the host and the guest, conferring to the stranger the status of subject of laws. However, J. Derrida do not make a synthesis of hospitality, neither seems to have this intention. The moral confirmation, around which this synthesis might coagulate, is taken in no way into account in the pages of the seminary. To be here at fault the socio-cultural background of the French philosopher?! This background is substantially touched by what was suggestively called “macdonaldization” (“a process by which the principles of fast-food restaurant begin to dominate more and more sectors of the american society as well as in the rest of the world” [Ritzer, 2003: 17]). Inside this phenomenon, the *moral* agency of the person does not have importance, the person becoming only impersonal subject for countless sets of procedures.

<sup>24</sup> The present study was finished in April 2013.

coordinator, Holly High, is proposing a new approach of the “debt” concept (of which the anthropological world is convinced that it represents the molecular structure of the social life) on the background of the global economic-financial crisis. H. High proposes not to utilize an economic grille, toward which we would have been guided for decades by Franz Boas, after the American anthropologist had used it for *potlatch*, but a grille of the “distinctions that matters” for the respective peoples. The latter grille had been proposed by Edward S. Curtis, a contemporary researcher of Boas of the north Amerindian peoples, but it was weakly received at that time. According to E. Curtis, we must conceive the significance of *potlatch* firstly in its valences of *status recognition*, and not of *economical type investment*, as F. Boas had it interpreted (High, 2012: 366–371). The same for us, any other interpretation beyond the moral confirmation touches only partially the core of significance. “Distinctions that matters” for our population are first of all instanced by the distinctions between “good men” and men that who are not so. But the reference is not only to men / women: “κόσμος” means “world”, having the meaning of “humans”, but also “universe”. The moral confirmation is valid for the latter too, of course by a ritual of *kerasma*, in the lyrics of a ζειμπέκικο song:

*An eagle I want you to be like  
The nest very high to erect.  
The sun's light is your wine  
Honour to the stars to make.*

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