

*Holy Metropolis of Messenia*

*Holy Pilgrimage of  
Panagia Sgrapa of Pylia*



*“Your faithful people rejoice and jubilate, oh you source, due to the finding of your face and celebrate in Pylia’s Sgrapa honoring and magnifying your mercy”  
 (“Megalyrnarion”, Cristian religious book)*

Messinia’s land has been called “Blissful” from the ancient times and it is praised as blessed from both the elderly and the young. And rightly! It is one of the most beautiful and fertile areas of our Motherland! Rich in history, monuments and culture, it can compete against the great historical sites.

In the unparalleled, full of alternations beauty of “Blissful Land”, its south-western edge, Pilia, constitutes its priceless jewel: A noble, cosmopolitan, scenic area!

Its centuries-long history comes alive through the well-preserved Homeric remains of Nestor’s kingdom, as well as through the medieval castles and fortresses.

The natural bays of the crystal clear sea, its sandy beaches, the summer sun, the cool summer winds, known as “meltemia”, and the silvergreen olive trees create a heavenly scenery, intense impressions and lively colors, all of which nest indelibly in the visitor’s memory, when he passes from this beautiful place.









## *The Chapel and The sacred Icon*

**T**his beauty becomes even greater with the presence of the Unspoiled Virgin Mary. It is this land that She chose to become Her home and throne. During the times that Pilia was part of the Franks principedom of Ahaia 1204-1432 AD, Paleokastro had become the centre of military operations of Navara, aiming to enhance the weak -by then- power of the conquered Frank State. According to tradition, in the years 1381-1402, Ahaia's princess Maria of the Bourbons built at the place of today's Chapel, the first small chapel of the Holy Virgin, dedicated to its Assumption. That Chapel was destroyed by the Turks in 1573, when they occupied Pylia and built Pylos' fortress (Neokastro). Around 1686, when Venicians came in the area, they erected again the ruined Chapel. From that time on the Chapel was preserved until Ibrahim's raid in 1825, when it was completely destroyed.

During the years of the Turkish occupation Virgin Mary's Chapel was the only place of worship for the enslaved Christians, who in the sacred Icon of Panahrados found comfort and hope. Before it, great figures of the Greek Revolution kneeled and prayed.

Archimandrites Gregory Dikaïos or else Papaflessas (a hero of the greek revolution) passed by and kneeled before Blessed Virgin before the beginning of the revolution and begged Her to help the Greeks for the nation's freedom. When Mavrokordatos and general Makrigiannis experienced the huge defeat of Sfaktiria's battle, endangered by the other believers' sword (Turks) and unable to do anything more, he turned to Sgrapa's Holy Virgin and prayed, while at the same time Makrigiannis addressed hymns to Her from the Akathist hymn.

After Greece's liberation from the Franks' General Mezon and his troops in 1828, about 10 families from Greek Peloponnesus and



by Ibrahim, Chapel, which they named “Vouvalovoro” (a place for feeding buffaloes). In 1835 the new settlers (habitants) built once again the chapel in its original size. Before the erection of the Chapel they dug in depth around the ruins, in search of the old miraculous Icon; unfortunately though, “nothing was found”. Therefore the Worthy (today’s Mare) of “Vouvalovoros” Anastasios Alexopoulos donated to the chapel today’s Icon of Zoodohos Pigi as a replacement to the lost old one. However, malaria and lack of water coming from Gialova’s swamp, made the place inappropriate for the settlers’ living and consequently it was soon abandoned. In 1855 the settlers moved 3km to the northeastern part of Peloponnese and founded a new village which they named “Sgrapa”, assumedly because of the existence of a water source (sgourna in this Greek dialect). A few years ago it was renamed to “Eleofyto”, because of the many olive trees in the area. The consequence of this migration was the complete abandonment of the Chapel and finally its



## *The Discovery Of the Sacred Icon*

Around 1890, residents from a mountainous area of Arkadia and Messinia came and settled around the area of the destroyed Chapel, searching for “sheepfolds” for their sheep. Amongst others, the 5-member family of Nikolaos Argiropoulos, came from “Boleta” (Makri today) of Tripoli. With his devout 32-year old wife Anastasia and his 3 boys, they built in the northern part of the Chapel a temporary house and a sheepfold for their sheep. One afternoon Anastasia and her younger son Dimos, climbed up the small hill where the ruins of the chapel laid, in order to cut some wood. After Anastasia cut all the wood she needed she tied it in a sheaf and loaded it onto her shoulders. She tried to walk but her efforts were in vain! What if she tried to put all her strength in it! What if Dimos tried to make her stand up! Fastened with her load, an inexplicable force was keeping her nailed on the ground! She took some woods off the sheaf and once again she tried to leave. In vain! Worried, exhausted and puzzled she untied the sheaf from her back, put it on the ground and left. When she returned home she narrated the incident to her husband and her neighbors, but no one believed her; on the contrary they mocked at her.

Eight days had passed, full of anxiety and bewilderment. On the 8th day Anastasia was found again at the same place. She had gone there with a neighbor of hers to gather some wild chicory from the mountain. Oblivious of the incident now and focused on cutting off the chicory, Anastasia suddenly heard a female voice from beneath her feet saying: “Tell the girl to leave and sit down; I have something to tell you”. Scared as she was, Anastasia grabbed the girl’s hand and started running. When breathless she arrived back home, the moment she grabbed the doorknob, she saw 3 snakes hanging from it. She stepped back and terrified she shouted: “Holy Mary!”. To the address of Holy Mary’s name, the snakes immediately vanished. She had no further doubt that it was a miracle but her soul was in confusion. She didn’t know what to do. She wanted to tell people the story but she



The days were passing by and Anastasia's troubled soul was seeking for an explanations. The sweet voice that she had heard back in the field echoed inside her mind and sank her into thoughts. Her only way out was praying to Holy Virgin, asking her to help her calm down. A Saturday night, tired from the works at home, mentally exhausted from her thoughts and after lots of praying, Anastasia laid down to sleep. Her husband was absent. He had gone to the city and would not return until the next day. It was a really difficult night for Anastasia to fall asleep and around dawn she managed to close her eyes. While she was finally sleeping peacefully, a noble and glowing female figure bearing a halo, appeared before her eyes. Her look was rigorous, her voice and expression imposing. She addresses to Anastasia: "Why didn't you obey and ignored my calls, which a few days ago I addressed to you Anastasia, up at the hill?" Anastasia wakes up scared from the vision and the woman's demanding questions. She gets up and sits at the edge of the bed to come round. She takes a quick look at her children and sees



the room and turns to the place from where earlier, the voice was coming from. Suddenly, she sees the whole figure of Holy Virgin face to face. Her appearance was angelic while, the whole humble room was glowing from the divine Glory of Theotokos' presence. With a trembling voice, still in shock, Anastasia asks: "Who are you my Lady?" Mary then sweetens her expression and voice and answers: "It's me! I bring to Earth great joy". With a thrilled voice full of anxiety Anastasia exclaims: "Holy Mary!" and starts praising Her until Mary stopped her and told her: "I invited you as the noblest woman of this place. You will go to Iklena (today, an important archeological site), you will find priest Aristomenis Dimopoulos and tell him to gather the people of Sgrapa to come and dig out my Icon, which is buried near to where you loaded the woods the first day, at the opposite hill and under the locust tree.

After this command, Holy Virgin disappeared. Anastasia immediately and despite the heavy rain of that blessed night, went out of the house to do what our Holy Virgin had commanded her. Early in the morning, before the priest rang the church's bell, Anastasia arrived at his house and narrated him what had happened the previous night. Priest Aristomenis didn't believe anything Anastasia said and left for the Chapel to perform the liturgy. As the bell was ringing, he was informed that his child had an accident and had fallen from the balcony of his house. While he was running to his house to see his child, an upset neighbor reports to him another bad incident; the priest's wife fell off the ladder. Then the priest "acknowledging the meaning" considered these incidents as Holy Virgin's signs and results of his disbelief. Without wasting anymore time, he rides his horse and sets off to do what Holy Virgin commanded him through noble Anastasia. On the way, his excitement started to fade out and thoughts of postponement were coming to his mind. He thought that he could do all he had to do the next day and he decided to go back. On his way back, the horse dropped dead without a reason. Regretful once again for his doubt, the priest gathered the residents, organized a team and he went to





They were digging all day long full of enthusiasm. They dug the whole hill but they found no Icon. Disappointed, they decided to give up all their efforts. Begging with tears in her eyes, sure about the outcome, Anastasia urges them to continue, regardless of the night that had already arrived. So they carried on until suddenly, under the moonlight, a hollow sound from a villager's hoe is heard. What a miracle! The holy Icon was discovered! Holy shiver, tears and sobs conquered them all. One by one, full of respect and gratitude, they embraced and kissed the sacred Icon. That blessed day of the discovery was the 23rd of August, 1892.



## *The creation of the the Holy Pilgrimage*

The residents' devotion erected today's Chapel and the respect and love of the Arkadians built the cells and all the other buildings. The people of Tripolis in particular, visit Sgrapa's Holy Virgin's church, maintain strong ties with the Holy Pilgrimage and preserve it with every means, mostly due to Anastasia's Arkadian origin.

Anastasia Argyropoulos, the noble woman to whom our Holy Mary appeared, passed away in January 1951 at the age of 91 years old in her village Makri (Boleta) of Arkadia. Her bones are kept in the outer northern wall of Sgrapa's Chapel, for which she struggled greatly.

Virgin Mary's "Holy Pilgrimage" at Sgrapa Chapel, is celebrated 3 times a year. The first one is in the memory of Zoodohos Pigi, on the first Friday after Easter. The second is on the 15th of August in Theotokos' Assumption and the third Holy celebration takes place on the anniversary of the holy Icon's Discovery on the 23rd of August. For the Discovery's celebration a Holy Asmatic Mass was organized in "Agion Oros" in 1984 by the hymn-maker of Christ's Great Church, the old monk Gerasimos Mikragiannannitos. Recently in the year 2013 the Pleading Rule of the Holy Icon was drafted by the reverent bishop of Edessa, Mr Eoil.

We wish you with all our heart the Blessed Virgin Pandassa and Zoodohos Pigi of our holy Pilgrimage to offer to each pilgrim, who with faith and devotion kneels before Her holy Icon, health, enlightenment, strength, endurance, courage and help through the hardships and pains of life.







