

The Indian Connection With Traditional Kastellorizian Clothes by Geoffrey Conaghan, Bangalore



Geoffrey Conaghan is from the Askitis-Stavrianos family, Sydney. Since 2009, he has been Trade Commissioner to India for the Victorian Government and lives in Bangalore.

Many Australians of Kastellorizian descent preserve the wonderful clothes of their mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers. Garments of great beauty and value were worn to show wealth and status on Kastellorizo. As their owners began a new life as migrants in Australia, they were completely out of place with women's wear of early 20th Century Australia and used only for family and community events, since they were of little practical use. However, they remained cherished by their owners as a reminder of a very different social environment.

These clothes are now valued family heirlooms and a material link with our past, even though we may never have known their original owners, as is my own experience.

The clothes also tell a story of the island's trade and how it linked East with West. My own research has shown the clothes of my great grandmother were drawn predictably from France and Italy, but many of the fabrics are from India and possibly some regions further north in what would now be Pakistan and Iran.

The clothes of Kastellorizo tell the pattern of trade in the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. The acquisition of the finest fabrics was made possible by a series of factors that I will try and describe in this article.

Did Kastellorizians trade directly with India? This is not known, and perhaps family tales may shed light on the possibility. What is known is that Kastellorizians actively traded across the Mediterranean. Other merchants from eastern shores traded with Arabs who in turn traded further east with Indians, Malays and Chinese.

Various families' stories told to me have identified trade links with Singapore and Java and as far east as the Philippines. Therefore, direct Indian trade connections are possible.

Greeks certainly traded directly with India and Kolkata and Dhaka (now the capital of Bangladesh) on the east coast. An established Greek trading community existed in the 18th century. Information is quite difficult to source. "Banglapedia" gives a very good, but unsourced summary of Greeks in the region, but gives solid references which I include at the end of this article. The Greek Church of the Transfiguration

in Amratollah Street, Calcutta was consecrated in 1782 and another church was opened in Dhaka in 1812.

The Ottomans had trade ports in Gujarat during the 16th century, so it is completely feasible that Greeks would have been included in these commercial activities. An Armenian church in Chennai (then Madras) was first built in 1712. Greeks, Armenians and Jews were established communities, so perhaps, Kastellorizians were also in India, but this is purely speculation.

TRADE, POLITICS AND KASTELLORIZO

Kastellorizo's location on the East/West trade axis was enhanced by a deep and protected harbour, one of the few between Rodos, Cyprus and the port of Alexandretta (now Iskenderun) near Antioch (now Antakya) in Turkey.

Kastellorizo was a remarkably busy port with many ship owners and merchants. It is 9.78 square kilometres – most of it always uninhabited – and supported a population up to 10,000 all clustered around its harbour and the Mandraki, an area of perhaps 2 square kilometres.

Kastellorizo needed trade to survive. It was never able to feed itself, relying instead on farmlands along the Turkish coast and trade further afield to support a population disproportionate to its physical size.

With over 5,000 people per settled square kilometre, population density was greater than modern day St Kilda, Melbourne at 4,000 and behind Bondi Junction and King's Cross in Sydney at 8,400 and 14,000 people per square kilometre respectively. Kastellorizo had a highly urbanised community without having high-rise buildings. It was probably one of the most densely populated places in the Mediterranean, and therefore, of little surprise that our forebears adapted to inner city living and commerce so easily on their arrival in Australia.

The island's epoch is generally regarded to be the second half of the 19th century. This era was heavily influenced by a number of factors that encouraged trade and one event that pushed commercial opportunity, almost literally, to the port entrance.

Unrest is never good for trade and Europe settled down after major early 19th century upheavals. The Second French Empire in 1852 brought stability to France. Italy was theoretically unified in 1860 and the British Empire was at its zenith.

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French trade from Marseilles and as far west as Nante grew and the Italian ports of Genoa and Naples along with the various Adriatic ports crowned by Venice were important for little Kastellorizo. Many Australian families have items from this period: Venetian glass and French ceramics. There was a time when every terracotta roof tile on Kastellorizo was brought from France as ships' ballast. If you scratch around the ruins on Kastellorizo you will still find tiles from this period with their Marseilles makers' 19th century stamps.



Turkey, which had theoretically ruled Kastellorizo since the 16th century was too busy with its affairs in the capital and its relationships with western Europe and Russia to worry much about an obscure island populated by 10,000 Greeks.

So, with increased customers, a distracted landlord (Turkey) and their appetite for commerce, the islanders got on with their business of business. However, the islanders did not look only west for their trade, and the second half of the 19th century brought an event that made the eastern Mediterranean a major commercial zone. One major event shaped Kastellorizo's success right up until WWI: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. This effectively pulled trade from the western Mediterranean to the east and what was a loss for Gibraltar, Cadiz and Tangiers was a gain for Kastellorizo, Beirut and Alexandria and the rest of the Levant.

Western Mediterranean ports had dominated trade since Vasco de Gama discovered the sea route to India in 1498. Nearly 400 years later the British opened the Suez in the eastern Mediterranean, referred to at the time as 'the highway to India'.

While we should not exaggerate the importance of Kastellorizo in Mediterranean trade, we can recognise the importance of trade and politics for the island. Trade made Kastellorizo. The 20th century's changing political climate, however, led to the slow demise of Kastellorizo's commercial advantages.

The Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922 and the subsequent exchange of ethnic groups under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne effectively marked the beginning of the decline of trade for Kastellorizo. Although it was not part of Turkey after 1918, and therefore, not part of the exchange of populations referred to as 'the megallo catastrophía', its important Kastellorizian satellites (Myra, Kalamaki, Makri et al), Smyrna/Izmir and other Greek communities along the Turkish coast diminished after 1923. Trade links diminished with them and corresponded with the 1920s departures of Kastellorizians to Australia and elsewhere.

THE INDIAN CONNECTION - FROM GUJARAT TO KASTELLORIZO



The India to Europe trade route is very old. 19th century commercial activities were a continuation of the incense route that brought frankincense and myrrh by caravan from the Arabian Peninsula from around the 5th century BC; the spice routes from India and Indonesia from the 5th century AD and later general trade, including high quality and valued textiles.

Many of the clothes in my possession and many I have seen over the years have their materials sourced from India, mainly from the State of Gujarat which sits on the point between the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, between Karachi in Pakistan and Mumbai (Bombay). It has had good access to inland Indian trade routes and a generous coast-line. This region has been a major trading centre since the classic period with contact from Arab, Roman and Greek traders.

The Ottomans had trading ports in Gujarat in the 15th and 16th centuries until control was wrested by the Portuguese, the dominant European force in the region for 300 years, after which it was shared with the British. Modern day Goa and many suburbs of Mumbai are a legacy of the Portuguese presence. Bombay is the anglicised Bom Baia,

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Portuguese for 'beautiful bay' and acquired by the British through the marriage of the Portuguese Princess Catherine de Braganza to Charles II in 1661.

In the Winter South/Summer North 9th edition of *Filia*, Nick Bogiatzis mentioned the Konstantinata gold coins being found in Kerala on the south west coast of India. Around the southern tip into Tamil Nadu, a major Roman port is currently under archeological survey. The small museum of Pondicherry on this coast has amphorae from the Dodecanese.

THE CLOTHES OF KASTELLORIZO AND THE FABRICS OF INDIA

Many of the Kastellorizian garments are lined with very fine Gujarat fabric known as ikat which is made of cotton or silk. The ikat on the Kastellorizian clothes I have seen is cotton or silk and is double ikat.

Ikat, or Ikkat, is the method of weaving that uses a resist dyeing process similar to tie-dye on either the warp or weft fibres.

The dye is applied prior to the threads being woven to create the final pattern or design.

Double Ikat is where both warp and the weft are resist-dyed prior to stringing on the loom. Traditionally, and still commonly, a back-strap loom is used, though any variant or modern loom may be used.

Ikat is an extremely strong weave that requires great skill and is called the 'king of weaves'. The Ikat technique spread from the Caucuses through to Indonesia. The technique became very popular in Europe and I have seen museum pieces from 18th century France and England.

Many Australians would have encountered ikat in Indonesia. The quality varies considerably, but the finest double ikat is the most expensive.

The external silks, brocades and Genoa velvet of the Kastellorizian clothes were generally heavy material and the Gujarat ikats worked well for their strength and great beauty. Thus, the outer fabrics and the inner fabrics were of equal high quality fabric for their type. There were no belts or clips for the outer jackets, allowing an open jacket to display the beautiful lining.

For those with their families' old clothes the material will be immediately recognisable on description: the interior panels of jackets may be lined with finely woven, dense cottons in fine geometric patterns of predominantly blue, green, black and red. Most will be cotton, though silk was used occasionally.



I believe Indian cottons have also been used to make my great grandmother's vrakia (underpants, but what underpants they are – half bloomer, half Turkish style trouser with draw-string waists). We possess three pairs of these in excellent condition, made from block print cottons in similar patterns to fabric still sold in the markets of Ahmedabad, Gujarat today.

Ikat fabric used on 19th century Kastellorizian clothes is still available today in a range of qualities. It is one of the most complicated and time consuming weaves, delivering a tightly woven, very attractive material. While cheap labour has made these fabrics still possible to produce, changes in fashion and manufactured alternatives has made ikat less popular.

SPICE AND CLOTH WERE HIGHLY PRIZED GOODS FROM INDIA.

Another study of interest to Kastellorizo could be the clove, or mousoukafi. Highly priced in Western Europe, they were used lavishly on Kastellorizo during weddings with the groom's hair washed in clove water and strings of them were used as necklaces and bracelets for the various brides' ceremonies. This extravagance, when you consider the price of cloves in Europe, was probably the result of the availability of the product and the fact that Kastellorizians were in a position to be extravagant.



In mid 15th century Western Europe it took a day's wage of a master carpenter in Antwerp to buy 65 grams of cloves (a cup) and in London 102 grams. While 15th and 19th Century economies have different influences, one can see how valuable spices were. Cloves were the most highly priced spice on the western European market, except for saffron. Cloves were 50% more expensive than cinnamon and double the price of pepper in London in the mid 15th Century.

Where else other than Kastellorizo was a clove used to decorate a single kourambie? A single clove per little sweet, simply for the pleasure of wooshing it around one's mouth.



I am not sure when the mousoukafia became a part of the wedding ceremony or were introduced to kourambiethes, but clearly the most valuable spice was chosen using the price charts available.



a happy new year!

The Indian Connection With Traditional Kastellorizian Clothes (cont.)

THE CLOTHES OF AMIRISA HATZIAGAPITOU ASKITIS.



These clothes were made for her wedding and during her early years of marriage. Therefore, they would date from about 1895 through to 1905. The clothes came to Australia when Amirisa left Kastellorizo around 1924 with her daughter Maria to join her brothers in Sydney.

The wardrobe of Amirisa is remarkable, because it has not been distributed among subsequent generations. There are 75 pieces in total. It was given to my mother Amirisa (now Amy Conaghan, Sydney) by her uncle Nicholas Askitis in the 1980s. With no children of his own, he thought it was appropriate that they go to the next Amirisa, the daughter of his sister Maria.

He kept the clothes in good condition after his mother died in Sydney during WWII. No one knew he had these garments during their 60 years of storage. My mother, who lived with her grandparents for several years in the 1930s, had never seen her grandmother, Amirisa's clothes.

And so they came into my care. In 2000, I had the whole wardrobe conserved by a professional textile curator, and it was during this time the curator was able to tell me about some of the European materials. It was a trip to India in 2004 that introduced me to ikat fabrics from the Gujarat, and my subsequent further discovery of how much of the wardrobe is in fact originally from India.



WHO WAS AMIRISA?



Born around 1875 on Kastellorizo, Amirisa Hatziaagitou was my great grandmother. She married my great grandfather Andonis Askitis around 1899. She was his second wife. Andonis had the great fortune – literally - on primo-geniture, matrilineal (this is code for 'the first daughter gets the house' among other assets) on Kastellorizo to marry two first-born daughters from wealthy families.

His first wife died in childbirth, but his daughter Chrissie (later Chrissie Bispinis, who settled in Sydney after WWII) survived. A second marriage was quickly arranged for Andonis and baby Chrissie was raised in a happy family with his second wife Amirisa and five other Askitis children from 1901: Arthur (Brisbane), Maria, Agapitos (Bill), Michael and Nicholas (all Sydney). All of the named Askitis are now deceased, but their descendents are in Australia, mostly in Sydney.

Maria Askitis (born Kastellorizo 1901 died in Sydney in 1975) was my grandmother. She married my grandfather Evangelos Stavrianos (Kastellorizian born in Myra around 1890 and died Sydney 1967) in 1926 and had nine children, five of whom survive and live in Sydney.

Sources:

- 1 Australian population densities from the 2006 Australian census.
- 2 Monro John. The Consumption of Spices and Their Cost in late-Medieval Europe 2001. www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/SPICES1.htm
- 3 Trade Routes between Europe and Asia during Antiquity | Thematic Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Student Exchange 2011

Phillia Bakaimis

This year I was lucky enough to be chosen for an exchange program to Kastellorizo that helped me to understand my Greek heritage. Thanks to the exchange I know more about the history of the island, and what my ancestors would have gone through. The history of Kastellorizo is really interesting.

When I arrived on Kastellorizo I was befriended by the welcoming locals. I attended the school with Ethan and Nathan where we experienced what it was like on a small island. The school has only 35 students. The classes I attended were Religion, English and Chemistry. We took part in English lessons with the younger children and workshops with the book 'Kastellorizo: My Odyssey'. We also accompanied school students on an excursion to St George of the Mountain Monastery via Avlonia and on the way down we went past Paleokastro.

As soon as we met the local children on the island they invited us to their soccer games and to have coffee with them. We all became close in such a short time.

On one afternoon we went kayaking. Yannis showed us other good places to swim such as Plakes. We also went to the beautiful grotto and swam in its amazing blue waters.

The great thing about Kastellorizo is that it has so many interesting things to do and to see. We visited the island of Rho where we saw the Lady of Rho's grave.

Thanks to Marilyn for accompanying us and caring for me whilst we were away, and to AFK for the chance of a lifetime. Thank you to everyone on Kastellorizo for making me feel so welcome; it was like I was coming home. Kastellorizo may be a small island, but it has an incredible amount of beauty. I hope Kastellorizo never changes as it is perfect the way it is.

I will always remember the friends I made and the people I met. This was definitely an amazing experience and I would encourage anyone to go to this incredible island. I had so much fun and would like to go back as soon as I can.

Nathan Kagi

Throughout the two weeks on Kastellorizo there were many highlights which included walking up the mountain with artist Alexandros, the relaxed lifestyle and afternoon siestas and sitting at cafes, the food, the beautiful structures around the Limani and Mandraki, the island itself, definitely the Kastellorizian people and all the Aussies who we met and got to know on our holiday, and not to mention Ethan, Phillia and Marilyn for being such good companions on this trip.

My impressions and thoughts about the island were changed on this visit. I always had the impression that the lifestyle on the island was pretty close to ours in Perth, but it revealed itself to be different, but completely desirable to me. The memory of the food had stayed with me and everything brought back memories from my first visit many years ago. I had never got to know anyone on the island on my first visit, and this time around I got to know quite a number of people. I admire the personalities of the Kastellorizian teenagers and enjoyed spending time with them playing soccer, relaxing at Faros or whatever else we managed to do.

My understanding of my Kastellorizian heritage has grown somewhat; I now have more knowledge about my yiayia and her family, but my pappou's side of the family is still quite a mystery to me. Even when my mum explains, I still get quite confused about who is what and where and in general, it confuses me enough to just want to have a nice siesta. I would also like to express my appreciation to all those who made accommodation available for us, people who took us out to lunch/dinner/or anywhere else, and everyone else who helped contribute to making it such a lovely two and a bit weeks on the island.

Ethan Koutsoukos

My time in Kastellorizo was amazing. The first couple of days were a bit slow moving, because I was very tired and out of my comfort zone. Nathan's gastro illness didn't really help the settling in, but it was a memorable experience and we can look back and laugh at it now. After I'd settled in and met the local kids, time flew on the island. After I left Kastellorizo, I couldn't wait to go back. Poseidon Apartments, where we stayed, was very nice and everybody on the island was so friendly; it's a nice change from Australia.

My favourite part of my time on Kastellorizo was definitely the kids. They were extremely nice. They welcomed Nathan, Phillia and me into their group and went out of their way to spend time with us which is a rare thing in Australia. Almost every afternoon we would go down to the soccer field or the basketball court behind the school and play for a couple of hours, which I really enjoyed and it brought us closer to the kids on the island. Because the kids on the island made the experience so much better, it was very hard saying goodbye and it wasn't the best end to the trip, but these things happen when you meet new friends overseas.

The scenery on Kastellorizo is unlike anywhere I have ever been and it is amazing to say the least. When we climbed the mountain and looked down onto the harbour from such a great height, it was a stunning view. Even just looking out the apartment window at all the cafes along the harbour at night time and hearing the clanging of knives and forks on plates was awesome.

I was amazed at the beauty of Kastellorizo. I can't wait to go back with my family so they can see how wonderful the island is and hopefully they will enjoy it, just as much as I did. It was a truly amazing experience. I hope to go back to the island in the near future so I can relive the experience.



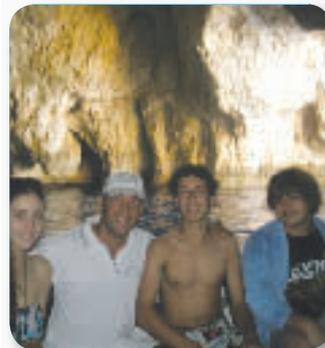


Student Exchange 2011 (cont.)

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Summer In Kastellorizo 2011

By Rebecca, Jack and Lavinia Mangos, Sydney

Voices from Generation M (The media generation)

We spent 3 weeks in the peak of European summer on the most idyllic Mediterranean island of all - Kastellorizo – the birthplace of our ancestors.

Each morning, we would wake up to the bells of Aghios Giorghios tou Vounou, and a glistening sun shining over the beautiful azure water. Most of the day would be spent by the limani, swimming, cliff jumping and playing tavli. Every afternoon at around 5pm, the locals and the Australians would play a soccer match against each other at the pitch behind Mandraki. The international game proved to be a bonding between all of the different cultures on the island. Waiting for the heat to subside, we would explore the island on walks to Aghios Stefanos and the Paleokastro together. We felt like we were discovering things that our parents, grandparents and great grandparents would have done in the past.

Evenings in Kastellorizo were unlike anything else we had ever experienced. We think our Kastellorizo is at the peak of its beauty at this time of day! This time was spent with family and friends sitting by the spectacular port having a scrumptious seafood meal, observing the boats and the not-too-distant lights of Turkey.

There is a certain freedom about it all: a serenity, yet anticipated excitement along the waterfront when the sun goes down which continues into the late hours...but hours don't matter on Kastellorizo!

Typically we would then go off to Faros which became a meeting place for young Kazzies and tourists and where we would build on our

relationships even more. We think that the best part of every summer in Kastellorizo is establishing these new friendships with Kazzie youth: from England, America, France and of course, Australia... knowing that other people share the same rich cultural heritage as us is fantastic.

Three weeks on the island can give you some of the most incredible friendships you will ever experience which happen at a warp speed. These connections are strong and they are enduring. We are fortunate enough to live in an age of advanced communication technology so that our relationships can continue, no matter where people are in the world.

When it was time to leave, we did so with tears in our eyes and great sadness, knowing we had to go from this magical place and return home to the reality of school and life back in Sydney. Our love for one of the most easterly and remote islands of Europe gives us pride and happiness.



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 Marilyn Tsolakis, AFK Co-ordinator | + 61 423 776 896 | coordinator@kastellorizo.com | www.kastellorizo.com