

The Day Castellorizo Came to Rome: 10 January 1930

by Nick Pappas, Sydney



Some of the Castellorizian women pictured waiting to take their part in the parade on 10 January 1930: from left, Evangelia Mayiafi, Christina Calopedou, Evangelia Palaïou and Eleni Xanthi. With them stand, at right, deputy mayor Agapitos Xanthis and teacher Spyros Diamandaras. At far left are two of the island's musicians who formed part of the group, the brothers Sarsemis (Roditis).

A little over 83 years ago, the city of Rome, then at the centre of Mussolini's fascist empire, was the setting for a royal wedding the scale of which had rarely been seen. Princess Marie José of Belgium was to be married to the heir to the Italian throne, Prince Umberto of the House of Savoy, and a celebration occupying six entire days, between 5 and 10 January 1930, was planned for the event.

On this grand stage, 500 representatives of Italy's distant and diverse colonies were invited to take part in a closing parade which was to serve as a fitting climax to the proceedings – and a contingent of some 25 Castellorizians was chosen to be part of it. This is the story of that small adventure for those Castellorizians for whom the event would be recalled for many years as one of the happier occasions Italian rule brought to their island.

On distant Castellorizo, 1929 had been a year of some excitement. Despite the economic hardships the Depression had delivered, the year had been marked by the visit of the King and Queen of Italy. This was a short stop on their tour of the Dodecanese Islands, but their brief stay on Castellorizo on the morning of 22 May was filled with all the pomp and formality that characterised their longer visits to the major islands of Rhodes and Kos. An escorted glimpse into the island's famed grotto was followed by a brief reception at the Italian administration's newly-built headquarters on the point of Kávos. The royal couple and their two daughters were met warmly as they then walked through the town upon oriental carpets especially laid out for them by the locals.

The large crowd that lined the royal family's route, and the euphoric mood during the doxology service in the island's Cathedral, recalled for many the momentous events of the previous century when Ottoman administrators were welcomed with equally lavish ritual. In all, the royal couple was to stay on Castellorizo for no more than two hours,

but the rapturous reception they received was as much a reflection of the islanders' delight for sharing a brief moment on the world stage, as for any adoration they may have felt for the Italian monarchy.

It was in early September 1929 that the island's long-serving mayor, the staunchly pro-Italian Ioannis Lakerdis, received word from the Italian administration that he was required to select around 25 of his fellow islanders to take part in the parade. The engagement of Prince Umberto to the Belgian Princess had already received wide publicity across the Italian colonies, not least because Umberto was generally liked, even by his non-Italian subjects. He was tall, good-looking and seen as an asset to the monarchy, which was itself under some strain for its relations with the increasingly erratic Mussolini. Umberto had even visited Castellorizo in early 1925 as part of his own private tour of the colonies and the surviving images show that he received as enthusiastic a reception as his parents were to receive two years later.



A previously unpublished image from the visit to Castellorizo of Prince Umberto of Italy in early 1925. The Prince has just emerged from the island's Cathedral. To the left stands the island's mayor, Ioannis Lakerdis, while to the right is the island's Italian governor, Giuseppe de Bisogno.

The Day Castellorizo Came to Rome: 10 January 1930 (Cont.)

Not surprisingly, Lakerdis was careful in his selection. He knew, on the one hand, that some of his closest co-workers deserved to be rewarded for their loyalty with a funded trip to Rome, but he was also astutely aware that as broad a cross-section as possible was required to appease all interests. In the result, those selected were a convenient blend of loyal teachers and bureaucrats, workers and petty merchants, though, despite Lakerdis' best endeavours, there was to be a distinct lack of representation from the island's powerful merchant and seafaring class in the contingent. Even the glamour of a royal wedding in Rome could not paper over the deep factional divisions that existed on Castellorizo at that time.

Before they departed, Lakerdis had asked the women who had been selected to prepare their traditional bridal attire and their gold finery for the journey, as the intention of the parade was to display the sheer breadth, and wealth, of Italy's colonial portfolio. The men, too, were asked to wear the traditional vráka, even though many of them had abandoned it by this time. To assist them, the municipality ordered a range of vrákes and white shirts from a Turkish tailor in Rhodes and these were hastily shipped to the island in time for their departure.

The contingent departed Castellorizo by steamer on 29 December 1929 and, after stops in Rhodes, Syros and Piraeus, boarded trains in Brindisi for the long journey to Rome. While briefly in Rhodes, they had been joined by larger contingents from that island and also from the island of Karpathos. And yet, it was to be an epic trip for many in the Castellorizian contingent. While a few of the men had journeyed across the seas for their familial and business needs, most of the women had never departed their island before, or if they had, it had been prior to the exchange of populations for short trips across the sea to visit Castellorizian satellite communities in Anatolia. A trip of this length and of this nature would have been, literally, beyond their wildest dreams.

When the contingent arrived in Rome on the morning of 4 January 1930, the day before the festivities were to commence, the city was buzzing with excitement. Rome was resplendent in Italy's national colours, its newly-constructed boulevards through its ancient sanctuaries lined with flags and banners bearing the insignia of both royal households. It seemed to the Castellorizians that they had arrived at ancient Rome itself, such was the grandeur of the setting. They were soon escorted to a small hostel not far from the Quirinal Palace where the wedding ceremony was to occur.

On 5 January, the members of the Belgian royal family and their retinue arrived by train and, together with their hosts, King Vittorio Emanuele III and Queen Elena, a procession comprising 20 coaches then slowly made its way through the streets of Rome. The following day, a royal hunt took place and in the evening a reception for over 2,000 people was held in the Quirinal Palace. An even larger reception for 5,000 guests took place the following evening, the eve of the wedding, though the excited colonial subjects were not invited and had to bide their time as spectators from afar.

On Thursday, 8 January 1930, the wedding ceremony took place in the sumptuously decorated Paoline Chapel within the Quirinal Palace. The date had been specially chosen by Umberto himself because it was his mother's birthday. In the presence of all the monarchs of Europe, Princess Marie-José appeared in a long white velvet dress, decorated with ermine fur, and a five metre long cloak embroidered with gold thread and a lace veil made for her by the famed lace makers of Bruges. Unusually, the design of the dress was selected by Umberto himself.



AN OFFICIAL PORTRAIT OF THE NEWLYWEDS TAKEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MARRIAGE SERVICE IN THE QUIRINAL PALACE, 8 JANUARY 1930.

The newlyweds were received by the Pope after the ceremony and then hosted their private reception. A military parade signalled the next day's events. Italian military prowess was the theme and Mussolini took much delight in showing off his latest weaponry, including a spectacular air show comprising 300 aircraft which concluded the day's festivities.

At last the day of the parade of the Empire's colonial subjects had arrived – 10 January 1930. After receiving the well-wishes of 30,000 children at the Villa Borghese, the Prince and Princess were escorted to the Quirinal Square where the Castellorizians and other representatives of Italy's colonial portfolio patiently waited their turn to join the parade. The surviving images of the day reflect the excitement of the moment for the Castellorizians as they wait for their turn to come to take their part in the procession.



Municipal policeman Eleftherios Kaperonis and his wife Angeliki pose with their daughter Kyriaki who is dressed in a traditional Castellorizian bridal outfit complete with popázi (hat).

The Day Castellorizo Came to Rome: 10 January 1930 (Cont.)

In the event, the parade was a magnificent spectacle that received widespread publicity across the globe and affirmed for those watching just how vast, and diverse, Italy's territorial possessions had become. Mussolini apparently smiled broadly as the Dodecanese contingent trooped past, no doubt satisfied in his own mind that the extensive diplomatic efforts to secure the 'twelve islands' for Italy had been worth the effort.

For the Castellorizians, the event must have seemed completely out of the ordinary. Here they were, in Rome, parading with other Greeks, Ethiopians, Italians, Libyans and other exotic nationalities, all in the name of the Italian monarchy, to which their loyalty was publicly respectful, but privately ambivalent. And yet it was a moment to be savoured by all of them, and Lakerdis' pride at leading the group at this high point of his long tenure as mayor of the island is evident from the only surviving image of him from the day's proceedings. It is noteworthy that he alone wore western attire, a symbol perhaps of his desire to appear more westernised than the 'provincial' delegation he led.



Some of the Castellorizian men waiting to take their part in the parade. From extreme left, judicial officer Ioannis Valsamides, mayor Ioannis Lakerdis (in western attire), farmer Yeorgios Myriklis, farmer Vlassios Pitsonis, farmer Andreas Koutsoukos (at rear), Beirut-based merchant Theodosios Karayiannis, Eleftherios Kaperonis and teacher Nikolaos Palaos.



The scene outside the Santrapeia School after the service on Castellorizo to mark the marriage, 8 January 1930

Back on Castellorizo, a public holiday was declared for the wedding, a special service was held in Ayio Konstandino and special excursions organised for the schools. Most waited with eagerness for their island's chosen representatives to return and, when they did, many stories were told in the island's narrow lanes and coffee houses. They would be re-told over the next decade until savage events took hold of their island and consigned this brief moment of colonial pomp to the backwaters of the islanders' popular memory.



Another young (unidentified) Castellorizian girl in traditional bridal costume. Note the contingent from Rhodes waiting in the background in front of a sign reading 'Rodi'.



A final image of the Castellorizian women as they wait to join the parade. They are, from left: Maria Kritikou, Evangelia Palaou, Evangelia Mayiafi, unidentified, Kyriaki Kaperoni. Joining them is Theodosios Karayiannis.

Photo credits: 1-2 Author's collection; 3-7 Istituto Luce, Rome. Thanks to John Karayiannis of Sydney for assisting with the identification of individuals in the photographs.

Author's Note: Filia readers will note that not all of the Castellorizians pictured have been identified. For historical accuracy, readers are asked to contact the author at ngpappas@ozemail.com.au if they are able to assist with any further information. Naturally, every effort has been made to identify correctly those in the images. If, however, any errors are found by readers, they are kindly asked to contact the author and a correction will be published in a future edition.

Editor's note: Australian Friends of Kastellorizo would like to congratulate Nick Pappas for being awarded an AM during this year's Australia Day Honours list for distinguished service to Rugby League, the Arts and the Greek-Australian Community.



The 400 Steps

by Elizabeth Philippou, Adelaide

Looking up at the strong proud rock that stands like a crown over Kastellorizo's Bay, I see the etched steps meandering up the mountain like a carved arterial vein.

It leads to safety and freedom. To arrive at the top was to escape the danger, to keep away from the enemy.

Today casual unfit tourists walk these same steps as they stop for a breath while taking the time to look back over the bay and its breathtaking beauty.

In years gone by it was a hike of life or death to get away from the bombing.

It wasn't about you running to save yourself, no, you were a young mother, a daughter, alone and in panic and sheer terror. Reaching deep inside you for that extra ounce of strength that it took to protect your young in the shelter at the top of this mountain.

Let's think about each step she took, each breath of terror, as she rounded up her four young children and her ageing parents. Panic and terror forces against our current reality, she found the strength in her fragile frame to save them all.

Yiayia mou! I see you climbing! I see you.

Dedicated to my grandmother Elizabeth (Zambeta) Karasavas née (Zambella)

A ROCK SO DEAR

Quiet and calm the water laps
Upon a rock so dear
It wasn't long that thunder rolled
With cannon balls and fear.

You beared it all my little Isle
Standing strong against your foes
Until one day your children left
And so your story goes.

Fear and hunger drove them away
They had to cross the foam
But one by one their children come
To claim their ancestral home.

Your sons and daughters made you proud
You were alway in their prayers
And in the stories that they told
About a rock so rare.

Your songs, your chants, your customs dear
Are entrusted in our hearts
As we hand them to younger kin
To honour your great past.

Your waters clear, your sky so blue
Your castle standing tall
And there so proudly flying high
The flag that tells it all.

Your arms are wrapped around us all
No matter where we roam
There is no place on earth more dear
Than Kastellorizo my home.



Reflections of Kastellorizo

by Maria Noakes, Perth

As a child, Kastellorizo seemed like a mythical place. It was a place I heard mentioned in passing conversations, but I had no real sense of it.

As I grew older, I came to realise it was the birthplace of my maternal great, grandmother and great, grandfather.

As a teenager and even into my early 20's I felt no great desire to visit this far away Mediterranean island. It had no relevance in my life back here in Western Australia, or so I thought.

In 2009, as a 25-year-old I visited Kastellorizo with my family. Months in the planning, the trip was keenly anticipated. There were seven of us in total, my mum, yia yia, aunty, uncles, cousin and myself.

For my mum and aunty in particular, the trip was somewhat of a homecoming. Although they weren't born there, Kazzie was the birthplace of their maternal grandparents and they felt a strong need to visit the birthplace of their ancestors.

We timed it so we would be there for the Easter celebrations. I had no idea what to expect of Kazzie. It was cold when we arrived. The island felt empty and I remember being struck by a sense of isolation. I was thousands of kilometers away from my home and creature comforts, and although I was on the other side of the world in one of the most idyllic and exotic locations, I longed to be back in Perth with my friends and boyfriend.

Of course, after a day or two of indulging in the gentle pace and warm Kastellorizian hospitality, my homesickness subsided and I grew accustomed to the incredible beauty and peacefulness of the island.

Since then my mum has bought and renovated a holiday home on Kazzie and I've been to visit her twice. Each time I return I fall more and more in love with Kazzie - the people, the food, the mountains, the rugged terrain and the sparkling ocean that surrounds it.

Now I look back on my maiden voyage to Kazzie and revel in the memory. I feel so lucky to have spent time there with my family, especially my yia yia. Knowing that her parents came to Perth to start a new life never ceases to amaze me. I can't imagine the courage it takes to uproot and start a new life in a country on the other side of the world.

I met someone recently who visited Kazzie last year for a friend's wedding. It was amazing listening to him talk with such enthusiasm about the island I have the privilege of calling my home away from home. As he recounted stories of the island and spoke of the incredibly friendly Kastellorizians, the blue grotto and the indescribable sense of calm that envelopes you as soon as you arrive on the island, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride. I felt a connection with the island that I had struggled to articulate or realise before.

Maria's great, grandfather on her maternal line was Jack Kalaf and her great, grandmother was Ekaterini Kalaf.

STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM 2013

If you know of a 15 year old who would be interested in applying for the Australian Friends of Kastellorizo Student Exchange Program during the October school holidays this year, then please contact the coordinator@kastellorizo.com

Application forms are found on the website www.kastellorizo.com

Preference will be given to students who do not always have the opportunity to travel. It is a wonderful opportunity for young people to gain a greater understanding and connection with their cultural heritage. Applications close by the end of April 2013.



Kastellorizian Lexicon

The Kastellorizian word is in bold lettering with the demotic word in brackets.

anasérno	(vgazo nero apo tin sterna)	lifting water with bucket from a well
astropolétsi	(keravnos)	thunder
yierátsi tou psomiou	(gonia tou psomiou)	crusty end of a bread loaf
páppoukas	(antihiras)	thumb
yiema	(ema)	blood
kakómaros	(kakomiris)	one who is ill-fated
hrousáfi	(poto me vrasmenes stafides)	drink made with boiled sultanas
penetátha	(harisma apo taxidiotin (hrima))	money given to a friend by a traveller
poulistrína	(prothroniatiko doro (hrima))	money given on New Year's Day
stravárga	(anathema)	cursing expression if you do something wrong
yiakkó	(dhango)	to bite

Proverbs

Ayia Varvara yenise, Avios Savvas to'kouse, ke Ayios Nikolas etrexe na pa'na to vaptisi.

The following is a well known Kastellorizian expression (serving as a mnemonic) relating to three successive Feast days of three saints, (St Barbara, St Savvas, & St Nicholas), celebrated on December 4th, 5th, & 6th respectively.

(Saint Barbara gave birth, Saint Savvas heard about it, and Saint Nicholas rushed to baptize it (the infant).)

Xeri to gourouni ti ine to karpouzi ?

(Does a pig know what a watermelon is?)

The expression is used when one is unable to differentiate between the value of things, and when we use our own criteria to judge others.

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