

Restoration of the Monastery of Saint George of the Mountain by Fotini Chalvantzi, Kastellorizo



Fotini Halvantzi is the Cultural Heritage Architect on Kastellorizo overseeing the restoration works on Kastellorizo. She is a graduate from the School of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens and is a PhD candidate focusing on Kastellorizo: the residential development from the 19th century to the mid-20th century. Fotini also has a MSc in the Protection of Monuments: Conservation and Restoration of Historic Buildings and Settlements from the School of Architecture.

She is also a Member of the Greek Department of International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and a Board member of the Greek Department of International Organisation for the Protection of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH).

Description of the monument

The complex of the monastery of Saint George of the Mountain (Hagios Georgios tou Vounou) stands on the plateau named after it on the island of Kastellorizo in the Aegean Sea. Resembling a fortress in aspect, it is of rectangular plan, girt by high walls and with cells of different construction phases around the katholikon (chapel). The katholikon is a single-naved basilica roofed by three cross-groined vaults. The pavement of the katholikon is a mosaic that dates from the early Christian era, whereas underneath it, in a natural pit, lies the crypt of Saint Charalambos.

Pathology

The monastery lay deserted for many years, suffering considerable damage and erosion, such as partial collapse of the masonry, the wooden roofs and mezzanine floors.

Purposefulness of the restoration

Before restoration works commenced, the monastery was in a derelict state badly in need of conservation and consolidation. It was considered a monument worthy of salvaging and enhancing, for which reason the project for its restoration was included in the European Union funded National Strategic Reference Framework. The project is being implemented by the 4th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities by the method of self-supervision and aims at restoring, enhancing and delivering the monastery to the public as a safe and functional monument ready to use.

Study-Supervision of the project

The study for the restoration of the monument was conducted by George Karavelatzis, Civil Engineer, whereas Fotini Chalvantzi and Michail Zerlantis, MSc Architects Engineers, are responsible for the supervision of the project. The restoration involves the rebuilding of the cells that had collapsed, according to the documentation, as well as the consolidation and the rehabilitation of the parts that are conserved in quite good condition and the conservation of the decoration of the katholikon.

At the same time as the project, implementation studies are conducted for the next construction phase, which takes into consideration elements that were collected in situ and were recorded in detail, such as drawings of the windows and doors, axonometric sketches and construction sections.

For the achievement of the objectives, the interventions follow international principles and aim at maintaining the authenticity of the monument through the conservation of the authentic elements, respect for the historical phases, the use of traditional materials and construction methods, the reversibility of the interventions and the distinction of the new constructions from the original ones.

Objective difficulties

The level of the difficulty in realizing such a project is high due to the objective difficulties resulting from the remote geographical position and the specific weather conditions prevailing on the plateau of Saint George.

To be more precise, the construction site must be supplied at all times with a sufficient stock of building materials and tools, because any lack can provoke serious delay, due to the fact that the ferry connection with Rhodes is not regular during winter time –twice a week and often the ferry does not come due to the bad weather conditions. In addition to these, there is only one shop selling building materials and it is only supplied with basic stuff on the island, whereas for a long period of almost nine months no fuels were available on the island. The existing petrol station was closed and the island's inhabitants were "hostages" because transporting fuels on the ferry either from Rhodes or Turkey is prohibited. In our case, fuel could only be brought in the reservoir of the car that we used to send to Rhodes for refueling, and thus fuels at the construction site had to be used sparingly.



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To these difficulties, we should add the absence of electricity and of water supply on the plateau as well as the bad road for ordinary cars. The energy needs on the site are therefore met with a generator which runs on petrol and water is supplied by the army.

Work team

For the realization of the project the Archaeological service hired builders, carpenters and an architect engineer, the selection criteria being experience and specialization in historical monuments. Most of the staff are Kastellorizians and thus show sensitivity for the religious monument of their island and are aware of the special vernacular techniques used on the island.

Project supervisors:

Michael Zerlentis, Project Manager- Architect Engineer

Fotini Chalvantzi, Supervisor Architect Engineer

Maria Michailidou, Director of 4th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, archaeologist

Sotiris Patatoukos, Conservator of Antiquities and works of art

Technicians:

Komninos Amygdalos	Klimis Amygdalos	Giorgos Kavasilas
Emmanouil Gatis	†Michalis Raftis	Michalis Siskakis

Timetable

Up to now the southeast wing has been almost completely restored, after the extensive rebuilding of parts that had collapsed. By the end of March 2014, restoration will be about to finish for the pronaos (narthex or vestibule)-gynekonitis (women's gallery) and for the vaulted cemetery –priory of the east wing.

The next phase of the project will be the rebuilding-consolidation of the northeast wing, which will last until September 2014, whereas until the end of the project the conservation for the katholikon and for the pebbled court, the restoration of the enclosure walls and the configuration of the surrounding space will be completed.

Re-use of the monument

The re-use of the monument is the ultimate goal of this project. The monument will be re-used in its initial function as a monastery and there

are monks of Kastellorizian origin who have already shown interest in living in it. After the restoration project, the monastery will have all the required facilities and equipment, not only for the monks who will live in the northeast wing of the monastery, but also for hosting pilgrims in the cells and for a small exhibition space in the southeast wing.

In the southeast wing specifically, a small exhibition space will be organized in two connected rooms and will be dedicated to the history of the monument and its restoration. There, the visitors can have a look at the drawings of the monument and the special construction details of the documentation, but also at photos taken before and during the restoration process. Complementary to the documentation, parts of the original structure will be exhibited for the sake of recording the building technology of that time, such as part of the cover of the original terrace, various French tiles from Marseille, windows and smaller items like lockers, keys, nails etc.

Beyond the documentation of the monument, a large number of items collected during the restoration will also be on display and, although they are fragmentary, they can provide interesting evidence about the recent history of the monument. These are:

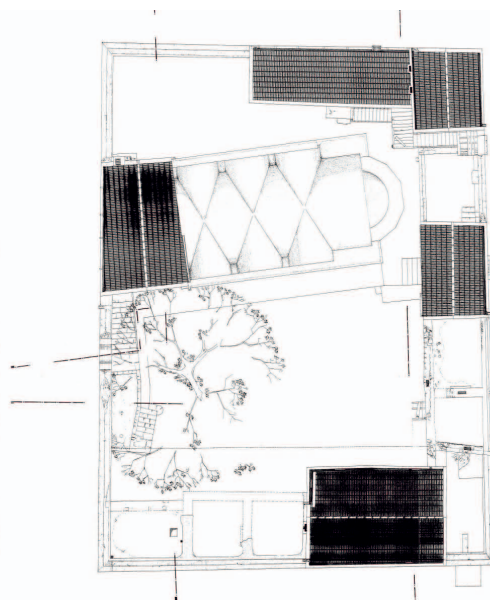
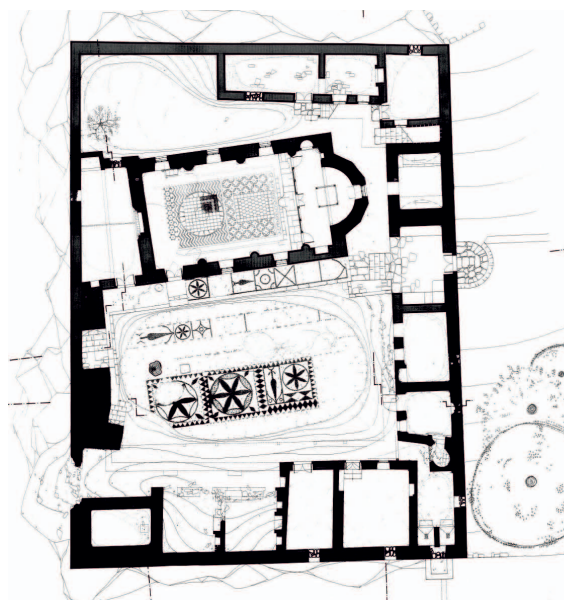
- daily life objects, such as a mousetrap, bottles of Italian firms, fragments of byzantine and "Blue willow" plates
- agricultural tools, such as a sickle and a wooden part of a plough
- a French advertisement sign "LIQUEURS DIVERSE".
- army equipment: helmet and bullets
- a small piece of furniture used both as a seat and storage trunk.
- a painting that depicts a sailing vessel
- and a coin with Arabic letters on it.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that at the same time, the 4th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities has started the study for the restoration of "Saint George Santrape" at Horafia, in order to include the restoration project in the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) for the next Programming period, 2014-2020.

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National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007-2013

Regional Operational Programme Crete & Aegean Islands

Budget: €1.100.000

Implementing Agent: 4th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities)

Duration of the project: 1/3/2011-31/12/2014

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- I thank Efrossini Zoniou for editing the English translation of the text.



Tribute to George Theo Kailis

George Theo Kailis passed away in Perth, Western Australia at the age of 60 years on Saturday 22 March, 2014.

This tribute is to a man who, like many of us, had a deep abiding love for our little island of Kastellorizo, but who also strongly felt an overriding obligation to give back to the island of his forebears in a constructive & meaningful way.

George was a founder of the Australian Friends of Kastellorizo and served as an active director of AFK from its incorporation in 2007. He was integral in the inception, funding and delivery of AFK projects from the Student Exchange Program, the Children's Literature project Kastellorizo: My Odyssey, the Visitor's Island Guide, numerous restoration projects and the recent Recycling Plant project.

Not only was AFK a beneficiary of George's generosity, guidance and hard work but so too were the Greek Orthodox Church & Hellenic Community of WA, the Holy Monastery of St John of the Mountain (Forrestfield, WA), St Timothy Foundation for the less fortunate in WA, The Hellenic Initiative (the global Greek diaspora response to help shape Greece's long term recovery), Indigenous Boys Program at Hale School (Perth, WA), the Mauritanian Children's Health Fund for lifesaving surgery performed in WA and the Marine Conservation Fund of WA.

George was a true philanthropist who understood the fragility of life itself through his own experience of extended ill health, who empathised with those in real need and in his indomitable understated manner never looked for the accolades though genuinely deserving of them.

George is survived by his wife of 38 years, Athanae, his son Theo, two daughters Erini (married to Ilia), Philia (recently married to Stratos) and his 3 grandchildren Stella, Zara and Andreas. He was the son of Irene and the late Theo G Kailis and the brother to Joanne, Debra & Marina.

Kastellorizo: we have lost a good man in our beloved George, a true Megisteon.

Vale George Theo Kailis.



Yiayia's Mostly True Stories of Kastellorizo

by Nick Bogiatzis, Canberra

(Part 5) Yiayia's 'A Time for Weddings' Story

This next part of Yiayia's mostly true stories gives us a glimpse into some aspects of a more familiar Kastellorizo. It refers to some of the island's traditions, reflecting also a time of easy co-existence between Greeks and Turks in the Ottoman world.

Yiayia always wore around her neck a gold chain with a gold cross, and a gold coin.

It was time for us to go to bed, but again we didn't want to. I suddenly thought to ask Yiayia what the coin was. We knew what the cross was, because all children were given a cross when they were baptised, from their godparents, their Nono and Nona.

'Ah,' said Yiayia. 'This is a special coin. It was given to me by my mother when I married. And I will give it to Mia when she marries.' Mia became very interested then, and started asking questions.

'Where did it come from?' she asked.

'Well,' Yiayia smiled, getting up to get her tin of koulouria. 'Our house was just near the mosque. Remember seeing it in the big photograph? Every Friday the Turkish families on the island went to the mosque to pray. My Mamma was Yiayia Malamateni. When she was a young girl, she had a good friend called Jasmine, who lived nearby. Jasmine was Turkish. And after prayers, her family would come to our house for coffee and sweets. Malamateni and Jasmine would play together, and became good friends.

'My Pappa, Pappou Manoli, used to greet them, saying: 'teshekir ederim' in Turkish, and they would answer back: 'herete effendi' in Greek. In those days we all spoke some Turkish, and the Turks could talk to us in Greek.

'Even though Kastellorizo belonged to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, there were only a few Turkish families living on Kastellorizo, up near the castle on the Kavo. The Turkish governor, the Kaimakam, lived near the mosque, on the very tip of the harbour from where he could look out over all the Limani, and of course where everybody could see him. But the people on the island ran their own affairs. Even then there was free education and free doctors for everybody.

'We and the Turks were all friends then, and used to trade together. In fact we had homes and businesses in Turkey. When Yiayia Malamateni married she was given the family house near the mosque, and also given a house by the water in Antiphellos, the town opposite Kastellorizo.'

'Wow,' Mia said. 'She was given two houses?!'

Yiayia laughed. 'Yes, in those days when a girl married, she was given a dowry, with a home, and beautiful clothes, and everything needed for her home. While money would be given to the groom, to help them establish their new lives together, the houses always remained the property of the girls.

'Especially, the brides were given a pair of bracelets of woven gold called tserkika. If they were lucky, they got a matching necklace. These were always a special part of the girl's dowry. And there was other gold jewellery as well. My mother had three holes in each of her ears to carry lots of different earrings.'

'I don't think my Mum would let me do that,' Mia said softly.

'But is that how you got the coin?' I asked.

'Slow down' Yiayia laughed. 'Yiayia Malamateni and Jasmine were such good friends that when she married, Jasmine gave it to her as a present to a special friend. Jasmine's father, Mustafa Bey, had many coins like that. An old man was digging his garden in the town called Kalamaki, and found a clay jar full of them. He was good friends with Mustafa Bey, and sold them to him one by one as he needed money. Mustafa Bey was happy because he wanted many gold coins to give to his daughter Jasmine when she married.'

I wasn't really interested in the coin until then, but I thought it exciting that Yiayia actually had a gold coin that was part of a buried treasure. 'Will you take it off so we can look at it?' we asked Yiayia.

She did. It was very different from our coins in Australia. 'Mustafa Bey knew that these coins were special to the people on Kastellorizo. We call them Konstantinates, or the coins of Emperor Constantine. Remember we talked about Constantinople, the city that Constantine built? Well we thought that his mother Empress Eleni had them made.

'Kastellorizians say Empress Eleni, or Ayia Eleni, rested in Kastellorizo on her way to Jerusalem to look for the cross that Christ died on. She built a small church on our island, and many years later, a big new church was built called 'Saints Constantine and Helen'. It has wonderful stone columns inside that were floated across from Turkey from the ancient city of Patara. They are very big, and the church is very beautiful.

'And Ayia Eleni is said to have found the cross in Jerusalem because of a special sign. It was a sweet smelling plant that then only grew where the cross was buried.

'Do you know what plant that was?' Yiayia asked. We couldn't imagine.

'It was vasiliko' she said, 'or 'basil', meaning the plant of the king. When I was little all the Greek and Italian homes had vasiliko growing, and now everybody grows basil because it smells so sweet.'

We were all looking closely at this special coin. 'See on one side what looks like Emperor Constantine holding the cross, and Empress Eleni kneeling in front of it?'

'Yes' we whispered, thinking this must be so old.

'Well,' Yiayia said. 'Actually it was only after I came to Australia that I learnt it was not so old, and not made by Empress Eleni. It is actually a coin made in the city of Venice in Italy. It's called a 'ducat'.



We weren't sure whether to be disappointed or not. 'But it looks old', I whispered.

'And it still is. It is nearly three hundred years old. And one day Mia, it will be yours.'

'Will I get a dowry?' Mia asked.

'The best dowry a girl can get today is to have a good education', said Yiayia gently.

'But did you get a dowry?' Mia persisted.

Come here, said Yiayia. She took us into her bedroom. In the corner was a large wooden carved chest. It had always been there. I now wondered if it was filled with gold treasure.

'No', Yiayia laughed. It's a different treasure. It's part of the dowry that my Mother, Yiayia Malamateni gave me. Not the gold, but the beautiful clothes and things for our house.

I wasn't very interested then, but was still curious when Yiayia opened the chest. She carefully took out a big red velvet coat, with fur edges, and lots of gold thread sewn on to make amazing patterns. 'Look', said Yiayia. This was my coat. And it's real gold thread. She took out many different things of fantastic colours, nothing like the clothes women wear now.

'What are these?' Yiayia asked me. I told Yiayia I thought they were the gold buckles that the pirates would have worn. They looked like big gold buckles, but with pins in the middle. 'No', laughed Yiayia. 'These are the boukles the women wore, instead of buttons on the front of their dresses'

'But how did they put all this on?' Mia asked.

Yiayia reached into the chest and took out an old envelope. Inside were the strangest photographs. Not only because they looked old, but because the people were dressed so differently. The men had baggy trousers that Yiayia called vrakes, and the women wore all the clothes we could see in Yiayia's chest. And with funny shoes like slippers. Yiayia showed us these shoes were made of velvet with more of the gold embroidery.

Yiayia said that this was the wedding photograph of Yiayia Malamateni and Pappou Manoli. There were so many people in the photograph, and many of them were our relatives. They had all come from Antiphellos, Kalamaki, Livisi and Myra in Turkey. The celebrations lasted many days. And special songs were sung and foods cooked.

One week before the wedding, Yiayia Malamateni would have shown her dowry to all her friends and relatives. From the time they were little, the girls would start embroidering their sheets and pillowcases so they could have the most beautiful ones when they married. Gold coins and sugared almonds were then thrown on a bed for the bride and groom. Imagine missing some and finding them in your bed when you went to sleep at night.

I was ready to go to bed then. I was very tired, especially from imagining buried treasures of gold. But Mia wanted to know more about Yiayia Malamateni's wedding. 'How did Yiayia Malamateni meet Pappou Manoli? Would they have gone to parties together?'

'No, no', said Yiayia. 'In those days girls stayed at home till they married. They went to school till they were twelve or thirteen, then they stayed home and didn't go out at all in the daytime when young men could see them.'

'That's terrible', Mia said. 'How could they live like that?'

Yiayia sighed. 'It was different then. A girl learnt at home how to look after the house, and how to be a mother. There were no television programs to teach them, or take-away shops for food. She learnt to be queen of her house, and the boys learnt from their fathers the work that would provide for their families.

'When it was time for them to marry, family friends, or matchmakers, would suggest a good boy from a good family to marry. If the family liked the boy, he would meet the girl at her home, and if they liked each other, they would marry.

'That is how Yiayia and Pappou met, and they were very happy. It was different then.'

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The Curses of Living on Kastellorizo

by Efrossini Zoniou, Kastellorizo

Efrossini is of Greek heritage and was born and educated in Belgium, where she also learnt Dutch. She is a qualified teacher of German, English and French as foreign languages. She also teaches Greek for foreigners and taught herself Italian. She was trained as an interpreter by the European Parliament at the École de Traduction et d'Interprétation (School for Translation and Interpretation) in Geneva, but chose to live and work in Greece. In Athens, she was a foreign language teacher, director of studies, teacher trainer and published writer of educational books at a large language institute before setting up her own foreign language institute, which she closed when she came to Kastellorizo with her husband, Sephanos Zois.

This is the first of two articles in which Efrossini reflects on living on Kastellorizo for three years.

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Part Two

Kastellorizo's geographical location is its best blessing and its worst curse at once. Its strategic position at the crossroads of East and West have made it the meeting point of different worlds and civilisations, the blend of which generated a rich culture, so that the Greek phrase "lighthouse of civilisation" accurately describes this gem of the Dodecanese, radiating with a bright heritage. Its isolation from the rest of the Greek territory – 72 nautical miles from the nearest island Rhodes – is also the source of all its evils, exacerbating the difficulties inherent to islands, triggering a chain reaction of problems in apparently unconnected, yet mutually interrelated areas, thus affecting every aspect of the inhabitants' life in ways one could not suspect. This minuscule rocky dot lost in the middle of the south-east Aegean, battered, lashed by waves and winds, and is at the mercy of Poseidon's, Zeus' and, above all, Aiolos' wrath. When these three divinities join forces to unleash their weapons onto the tiny island, Kastellorizo is hardly agreeable to live on. The difficulties posed by the remoteness of the island are then amplified by its vulnerability to severe weather.

Thus, the almost daily connection to the rest of Greece by sea and air links is all but theoretical, their feasibility being subject to the solecisms of the weather as well as, in the absence of a local ferry link between Rhodes and Kastellorizo, dependent on conditions prevailing in mainland Greece. The short and narrow runway can only accommodate small aircraft, which makes landing impossible by winds of 5 on the Beaufort scale and results in the all too frequent cancellation of flights, even in summer, sometimes for days in a row. Until a scheme is implemented to enlarge the airport, this problem will continue. The connection by ferry, which is supposedly seaworthy by higher winds and thunderstorms, is sometimes cancelled, not only on the pretext of weather prohibiting sailing in the Kastellorizo sea, but also because of high seas off the coast of Attica, where the ship sets sail from, or in the Central and South Aegean on its way to Rhodes, when the Kastellorizo Sea (South-East Aegean) is oily, and even because of crew strikes in Attica. All these circumstances sometimes combine so that the island may be cut off for ten days or longer leading to shortage of supplies and basic perishable goods. It is therefore obvious that, apart from the direct

connection between continental Greece and the Dodecanese, indubitably instrumental to the transport of goods and people, a local ferry link should secure the connection between Rhodes and Kastellorizo, so that island life is not affected by conditions in Piraeus which are totally irrelevant to local reality.

Our personal experience of taking leave has seldom been "plain sailing". At its worst the Piraeus-Kastellorizo route repeatedly proved to be a modern Odyssey with my husband, me, our luggage and our vehicle finding ourselves –separately- roaming the Aegean Sea and sky back and forth for days before we all reached our destination! Considering that local residents rarely travel for holidays, but mostly for business, any delay in your journey may have far-reaching consequences. In my husband's case, being stranded in Rhodes meant that the Megisti branch of the National Bank of Greece remained closed, local businessmen unable to carry out their transactions, which were necessary for their suppliers to forward their orders (including food supplies), and employees and conscripts deprived of access to cash, required for their daily needs.

The unreliability of transport does not merely cause frustration and stress due to the inability to travel when planned. It deals a major blow to the engine of Greek and the local economy, tourism: how can one book a holiday in the mid- or low season, when the weather is generally most clement, or a long weekend to Kastellorizo, if one is not sure to reach one's destination in the first place? The volatility of the weather and transport was most recently experienced on Good Friday morning, when it only took a one-hour downpour coinciding with the time of the flight (last year it was the wind!) to cancel the flight from (and therefore to) Rhodes alongside the plans of many travellers who had anticipated spending the Easter weekend either in Rhodes or on Kastellorizo.

Cancelled links also delay the availability of indispensable products and services on the island. Construction works and restoration projects are brought to a crawl for lack of material, the delay in postal delivery, apart from deferring reception of much-needed parcels, has caused people to incur fines for delayed payment of bills or taxes or required some to travel to Rhodes (which means a five-day trip, with the ensuing inconvenience and transport, accommodation costs) to settle the outstanding bill. On New Year's Eve 2011, Zeus treated us to an early evening fireworks display which plunged the whole area of Mandraki in the dark, leaving the inhabitants without heating or cooking facilities (as everything is electricity-run). We were preparing ourselves for several days without electricity when thanks to the selflessness of the power supply company crew, who risked life and limb in the pouring rain to repair the network, lighting was restored after a few hours. However, in all households, appliances, TV sets, computers, telephone, mobile telephone and internet lines had been damaged. Thus, we were deprived of phone and internet connection, whose vital importance in a remote area cannot be overstated, for over three weeks, the time it took repair crews to come from Rhodes.

The difficulty of arranging for a substitute to replace an employee taking leave makes it almost impossible for one to obtain leave when one needs to, especially in posts which are of crucial significance to the island or when one is the only staff member in a specific post. For instance, the municipality plumber, who is responsible for maintaining the desalination unit daily, hardly ever



It is important to note that Kastellorizians do not cause all the pollution: in this picture it is sea-borne pollution brought by north-easterly winds.

leaves the island as central administration regulations do not allow the appointment of a second plumber. In three years on the island we never had the chance to leave on a weekend to Rhodes or Turkey as my husband was on-call twenty-four hours a day.

On Kastellorizo, nothing can be taken for granted, not even things which commonly are, especially vital supplies as water and food. Kastellorizo, is a “waterless island”, without potable water, which necessitates the consumption of bottled mineral water for drinking, as well as cooking, and cannot cater for the needs of an increased population in summer. Consequently, the island relies on the water supplied from Rhodes by tanker weekly in the high season. It is sad to think that in the past our forebears had solved the problem of fresh water supply for several thousands of inhabitants –who, granted, must have had much less wasteful habits- and passing ships (Kastellorizo was a well-known stopover for clean water supply) by securing communal wells (among them the Pacha’s wells, the aheres), dams and cisterns on every farm as well as a cistern in every house to collect the water from the abundant winter precipitations, whereas their twenty-first century descendants, for all their knowledge of recent technological developments and supposedly heightened environmental awareness, cannot be self-reliant. Sadder still to hear that the Pacha’s wells, are no longer landmarks, but “breeding grounds for mosquitoes, a threat to public health”, when, as recently as seventy years ago, they provided water so clean as to be drinkable and definitely free of mosquitoes, thanks to a kind of fish, introduced from Rhodes, which thrived on insects. No need to mention the health hazards associated with water from plastic containers transported and stored in unsuitable conditions or the pressure on the fragile local ecosystem caused by unsightly tons of plastic disposed on the seaside slopes or unofficially “incinerated” in the local uncontrolled “landfill site” instead of being recycled. The lack of ecological concern is a burning issue on Kastellorizo. The natural environment is the source of livelihood to the majority of the population and must be preserved.



One reason I was looking forward to living in a rural area was the expectation to consume locally grown, healthy produce. Alas, I was greatly mistaken! The monoculture prevailing on Kastellorizo is the tourist trade. Agriculture and cattle rearing are neglected, supposedly because of an inadequate water supply. Very few grow crops, which are not sufficient to cater for the whole island’s permanent needs anyway, or breed chickens, whereas sheep, goats and oxen are left to graze in the mountain and are used only for meat, not for their milk, which would also secure dairy products. This is regrettable because the potential for farming on the island is undeniable (as is confirmed by a current enterprise to revive the

Mirikli farm with organic crops, which should be hailed and, hopefully, will be imitated). In consequence, one is entirely reliant, on products brought from Rhodes by ferry. When the ferry link is cancelled consecutively, the scarcity of dairy products is inevitable on the island. On one occasion milk and eggs were ordered from Cyprus and brought by a cruise ship which fortunately happened to be scheduled for a stopover on Kastellorizo! The corollary of dependence is the ludicrously high cost of living –double or triple to that in the rest of Greece. The only other option available to the residents –rather an imposed choice of a lesser evil- is that of purchasing fruit and vegetables in neighbouring Turkey, where produce is both of lesser quality and higher cost than in Rhodes and mainland Greece. In Western democracies, and indeed in the cradle of democracy, equality of citizens and equal opportunities offered to all are recognised as fundamental rights and the right of the consumer to choice is a basic rule governing our open-market economies. On Kastellorizo none of these tenets apply: they still need to be claimed and conquered.



Kastellorizo residents are denied another basic right: access to proper medical care. The local health centre is always understaffed and the normally required specialists are not represented. Patients are treated by either a medical trainee, the so-called “agricultural physician” performing their medical practice for several months prior to graduation, or a doctor usually sent from one of Rhodes’ health centres for short periods of time, or even the army doctor – never permanent staff. Currently the island is fortunate enough to have a dentist –a conscript who happens to be a graduate in dentistry and provides dental services during his military service. In the event of cases requiring more comprehensive care, emergency transfer to Rhodes by army helicopter is necessary, but this cannot always prevent tragedies, as was recently experienced.

The initiatives taken by volunteer doctors, NGOs, the Dodecanese Periphery, even the Health Ministry to organise healthcare programs lasting a weekend now and then are undoubtedly laudable. However, these can be no substitute for a comprehensive health policy and cannot overshadow the need for a health centre permanently staffed with a GP, nurses and basic specialties such as a dentist, a paediatrician, an orthopaedist, and equipped with a microbiology laboratory, where basic tests can be performed.

It is commonly held that one’s place of living shapes one’s character. The remoteness of Kastellorizo, its peculiar conditions and its recent history of hardships could not fail to affect its inhabitants’ mentality. The isolation of Kastellorizians is not solely physical. From their island, perceived as the navel of the world, the regulations and laws



The Curses of Living on Kastellorizo

by Efrossini Zoniou, Kastellorizo

of the Greek state seem very distant and a vague notion. The indifference of the state at times has encouraged the idea that the law is too remote to reach the island and to be applicable there. The abandonment felt by the inhabitants in the years of deprivation has fostered the belief that they have only themselves to rely on and nurtured individualism coupled with materialism. As akrites, they appear to feel the state owes them compensation by exempting them from basic obligations of other Greek citizens and providing for them in all. The unquestionable discomforts of living on a border island require positive discrimination, it is true, to alleviate the difficulties and to create conditions for the population to remain on their home island enjoying the quality of life of all citizens. However, they do not justify the ungrateful ignorance of all the facilities and services provided by the state so far and its on-going efforts to improve living conditions or the precedence of short-term personal interest over collective interest. Nor do they exempt locals from the need to take initiatives, to act as committed citizens for the greater interest of their home, to be prepared to give back to the society and the island that sustains them, to contribute to voluntary, gratuitous action for sustainable development of the island where they and their offspring have a stake, and to be involved in the shaping of a better future, rather than expect authorities, sympathetic fellow citizens or dedicated Kazzies of the diaspora to act. Kastellorizians need to recover a sense of community, of responsibility towards and commitment to it, of altruism and solidarity, of active participation in a common goal, the greater, long-term good of the whole island.



One category of residents who are never included in the notion of akrites, though they live on the island permanently or for several years for the demands of their profession, deserves mention as they make up half of the island's population. These are the security forces personnel, army people, power supply company employees, teaching

staff, etc. Some of them move in with their families, their spouses having to give up their jobs, others leave behind them a husband or wife and infants -sometimes new born babies- for salaries at subsistence level. The increased cost of living on a remote island and exorbitant rents on Kastellorizo are a heavy burden on their meager income. It is essential that they be embraced by the local community, whose recent history has taught them the pain of expatriation, their services be acknowledged and appreciated, and the professional skills of their spouses be put to good use, enabling them to occupy vacant positions wherever possible. They should not be regarded as all-year-round clients, who support the local tourist trade in both the high and low seasons. Mutual understanding and solidarity is instrumental, since, ultimately, Kastellorizians and non-Kastellorizians face the same daily challenges and their fruitful cooperation and combined efforts are to the benefit of the island's living conditions: together they can make things happen instead of letting them happen.

On the other hand, non-Kastellorizians coming to the island should realise that they represent to the native a mirror of the manners and values of the rest of Greece and an open window on the outer world. They are seen as models to be imitated, their stance as representative of the norm elsewhere. It is therefore crucial that they respect Kastellorizo and its people, introduce to the islanders the best of Greece and inspire them to improve and broaden their minds. Visitors' manners and actions should not offend or corrupt the inhabitants with displays of disrespectful, inappropriate or dishonest behaviour causing scandal and discrediting all non-Kastellorizians in the eyes of the locals.

Despite all the difficulties connected to life in a remote region, Kastellorizo is blessed with many assets and offers many opportunities to its inhabitants. Its immense potential for development and yielding prosperity is still unexploited and augurs well for the future. At a time of bleak crisis in Greece, Kastellorizians have every reason to count their blessings, which are plentiful and outnumber by far the curses.

The long-term visitor to the island may, like Odysseus, wish to break from the spell of this mighty Circe. However, all along they have been a consenting victim and once they have escaped from her den, they may surprise themselves by longing for their confinement. Personally I will leave the island with my baggage full of unique experiences and images, a wealth of material to reflect on with love and emotion when I am back home. Like the poet, I know that they will often "flash upon that inward eye", memory, "and then my heart with pleasure [will] fill" and roam the Kastellorizo hill...

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