

The Rules Of Betrothal and Marriage – Castellorizian Style

by Nicholas Pappas, Sydney

Detail of the mandili of the late Triantafyllia Papanastasiou (Pappas), courtesy National Museum of Australia

It is well-accepted that the customs and traditions surrounding betrothal and marriage were adhered to strictly on Castellorizo, at least until the Second World War. Indeed, some of these practices were transported with Castellorizians as they travelled and settled abroad, and some are still practised today, albeit in a much diluted form.

What is less known is that during the boom years of the mid-19th century, as the island's trade and prosperity blossomed, the island's elites developed and implemented detailed rules that governed betrothal and marriage practices. These rules were to be refined over time and they underwent many changes during the second half of the 19th century, and again in the early decades of the 20th century.

The precise detail of these rules of betrothal and marriage has been generally long-forgotten, even on the island, until the author was fortunate enough to acquire an obscure document at an auction of rare items. This elegantly written nine-page municipal tract bearing the date 5 April 1900 aimed to codify the exact steps to be followed by intended grooms and brides, their parents and their other family members, when entering into marital relations. Needless to say, it is as fascinating as it is revealing.¹

Codifying the ritual of marriage

The level of regulation of an intended couple's private affairs revealed by the document would surprise most readers today, but it does reaffirm for us just how important – and structured – the ritual of marriage was on Castellorizo in the 19th century. One reason for this was that marriage was a way for families to entrench themselves within, and sometimes ascend through, the otherwise rigid social structures of the island. Another reason was that marriage was a critical vehicle for the transfer of property, particularly real estate, through the transmission of dowry from parents to daughter.

The document in question (see photos) is actually a 1935 municipal

rewrite of the 1900 original, but that detracts little from its overall significance to historians and those claiming links to the island. It is a veritable mine of information on little known details of what simply had to happen in the weeks leading up to a betrothal and a marriage. It warrants close inspection.

Betrothal or *lógos*

Not surprisingly, the document begins by reciting the minimum age for betrothal; for females this was the jarringly low (but not uncommon for those times) 14 years of age, a rule first set by a Patriarchal encyclical of 12 July 1868. Conversely, the minimum age for males was the more accepted 18, though the setting of that age had more to do with a young male's readiness to earn an income at sea, than any maturity for marriage.

The importance of the betrothal as a critical forerunner of marriage is well-recorded in the document. The binding nature of the promise to marry is reinforced again and again, as is the importance of formalising it by the giving of modest gifts that presage what lies ahead; on the part of the intended groom, these comprise whatever gold coins he might offer, while the intended bride will offer her kerchief with a ring, accompanied by a tray of *loukoúmia*, but nothing more. The aim at this early point is commitment, not extravagance.

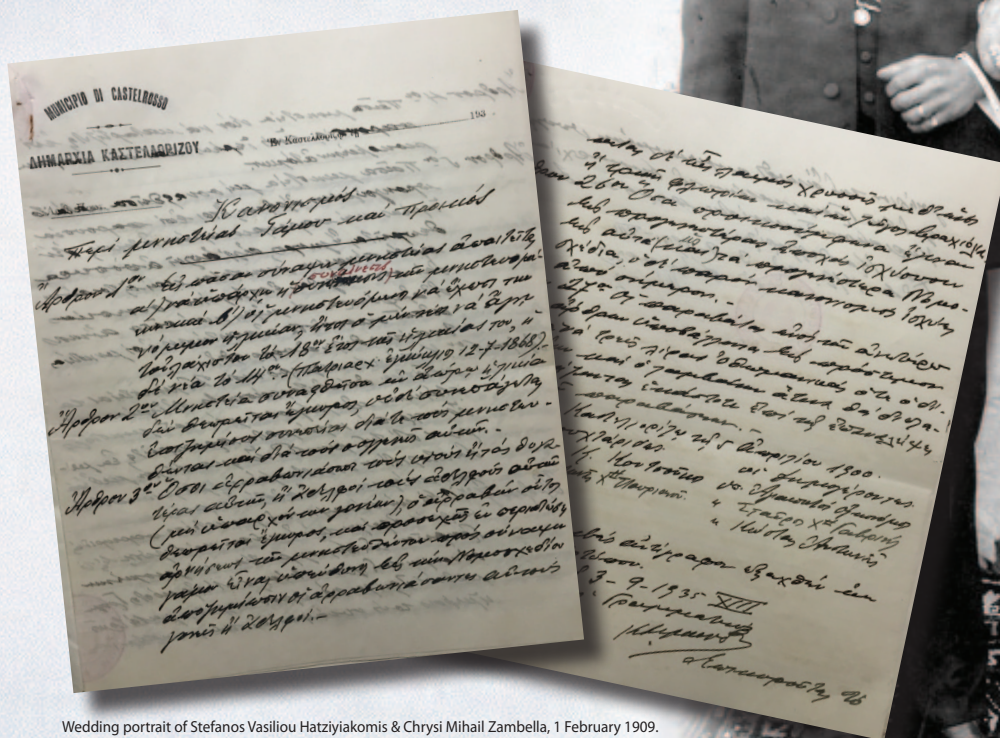
The giving of *lógo* (word or promise) to constitute the betrothal was the pre-requisite to the attendance of the parties at the offices of the *Demogerontía*, the pre-1913 equivalent of the local council. This was for the purposes of preparing the fundamentally important dowry contract which would record the gifts from the bride's family to her husband-to-be. These had usually been worked out well in advance by relatives on both sides. Penalties for failing to deliver on promises of dowry were as hefty as for breach of promise; 6,000 *grósia*² was the prescribed sum, of which 2,000 would be applied towards philanthropic causes on the island.

¹ The text of the 5 April 1900 document has been copied by hand on municipal letterhead of the Italian period by the then secretary, Kyriakos Simonides, and counter-signed by the then mayor, Savvas Mihalakis. It bears the date 3 September 1935. The signatories to the original document from 1900 were the then Demogerontes, Konstandinos Koutsoukos, Antonios H'Stavrianou, Agapitos Economou, Stavros H'Gavriel and Kostas Antonas.

² One Ottoman lira was equivalent to 100 grosia.

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Wedding portrait of Stefanos Vasiliou Hatziyiakomis & Chrysi Mihail Zambella, 1 February 1909. The bride and groom are probably pictured standing on one of the *setsetédhes* given by the bride's family as part of her dowry. Strategically placed behind the bride to offset her clothing is an oriental wall-hanging. Courtesy the late Katina Penglis.

Familial interactions

The next sections of the document are especially revealing because they sought to regulate the interaction between the two families in the period between betrothal and marriage. Neither party was permitted to visit the other unless the strict regime prescribed by the rules was followed. For the bride, a visit to her future mother-in-law on the day after the betrothal was compulsory, but only if she was accompanied by her mother or sister. Such visits were to continue on a weekly basis until the wedding, but the hospitality to be offered to them by the *syμβethéra*-to-be was to be limited to a 'simple sweet or some other simple offering'. *Baklavá* and *katoumária* were expressly forbidden.

Nor was the exchange of gifts permitted during this period. The intended bride or her mother could not deliver 'socks or caps' for the budding groom, and even gifts of the handicrafts of the bride's mother were out of the question. These rules remind us that the period of betrothal was generally considered reserved and subdued in nature.

Unsurprisingly, there is a specific provision that expressly prohibits the groom from 'spending the night' at the home of the bride's family during the betrothal. Like the bride, the groom could only visit once each week, but, in his case, never after 4pm. And any revelry on the groom's part was not permitted, as was 'unnecessary expenditure' on eating and drinking while he waited for his wedding day.

Dowry

Perhaps the most interesting part of the document is the long provision that set minimum thresholds for dowries. A completed house was a standard prerequisite, but so was 'as much cash as the bride's family could give'. The bride had to receive from her family, as a minimum, five *kavádhia* (long coat, two of gold thread), five *zepoúnia* (vest), 25 shirts (ten of silk), two velvet *kontóchia* (short coat), six silver or gilded *boúkles* (shirt fastener), two *zómata* (sash), two gold rings, seven *mandília* (shawl, one of silk and one in the *Polítiko* style), ten *tsakiá* (head-piece), ten pairs of socks, four pairs of *kountoúres* (shoes) and, most visibly, a *goúna* (fur) worth not less than two *eikosafranga*.³

The obligations of the bride's family did not end there; essential items for the new household also had to be provided. Two *setsetédhes* (knotted carpet), one bedcover, 2 silk or woollen cushions, a mirror, a chest of drawers and kitchen items including a boiler and a saucepan were all compulsory gifts. And they all had to be verified by a representative of the *Demogerontía* before despatch to the groom's family for approval.

The wedding

The last sections of the document deal in some detail with the lead-up to the wedding itself and are too many to summarise here. Of special note is a provision prohibiting relatives from delivering sweets on the eve of the wedding, while another limits the display of jewellery on a bride to 'a gold necklace with three *floriá* and a pair of bracelets'. And perhaps the most intriguing stipulation is a clause banning the brewing of beer during the 'wedding period' (traditionally, the period after *Fota* until the beginning of Lent) to discourage revellers from 'descending to the taverns' and indulging in 'pranks and games'!

This is without doubt an important document that casts new light on the betrothal and marriage practices of a by-gone era on Castellorizo, when the ritual of marriage was dictated by the familial, economic and social obligations arising from the union of two families. It also reflects how decades of financial prosperity on Castellorizo had converted the act of marriage, and its related traditions, into an opportunity for families to display their own wealth and standing to their community.

It is a sobering thought that by 1900, when this document was created, the island's economy was about to commence its trajectory of decline. The next few decades would see many of these strict stipulations eroded and abandoned as isolation and deprivation set in, and local demands of social standing and etiquette took a back seat to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

³An *eikosafranga* was a French gold twenty franc coin, usually of the period of Napoleon III.

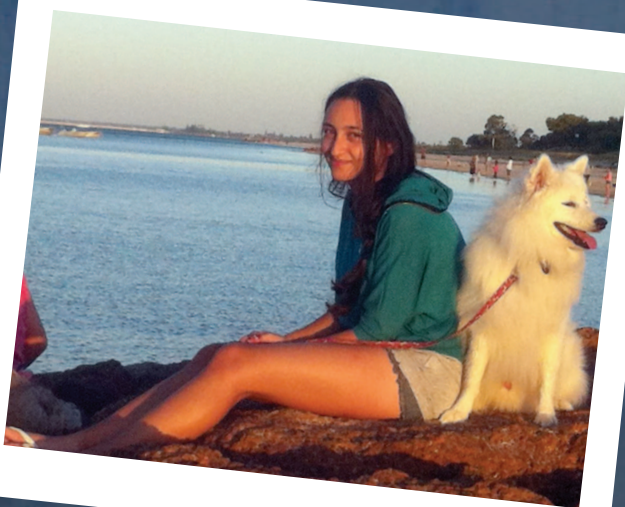
STUDENT EXCHANGE

2015

Maraya and Demi's links to their Kastellorizian ancestors:

Their maternal great grandparents were Angelo Petridis and Ekaterini (Katherine) Petridis (nee Passaris) who were born on Kastellorizo.

Their paternal great grandfather Angelo (Diamandaras) Antonas was born on a Greek settlement south of Turkey. Myra and his wife Zambeta (Elizabeth) Antonas (nee Papakotis) was born on Kastellorizo. They migrated to Perth, Australia in the early 1900s.



Maraya Takionatis

I have chosen to apply for this exchange, because I hope that spending time on Kastellorizo will give me inspiration for the future and help me with my understanding of the world. I also am proud to have a Greek heritage and believe that we can learn a lot from the Greeks.

Personally, I also look forward to learning more about my family. My grandmother and mother, tell stories of Kastellorizo that mesmerise me, and I want to be able to tell my grandchildren these stories, as well as have stories of my own to contribute.

I would also like to go because my cousin, Demi Sipsas, has applied for this program and I think that it will be a wonderful experience for us to bond in a meaningful way and learn about our family history together. It would mean a lot to experience the island for myself, without the influence of my family, and to get to know the place on my own terms.

I think it is extremely important to know where you come from, and before I start to consider building my career, and a life after I finish school, I would like to know more of my family's history to help me with my future. Without a doubt I will learn more of the language, customs and way of life. I want to see the churches and discover every landmark. I want to see the balcony from which my great, great uncle dived each day. I want to see the house my great, grandmother was born in. I want to swim in the blue grotto and I want to study the characters which make the island. I want to see how I can fit in this island and want to feel the magic my Yiayia fondly speaks about. Ultimately, I want my Greek heritage to be more than something I was born into, I want to feel proud and inspired by my background. I hope I will find a way to promote, respect and honour this island always.



Demi Sipsas

I have chosen to apply for this student exchange as I have not travelled overseas before and I think this would be a magnificent opportunity to visit the island of Kastellorizo where my maternal great-grand parents were born. Since I can remember, I have heard so many wonderful things said about this unique and beautiful island and have always wanted to go there. I would love to be given the opportunity to travel overseas to Kastellorizo to see the birth place of my ancestors. It would be a truly incredible experience. It would also mean that I will be able to improve my knowledge of the island and I could also improve my Greek speaking skills and also have a really memorable time.



Chris Zounis from Christos Jewellery in Mt Hawthorn WA has kindly donated two sterling silver pins with the Kastellorizian logo as a memento for the girls as part of their Student Exchange experience. Friends of Kastellorizo would like to thank Chris for his fine craftsmanship and his generosity.

PRODUCT KASTELLORIZO

by Margarita Kannis, Kastellorizo

Greeks are historically entrepreneurs, the keenest eye for an opportunity. And now in this time of crisis, there are pockets of people using the void that has been opened, to create new areas for jobs and incomes.

One such example is the easterly South Aegean island of Kastellorizo or Megiste. The people here are making a blueprint for what could be a way up and out for other villages and small towns across Greece.

We are very happy and proud to announce that locally produced olive oil is now available on Kastellorizo. It is the first time in 100 years that locally grown olives have been harvested for commercial use.





Kastellorizo has many olive trees, which for centuries have been harvested in a small way for personal use, but mainly have gone to waste. With the support of the local non-profit organisation Drasi Kastellorizou this is changing. The Diaspora from this island are enthusiastic to help Greece emerge from the crisis and so, working with Drasi, individuals are seeding small industries that once served this region well. Using the physical resources of the trees, and the human resources of the island, one fulltime and one part-time job have been created.

For the first time, this past winter, olives were harvested in the winter by Dimitris Kambouris and taken to Rhodes for pressing that occurred within 24 hours of picking them. The oil was returned to the island where it settled until this month. It was bottled and labelled on Kastellorizo. It is the first time in modern history that this has happened here!

The oil is available in two sizes, 250ml and 100ml. The first is for salads, the smaller for baptisms and weddings. The oil is available from the Kastellorizian Information Centre on the island. If you want to order oil, please contact margarita_kannis@hotmail.com

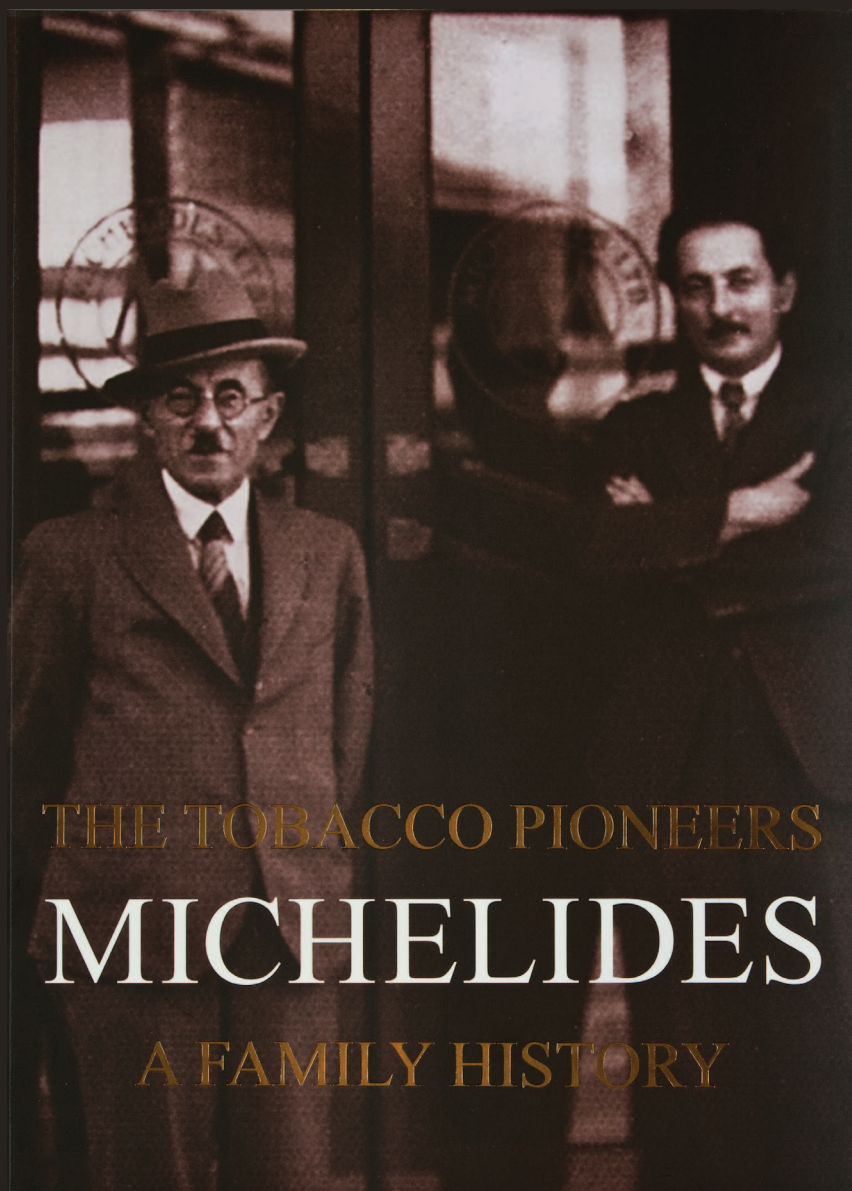
Income from the oil is donated entirely to Drasi Kastellorizou to pay the wages for another two jobs recently created for the Recycling Programme and for all expenses to produce the bottled oil. Slowly, with the much appreciated financial support from the Diaspora (mainly from Australia), a new/old industry has been reborn. It is similar to the South Asian micro-lending system which has been so successful in that part of the world.

The 3.5 full time jobs created to date is significant given the permanent population of 300 people on the island with Drasi Kastellorizou now being the second largest employer after the local municipal council.

And the island is not stopping there. Nor is the Diaspora. With the seeming success of this project, more people are coming forward, seeking industries to seed with much needed startup capital, with hope for similar success. The opportunities listed to be seeded include a free range chicken farm producing eggs for local & tourist consumption, apiaries for local honey consumption and Guided Walking Tours.

The future looks good!





The Tobacco Pioneers: Michelides - A Family History

This remarkable history celebrates the business skills, energy and determination of brothers, Peter and Michael Michelides, not only in their pioneering of the tobacco and cigarette manufacturing industry in Western Australia in the face of overwhelming odds, but also their leading roles in the development and growth of a vibrant Greek community in Perth.

Richly illustrated with photographs and documents from family archives and government and newspaper sources, the book is in two parts: Firstly their arduous journey from the small Greek island of Castellorizo via Egypt to Perth over a hundred years ago; the founding, growth and decline of their cigarette and tobacco empire, Michelides Ltd and their strong family and community involvement; secondly comprising dynamic biographies of their children, together with a detailed family tree.

This is a book of historical significance and rich heritage that details the struggles and triumphs of early Greek migration to Australia and for family and friends to reconnect with, or find their place in, the story of these two outstanding men.

The book was launched on Sunday 23 August 2015 by the Hon Dr Ken Michael AM, former Governor of Western Australia at Castellorizian House, 160 Anzac Rd, Mt Hawthorn.

Retail price \$50.00 (450 pages, fully illustrated)

The book can be purchased online at
www.vividpublishing.com.au/michelides

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