



## THE KASTELLORIZIAN WOMAN'S COSTUME

by Geoffrey Conaghan, Melbourne

*Geoffrey Conaghan from Melbourne is a member of the Sydney Askitis and Stavrianos families through his late mother Amy Conaghan (Amirisa Stavrianos).*

*He is custodian of his great grandmother's wardrobe brought to Sydney in 1925. The clothes of Amirisa (Hatziagapitou) Askitis have remained as a single collection, the largest intact wardrobe known to exist, consisting of around 100 items.*

*Geoffrey continues to research the origins of fabrics and this article is his second contribution to FILIA on the history of our island's unique clothing. His focus is how trade routes introduced fabrics to Kastellorizo, and why many Australian Kastellorizian families have clothes, jewellery, carpets and furniture brought by their ancestors.*

*He has presented his work to the Kastellorizian Association in Victoria 2009 and 2019 and the Hellenic Centre London 2016.*

**'Why do you Australian Kastellorizians have so many things from the old country? We have nothing'**

This was put to me by an Australian of Pontian Greek origin, referring to the experience of many Ottoman Greek communities who fled Turkey with nothing.

Why do Australian Kastellorizians have many things that our grandparents and great grandparents brought to Australia: clothes, carpets, jewellery, furniture and household items? The answer is found in politics, war and international treaties.

Kastellorizo was controlled by the Ottomans for around four hundred years until the eve of WWI; it was then a French protectorate; then officially ceded to Italian control as part of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Italy held the rest of the Dodecanese since the Italo-Turkish War of 1912.

The Greek-Turkish War of 1919-22 resulted in an exchange of ethnic populations between Greece and Turkey. It was one of the largest movements of people in history and was neither peaceful nor organised. Many Greeks fled Turkey with stories of massacres and robberies. The burning of Smyrna/Izmir is a well documented disaster. In short, many Greeks were lucky to leave Turkey alive. Clothes and household goods were their last concern.

Due to Italian protection, Kastellorizo was not included in the population transfer, but was in crisis as trade links with Turkish coastal towns were disrupted by the population exchange. Many Kastellorizians had to abandon their mainland farms and businesses. The towns of Makri (Fetiye); Livisi (Kayakoy), Antiphelos (Kas) and Myra (Demre) had substantial Kastellorizian and other Greek communities.

The islanders were protected by Italy, departures were orderly and subsequently many Australian Kastellorizians now own beautiful and important examples of material culture.

WWII era Kastellorizians were not so fortunate. The bombing and burning of Kastellorizo is well documented (see works by Nicholas Pappas AM). Many families were evacuated to Palestine and left with nothing. They expected to return to their households, but there was little to return for as 90% of the buildings were bombed, burnt - or both. Clothes, carpets and furniture were only a few items they would never see again.

**The eastern Mediterranean in the last quarter of the 19th century. How Kastellorizo became part of the action.**

Kastellorizo was a mercantile, not agricultural, community. The mountainous island, only 11 square kilometres of which only 20% was habitable, supported a population of about 10,000 in its heyday. It enjoys a deep and protected harbour, its population was supported by international trade, its wealth created by ship owners and merchants.





# THE KASTELLORIZIAN WOMAN'S COSTUME (cont.)

by Geoffrey Conaghan, Melbourne

Kastellorizo's epoch is said to be the last quarter of the 19th century. Great wealth was created thanks to a safe harbour and the eastern Mediterranean becoming the entry point of trade from the East following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.

Financed by British interests, the Suez provided an 'express route' between Asia and the UK, a very handy asset following the official British occupation of India in 1858. British interests were previously managed by the privately owned East India Company centred in Calcutta. Following the 1858 exile to Burma of the Mughal Sultan, the British relocated to Delhi and the west coast port of Bombay (Mumbai) was expanded. Britain ruled India for the next 90 years, using the Suez Canal for commerce from India, Burma, Sri Lanka and points east of Malaya.

The Suez replaced the centuries-old Silk Roads. France, Britain and later Italy pursued economic interests in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon. Port Said was built as a new city in the 1850s, as what we would now call a 'special economic zone'. Aden was under British administration from 1839, initially from India but later as a British colony in its own right.

Cyprus became a British protectorate in 1878, strengthening British influence. Meanwhile, Alexandria flourished with the opening of the Suez Canal and Greeks prospered, as there was already an established Greek merchant community in Alexandria.

While European expansion demonstrates the eastern Mediterranean's economic importance, my favourite description of social change comes from an unlikely source: the eminent food writer and cultural anthropologist Claudia Roden. Based in the UK since the 1950s, Ms Roden's many achievements include introducing the British to hummus and the orange and almond cake. For this humanitarian gesture alone, she should be made a Dame of the British Empire.

I digress. From Roden's *The Book of Jewish Food* (page 5, Roden 1997) she describes her family's move to Egypt. Hers was a prominent Syrian merchant family, her great grandfather the Chief Rabbi of Aleppo. What led to this family relocating to Egypt from Syria?

*"Both my grandfathers left when Aleppo ceased to be the centre of the camel-caravan trade because the opening of the Suez Canal...had turned Egypt into an "El Dorado of the Nile Valley".*

Kastellorizo was ideally located almost directly north of 'El Dorado'. Like many communities it flourished and had the wealth to buy fine goods introduced from the east and the west. Fabric for the extravagant women's costume was among the luxuries.

**Trade routes and fabric: Indian ikats and French brocades. Kastellorizo as the interface of East and West.**

## Looking East

Many Kastellorizian women's garments include fine, tightly woven fabric with geometric patterns called ikat, a high quality weaving technique. They simultaneously strengthen and decorate the clothes. Ikat technique is considered the 'king of weaves' and found from the Caucasus to the eastern Indonesian islands.

The basement floor of the Benaki Museum Athens features dozens of regional Greek costumes as part of its ethnographic collection. Many of them feature ikats, and many of those I recognised as Indian, probably from the north western state of Gujarat (footnote 1).

Other items from Kastellorizo are Indian design. Fine 'tie-dye' or pinch dye silk panels were used as scarves which may be from Orissa state, central north east India. There are batiks, a technique synonymous with Indonesia but also found in India.

The women's headdress even carries a South Asian name: the Tsilaniotiko, from the local name for Ceylon, Tsilan (now Sri Lanka). My pro-Yiayia's is a fine maroon and emerald green silk, still in its headdress format: wound around a cardboard ring, which was placed on the head to balance and shape the head scarf. There are various theories to its source, but the name suggests the origin. I can think of no other reason why it would have the name of Ceylon.

## Looking West

However, the luscious and opulent silk brocades used to make the Ottoman style coat-dresses suggest other trade links, this time with the West. My theory - still to be corroborated by textile archivists - is





many are French and may be attributed to the great silk textile company, Tassinari and Chatel.

This was initially proposed by a retired salesman who worked for Tassinari and Chatel's London distributor who attended my 2016 Kastellorizian clothes presentation at the Hellenic Centre London. He recognised some of the fabrics. Photographs sent to Tassinari and Chatel in Lyon are confirmed as 'looking like ours' but until an archivist can examine the fabric, Tassinari and Chatel will not confirm or reject my theory. Thus I have an ongoing research challenge.

Tassinari and Chatel dominated the Lyon silk trade, estimated to employ 30,000 workers by the end of the 19th century. Established in 1680, Tassinari and Chatel supplied fabric to European royalty, silks for Napoleon's restoration of French palaces and to Catherine The Great of Russia. It was the premier French silk manufacture of the 19th century.

The rise of merchant classes in Europe created new markets for Tassinari and Chatel, and there is every likelihood that either Kastellorizian traders encountered the fabrics in France, or through intermediaries on trade networks as French industry sought international markets.

*"Throughout the 19th Century, commissions came... from overseas wherever French culture was in the ascendant, exported as far away as Turkey, Egypt and India. The arrival of a new era of affluence and the decline of royal furnishings brought into being a new clientele: the bankers, Lafitte, Rothschild and the merchant classes."*

Source: website of Tassinari & Chatel Lelievre, company history.

#### **The swing and the bling- how it was worn altogether.**

Observations from my late mother Amy Conaghan following the conservation of her Yiayia's clothes around 2005. She was the same size as her grandmother Amirisa, she could wear the costume and shoes.

**"The shoes are cut shorter than the heel and are open-backed so it takes some practice to walk. To keep the shoes on, I have to sway or swing a little while walking. This makes the clothes sway."**

An interesting observation. Only the under garment was secured by 'boukles' - the silver clasps.

None of the garments had buttons and the costume pre-dates zips. Layers of outer garments were left open, and the swaying or swinging motion created a movement that showed the colourful,

contrasting linings of the dress-coat and other items.

When she put on jewellery it rattled a little as she swayed. My mother concluded the women would have been seen and heard - luscious colours, furs, the gold embroidered ghounha (long over coat) - and jangly jewellery.

The sleeves of many garments are either cut short above the wrist or designed to be turned over, creating a cuff to show contrasting lining and to display bangles.

Another thought about the short-cut, backless shoes. Think of the unique dance of Kastellorizo: the sousta. It is led by the women, feet stay on the ground. No kicking or any upward movement. The dance is a rhythmic shuffle with increasing tempo but the feet stay on or very close to the ground, perfect movement for backless shoes.

The bling and swing. Visualise the women in a multitude of richly coloured, luxurious fabrics sourced from the east and west, including furs. Add as much gold jewellery as possible. More importantly, add an attitude of confidence created by wealth and matrilineal property inheritance. The women truly were 'the fabulous Kastellorizians'.

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Footnote 1. Although I have no formal training in textiles, I have studied them at length. I lived in India 2009-2013 where I was Victoria's Commissioner to India, allowing me access to textiles and experts. I was later Victoria's Agent-General to London 2009-2016, with access to textile collections and experts at the Victoria and Albert Museum and guest lecturers at The Hellenic Centre London. My observations are empirical and supported by conversations with Greek regional costume specialists at the Patterns of Magnificence costume exhibition at the Hellenic Centre London September 2015.



# RESTORATION OF THE "ITALIAN MARKET" IN KASTELLORIZO AND ITS RE-INTEGRATION INTO COMMUNITY LIFE

by Fotini Chalvantzi, Athens  
MSc Architect Engineer-Restorer NTUA

by Konstantinos I. Toumpakaris, Athens  
MSc Civil Engineer NTUA

The Municipal Market, or the "Italian Market" (Mercato) (fig.1) as it is widely known, of Kastellorizo was built during the period of Italian occupation (1934-1935) and was inaugurated on 20/1/35. It sits on the "Kavoulatsi" waterfront and houses the fish and meat market. It was made of reinforced concrete, with "graniglia" countertops, a type of cement mortar that resembles a mosaic form.

Over recent decades, a lack of maintenance and the building's close proximity to the sea have led to the gradual erosion of the "graniglia" due to the oxidation of its steel reinforcement. Its slow degradation, however, did not exclude it from the life of the community, at least until part of its central countertop collapsed in late 2014 (fig.2). This raised questions about the overall stability and security of the structure, but it was also the trigger for the development of keen interest in the entire building's restoration.

In the midst of many discussions on the intervention to be adopted in the methodology, we proposed a conservative plan that involved

welding of the collapsed section by the careful filling of gaps with material of the same consistency and shape as the original so as to reinstate the authentic form of the benches. This intervention was initially intended solely for the central bench, consolidating the collapsed part of the countertop and the oxidised reinforcement (fig.3).

After preparing a number of samples (fig.4), the most suitable mortar was chosen to fill the lost portions of the countertop. The restoration was extended to the side market benches, the initial geometry of which had been altered (fig.5,6).

The important project was achieved thanks to the private initiative and genuine interest of benefactor Nicoletta Fiorucci, a loyal and trusted friend of the island. Her confidence in the work of the study group, which complied with all applicable heritage standards relating to the restoration of monuments, led to a very satisfactory and pleasing restoration of the Municipal Market and, thereby its complete re-integration into the life of the community (fig.7).



Fig.1 The Municipal Market or the "Italian Market" of Kastellorizo



Fig.2 Partial collapse of its central counter



Fig.3 Consolidation of the collapsed part of the countertop Fig.4 Various samples before deciding upon the most suitable mortar to fill the lost portions of the countertop



Fig.5 The intervention was extended to the side market benches whose initial geometry had been altered



Fig.6 The intervention was extended to the side market benches whose initial geometry had been altered



Fig.7 The restored monument – and its re-integration into the life of the community



# A DAUGHTER OF CASTELLORIZO

by Christian Doratis, Queensland



Sometimes I forget that I'm Greek but I never forget that I'm Castellorizoian. I've lived in Australia all my life. I think like an Australian and talk like an Australian, but I am 100% Greek, with a mother from the Dodecanese Islands and a father from Cyprus.

As a young girl I hated being Greek. I felt uncomfortably different to the children in the working-class suburb where I grew up. In my school photos, I sit scowling; I stand out with my dark skin and Mediterranean features. I longed to be like the curly-headed Shirley Temple in my kindergarten class but I could not have been further from the ideal of English beauty.

My parents came to Australia in the 1920's, long before the mass migrations of the post-WW2 period. My father was in his early twenties when he arrived in Sydney, strong, ambitious and hard-working. His family hailed from a village not far from Limassol. He knew the small family plot could not provide a living for four sons, so he left his family and country behind and never looked back. He was perfectly suited to the challenges of making it in a land of promise and plenty.

About the same time my maternal grandfather, along with his two oldest sons, set off from Castellorizo for Australia. He'd been a lighthouse keeper and a fisherman and a bit of a drinker, so I'm told, but his livelihood had been taken away from him. His wife and one of his sons had died in the flu epidemic of 1919, leaving the older daughter to act as mother to the two younger children. I cannot imagine how difficult it was for them to undertake such a long and arduous journey, arriving in a country of vast spaces, with no knowledge of the landscape, the language or its customs, a country peopled by White Australians.

I have heard stories of Castellorizo since I was a child; it has always held a certain fascination, the beauty and isolation of the place. I had seen the embroidered tablecloths my mother had stowed away in her casella and the gold jewellery made from coins. We had one photo of my grandmother after whom I'd been named, her hair drawn back severely from her face, a shawl tied up around her neck. And there were stories about my grandfather George, his drinking and boastfulness, his life on the trading boats and as lighthouse keeper on Strongili, the son of a priest. I knew that my mother had been to school on Castellorizo, that the houses had been grand, that it was a dry, barren, rocky sort of place and just across the strait from Turkey.

Travelling in Greece was an important part of my youthful wanderings, from my first visit in the summer of 1967 to a prolonged sojourn in Athens a few years later. I rented an apartment close to the city centre and had a job in a night school teaching English and lived a fairly solitary existence. I never felt accepted by the Athenians; they viewed me as 'xeni,' a foreigner.

And besides a Greek woman did not live alone in a downstairs apartment, would never dress as I did or walk the streets unescorted.

I was in Athens when Leonard Cohen was there and visited the Greek islands not long after George Johnston and Charmian Clift had left their bohemian lives on Hydra to return to Australia. I was captivated by Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller's romantic views of the Levant, the love of Greece expressed in their novels and travel writing. "The light of Greece opened my eyes, penetrated my pores, expanded my whole being," says Miller in, "The Colossus of Maroussi." At that time Santorini was not a wedding destination, huge pleasure boats did not cruise the Aegean and jet-skis weren't polluting the beaches of Crete.

I returned to Castellorizo in 2016, forty years after my first visit. It was during my visit to the museum that I learnt of Castellorizo's part in the ancient Rhodian State, which included most of the Dodecanese Islands and part of the Anatolian coast from the 4th Century BC. Megiste, it seems, played an important role as a naval base, controlling the surrounding seas during that time. I am charmed by the words of the Frenchman D'Anglure written in a journal in 1395 during a voyage to Jerusalem. How beautifully these words paint a picture of the island.

*"le Chastel Rouge est une tresfort chastel, bel and bien assis sur une haute montagne de roche, tout enviroonee de la marine."*

The museum represents a tiny part of the treasures that lie hidden in the ground or in the waters surrounding the island; it is not surprising that no thorough archaeological investigations have been conducted on Castellorizo. 'You can collect bits and pieces every time it rains,' one resident told us. "They lie uncovered in the squares and on the roads and beaches." The torso of a kouros was unearthed from the horafia in recent years, after heavy rain, she says.

In a corner of the museum's basement I find the thick green-blue light from Strongili where my grandfather worked as a lighthouse keeper. It is a beautiful object, but needs to be repaired; some of the thick transparent louvres lie broken on the ground. My sister had her photo taken in front of it during her last visit to the island.

How could I ever forget that I am Greek? Each time I look in the mirror I see an elderly Greek woman looking at me, her body still strong despite the accumulation of years, an inheritance for which I am extremely grateful. I cook Greek food; keftethes, kokkinisto, koulouria and kourambiethes; my fruit bowl is overflowing as it was in my childhood and I have fresh veggies in my garden. Pulses feature in many of our meals; we don't eat takeaways and don't waste food or money. And I give generously to my children, as my father did to me. My Greekness is everything to me.



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