



A photograph taken by a German traveller (Hans Rott) in 1906 which shows Abbot Venedictos with his assistants outside the Monastery of St Nicholas in Myra. To the right may be seen some of the Christian homes that were built along the perimeter of the sanctuary.

MYRA – KASTELLORIZO'S 19TH CENTURY SATELLITE SETTLEMENT

by Nicholas G Pappas, Sydney

This is the third in a series of five articles that look at the towns in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) that held special significance for Kastellorizians in the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century. Previous articles have considered Antifilo and Kalamaki, while future articles will examine Finika and the twin towns of Livisi/Makri. This piece looks at Myra, a town with deep connections to the island, both commercially and religiously.

Myra's historical background

The ancient Lycian, later Roman, town of Myra, ('Démre' for the Turks, from a corruption of the Greek 'τα Μυρά'), lay on a fertile plain south of the Taurus mountain range, and to the west of the Mýros river. Its location was a direct function of a fertile landscape which yielded bountiful grain and barley and an abundance of fruit and vegetables. The town's produce, and its relatively close proximity to the sea, made it a much sought-after prize between the 6th-11th centuries, and this is attested by the remains of Myra's ancient port, Andriaké, where traces of a substantial harbour facility dating to at least the 1st century BC may still be seen.

While founded in the Lycian era, Myra's historical legacy was to be forever distinguished by a 4th century bishop from nearby Pátara who served his bishopric in Myra and died there on 6 December, 343. Nicholas of Myra (*Nikólaos* in Greek, *Klaus* to the northern Europeans – hence 'Santa Claus', 'Noël Baba' to the Turks) left a deep imprint of Christianity in the region, such that by the 5th century the

town and its environs were declared a metropolis by Byzantine Emperor Theodosios II, with its focal point the Church built over the grave of the Christian saint who had elevated the town's importance.¹

Myra re-settled

Much could be written about Myra's vicissitudes in these tumultuous centuries, but this article will focus on the town's 19th century re-settlement. There is little doubt that the re-population of Myra was a direct result of the 'Tanzimat' reforms within the Ottoman Empire which were enacted from 1839 and continued until 1876. These far-reaching initiatives, which were largely influenced by western liberal ideals, sought to re-integrate non-Turks into the Empire's administration and mercantile life. As such, they served as a catalyst for renewed Greek investment on the mainland and, in Myra's case, for the relocation of many Greeks from nearby Kastellorizo.

Myra's re-settlement during this period, less than one decade after the bloody revolution that had liberated parts of mainland Greece, reaffirms for us that a local spirit of commercial co-operation persisted between the Greeks of Kastellorizo and the Turks who worked the land in Myra's surrounding plain. The place chosen by these enterprising Kastellorizians for their 'new' Myra was approximately one kilometre from the ancient town, but nevertheless took full advantage of the trading opportunity provided by the location and, just as importantly, the Kastellorizians' special devotion to St Nicholas.

Myra – Kastellorizo's 19th century satellite settlement (Cont.)



Kyrillos Romános (left), the last abbot of St Nicholas Monastery, pictured on Kastellorizo with fellow priest Kleovoulos Papaioannou Piangos, the island's dignitaries and uniformed school students during an excursion to the Monastery of Profiti Elia in 1926.

A market town

By the early 1850s, Myra had re-emerged as a small, but vibrant, market town feeding off its fertile surrounds. Built at the cross-roads of the only two thoroughfares, 'new' Myra was accessed by a pleasant walk from the shoreline through verdant & lush vegetation. Population statistics are few, but correspondence between the various abbots of the Monastery to their local Metropolitan in Antalya and to the Ecumenical Patriarchate refer on more than one occasion to '100 Greek families' living in the town, while a published Greek study from 1905 records 650 Greeks and 150 Turks living there.²

Myra had a small Greek primary school that catered for 65 students up to 4th class. As would be expected, the religious needs of the Christian community were served by the Church of St Nicholas (more about this later), and their houses were huddled around the buildings and surrounding landholdings of the monastic community. A cemetery long believed to have been next to the Church was thought desecrated and abandoned until recent excavations by Turkish archaeologists brought to light a number of Christian graves from the mid-19th century. Their finds included many boukles and poignant traces of Kastellorizo's ornate bridal costume, particularly gold thread, in which many females were buried.³

Administration and faith

Administratively, Myra fell within the district of Kasambá, some six hours walk from the town. In the spirit of the 'Tanzimat' reforms, a local Greek who was fluent in Turkish was appointed annually to serve as *múchtar*, or town governor. His office was always in his home where he would receive and consider building applications, record property transactions and register births, marriages and deaths for despatch to the Ottoman authorities. The last two *múchtars* in Myra were **Yeorgios Marsélos** and **Yeorgios Stefanou Paltóglou**, the latter of whom was to serve in municipal affairs on

Kastellorizo after a majority of Myra's Christian population had abandoned the town in 1914 with the outbreak of war.

In religious affairs, Myra's status as a Metropolitanate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate had endured for centuries, at least until the 16th century when it was attached to the Metropolitanate of Pisidia. It was returned to its former status in 1646, but only until 1651 when it was annexed again to Pisidia. Here it remained until the exchange of populations and the conversion of the status of the Metropolitan of Pisidia into a titular hierarchy.

While the town's religious and cultural epicentre was always the Church and Monastery of St Nicholas, a close study of the second half of the 19th century reveals considerable dispute and division over control of the Monastery, largely due to the regular intervention of high-placed Russians for whom St Nicholas' life and death in Myra carried as much significance as it did for Greeks.

Russian intervention

Russian involvement in Myra had its origins in a visit to the Church in 1850 by the Russian writer **Andrei Nikolaevich Muraviev**. Moved by its dilapidated state, Muraviev enlisted the support of the Russian vice-consul in Rhodes, **Henry Ducci**, and together they raised an amount sufficient to 'purchase' the entire 42 hectares of land upon which the Church and Monastery stood. The then Metropolitan of Pisidia, **Meletios**⁴, supported the purchase, but on the strict condition that the total sum raised (apparently 40,000 roubles) was applied towards the Monastery's restoration and all landholdings be registered in the name of a wealthy Kastellorizian trader, **Dimitrios Antonas**⁵, an Ottoman subject (foreigners were not permitted to own land within the Empire), who had strong mercantile connections within Russia. Antonas also served for a period as vice-consul of Russia and Denmark to Kastellorizo and its Anatolian dependencies.



This photograph, also by Hans Rott, shows Abbot Venedictos (originally from Metsovo) standing at the top of the nave of the Church of St Nicholas in Myra.

And thus, from 1852, under the oversight of a German architect, the project of restoration commenced. But before it could be completed, the Ecumenical Patriarch, **Kyrrillos VII**, was alerted to a rumour that the Russians were already claiming the Monastery exclusively for themselves – with Antonas' support. Kyrrillos speedily issued a patriarchal decree directing Meletios to arrange for all works to cease. But Meletios' order was ignored by both the Russians and Antonas, and the restoration completed by 1863. The result was a newly restored and renovated Church and Monastery entangled in a simmering dispute that would persist for the next 15 or so years.

In this period, the Kastellorizians displayed characteristic alacrity, not only to assert and support Greek Orthodox rights over the Monastery, but also to demonise their own Antonas and his sons who, they felt, had 'betrayed' their branch of Orthodoxy (and thereby their fellow islanders) by allegedly allowing business interests with the Russians to influence their judgment on the matter. ⁶

It was not until 1879 that the Sultan stepped in to declare the 'sale' to the Russians void and to re-assert the regime's underlying rights over the entire land. Importantly, the Sultan also declared that the only lawful custodian of the Monastery was the Ecumenical Patriarchate which could do with it as it wished. With the regime's position at last clear, an abbot, **Chrysanthos** ⁷, was speedily despatched to assume control and to expel the sons of Antonas from the property. The Russians were to ultimately withdraw, but not before significant damage was done to the Monastery's standing and influence. Against such a background, it is little wonder that Chrysanthos and his successors struggled with their local priorities while trying to manage the competing interests of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Ottoman regime and the Russians' persistent desire to establish a monastic centre within the territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

It is noteworthy to add here that the Monastery's third abbot, **Paisios** ⁸, was from Kastellorizo, while the last abbot who served at the Monastery before the exchange of populations was Kyrrilos Romános ⁹, an archimandrite originally from Cephalonia who was to serve on Kastellorizo until 1927 after relocating to the island during WWI.

Expulsion and re-settlement

With the onset of peace, and Turkish irredentism at an all-time high, Myra's remaining Greek population was left with little choice but to depart. Many had already left by the end of 1914, and those few who remained during the war years faced increasingly hostility, as **Vlassios Konstandinou Antonas** reminds us in an interview from 1970:

The war closed all the ports. The Turks had their eyes on our properties. They secretly placed all these weapons in our well and then accused my mother of storing them there to help the French who were occupying Kastellorizo. They arrested her and sent her to Aidin where she was imprisoned. I eventually arranged her release... After the hostilities ended, I returned to Myra and found our house in ruins. I was called to the office of the Turkish military commander and told to leave Turkish soil in four days. They told me to take a small Turkish rowboat and leave. As I was rowing back to Kastellorizo, they started firing at me. I realised then that they wanted to kill me. ¹⁰

Such reminiscences are, sadly, relatively common in the archives of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies in Athens from where this extract emanates. Like their compatriots along the Anatolian littoral, the bulk of Myra's frightened and displaced Christians found first refuge in the islands, in this case on Kastellorizo, and began new lives there. Dreams of a return to their lost lands were held for a few short years, but by the late 1920s the realisation had set in that this was never to occur. In the meantime, claims for compensation were made to the Italian authorities on Kastellorizo and, as is the case with Antifilo and Kalamaki, they remain for us a revealing insight into the substantial wealth that was left behind.



In Myra's case, the claims numbered 119 and totalled 18,627,479 lire, almost 17% of all claims made by Kastellorizians. Vlassios Konstandinou Antonas alone (a grandson of Dimitrios Antonas quoted earlier) represented 1,549,200 of the total sum. Other major claimants were **Dimitrios Stefanou Paltoglou** (960,000 lire), **Anastasia Konstandinou Mirikli** (699,000 lire), **Kalliope Mihail Avgousti** (680,000 lire), **Ipokrates Louros** (678,000 lire), **Eleni Yeorgiou Koutsoukou** (550,000 lire) and **Despina Yeorgiou Paltoglou** (500,000 lire). ¹¹

As has been the case with previous articles that have focussed on the Kastellorizian presence in Anatolia, the conclusion is invariably a sad one. In Myra's case, the contemporary town, re-named 'Demre', hardly bears any resemblance to the small settlement the Greek refugees left behind between 1914-1923. And it remains poignantly ironic that, today, Demre's major touristic attraction, which welcomes pilgrims and visitors from across the globe, is a church dedicated to a 4th century Christian saint.

¹ The remains of St Nicholas were removed in the 11th century by Italian merchants and taken to Bari where they are to this day.

² A population chart for the entirety of Pisidia extracted from Xenophanes, Vol 2, No 1 (Oct. 1905) is featured at the conclusion of this article. The houses built by the Kastellorizians in Myra were of far cruder design than their homes on the island.

³ I acknowledge here the work and co-operation of Dr Ebru Findik who took part in the Myra archaeological project which brought to light these Christian graves.

⁴ **Meletios** served as Metropolitan of Pisidia between 1848-1861.

⁵ **Dimitrios Antonas** was born on Kastellorizo in 1808. A prosperous trader, he became deeply enmeshed in the disputes over the Monastery after agreeing to be the holder of the Monastery's titles on behalf of his Russian principals. He was to drown when a ship he was travelling on sank in a severe storm.

⁶ This period is well-covered in two texts, both from different vantages. For the Russian perspective, see Gerd, L. Russian Policy in the Orthodox East, 2014. For the Greek Orthodox viewpoint, see Kalaïtzis, Chrys., Ta Myrovola Myra, 2002.

⁷ **Chrysanthos** held the title of abbot of the Monastery from 1876 but only took up his position when the Sultan issued his decree on 4 August 1879. He served as abbot until 1881.

⁸ **Paisios** was born on Kastellorizo in c. 1857. His tenure as abbot of the Monastery was relatively brief (1886-1890). Paisios returned to the island and died there on 2 December 1907.

⁹ One of the more interesting participants in this episode, **Kyrrillos Romános** was born on 14 September 1875. A graduate in theology from Constantinople, he served as abbot of the Monastery between 1908-1922. While serving at the Monastery, he was also employed as an informer by the French forces on Kastellorizo during WWI and gave valuable information to the Allies about German and Turkish troop movements in Anatolia. He left Kastellorizo on 30 July 1927 and served in Nisyros until WWII.

¹⁰ Reminiscences of **Vlassios K Antonas** extracted from the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens, in 1998 (author's translation).

¹¹ Once again, I am grateful to Irini Toliou & Fotini Chalvantzi for, respectively, access to this documentation and research assistance.

EPARCHY (TERRITORY) OF PISIDIA, 1905

TOWN	POPULATION			CHURCHES	PRIESTS	MALE SCHOOLS				FEMALE SCHOOLS			
	GREEKS	TURKS	FOREIGNERS			NO.	CLASSES	TEACHERS	STUDENTS	NO.	CLASSES	TEACHERS	STUDENTS
ANTALYA	9,000	20,000	300	2	6	3	9	9	420	1	7	5	250
KASTELLORIZO	9,100	50	--	6	9	2	10	7	350	1	7	6	260
ANTIFILO	400	--	--	1	1	1	3	1	50	--	--	--	--
KALAMAKI	1,000	--	--	1	1	1	4	1	80	1	3	1	40
MYRA	650	150	--	1	1	1	4	1	65	--	--	--	--
FINIKA	800	2,000	150	1	1	1	5	1	40	1	3	1	30
MAKRI	1,500	800	480	1	2	1	6	6	225	--	--	--	--
LIVISI	4,500	--	--	3	5	1	8	5	398	--	--	--	--
VOURDOURION	2,000	13,000	1,000	3	2	1	4	6	190	1	5	3	85
ALANYA	1,900	14,000	--	2	2	1	4	1	96	1	5	1	50
ISPARTA	4,643	27,700	550	11	7	1	8	8	312	1	5	3	100

KASTELLORIZO.

by Nicholas Bogiatzis, Canberra



The dashing young Andoni Halkitis, one of four Kastellorizians killed that day, aged 27.



The only known photograph of Evdokia Mihali Efe (sitting at the far right of the photograph)

OCTOBER, 1943

As with any community, Kastellorizo has its share of stories, joyous and sad. War adds heroic and tragic dimensions to these stories.

At the outbreak of WWII, Kastellorizo was Italian. Italy's fortunes during the war were reflected on the island.

In 1943, Italy surrendered to the Allies. What followed was a brutal race between the Allies and Germany to take the Italian territories. Kastellorizo was not exempt from this. For the Allies it was an opportunity to establish a base in the eastern Mediterranean from which to challenge Germany's hold in north Africa and eastern Europe. In this they succeeded. In September 1943, British troops left Cyprus, and easily took the island. Together with Greek troops, and their new Italian allies, they prepared for any reprisals from the Germans. Quickly the island built up its garrison for defence.

While war raged, domestic life continued, albeit with the privations that war brought. But youth was youth, and romance was romance.

Evdokia Efe was the only child of Mihail Andona Efe, or Hatzimihali, and Christina Penglis, a wealthy family with their home on the waterfront in Kavo. The late Despina Mavro recalled Christina's saying that when her daughter married, the bells of Ayia Sophia in Constantinople would ring out in celebration. And Evdokia had a romantic attachment.

He was none other than Andonios Dimitriou, or Halkitis, a son of the doctor Nikitas Dimitriou / Halkitis and his first wife, Eleni Andreou Kontouzoglou. This was an ideal match. Two prominent families, with an only child to marry a doctor's son. And both were young, attractive, and already romantically attached.

The 17th of October is a day to be remembered on Kastellorizo. The war renewed itself there with vicious energy. Kastellorizo was bombed. The bombings continued over the next few days, and the residents were hurriedly evacuated to Cyprus, via Antifilo, then to Gaza. Christina was with them. Evdokia and Andoni were not.

On that first day of bombardments, Evdokia went out onto her balcony to see the German planes screeching over at low altitude. She called to Andoni to see, as he worked nearby in the TEMI tobacco office. He came to join her, standing below her balcony. A bomb dropped, on that house. And both were killed. Evdokia's mother



THE GRAVES OF THE TWO YOUNG PEOPLE, SIDE BY SIDE IN THE CEMETERY ON KASTELLORIZO. THE INSCRIPTION ON ANDONI'S GRAVE TRANSLATES AS:

STORMS DID NOT SCARE ME
BOMBARDMENTS I DID NOT FEAR
BUT THE ENEMY KILLED ME
CUNNINGLY WITH A BOMB
AT TEMI* WHERE I WAS

* The Italian government-owned tobacco monopoly where Andoni worked.

happened to be under the stairs and survived. And she was not the only one to lose family members in the bombings that day.

Imagine the distraught mother. She was forced to evacuate, and her only child's body was left in the ruins of the house. When the Kastellorizian refugees were sent on to Palestine, to live in the desert in tents, Christina went to Jerusalem and stayed in a convent. At war's end she returned, removed her daughter's body from the ruins, and buried her next to Andoni. Today the marble slab simply reads 'E. EFE'.

Christina returned to Palestine and lived the remainder of her days like a nun in the convent that had given her shelter. She extracted the family's gold buried in the bombed house, and donated it to the convent. Her husband Mihali had been living with his brother in Adelaide. The brothers had died within a few days of each other just before the outbreak of the war in 1939.

A tragic ending to a tale of young romance. But it doesn't end there.

One year I joined Nick Pappas in researching through the archives still held in the Dimarcheia on Kastellorizo. We found the municipal death notice for Evdokia Mihail Efe. Touching. But closer examination had her death as aged under one. In 1920. It took some time for the sad realization to dawn. Mihali and Christina Efe had already lost a daughter, named Evdokia, probably at birth, in 1920. They had named their second daughter 'Evdokia' again. An expression one guesses of optimism and hope looking to the future. And twice, tragedy tore at them.

** Especial thanks to Nicholas G Pappas for his provision of the photographs of Evdokia and Andoni.*



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