



#### Edition 58



### The Quest for a Better Life. Kastellorizians in early 20th Century, Port Pirie, South Australia

#### by Marilyn Tsolakis, Perth

Port Pirie, a town in South Australia, developed as the port for the export of lead ore from Broken Hill, New South Wales. It resonates with many Kastellorizians who had family members live and work in this region in the early 20th century. Lead smelting began in the town in 1889 where the first wave of Greek migrants found ready employment in this industry at the turn of the century.

I first heard of the significance of this town from my father, Michael who told me that he had a brother, Panayiotis Tsolakis, who died from the Spanish Flu and was buried in Port Pirie. He was only 18 years of age. It always piqued my curiosity to know about the circumstances that led to my uncle being there with his father, Malaxos, from December 1917 to 1919, entering Australia on a French passport, as Kastellorizo was occupied by another sovereign power.

I had the opportunity in 2003 to visit Port Pirie and found my way to the Port Pirie Regional Council to make inquiries. While they could tell me the date of his interment on 17/06/1919 at the Port Pirie cemetery, they did not have a record of the location of the grave. It wasn't until 13 years later, that Allan Cresswell found the lot and grave number that eventually led me to return to Port Pirie. And it was another seven years when the South Australian Castellorizian Brotherhood organised a seminar in the town in February 2023. I crossed the Nullabor Plain again from Western Australia to find out more about this period of history that had links to my family.

I made a promise to my father that I would organise a memorial plaque to acknowledge his brother's life by giving him an identity in what was an unmarked plot and grave. This was my quest on behalf of the family to honour him, far away from the shores of where he was born on Kastellorizo in 1901. A young life cut short with only his father by his side in the final days of his life. A broken hearted father wept for his eldest son. He returned to Kastellorizo, vowing never to step foot on Australian soil again. I can only imagine what my grandfather was going through; questioning his decision to leave Kastellorizo and weighing up the loss of his son, unaware that this would bring such sadness for the family. However, life for people on the island was becoming increasingly challenging due to economic and political circumstances that led to difficult life choices. The eternal dilemma: to stay or leave.

My Uncle Panayiotis' story is one of many stories that tell of the ongoing quest for families to find better opportunities, by traversing the globe to the new world in the early 20th century to do backbreaking work in pioneer industries, earning money to support their families. Other stories may have happier endings.

The pattern of migration to Port Pirie seemed to show that the majority were coming from Kastellorizo and the towns on the south coast of Asia Minor.<sup>1</sup> During World War I (WWI) from 1914-1918 Kastellorizians suffered because of their island's geopolitical position. The upheavals and deaths that emanated from the Greco-Turkish war in 1921-22 contributed to more displacement of people. That is the human story; the movement of people to find where they belong without persecution to practise their own political, religious and cultural freedom.

And so, the first wave of migrants to arrive in Port Pirie from Kastellorizo were well and truly settled by 1916. Families arrived in Port Pirie during WWI as a significant labour shortage emerged in Australia. They worked at the smelters ignorant of the health effects of lead poisoning. Exposure to airborne pollutants from metal processing and smelting can lead to various acute and chronic diseases, even premature death. The smelter was built in town right on top of the Greek enclave at Port Pirie West and therefore, even if you did not work there, families, children and shopkeepers were still prone to the ill-effects.

The White Australia Immigration Policy added another layer to the fabric of social cohesion in the community. The preference for British

migrants was deeply embedded in what essentially was a policy that did not welcome Southern European migrants. The social climate at Port Pirie took a drastic turn with the return of Australian soldiers to Port Pirie. At the end of the WWI in 1918, racism peaked. The Greek government for the first few years of WWI took a neutral stance that was not looked upon favourably by the allies, and in particular, the Commonwealth countries. Imagine, in the midst of WWI, young men from Europe (many of Kastellorizian background) arriving at Port Pirie and finding employment almost immediately. The local residents may have viewed the Greeks as cheap labour and thereby, jeopardising the working standards of the smelter workers. (Markos, 2021)

There was a perception that unskilled Greek labourers were occupying jobs that should have been prioritised to war veterans for their loyalty to the nation. This sense of entitlement added to tensions in the community, as they felt financially disadvantaged. Racial and physical abuse was interconnected with the ethnic integration of the workforce in Port Pirie.<sup>2</sup>

The racist narrative was gaining traction fuelled by numerous derogatory articles in the Port Pirie newspaper, *The Recorder*, that contributed to a campaign against the local Greek community. *Unlawful assaults against Greeks became a common occurrence and even a demonstration against Greeks was held which resulted in property damage and physical injuries. (Markos, 2021)* 

I can only imagine how their alienation and mistreatment from the broader Anglo-Celtic community brought them to despair and once again questioning their decision to find their fortune in the 'lucky country' where 'money grew on trees' which was part of the mythology of the new world.

In this tense climate, the Spanish flu hit the town of Port Pirie and even more so the Greek community. The first deaths of Greek smelter workers sent the Port Pirie Greek Community into a frenzy and in the early hours of the morning on 4 April, 1919 nearly fifty Greeks congregate at the Railway Station to hastily depart. (Markos, 2021). It was in the second wave of the Spanish Flu on 17 June 1919 that my Uncle Panayiotis succumbed to the ravages of this pandemic with another compatriot, John Kominos the day after.

While some lost their lives, others survived and eventually flourished demonstrated by the following examples. Anthony Kiosoglou migrated to Port Pirie from Kastellorizo in 1914 and worked at the lead smelters, saving enough money to bring his parents, brother and sister to Australia. He became President of the Greek Community in the early days and was one of the leaders responsible for purchasing the property for the church. Anthony's wife, Mary, was the only daughter of the Adgemis family arriving in 1916. Anthony bought a bakery and he was the first continental baker in South Australia, then later buying a grocery store in Port Pirie.

George Polites arrived during WWI and after two years working at the smelters, bought land and property before he brought his wife and



two daughters to Port Pirie. A son, Con, was born in 1919 who went on to become a very successful businessman.

During the late 1920s, and throughout the Depression, many of the single Greeks left to seek their livelihoods elsewhere. However, Port Pirie, in the late 1940s and early 1950s became boom years for the market gardens and the expansion of the lead smelters and another wave of Greek migrants arrived in Port Pirie after the impact of World War II.

The Greek Community gained strength with people living in the towns and districts: churches were built and businesses established. The Greek Orthodox Community of Port Pirie was established in late 1924 after a visit by the first Orthodox Archbishop that year. However, Greek Orthodox services took place in Port Pirie as early as 1913 at St Paul's Anglican church. In October 1925, the Greek Community purchased the old Parish Hall that belonged to the Church of England on Florence Street. The hall was refurbished and became the temporary Greek Orthodox church. It was named St George as a sign of respect to the British dominion. In later years, the new church of St George was built replacing the old one.

I admire the hard work and resilience of these early migrants from Greece to build lives for their families that brought success at a time that was well known for its xenophobia which is emblematic of all migrant communities. Their courage to carry on regardless of the damaging environmental effects on their health shows the sacrifices they made for the family.

In many ways, Port Pirie was essentially a transitory place for many to make money and then leave. However, working in often dangerous conditions at the Port Pirie lead smelter, many young Greek men, such as my uncle, never left. Yet for others, Port Pirie laid the foundations for a successful Greek Community that emerged from hard beginnings.

The Port Pirie Greek Community will be celebrating its 100th year as the second oldest Greek Association in Australia in July 2024 (the oldest being the Castellorizian Association of Western Australia established in 1912). In conjunction with this event a commemorative book is being compiled by Nick Seindanis, capturing a lot of the early Greek history in Port Pirie. The book will feature many Kastellorizians who passed through Port Pirie in these early years of migration.

Considerable historical information has been documented and preserved for future generations. The Book has two sections. The first, covers specific topics that include early families from Kastellorizo.

The second part of the book is made up of 150 Family summaries that have been compiled by the individual families. Many of these are from very early families from Kastellorizo, travelling with French and later Italian passports/travel documents such as my uncle and grandfather. The book will feature some of these documents mostly from Kastellorizo in the documentation of this time.

Centenary celebrations have been booked for 20th July 2024, with the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, His Eminence Archbishop, Makarios, attending and officiating Sunday service, on the 21st July 2024.

#### The following Greek Residents of Port Pirie Died of Spanish Influenza in 1919

**29/03/1919** Dimitris/Vas Alexiou Labourer-Smelter, 25, Kastellorizo, Greece, Single, Influenza Pneumonia & Lead Poisoning

**30/03/1919** Jim Hagenakis Labourer-Smelter, 35, Greece, Married, Influenza, Pneumonia

**31/03/1919** Michael Karegos, Labourer-Smelter, 23, Greece, Single, Influenza, Pneumonia & Lead Poisoning

**2/04/1919** Dimetrious Spaies, Labourer-Smelter, 34, Greece, Married, Influenza, Pneumonia

**5/04/1919** George Kondoulos Labourer-Smelter, 30, Kastellorizo, Greece, Married, Influenza, Pneumonia

**6/04/1919** James Kondoulos, Labourer-Smelter, 31, Kastellorizo, Greece, Married, Influenza, Pneumonia **17/06/1919** Panagiotis Tsolakis, Labourer-Smelter, 18, Kastellorizo, Greece, Single, Influenza, Pneumonia

**18/06/1919** John Kominos, Labourer-Smelter, 28, Kastellorizo, Greece, Single, Influenza, Pneumonia

Source: Costas Markos Neos Kosmos (25 January 2021) "Early Greek Settlers: Pandemic, Racsim and the Greeks of Port Pirie in 1919

#### Editor's note:

1.1 organised the priest, Fr Christos, from Port Pirie after the Sunday service on 11th February 2023 during the seminar weekend to bless the gravesite of my uncle Panayiotis Tsolakis. The poignancy of the moment was keenly felt when many seminar participants from Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne and Brisbane gathered at the gravesite. I am grateful for the support from my fellow Kastellorizians in a symbolic moment that gave my uncle's life meaning and that he would not be forgotten by future generations. Eternal be his memory.

2. I would like to thank Florence Livery for proofreading and critiquing the historical information.

## A MYSTERY IN GOLD

#### by Nicholas Bogiatzis

This mystery is about a coin, as shown, that technically does not exist. Well, sort of. Except that I've come across four of these supposedly non-existent coins in the Australian Kastellorizian community. What's going on? I need your help in solving it.

First, let me share with you what I do know. I was aware of this unusual Venetian coin, and keen to include it in the book I was writing on Kastellorizian jewellery. But I couldn't find any information on it. Basically it is missing from coin catalogues - which made me more interested.

In the past the coinage of Venice was the ducat. This ducat in gold was a much smaller coin than the quarter ducat in silver. Yet although my mystery coin was in gold, inexplicably it was the size of the large silver quarter ducat. Like the English sovereign, the ducat was a widely used trade coin, so was not uncommon on Kastellorizo where it was referred to as a 'Konstandinato', or Venetiko.

Finally through an academic at Harvard, I learnt

the following. Back in late 18thC Venice, someone at the mint, or zecca, decided to take the large die or stamp used for the silver quarter ducat and instead strike some coins in gold, rather than silver. Curious.

Venetian coins are dated by reference to the relevant Doge, the ruler of Venice at the time. All four of the gold mystery coins from Kastellorizo are dated to the time of the same Doge, His Serenity Aloise Mocenigo, 1763-79.

Great progress. However, for my book I needed to know how, or indeed if Kastellorizians had their own name for this coin. Finally I located a seventy year old handwritten reference to the coin, where it was called a 'Diplovenetico' or 'Double Venetian'. It made sense, given its large size. So with this information, I could now include this coin in my book, in a fairly informed way. Excitingly I then located another three identical coins belonging to fellow Kastellorizians across Australia.

Although part of the mystery was solved, the bigger mystery went unanswered: how did four such rare coins come to be found on Kastellorizo? I had to keep digging.

I found a reference to a 1947 sale of a similar coin in the United States, confirming its name as a 'Double Ducat'. This time it was minted during the reign of a different Doge, Paulo Renier, 1779-1789, the successor to Mocenigo.

Laboriously I searched thousands of records of internet sales, but found only a couple more such coins. None were dated from the same period as those from Kastellorizo.

Interestingly one of the coins I found was from the next and final Doge, Ludovico Manin who was forced to abdicate by Napoleon I in 1797. This brought to an end about 1,000 years of the rule of the Doges. So I had now located similar, but very few coins from three successive Doges over the period 1763-1797. How many of these coins are there?



The Hunt Begins!

Do you recognize this coin?

As Venice's, or La Serenissima's Doges were in their final decades, was there corruption in the zecco? Was there unrecorded minting? Why did this small, unique batch end up on Kastellorizo, and seemingly

> only on Kastellorizo? Are they counterfeit? All the coins from Kastellorizo are well worn, and pierced, typical for coinage from the island as it was used in jewellery. And their worn nature showed they were not recent counterfeits though why forge a coin that apparently doesn't exist?

> Yet none of the very few other coins found were of the same mintage as those from Kastellorizo.

Why? I contacted the Italian Numismatic Society (Sociedade Numismatica Italiana) for help. This led me to Andrea Costa who proved most helpful. He advised that at one time you could take precious metal to the zecco in Venice, and have it mint coins for you in the coinage you wanted. Confusing.

Andrea then threw out a challenge. Was there a post 1763 link between Kastellorizo and Venice? Could this link have led to a batch of at least four

coins specially minted for the island, and possibly only for the island?

Who? How? Why? Given the 250 years that have since passed, this looks impossible to answer. But we can try to add to the story, by seeing if we can locate more such coins in our community. Not easy, given the diaspora, the dispersal of coinage and jewellery through the gifting system, and their sale from need or even disinterest.

If more coins are found, and they are all from the Mocenigo period, as all four from Kastellorizo have been to date, then clearly someone with a strong link between Venice and Kastellorizo commissioned these coins for use on the island.

So the mystery remains. Are there more such coins of the same, or of different periods with Kastellorizian families, here and abroad? And why did as many as four identical coins turn up only on Kastellorizo? Perhaps those who now own the coins have a family connection, even distantly, suggesting one family especially commissioned the coins: perhaps to dowry daughters; or to show prestige through links to a powerful trading centre? If so, which family?

And now the task for you, fellow Kastellorizians. Would you please have a look through your Kastellorizian heirlooms to see if you have such a coin?

If you do, I'd appreciate your letting me know, to help research these questions. Of course all identifying information will be confidential. Let's see what other nuggets of information we can unearth on this mystery in Kastellorizo's golden history. It is a mystery worth solving.

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The coins are around 6.9 grams, and 29mm diameter. They should not be confused with the ordinary Venetian gold ducat.



# KASTELLORIZO CONSTRUCTION

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## **The Natural History of Kastellorizo** The Trees of Kastellorizo

#### by Robert Moorhead

Kastellorizo and most Mediterranean islands have suffered tremendous degradation and habitat loss through a long history of logging, overgrazing, conversion to agriculture, urbanisation, fire suppression, and introduction of exotic and invasive species. This process goes back at least 3,000 years with the earliest occupation of the island. Kastellorizo is now covered by typical Mediterranean maquis scrub which appeared after the removal of the native forests of pine, cypress, and holm oak. These forest communities are now some of the most endangered and vulnerable on the planet. We are fortunate that the island possesses some precious remnants of these forests which are likely to be important for preserving biodiversity in these species.

The depopulation of the island over the last 100 years has been a mixed blessing for our landscape. Whilst our forebears extensively farmed the island and denuded it of woodland, they also strictly controlled their grazing animals leaving space for the annual flowering plants that are so important in the folklore and traditions of the island. They also left a legacy of trees important for agriculture. So, let's look at some of these precious trees.

Olive Tree (Olea europaea) The Olive is native to the Mediterranean basin and is thought to have been domesticated in the third millennium BC or earlier. Together with grain and grapes, these staple crops fuelled the emergence of ancient societies. There are olives of various cultivars across Kastellorizo including some very old trees. This one on Pitsonis Ambelli is thought to be over 500 years old.



**Carob Tree (Ceratonia siliqua)** The Carob tree is native to the Mediterranean region and is widely cultivated for its edible fruit pods. Carob trees often indicate old farms, where they were cultivated for animal feed (particularly for donkeys) and a last resort human food. There are many carob trees on the island which also provide welcome shade. I understand there was



an attempt to create a cottage carob industry in the 1970s, which explains the trees around the village.



Holm Oak (Quercus ilex) Holm Oak forests were once common across the European Mediterranean with Kastellorizo at the eastern edge of its range. It has spikey leaves like holly with hard and tough wood that has been used since ancient times for construction, firewood, and charcoal manufacture. There is a lovely old stand on Avlonia and some other trees scattered across the farms. The author has had some success propagating



them from acorn. The acorns can be made edible and can be used as a flour substitute.

Valonia Oak (Quercus ithaburensis subsp. macrolepis) The Valonia Oak is native to the European Mediterranean and we have one magnificent tree on the edge of Avlonia escarpment overlooking Mandraki. This is one of my favourite trees, but as far as I know, the only example on the island. Perhaps a remnant from the French period?





Turkish Pine (Pinus brutia) This classic pine is one of the most common trees on the island that has been used extensively in re-forestry, particularly the stands above the village, and the beautiful



mature trees you see on the walk to St George of the Mountain. An important commercial variety, it is native to the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey, it is famous as the "Lone Pine" of Gallipoli. It is also susceptible to infestation with pine processionary moths whose caterpillars can be seen



moving in chains across the ground.

#### Almond Tree (Prunus amygdalus)

Almonds are native to the Middle East and North Africa though they are now grown all over the world. According to Greek mythology, the almond tree is a symbol of hope. The



sugared almond or koufeta is a ubiquitous traditional symbol at Greek weddings. There is an ancient myth that tells the story of how Zeus and Apollo competed over who could create something more beautiful and useful. Zeus produced the olive and Apollo the almond. They called it a draw. Today, almonds grow well across the island and are not difficult to



propagate from seed. They bloom gloriously in Spring and support our bees. Our almonds are from heirloom varieties and should be preserved.

## The Natural History of Kastellorizo The Trees of Kastellorizo continued

#### by Robert Moorhead

#### Black Mulberry Tree (Morus alba)

There are a few black mulberries on Kastellorizo with the bestknown providing the shade in the Agora. Originally from South Asia, mulberries are grown across southern Europe providing delicious fruit and the sole food for silkworms. Readily grown from fruit or cuttings, they are drought resistant once established.





#### Plane Tree (Platanus orientalis)

The Old-World sycamore or Oriental plane is a large, deciduous tree that can grow to 30 m and known for its longevity and spreading crown. In autumn its deep green leaves may change to blood red, amber, and yellow as shown in the photo. Plane



trees are associated with water. The Horafia is known for its plane trees and lend their name to the restaurant. The other example



is the magnificent plane tree in the courtyard of St George of the Mountain Monastery attesting to the moisture found in the underlying rocks.

#### Mastic (Pistacia lentiscus)

Mastic is an evergreen shrub or small tree of the genus Pistacia native to the Mediterranean Basin and common across the maquis of Kastellorizo. It grows up to 4 m tall when shielded from the goats and is the same plant cultivated on Chios for its resin. This is an important tree in our landscape giving shade and cover to the wildlife.



#### Tamarix Tree (Tamarix aphylla)

Tamarix aphylla is the largest known species of Tamarix, with heights up to 18 metres. The species has a variety of common names, including Athel tree. It is an evergreen tree, native across North, East, and Central Africa, and the Middle East. These trees are known to be highly drought and salt tolerant. They have been extensively planted around Mandraki and are non-native.

#### Mediterranean Cypress (Cupressus sempervirens) Mediterranean cypress, also known as Italian cypress or

pencil pine), is a species of

cypress native to the eastern Mediterranean region. The above classic example is a mature tree on Pitsonis Ambelli with St George in the background. Native to the island there are





many around the village and it is included in the re-forestry areas. In classical antiquity, the cypress was a symbol of mourning, and in the modern era it remains the principal cemetery tree in both the Muslim world and Europe.



#### Fig Tree (Ficus carica)

The fig is the edible fruit of Ficus carica, which is native to the Mediterranean region and across Asia. It has been cultivated since ancient times and is now widely grown throughout the world. Ficus carica is the type species of the genus Ficus, containing over 800 tropical and subtropical plant species. Figs grow well on the island where it can find water, particularly in the village where it taps into vothro effluent and can become a problem among the ruins.







We applaud efforts over the last 20 years to restore some woodland to the island. Who would wish to go back to summers without the cooling influence of the pine forest overlooking the village? However, the post war regime of uncontrolled grazing has prevented trees from regenerating and has suppressed our annual wildflowers. The ugly fences protecting our gardens and farms are testament to the overwhelming presence of ravenous goats.

For more information on the natural history of Kastellorizo, please follow KNHG on Facebook: Kastellorizo Natural History Group | Facebook, Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/kazinhg/ and iNaturalist: Observations iNaturalist. Please share your photos and natural history observations and contribute to the documentation and preservation of Kastellorizo's unique environment.





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