



A primary school class of male students with their teacher, Ioannis Valasiades from Halki, photographed at the entrance to the island's cathedral, Sts Constatine & Helene (courtesy Michael Tsolakis family)

Education on Kastellorizo - Part 2 (cont. from edition 59) The French and Italian Years: 1915-1943

By Nicholas Pappas, Sydney

This is the second part of Nicholas Pappas' special feature on education on Kastellorizo. In the previous edition, Nicholas examined the Ottoman years up to 1913. In this second part, he turns his focus to the years of French and Italian occupation.

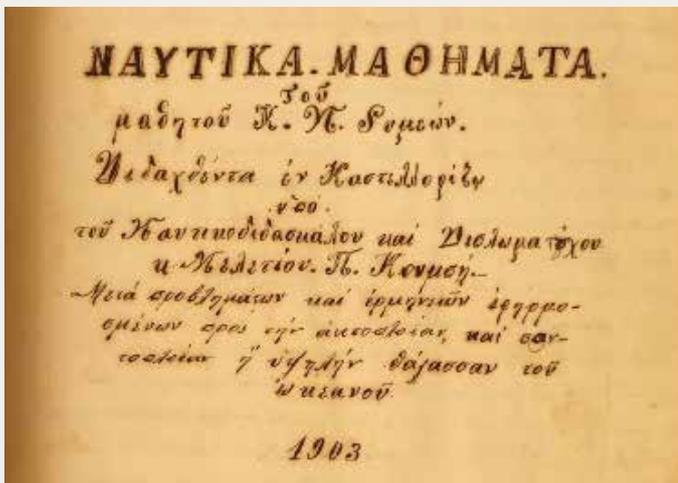
1. Nautical training

Before looking at the fraught years of French occupation, we should not omit a brief excursion to the world of nautical instruction on Kastellorizo given the central role maritime travel played in the daily life of the islanders. Despite Diamantaras' best efforts, a school-based education beyond 3-4 years' of elementary study, on the one hand, and a life at sea, on the other, were seen as two competing alternatives for young males. Maritime travel brought with it swift, but occasionally hazardous, opportunities to provide for a family in troubled times, while an education at school was seen by many as restricting, or simply delaying, a young male's ability to achieve his economic potential. This was more the case in families where the father owned or captained a vessel, thereby creating a need for a son to journey with, and assist, his father. Indeed, Diamantaras' surviving records attest to parents regularly withdrawing their sons from school to have

them embark on long journeys with their father or uncle and thereby assist their family economically.

But nautical skills were not something imparted solely by practical application at sea. There were noted nautical instructors across the Aegean who took the sons of wealthy shipowners under their wing and trained them in the 'art of the sea'. We have a few examples of surviving teaching manuals, but perhaps the most illustrative is the handwritten volume of seafarer **Kyriakos Nikolaou Symeon** who, like a number of his Kastellorizian contemporaries, was given nautical training by noted teacher, **Meletios Koumbis**. Originally from Megara in the Peloponnese but based on Karpathos, Koumbis visited Kastellorizo regularly from as early as 1853 until the first decade of the 20th century and taught the island's young, aspiring seamen. Subjects his students undertook ranged from geometry, arithmetic, trigonometry, geography, astronomy, vessel piloting, English sailing terms, weather systems and other core nautical subjects. Koumbis is still fondly remembered in his hometown of Aperi on Karpathos but has long since drifted into obscurity on Kastellorizo.

Others eager for nautical instruction travelled to the maritime centres of the Aegean. From as early as 1840, these young men were enrolling in nautical schools in commercial centres



The opening page of Kyriakos Symeon's exercise book from 1903 in which he kept a record of the lessons of noted nautical instructor Meletios Koumbis of Karpathos. (Courtesy Kyriakos Simeon family)

But Terme's initiatives were not solely administrative in nature. To raise much-needed funds for the schools, he introduced some novel fundraising drives, including the



Trained in Athens, locally born teacher, Mihail Petrides, became headmaster of the Santrapeia in 1916 with the departure from the island of Achilleas Diamantaros. He had earlier served as assistant municipal secretary during the period 1908-1912 in the lead-up to the island's revolt

such as Syros and Chios. One of them was **Savvas Nikolaou Savvas**, the later pioneer of Greek settlement in Santa Caterina in Brazil, who took his lessons between 1876-1878 in Ermoupolis, Syros' capital and the focal point of most maritime activity in the Aegean at the time. Savvas' registration in the roll of arrivals from Kastellorizo may still be viewed today, as may the entries of a number of other Kastellorizian males who travelled there to obtain formal nautical qualifications.

2.The French interlude, 1915-1921

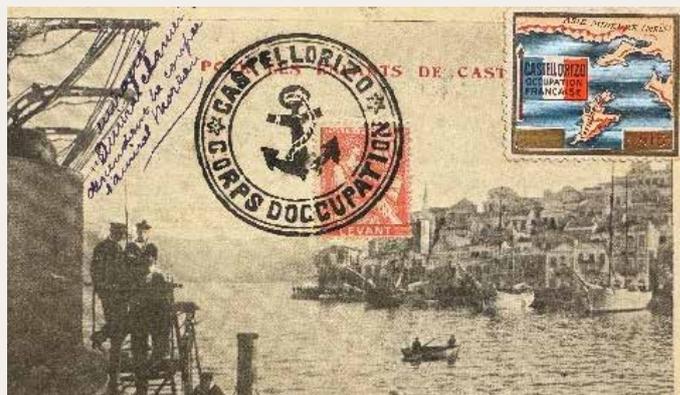
The arrival of French naval forces in December 1915 delivered security and stability to Kastellorizo after almost three years of internal discord during successive periods of self-administration and *de facto* Hellenic rule. But French occupation also brought with it the presence of a determined naval power that was at war with Germany and its close ally in Turkey. This provided safety from Turkish invasion - a prospect that was greatly feared among the local population - but did not immediately resolve many of the internal issues on the island.

Captain **Raymond Terme**, the island's third French governor (1919-1921), was particularly eager to modernise and integrate school administration into the French system as part of his strategy to make a case for Kastellorizo to be retained permanently by France. In particular, he was aware that his predecessor, **Joseph de Saint-Salvy**, had been called upon to intercede in disputes between the *Ephoria* and the municipality and he was keen to ensure such instances were not repeated. To achieve this, he devised a new structure for the administration and oversight of the schools. But before this was implemented, Terme despatched **Mihail Petrides** (a local teacher who had replaced Diamantaros as headmaster after the latter's departure for Aegina in 1916) to Athens to acquire the latest Greek texts and teaching materials for use in the schools. Petrides returned with bountiful materials by which time Terme had introduced the most sweeping reforms in education in the island's history. These were effected by the enactment of a new law which ranked teachers based on their education and experience and established a *Commission des Écoles* by which teachers were employed and assessed to ensure ongoing quality of instruction. Terme also expanded the syllabus by introducing a range of practical subjects which he hoped would encourage parents to keep their children at school longer.

re-issue of a series of special postcards, the proceeds of which were donated to the schools. The overall result was that, despite the fact that the island's population had halved to just over 4,500 prior to the French arrival, and 1917-1918 had witnessed ferocious bombardment of the town, the post-war period saw a mini renaissance, as many who had departed chose to try their luck and return under their new occupier. Terme was encouraged by these early success which he viewed as a magnet to discourage further emigration:

All these measures have had the desired effect. They have been welcomed with as much favour by parents as by teachers. Perhaps the most appreciated is that which provides for higher education, half theory, half practice, to give children at the end of their elementary studies the basic professional skills needed for the main trades or occupations they are likely to take up later within the economic framework particular to Kastellorizo: the fleet, the trades, mechanics, agriculture.

Terme was especially proud when, in October 1919, **Admiral De Bon**, his commander-in-chief, visited Kastellorizo and, in a special welcoming reception in *Mesi tou Yialou*, the main square of the island, the assembled students sang the *Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, 'most correctly' and with gusto.



An example of the series of postcards issued by the French to raise much-needed funds for the island's children. Partially obscured by the circular cancellation and the vignette stamp at top right are the words 'Pour les enfants de Kastellorizo' (For the children of Kastellorizo).

Nevertheless, the French navy's desire to keep Kastellorizo for France was outweighed by the French Foreign Ministry's disinterest in yet another distant colonial possession. Many of Terme's reforms quickly evaporated as another occupier in Italy arrived on 1 March 1921 and soon established its own template for education on the island. For the children at school, it meant yet another national anthem to learn and sing before morning class.

3. Education under Italy, 1921-1943

The arrival of the Italians was for some a disappointment. Persistent hopes for union with Greece, which was distracted by its disastrous foray into Anatolia, were to be forlorn, but at least Italian occupation brought with it 'union' with the Dodecanese islands which had been under Italian tutelage since 1912. And Italian presence brought with it hopes of much-needed investment in the island's economy and infrastructure by a nation that wanted to be recognised as both a strong and benevolent world power.

For the historian of education on the island, one less obvious, but certainly important, by-product of Italian occupation was the swift proliferation of the photographic camera. Like all eager colonialists, the Italians enthusiastically photographed all that they saw, and before long, they were being mimicked by locals who had access to relatively inexpensive cameras for the first time. The taking of the formal wedding portrait on the school steps was already an established custom, but now the annual class portrait became a mandatory and much-anticipated event, heightened in its importance by the fact that a photograph could be easily transported or despatched so as to keep a growing diaspora in Egypt, Australia and America informed about the fortunes of relatives on the island. Today, these precious images remain, for some, the only tangible link to lost generations of relatives.

photographs. Italy was an enthusiastic occupier, at least in the early years, and adding Kastellorizo ('Castelrosso') to its Dodecanesian portfolio was a source of considerable national pride. With a population in 1921 of just under 3,000 that comprised an abnormally large representation of minors (given the impact of adult male emigration), the island's schools catered for almost 600 students with a combined teaching staff of 16 teachers across the boys', girls' and infants' schools.



A mixed junior class collecting wildflowers on an excursion to the slopes above the Aheres valley in 1930. In the background at right is the monastery of Ayia Triadha (Holy Trinity) and, further to the rear, the monastery of the Prophet Elijah (Profiti Elia) is also just visible. This part of the island has undergone complete change in recent decades, with military installations now dominating the serene landscape pictured here.

Of course, the occupation of Kastellorizo by the Italians in March 1921 preceded Mussolini's rise to power that followed his infamous march on Rome in October 1922. At first, therefore, the occupation was fairly benign, with the emphasis being on integrating the island into the *Isole Egeo*, the Italian-occupied islands of the Dodecanese, by improving transport and communication connections and by encouraging commercial interaction with Turkey. In the educational sphere, the existing curriculum was retained, with the only material change being the introduction of Italian language as an additional subject of study. But the language of instruction remained Greek, at least until 1937 when noted fascist, **Cesare De Vecchi**, became governor of the island group and introduced assimilationist policies that sought to 'Italianise' the local population. These policies ranged from the abolition of the local mayors and municipalities and their replacement with an appointed administrator (*podesta*) to, at its most extreme, the banning of the colour blue on houses and churches. This policy was eventually extended to schools, with Italian made the compulsory language of instruction in 1939 and all public signage required to be in Latin characters.

But, despite such impositions, and at least until the impact of the worldwide depression was felt, there were aspects of Italian rule that delivered some positive improvements in education. Under well-regarded local governor (*delegato*) **Salvatore Tringali** (1925-1934), Greek teaching materials were regularly shipped to the island from Athens and Alexandria, while the regime donated funds towards improving the condition of the schools which had deteriorated markedly during the war years. Nevertheless, there was an undeniable Italian imprint on education from as early as 1925. A program for a school concert in May 1928 required the assembled children to open proceedings with the fascist song *Giovanezza* ('Youth'), the official hymn of the



With the arrival of Italy, photographing school classes became the norm. Here is a charming image of a senior boys' class taken immediately outside the cathedral of St Constantine on 29 May 1925, four years after the Italian takeover. There is yet no visible imprint of Italian occupation. The two teachers are, at left, the priest Kleovoulos Papaioannou Piangos and, at right, Dimitrios Logothetis. The pictured students are (back row, from left) Ioannis Omeros, Antonas Antonas, Stavros Kakulas, Antonios Moustakas, Nikolaos Stamatoglou, Vlassios Palassis; (front row, from left) Mihail Stamatoglou, Savvas Kiosoglou, Antonios Loukas, Stefanos Paltoglou, Venedictos Livissianis, Christodoulos Koufos, Mihail Penglis and Antonios Mihalakis.

The significance of these school portraits cannot be over-estimated. Not only did they capture the various school classes and their teachers at a moment in time, but they also preserved for us the evolving state of the various settings that were commonly used as backdrops. Some have remained intact, while others have long since disappeared, as the accompanying images reveal.

More generally, Italian occupation brought with it more in the educational sphere than just a proliferation of



Another excursion, this time of a senior girls' class to the island's heights on 9 January 1930. Standing in the back row are teachers: Eleni Avgousti, Anastasia Arnaoutoglou, Eleni Agapitou, Harikleia Irakleidhou, Maria Samiou & Triantafylia Agapitou. Middle row: Roza Lazarou, Eisodhia Louka, Evangelia Kasapi, Zoe Louka, Dialekti Avgousti, sister of Harikleia Irakleidhou, Kyriaki Passa, Chrysanthe Stavrianou, Katina Pispini, Anastasia Spyridi, Sevasti Koumbi & Marigo Merminga. Front row: Eleni Magripli, Evdokia Mihalaki, [unknown], Despina Kossena, Zabetta Kazakou, Evdokia Kiosoglou & Panagiota Passari.

Italian Fascist Party which later became Italy's *de facto* national anthem. Other songs sung that day included the rousing *Viva L'Italia* and a performance by the so-called 'Mussolini Choir'. The concert culminated in a dance by senior students to the song *Trieste*, an ode to the disputed city, and a solemn commemoration of Mussolini's triumphant march on Rome six years earlier.

But there were educational benefits as well as burdens that came with Italian rule. Music was encouraged for boys and girls and mandolin classes, in particular, were a favourite of both genders. Sewing and handicraft classes were also promoted, with young females given opportunities that had not existed within the narrow confines of the traditional Kastellorizian household. As one female student recalled many years later, 'the Italians didn't realise that they gave us liberties at school that we had not experienced on our island before.'

By the time another world war had arrived, Kastellorizo was well and truly assimilated into the Italian educational system. Symbolically, the last surviving group of school photographs are of an end of year school concert on the steps of the *Santrapeia* in June 1940. Behind the smiling children dressed



A charming photograph of a girls' mandolin class with their teacher, Persephone Papadaki, in 1929. The photograph has been taken just inside the rear gateway from which one exited the *avlogyro* of St Constantine and conveniently accessed the steps leading down to the Mandraki. The gateway was permanently closed after the war when the Parthenagogeion (at left) was extended and joined with the former Minglis school (at right). Traces of the gateway can still be seen in the external walling.



One of the sewing classes encouraged by the Italian regime and facilitated by the Konstantinou family who arranged for the delivery to Kastellorizo of Singer sewing machines. The students are, from left: [first name unknown] Anamourli, Zoe Livissiani, Maria Komninou, Maria Pitsoni, Maria Skotti (from Symi), Chrysfina Allayioti, Mersina Pispini and instructor Eleni Agapitou. The younger girl in the foreground is Eftychia Pispini, sister of Mersina.

in Italian provincial costumes, Santrapés' columns are draped in Italy's national colours, while the niches for the statues of the muses are covered by the insignia of the Italian royal family. But, by this time, it hardly mattered; a mere 1,100 souls remained on the island, increasingly isolated from the rest of their island group, in worsening conditions as trade stalled and supplies dwindled. Little did these children know as they danced that the years ahead were to bring even greater calamity.

By June 1940, when this photograph was taken, Italian colours covered much of the *Santrapeia's* elegant neoclassical detail, while the music played, and costumes worn, were a world away from Greece and recalled instead the provinces of Italy.



A mere 40 years had seen significant and occasionally abrupt changes in the delivery of education on Kastellorizo against a backdrop of war, occupation and increasing isolation. It is sadly ironic that the efforts of Santrapés, Stamatiou, Minglis, Penglis and others to elevate the quality of education for the island's children were not to be enough to arrest their island's gradual slide towards economic catastrophe. These benefactors could scarcely have imagined that their island's fate would be determined, not by the educational institutions they founded or the quality of education they delivered, but by decisions taken in war rooms and on negotiating tables, far from the island's shores.

All photographs are from the author's collection unless otherwise noted.

Castellorizo to Woolloomooloo *By Zeny Giles, Newcastle, NSW*

The failure to find his tiny island on a map of the world humiliated my uncle at Plunkett Street Public School where he and his sister were enrolled in 1924.

As many of you will know from your own forebears, the geographical location of Castellorizo was not the only problem faced by new arrivals. Learning English was complicated by a new alphabet and for many recent arrivals a name change. My uncle, Manoli, became Herb, my mother, Finnaki, Nina.

No wonder these two young children were puzzled when their father, Yeorgios Papacotis, described their new school as *The wonder of Woolloomooloo*. The fact that the Australian school had no fees and distributed reading and writing books freely, was a bonus their father had not expected.

Now, a hundred years since my mother and uncle travelled with their sister Maria to join their father and two older brothers in Sydney, I've written *Castellorizo to Woolloomooloo* which began as a family history but also revealed that Australia's system of public education in the early nineteen twenties was admired throughout the world. Teachers Colleges had been set up in many of the states, and publications like *The Education Gazette* in NSW reveal a school system where teachers were urged to attend lectures in science and music as well as assisting the study of nature by encouraging students to join groups like *The Gould League of Bird Lovers*.

One particular incident in our family's experience convinced me that these teachers were truly remarkable. While in his class in Plunkett Street, Herb had drawn an image of an Arab chief, Magemma. After many years, that drawing was returned to him. It amazed me that successive teachers had kept that work safe and had ensured its return to Herb and his family more than thirty years later.

The teachers I've recreated in my book, do make mistakes, but their overriding principle is one of encouragement. Cyril Longman, Herb's teacher, takes his class on a rare excursion to Taronga Park Zoo. He also urges his students to take part in various school competitions.

Constance Kitson, Nina's teacher, is determined to inspire her girls to further their education. She has a special empathy for Nina, knowing that her mother died in 1919 from the Spanish Flu. The teacher intervenes when the child is not allowed to attend a class birthday party. Maria's apparent failure to help her young sister angers Miss Kitson but some days later she reassesses the situation.

How awful to be locked out of a language. And how humiliating to have to depend on an eight-year-old to speak for you. Constance Kitson had thought with pity of her student's plight but surely Maria's situation demanded even more sympathy.

And she began to understand what Nina described as my sister, my mother. Maria would have had this role thrust on her. Not enough to have to weep for a dead mother but needing to step in to care for a toddler and her five-year-old brother. Hard on the island with all her relatives around her but here, in Woolloomooloo, what help did she have?

In spite of the obstacles being found in their new home, happy discoveries were being made. I remember my mother telling me about a dessert she first tasted in those early days in Woolloomooloo.

It was a taste I'll never forget—fresh, fruity, and deliciously slippery to swallow.

I won't name that new-found treat but it was later marketed with a well known tune that began *I like aeroplane...* And in later years, Maria, proud of her new refrigerator, would make a much admired trifle that depended on this slippery item as well as cake and custard and a dash of wine.

For Herb, leaving Castellorizo meant the loss of his own beloved *thalassa*.

He was to discover as he travelled on a ferry to Circular Quay some months after his arrival, that he was slowly finding another beautiful ocean. Indeed, a photo at the end of the book, shows Herb in retirement, on board the RSL's *Seagull*, sharing the beauty of Sydney Harbour with his own granddaughters.

The photo of Magemma is in the book too, the image taken from the photo now carefully framed and proudly displayed in the Brisbane home of another of Herb's granddaughters.

A more modern photo shows my great-granddaughter Beatrix, presently a student at Plunkett Street Public School, the same school her great-great-grandmother attended. She stands proudly in front of a mural painted by First Nations artist Allan McKenzie in a school that now includes facts about Aboriginal history and language in its syllabus.



But the photo that gave George and me unexpected delight was a newly discovered wedding photo, taken in 1927 and showing the whole recently-arrived family. Yeorgios Papacotis, father of the bride, stands next to his eldest daughter Maria. Behind them are the two older brothers, Vassili and Dhimitri. Closer to the front, fourteen-year-old Herb stands behind three flower girls. The girl sitting furthest to the right is my mother, Nina. She is just eleven years old.

An epilogue describes some of the ways the two Castellorizian children were able to contribute to their new country. Nina worked for years with Parents and Citizens associations in Sydney schools, serving for some time as president. She also became the president of the Ladies Auxiliary at St Spyridon's Church in Kingsford. Herb established himself as a successful tailor in Sydney and served during the Second World War with Australian forces in New Guinea. And only last year, Herb's son George received the Order of Australia for service to conservation and the environment.

As I've looked back over the last hundred years I've been delighted to explore a proud family history. That research has also thrown light on Plunkett Street Public School which like so many of our schools has contributed greatly to generations of Australian children.



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