

On Sunday 24 April 2019, the KAV was treated to a stimulating and impressive lecture on 'The Origins of the Kastellorizian Costume' by Geoffrey Conaghan. This lecture was not only an informative analysis interspersed with humorous asides, but also a visual delight where the audience could actually see the exhibits that Geoffrey was discussing. A *PowerPoint* presentation which zoomed in on the finer points of the patterns and fabrics added to the sense that we were all immersed in a kaleidoscope of colour.

Geoffrey began by establishing his place on the Kastellorizian genealogy map. He is part of the Sydney Stavrianos/Askitis family. His maternal great grandmother was Amirisa (Haziagapitou) Askitis, and it is her wardrobe that is now in his possession. Putatively, it is the largest, single, intact collection of Kastellorizian clothing that exists. These clothes, along with some other items, formed a magnificent display along the side wall of the club rooms.

Geoffrey's research of textiles led to a comprehensive understanding of Kastellorizian trade routes. India, in particular the region of Guradjat, was a major producer and exporter of textile. Located on the west coast of India, directly opposite the Arabian Gulf, it allowed easy access to the 'Silk Road' and to Europe. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 created a 'fast track' to Europe and made the eastern Mediterranean the new point of entry for Asian trade. Kastellorizo's position and strong trade connections with Egypt would have greatly improved the island's access to goods, including fabrics, from the East. Geoffrey asserts it was from India that the linings of Kastellorizian garments, particularly the more sophisticated pieces such as the coat dress, were sourced. Future research challenges will be to piece together the trade routes that introduced Indian textiles into Kastellorizian and other Greek costumes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Ottomans had many links to India through the Mughal and Hyderabad Muslim dynasties. Geoffrey's theorises that where there were Ottomans, Greeks and Armenians followed in their wake. Alternatively, Greek merchants established themselves independently. There were Greek Orthodox Churches in Calcutta and Dhaka (now Bangladesh) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, established by Greek merchant families. There are still two Armenian churches in Calcutta. Geoffrey was most disappointed that he missed, by a week, meeting the Greek Orthodox nun responsible for managing remaining Greek charitable interests in Calcutta.

The lining of many of the garments was Indian but the outer layers reflected western trade, in particular, silk that Geoffrey believes was from Lyon. Hence the Kastellorizian costume, although Turkish in appearance due to many centuries of Ottoman influence, in fact used the very best of French and Italian silks and velvets. In effect, the costume was like a symbol of the place itself in that era - a meeting of the Orient and the Occident.

Many interesting points arose during the lecture. I will highlight a few of them:

- The clothes were meant to last for generations. This involved alterations being made in order to accommodate different figure shapes. Unfortunately, this legacy has made it difficult to date the original period when the costumes were made.
- The costume, along with jewellery was seen as a mark of social status and wealth.
- In practical terms the undergarments, such as the bloomers, had the silk attachments taken off when washing occurred and then re-sewn after the wash was completed. Our female forbears certainly did not shy away from labour-intensive work!

- The heel of the shoe was cut slightly shorter than the foot, designed in such a way that it caused the women to sway as they walked, thus assisting the unbuttoned coats and dress coats to reveal the interior linings and layers of clothes.
- The perception of the Greek widowed grandmother living in black - and I'm sure we all had one, was in fact, not the case in Kastellorizo. Geoffrey informs us that black was an expensive dye and so it was not used. What a shame it became available in Australia.
- Geoffrey showed us various articles where the original materials were cut to make other items. This he classified as 'repurposing'. I was particularly impressed with the slide that showed a beautiful silk evening bag made for Maria Kominos.
- Finally, as a consolation to all the Kastellorizian women in the audience who like to spend a few dollars on clothes, Geoffrey assured us it's in the blood. It's genetic. Now we have a ready-made excuse with historical evidence!

This lecture was an outstanding success with many questions being asked at its conclusion. I certainly gained a much deeper insight and greater appreciation of the culture, social mores and the economic status of Kastellorizo through this in-depth analysis of its costume. Thank you, Geoffrey!

Sandra Wyatt (nee August)