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An unbearable visit to Yialousa

The Yialousa Coast (Αχαιών Ακτή)



Figure 1 Most probably: The best beach in Cyprus

The air was completely still. Not even the slightest breeze was blowing. And it was terribly hot on this 20th of July; the day we honour prophet Elias. Even the sea was not in the mood for making waves and the water was completely still like a lake. I was driving alone, just myself with my thoughts, gazing at the familiar landmarks of the Karpasía peninsula. There were only a jarring and very provocative sight: every single village on the way, had at least one mosque and a minaret. Nevertheless, my eyes were gazing eagerly left and right, trying to capture everything I saw, to grasp as many images as I possibly could. Now and then, I stopped and took photos that would be used for my future memoirs, while setting in motion, as the Argentinian novelist Julio Cortazar described it: “this comparative and melancholic memory, which captures a lost reality.”

Everything looked distorted to me. The huge apartment buildings that were built in and around Trikomo, buried underneath the picturesque village architecture, and the vulgar accumulation of concrete boxes, dominate the skyline. Piled up in endless rows, modern monsters devoured the fascinating village houses and shops at the beginning of the Karpasía peninsula. I turned my head away in disgust, trying to stop gazing at this barbarity, painfully aware that what I saw was unbearably irreversible. I passed the quaint port of Boghazi, then Koma tou Yialou, Leonariso, reaching Yialousa. Their names on the road signs are now incomprehensible. I am trying to guess the original name of each village, because the Turks have replaced all of them with a Turkish one, obliterating the original. At first, my intention was to visit only Yialousa, spending a few hours at leisure, reminiscing where my mother was born. Suddenly, I decided to carry on straight to Rizokarpaso, the last village, and visit Yialousa on my way back.

The heat was already worse when I arrived at the furthestmost village and stopped, opening the car door. It was only eleven in the morning, but very few people could be seen walking around in the narrow streets. Suddenly, appeared before me the church of Ayios Synesis, a byzantine architectural jewel, abandoned in its endless silence, much different than the usual silence, a silence that stretches out into the unfathomable future. It is the only church functioning in the occupied areas, because about 200 Greek Cypriots refuse to abandon their homes in Rizokarpaso. I sat at the

An unbearable visit to Yialousa by Elias Eliades

village café and ordered a cup of Cypriot coffee with a glass of ice-cold water. I sipped it very slowly, without blowing first, and it burned my lips. When I finished, I paid and returned to the car, moving on towards the monastery of Apostolos Andreas, at the very edge of the peninsula.

The road was narrow and full of potholes, but I was mesmerized looking at the sea, both on the right and on the left, where sheep and goats were huddled under the carob trees for some shade. The big bales of dry yellow wheat were rolled up and shimmering in the heat like gold. The nature around me was amazing, despite the heat, rough and tender at the same time and I felt it right under my skin, because it was part of my own self, an intimate part of me. The first donkey emerged after the next bend, right in the middle of the road, followed by two more. They came slowly towards me, emaciated, friendly and very thirsty. They pleaded for water, carobs and also for a caress and some compassion. I was only too pleased to oblige them!



Figure 2 The Karpasia donkeys welcome all at Apostolos Andreas gate

At the monastery of Apostolos Andreas, the only people I saw were only a few Turkish Cypriot sellers [or settlers], sitting under the shade of a green tent. It was already passed noon and not a single puff of a cloud was to be seen in the sky. The sun hit the ground mercilessly and bounced back into the blazing air, even the soles of my feet were sweltering. Father Zacharias, the old priest whom I know well from previous visits, was half-asleep, exhausted too by the heat. I lit a candle as I entered the church, and I sat for a while on the uncomfortable wooden bench, deep in my thoughts. My worries did not become less worrisome, but at least now I was blessed by my friend the old priest with the long white beard.

After a while, I went down the steps to the sanctuary, where "the miraculous water of the humble fisherman" was flowing continuously, and it was indeed very cool. I filled a small bottle with it, then I drank some and washed my face, before placing my head under the holy water faucet. The sea and the sky were watching me, so were the thick aged doors of the monastery's main entrance, plus some black-eyed glass beads too, tied on tiny strings for good luck. Motionless, on one of the tables under the green tent, were also staring at me intensely.



Figure 3 Two decorative evil eye bead ornaments

Here, there is no room left for fake images, because reality hits me straight into the eyes. Only the glass “jewels” are fake. The truth is like the scorching sun, all-pervading and relentless. The cruel reality is the occupied monastery, the Turkish military outpost near the monastery, the cruel truth is that the Karpasía peninsula will never be free again...Before leaving, I bought a lot of dry carobs for the donkeys, I put them on the back seat and I started the car.



Figure 4 The gate to Apostolos Andreas area

Nevertheless, Karpasía peninsula is the proof that Cypriot humanity still exists. Not only it still exists, but it has deep roots in the lives of the Karpasites, determining their life values, while we, the rest of the Cypriots, are in the process of losing them, for the sake of our fake realities and false values. Only there, in Karpasía, you can gaze at both the sea of the north and the sea of the south simultaneously. In the good old days, there used to be “forty-two villages, two hundred and seventy churches, forty-six forests, sixteen islands and sixteen rivers.” Alas, today the peninsula struggles desperately for its survival. In addition to all its attractions, it is also an incredible blend of natural beauty, wonderful people and a long history lasting millennia. It is an amazing and captivating world, even though it is totally isolated from the free areas of Cyprus. You can see the stubbornness of these 200-odd people that do not want to be expelled, but remain rooted deep in their land, even after their death.

A thousand years ago they returned stronger, after the disastrous century of repeated Arab attacks and endless droughts, when all Cypriots had to abandon their island. The prolonged lack of rain turned it into a desert full of snakes. Yet, the Cypriots came back to rebuild their homes, their schools and their churches, despite their ordeals and

tribulations. Within their vocabulary, and within their souls, there is never even the slightest hint of the notion's misery or defeatism. Today, they remain steadfast in Rizokarpaso, 49 years after the invasion, with their life more difficult by the day, hampered by deprivations and restrictions. But they are hard like granite rocks, their lives graced with the determination to be free, clinging to every square inch of their precious land.

AIGIALOUSA [Yialousa]



Figure 5 A house still standing up after half a century of hardship.

Next stop, Yialousa. On my way, not even a trace of a cloud in the sky and despite the blinding sun, despite the searing heat, something like a heavy cloud hangs heavily within my chest, like a storm about to burst into a deluge. As I drive, I try to remember when the last time was, I visited my Yialousa. I am also wondering when I shall be able to return. Next year, perhaps, the year after or never? Will it be still the

same when I do eventually or will the massive colonization will destroy this part of Cyprus as well, just like it did in the massive suburbs of Kyrenia and Famagusta?

The carobs used to be the black gold of Cyprus, exported during the Ottoman and the British colonial periods to many parts of the world. Along the coasts of the peninsula, both in the north and in the south, one can still find plenty of storage spaces built for the carobs. They were built using the cut square stones, especially attractive in Yialousa and Rizokarpaso, on the ground floor of the house. By the way, the coast in the north of Yialousa is known as the place where the Achaeans landed, after their arrival from the Trojan War (Αχαιών Ακτή) and settlement on the island.

Chrysanthos Hadjipanayi xxxx-1956



*Figure 6 Christina Hadjipanayi Petevi, a Yialousa lady,
Elias' grandmother who died age 67 on 14.02.1952*

I must confess that every time I visited my mother's village, I avoided deliberately entering the cemetery. Having seen other cemeteries in the occupied part, I suspected what was expecting me. Today, I was determined, at last, to look for the grave of my grandmother. I loved her dearly, because she was so humble, so loving,

An unbearable visit to Yialousa by Elias Eliades

full of tender words for everyone, always smiling. I was aware too that she had a soft spot for me in comparison with all her other grandchildren. She died on the 14th of February 1952, when I was nine years old, but I managed to take a photo of her grave before leaving for South Africa in 1960.



Figure 7 Aigialousa cemetery. More than 1.000 souls resting including my beloved CHRISTINA. A 1959 photo during a Christmas visit to Yialousa.

It was early afternoon when I parked the car under the shade of a fig tree and started walking towards the cemetery. There was absolute stillness as I reached it, but the shock that I received when I entered it, is beyond description. I had the black-and-white photo in the pocket of my shirt to guide me, but it was totally useless. I was stunned, appalled and dismayed when I saw such a widespread demolition of the tomb

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crosses. So much lack of respect for the dead, and so much hatred felt by those who perpetrated this dreadful destruction, was impossible to imagine. It was a real nightmare and, shaken, I sat on a broken tombstone for more than half an hour, trying to recover my wits. Ironically, I thought that this must be the cemetery with the best view in the entire world, as I gazed at the soothing Coast of the Achaeans so nearby.



Figure 8 Aigialousa cemetery, after 1974

Finally, I began the search for the remains of my grandmother's grave, slowly, meticulously and painfully. I looked at all the graves and their fragments scattered around me. I recognized a couple of surnames, but the grave of Christina Petevi from Yialousa was nowhere to be seen. Not a splinter, not even the smallest piece. She was resting blissfully in her privileged grave now, not on earth, not under the ground, not in Yialousa, not in Cyprus, but in heaven.



Figure 9 The cemetery with the best view in the world



Figure 10 Aigialousa. Archangelos Michael, 11th century church adjacent to the cemetery

Yialousa is now, and will remain forever, the village of my youth, the village of my dreams, sacrificed by the stupidity and the brutality of those Cypriots driven by hatred and fanaticism, on both sides of the dividing line, to the altar of petty politics and despicable corruption. Nevertheless, Yialousa still has a special magnetism for me, unrivalled by any other village in Cyprus. With a heavy heart I dragged my feet out of the ravaged cemetery, without looking back. On my way to the car, I went past a military post with the oppressing symbols of the military occupation: the flag of Turkey, and that of the illegal state in the north. A dreadful reality that will almost be impossible to reverse. Not in my lifetime, anyway.



Figure 11 Karpasia, a beautiful, blessed place. Blessed are the peacemakers. Cursed are those who sow hatred

Elias Eliades

Malaga, 4 August 2023