

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPES IN EUROPE
LANDSCHAFTEN: KULTURELLES ERBE IN EUROPA

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edited by
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Euphrosyne Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou

Kythrea – Kephlovryso (Head-Spring): A Paradise in the Past, a Distorted Landscape in the Present

On an island like Cyprus, where lack of water has been a continuing problem for centuries, the abundance of water flowing from the spring of Kephlovryso was a blessing.

Originating from the southern flank of Pentadaktylos, the finest of all the springs on Cyprus springs up at Kythrea (13 kms NE of Nicosia). Kephlovryso was used in the ancient times and it was the reason for the rise of Chytroi as an inland urban centre in the Roman period. Thanks to the waters of its spring, Kythrea had the highest concentration of watermills. These watermills are mentioned most frequently in the written sources dating from the Frankish period onwards. They are referred to as royal. In 1210 King Hugh I granted the Knights of St. John

the right of grinding their corn in the mills of Kythrea, and ten years later the widow of Hugh, Queen Alice, conceded the right of use of the royal flour mills on a permanent basis, free of all charges and tolls, to Archbishop Eustorge and the Church of Nicosia, for the redemption of the souls of the king, the queen and their forbears¹.



Fig. 1: Drawing of Kephlovryso by Cornelius Van De Bruyn, 1683

In 1232 the Longobards of Friedrich II, destroyed the watermills at Kythrea², but they were soon reconstructed, and according to Florio Bustron, in the 16th century there were more than fifty mills in the area³.

During the Venetian rule, the Republic made considerable profits from renting the mills of Kythrea. According to the documents kept in the State archives of Venice, in 1513 two of the mills were sold to an individual for 2,257 ducats⁴.

At the end of the 16th century, Estienne Lousignan referred with admiration to the water, which operated the mills of Kythrea, and irrigated land full of gardens, cotton plantations and grain⁵.

In 1683 Cornelius Van De Bruyn from the Hague, made the first known drawing of Kephlovryso and described the spring-head: 'It lies under a hill and disperses itself in several direc-

¹ Coureas, Schabel (eds.) 1997, pp. 167-168, no 62.

² Hill II, 1948, p. 119.

³ Bustron, p. 29.

⁴ Aristidou 1994, pp. 149-153.

tions. The water falls first into an oval basin and with such swiftness that it eddies round and round'⁶.

About a hundred years later, Giovanni Mariti, who lived on Cyprus from 1760 to 1767, was impressed by Kythrea and made a detailed description of it:

'Citerea is made up of several villages, one close to the other; the mulberry trees round them make quite a grove. This is one of the most productive parts of the island; it is especially rich in silk and cotton, and its fields are abundantly watered by a spring on the north of the village, called Cefalofriso, or well-head, in which are three large jets, which throw out so much water that a few paces only from the source it turns a mill. There are many more mills below which grind grain for the neighbourhood, and for the city of Nicosia, eight miles away. In old time this water was carried as far as Salamis by aqueducts, of which some remains are still visible. The Cypriots are very fond of visiting this place for recreation, but they are scarcely fit judges of real pleasantness, so long as they think that the most beautiful spot is where there is most water. Citerea really has no merits except for its produce: and let no one fancy that here was the ancient city Cythera, where was a temple of the goddess Venus, for that lay between Pafo and Limasol. The village of which I am speaking was called Citri, and now by Europeans Citra and by the Greeks Cirkà. From the spring, where the mulberry trees begin, to the plain, where they end, is about two miles'⁷.

In 1790 Michael de Vezin counted 32 watermills in Kythrea⁸, and many are still remembered by their names by the village inhabitants, who were forced to abandon their homes in 1974 after the Turkish invasion.

The names of most watermills were preserved as mentioned in the old documents, and they serve as a reminder of the mediaeval past.

Kythrea overlooks the plain of Mesaoria, the granary of Cyprus, and due to their close location to Nicosia, its mills were of strategic importance. During the Ottoman rule there were several uprisings, as in 1680 and in 1765, when rebel Turks, in order to force their Governor to yield to their demands, captured the mills of Kythrea thus cutting the bread supply and causing starvation in the capital⁹.

In 1816 Kythrea was visited by Otto Friedrich von Richter (1792-1816), a son of a wealthy family in Estonia, who died shortly after his journey at the age of 24. He described the beauty of the landscape in the most lyrical style, also giving an idea of the friendly local atmosphere and the hospitality of a well-known rich landowner of Kythrea. His host was Hadjipetrakis Kytherios, who was prosecuted by the Turks a few years later, because of his suspected involvement in the Greek Revolution of 1821:

⁵ Lusignan 1580, p. 33.

⁶ Iacovou 1997, p. 278, Cat. No 189; Cobham 1908, p. 237.

⁷ Mariti 1769/1971, pp. 60-61.

⁸ Cobham 1908, p. 373.

⁹ Kyprianos 1788/1902, pp. 461-462 and 479.

'Am Fusse des Gebirges in der Ebene, liegt das weitläufige Dorf Chyttria zerstreut, zwischen Gärten von Oehl- und Maulbeer-Bäumen und wohl gewässerten Korn-Feldern. Pappeln, gemischt mit Palmen und Cypressen, beschatten das Ufer eines Baches, der nahe aus einem starken Quelle hervordringt, und in mehreren Armen den Ort durchschlängelt. Seine Gebäude sind gross und reinlich, von Erdziegeln erbaut, und umher prangten die Gärten mit einem Überflusse reifer Citronen. Man theilt diese Besetzung in Ano, Kato, und Paleo-Chyttria. Sie gehört einem reichen Griechen, Namens Petraki, von welchem ich, auf Peristiany's (The Russian Consul in Larnaca, Cyprus) Empfehlung, prächtig aufgenommen wurde. Sein Hausgeräth war zierlich und kostbar: es paarte Europäische Stühle und Commoden mit Aegyptischen Matten, und die Diwans hatten einen Überzug von dem bekannten trefflichen Sattun aus Nicosia, dessen Farbe nie verbleicht. Mir wurde ein leckeres Abendessen gegeben, während der Wirt magere Fastenspeise ass, und meine Bettwäsche bestand aus dem feinsten Musselin.

Türkisch nennt man den lieblichen Ort nur Deghirmenlik, Mühlenort, weil der erwähnte Bach mehrere Mühlen treibt¹⁰.'

Near the house of Petraki there were ruins of a Christian church with old wall paintings, and not far from it the young traveller found a piece of marble with an inscription in Greek, which he copied for his collection. In this blessed place, ruins from the ancient Greek past, a Byzantine church and traditional houses of the late 18th or early 19th century formed a historical landscape surrounded by wonderful nature. The topography enveloped a conglomeration of cultures.

In 1879, one year after Cyprus had passed under the administration of Great Britain, Kythrea was visited by Sir Samuel Baker, who wished to see the 'celebrated springs about three miles above the village'. Baker observed things with an acute eye and wrote meticulously and methodically; his descriptions are very accurate, and offer valuable details; his remarks are clever and to the point:

'The entire neighbourhood was green with abundant crops of cereals, some of which at this early season were eighteen inches high. The effect of irrigation could be traced for several miles into the plain and along the base of the mountain range, until by degrees the green became more faint, and gradually but surely merged into the dead brown which denoted barrenness, where the water-power was expended by absorption.

It was impossible to form any idea of the extent of Kythrea from the outside view. A succession of large villages with fields highly cultivated covered the surface at the base of the mountains, but the true Kythrea was partially concealed by the curious ravine through which the water of the springs is conducted by aqueducts until it reaches the lower ground. For a distance of three miles this ravine is occupied by houses and gardens, all of which are supplied by the stream, which turns thirty-two water-mills in its course. The waterwheels in Cyprus are horizontal turbines, and I have only met with one over-shot wheel in the island; this is on the estate of M. Mattei at Kuklia.

¹⁰ Richter 1822, pp. 321-322.

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¹⁰ Richter 1822, pp. 321-322.

The range of mountains exactly above the village exhibits a peculiar example of the effect of water-wash for about two hundred feet from the base. From the heights at Government House, twelve miles distant, I had observed through the telescope a curious succession of conical heaps resembling volcanic mounds of hardened mud; these rose one above the other along the base of the hills like miniature mountain-ranges. Even when near Kythrea I could not understand the formation, until we found ourselves riding through the steep ravine which holds the watercourse and ascending by a narrow path among the countless hills that I have described. Both sides of the gorge, and also the deep bottom, are occupied by houses with fruitful gardens rich in mulberry, orange, lemon, apricots, olives, forming groves of trees that in summer must be delightful. Sometimes after clambering up steep and stony paths which had originally been paved we entered into villages, the roofs of the houses below us upon our left, and the doors of others upon our right, so close to the narrow path as scarcely to admit the passage of a loaded mule. The water rushed along the bottom in a rapid stream, plunging from the adit below one turbine to a temporary freedom in a natural channel, from which it was quickly captured and led into an aqueduct of masonry to another mill at a lower level. All the inhabitants had turned out to see an English lady, and the usual welcome was exhibited by sprinkling us with rose and orange-flower water as we passed; the omnipresent dogs yelled and barked with their usual threatening demonstrations at the heels of our animals, and some from the low roofs of the houses were unpleasantly close to our heads. We were now among the conical mounds, along the steep sides of which a path of about twelve inches width appeared to invite destruction, as the loose crumbling material rolled down the deep incline beneath the hoofs of the sure-footed horses and mules. These creatures had a disagreeable habit of choosing the extreme edge of the narrow ledge, instead of hugging the safer side; and although no great precipice existed, the fall of thirty feet into the rocky stream below would have been quite as effectual as a greater depth in breaking necks and limbs. We again entered a village, where a large plane-tree formed the centre of a small open space, faced on either side by a café; the situation being attractive during summer from the dense shade afforded by the spreading branches. There were many people sitting in the open shed, who as usual rose and made their salutations as we passed. The path became worse as we proceeded, and we at length emerged from the long string of contracted villages and skirted the precipitous sides of the ravine, which formed one of the innumerable gorges between the conical mounds of marls and alluvium that had been washed from a higher level and worn into heaps by the action of rain upon the unstable surface. About a mile beyond all villages we skirted the stream along a steep bank, from which point we looked down upon the roofs of houses more than a hundred feet below, and we at length halted and dismounted at a rocky termination of the gorge, from whence issued suddenly the celebrated spring of Kythrea.

The mountains rose abruptly upon either side, and a dry ravine above the rocks upon which we stood exhibited the natural channel by which in heavy rains the surface-water would be conducted to the lower stream-bed. A rough arch of masonry and a tunnel in the rock for about forty feet formed the embouchure, from which the water issued into a carefully constructed stone aqueduct, which led directly to the first mill of the Kythrea series, about a hundred and twenty yards distant. The temperature was considerably warmer than the air, but I had no thermometer to mark the difference.

The aqueduct would have carried at least one-third more than the present volume, which was about twenty-six inches deep, and three feet in width. The water was beautifully clear and the current rapid, but I had no means of measuring the velocity.

The stone-work of the aqueduct, always moist from the percolation, must form a charming exhibition of maidenhair ferns during summer-time, as the crevices were all occupied by plants, whose leaves, even at this season (February) were several inches in length (...).

It is extraordinary that the water-power of Cyprus has of late years been so neglected by the authorities, as the island must from ancient times have mainly depended upon its springs in the absence of dependable seasons. Kythrea is an example of the importance that was attached to a stream of running water, as the town was established by the Athenians, and in former ages an aqueduct of masonry extended for twenty-five miles to Salamis; in the neighbourhood of which ruins of the old work are still existing. If the seasons of Cyprus have undergone a change since the forests have been destroyed, I can see no reason for the innumerable vestiges of ancient water-works throughout the country. Wherever an important spring existed, there was a settlement of corresponding extent and value, which suggests that the rainfall was even then as uncertain as at the present day. Every spring became a centre of attraction. The ruins of the ancient Kythrea have been partially excavated by the indefatigable General di Cesnola, but with unimportant results, as the ground is under artificial irrigation, and is in the highest cultivation, therefore it cannot be disturbed.

The chief industry of modern times which adds to the importance of Kythrea, is the production of silk, from the great abundance of mulberry-trees which supply the necessary food for the silkworms; but it has suffered to a considerable degree, in common with most silk-growing districts in Cyprus, by the want of foresight of the producers; these people have within the last

Fig. 2: Kythrea before 1974





Fig. 3: Ruined watermill in Kythrea, 2006

few years sold the seed in such extravagant quantities to the traders of Beyrout as to leave the island with a short supply. The result of this sacrifice for the sake of ready money is a serious reduction in the general produce, and in many portions of the island the mulberry-trees are flourishing without a silkworm to feed upon them. The thirty-two flour-mills of Kythrea are worked by a fall of 400 feet between the head-water of the spring to the base of the lowest mill at the foot of the mountains. It appeared to me that much water is wasted by an absence of scientific control. A series of reservoirs would store the excess during the hours when the mills are idle (similar to the mill-ponds in England), but as there is no municipal law upon this important subject, the all-important stream is much neglected. There is a general demand for grinding-power throughout Cyprus; the corn is brought from great distances to the mills of Kythrea at a considerable expense of transport; I have met droves of mules laden with wheat and barley

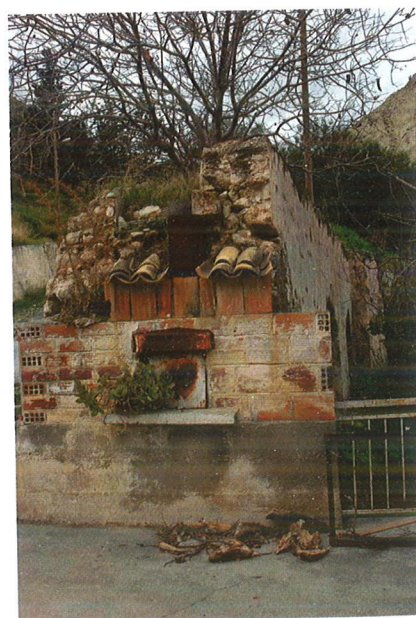


Fig. 4: Watermill turned into an oven, Kythrea 2006

¹¹ Baker 1879, pp. 69-75.



Fig. 5: Watermill, Kythrea 2006



Fig. 6: Watermill, Kythrea 2006



Fig. 7: Water-channel, Kythrea 2006

on their way from Larnaca, to which distant spot they would again return when their loads should have been reduced to flour¹¹.

People visiting Kythrea today see a completely different landscape from the one described above. This change is due to many factors, two of the most important being overexploitation of water resources along with decrease in rainfall (14% in the last 100 years). The international economic crisis of 1929-1931 was followed by the severe drought of 1932-1933, which seriously affected agricultural production and deprived mills of their driving power. More and more mills became seasonal. In Kythrea particularly, the sinking of wells, but mainly the di-

¹² Christides 2003, p. 104.

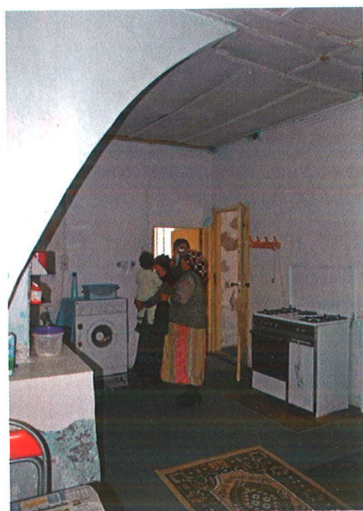


Fig. 8: People from Anatolia living in a watermill, Kythrea 2006

version of water from the spring for irrigation and water supply for 13 villages in Mesaoria in 1956, caused the exhaustion of the main source¹².

The final blow was the Turkish invasion of 1974, when about 37% of the territory of Cyprus was occupied by the Turkish troops, and a third of the population was displaced. Among those who became refugees, were the inhabitants of Kythrea. Their houses were occupied by immigrants from Anatolia, people of a different language, religion, customs and culture in general. The newcomers were not familiar with traditional agricultural practices of Cyprus, as most of them used to be shepherds in their home country. They have lived in Kythrea, in poverty and misery, for over 30 years now. The outcome is the distorted landscape of today, both natural and manmade. What the paradise of the past became at present is hard to describe in words; some aspects of it, however, could be captured by a camera, and photographs speak for themselves.

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