

## The Exchange of Populations: The Case of Sinasos

The convention on the Exchange of Greek and Turkish populations, which was signed in Lausanne on 3 July 1923, constituted the *fait accompli* of the Asia Minor War and finalized the upheavals that had taken place in stages in Asia Minor, with the Balkan Wars and the outbreak of the First World War. The departure of the Christian population of Cappadocia and Pontos set its seal on the end of Hellenism in the land of Asia Minor.

### The events from archival sources and personal memory

Sinasos is a unique case of an Asia Minor community that organized its repatriation methodically and sought beforehand a place in which to settle in Greece, mobilizing its emigrant compatriots for assistance and support. Four committees<sup>1</sup> were set up for the Exchange, foremost among which was the committee in Constantinople:

- a) The Constantinople committee was made up of members of the economically flourishing community of Sinasian caviar-merchants in Pera and of the affluent Sinasian ship-chandlers ('boyadjis') in Galata. As the central committee, it had undertaken to co-ordinate the transport of the inhabitants of Sinasos to Piraeus.
- b) The Sinasos committee inventoried, selected, packed and made provision for safe dispatch to Greece of whatever it was possible to salvage from community and personal property. It also oversaw the arduous journey over land and sea, as far as Piraeus, so that the refugees were not deprived of food or care. Recorded in a codex of the Christian community of Sinasos, which is now kept in the General State Archive, are the minutes of 13 sessions of the village Council of Elders, concerning decisions for dealing with, as they put it, the 'harsh repatriation'. These sessions were held between 20 June and 4 September 1924.<sup>2</sup>
- c) The Piraeus-Athens committee, which undertook the most formidable and difficult task of receiving the refugees from Sinasos, looking after them, finding a suitable place to set up Nea Sinasos and rehabilitating the Sinasians. Preserved in the Archive of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies is part of the voluminous correspondence between this committee and the committee in the village. The Piraeus-Athens committee gave rise to the association 'I Nea Sinasos' (New Sinasos), which is active to this day.
- d) The America committee, which assisted the resettlement and rehabilitation of the refugees with generous sums of money, and continued to bolster them economically after their settlement in Greece.

The primary aim of these committees was to find a place of settlement in Greece. Paramythia and Philiates were rejected, on the grounds that there were Arvanites (Albanians) thereabouts and the incomers would be in danger of bandit raids. In addition there were no roads and they were far away from the main harbors and commercial centers of Greece and Turkey, the area was plagued by malaria, and so on. Other places were suggested, in Chalkidiki, West Thrace and Crete, but in the end the proposal that they settle at Parga in Epirus was accepted. However, 'Nea Sinasos' was finally founded in northern Evvia (Euboea), in the Vistritsa çiflik, in the district of Xirochori, Hestiaia, while a large number of Sinasians were to settle in Piraeus, Athens and other towns in Greece.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the members of the four committees are recorded in the album Sinasos. Diamond of the East, Athens, 1924, 54 (in Greek).

<sup>2</sup> Summaries of the minutes are given in the catalogue by Matoula Kouroupou – Evangelia Balta, Greek Orthodox Communities of Cappadocia. I. District of Prokopi. Sources in the General State Archives and the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, publ. Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens 2001, 125-126 (in Greek).

<sup>3</sup> Nikolaos Rizos, *Cappadocian Varia*, that is an Essay of Historical Description of Ancient Cappadocia and Especially of the Provinces of Kaisareia and Ikonion, Constantinople 1856 (in Greek).

Money was collected from Sinasians domiciled in America and in Constantinople, for the transport of the poor people in the village and the dispatch of the community and ecclesiastical property to Greece. An inventory was made of the immovable properties, photographs of the village were taken, the funds of all associations were liquidated. Last but not least, the transportation of the population and the movable properties was arranged. The transportation of the Exchangeable Populations began in late August and was completed on 2 October 1924. The last telegram sent by the Exchange Committee to the Delegation in Constantinople reads: 'Today, 2 October 1924, we leave our fatherland finally'. Persons involved 'in situ' with preparing the journey were the brothers Rizos and Serapheim, sons of Nikolaos Rizos, author of 'Kappadokika' in 1856.<sup>3</sup>

Serapheim Rizos (I note in parenthesis that his house is the one whose front door is decorated with a lion flanking either side), schoolteacher in Sinasos, deposited in the CAMS an enormous body of material, both in its volume and in its wealth of information, as well as photographs of his homeland. His manuscript entitled 'Exchange', as well as the testimonies of other Sinasian refugees-informants about the exodus, which are kept in the oral tradition archive of the CAMS, describe the events. Their repetitiousness confirms these, composing with documentary material the historical nexus of the Exchange of Populations. Because of the emotive charge of these testimonies, they also constitute evidence of the psychological climate of the refugees' departure from their homelands and their arrival in Greece. This climate could not be captured by any official document, which is why my first thought, on accepting the invitation to attend this conference, was to deal with what has been recorded about the Exchange by the selective mechanism of the Sinasian refugees' memory. My intention was to deal with Sinasians' recollections, as recorded in the CAMS, of the news of the compulsory exchange and their reaction to it, their contact with the Turkish refugees who arrived from Greece, the behavior and the farewell of their Turkish fellow villagers, the collecting up of the heirlooms of communal life in Asia Minor. Last, I wanted to present the Exchangeable Sinasians' testimony about those who converted to Islam and stayed behind. The issues were many and the choices difficult.

### **The photographing of Sinasos**

In the end, the idea of focusing my paper on an individual issue of the Exchange prevailed; it was dictated too by the subject of the conference, which is dedicated to protecting the cultural heritage of the Exchangeable Populations. So, I shall speak to you about the photographing of Sinasos, which took place in July 2004, an event which typifies the uniqueness of the behavior of this Cappadocian community during that period. In the midst of committees involved with finding a new place of settlement, with collecting and inventorying community and public property, it was also decided to make a photographic record of the village. As the exact analogue of the solicitude for material goods, it was decided to record the immaterial image of Sinasos, in order to carry it away and to keep it safe together with the other heirlooms in the new homeland. Recorded in photograph are the landscape and the land, to be preserved in memory.

The 'literatus' Serapheim Rizos, the inspiration and protagonist behind the photographing of Sinasos, writes: 'One of the issues which was bothering me continuously, but I could not say so, was the photographing of our village. We had no plans or thoughts about photographing it. We were so weighed down by everyday concerns and our money was so tight that any proposal of mine for such a luxury was bound to be rejected.

I thought about speaking privately to my late brother and president of the Committee, Rizos. I explained to him the seriousness of photographing the village and he accepted my views, but on the recommendation that I be frugal, and said he would undertake to persuade the others to agree to the allocation of a sum for this project.

And indeed the sum of 20 Turkish sovereigns was made available. I knew that two from Kastro, the Pantazis cousins, Anastasis son of Iosiph and Isaak son of Ilias, sons of the good and virtuous Pantazis brothers, merchants and bankers in Kastro, had a camera. I got hold of them and made an agreement that during a specific time interval, from 1 July to the end of that month, 1924, they would go to various parts of the village and would photograph everything I pointed out to them, for which they would be paid 20 sovereigns, as well as photographing other houses, for which they would be paid by the interested parties.

I had in mind to photograph: our five neighborhoods: Gavra, Yeni Mahalle, Kipo, Kapalo, Loula. Our two churches: of Sts Constantine and Helen, and of the Taxiarchs and the monastery of St Nicholas. The schools, the building of the Council of Elders. Some houses, the fountains, the bazaar, the Marasoglu bridge, the Fengarina han and whatever else was beautiful to my eyes and in my mind, in the hope that I would have another installment of 20 sovereigns. But I did not manage this.

Toz duman icinde ferman okunmaz (= a firman cannot be read amidst dust and upheaval) our Eldermen told me. To all these were added the two churches at Kastro: St Basil and Hosios Ioannis, the Christian neighborhoods in Kastro, at the wish of friends of the Pantazis' family, without us paying. In one month we photographed whatever we could, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, as at Gorgoli and Jalela. We were afraid to go to the Holy Cross, Tsarmatsa, Davlmas, because of the deserters, who were numerous at that time.

I kept all these photographic plates and en route to Greece, via Constantinople, at my meeting with our 'Constantinople Delegation' I handed them over, with the recommendation and request that they use them to publish a brochure about Sinasos as soon as possible. The Delegation enthusiastically agreed to my proposal and the now late physician, Ioannis Archelaos, offered to take care of this, at my fervent behest that it be written in vernacular Greek (demotic) and their promise that it would be. And so I left for Greece, where I was swept along by the tide of refugeehood.

One day, at Podarades (Nea Ionia), in the carpet factory, a heavy parcel arrived for me by post. It was the album of the diamond of the East, of our dear village, the only memento of the long, silent, unknown history of Asia Minor Hellenism of the far-reaches, with the conquerors of our Gourna inside our rock-cut houses.<sup>7</sup>

This is what Serapheim Rizos notes in 1957, in his unpublished manuscript entitled 'The Exchange'. The adoption by the Council of Elders of the idea proposed by the enlightened Serapheim Rizos, who was aware of the significance of the issue, confirms the Sinasians' consciousness of the urban physiognomy of their land. Without doubt Sinasos was the only example of urban space in the heart of Cappadocia, the land of the troglodytes. This urban landscape was shaped mainly after the second half of the nineteenth century, with the money and the zeal of Sinasian emigrants domiciled in Constantinople. In the early 1840s over 400 males, of 12 years old and over, representing 20%-25% of the total population of the settlement, were working in Constantinople. This is a high percentage even by comparison with other Asia Minor villages with large-scale emigration, as historian Christos Hadjiiosiph points out.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Christos Hadjiiosiph is a descendant of the Hadjiiosiph family and his grandfather, Christos, was one of the last members of the Council of Elders in Sinasos. The family mansion still stands in the Kapalo neighborhood.

The Sinasians' consciousness of their land, product of an 'urbanized' rural society, was outcome of the influence of the educational system, which was introduced and financially supported by emigration. It was an example of the high cultural level which the long service of the expatriates in the Greek milieu of Constantinople transmitted to cultivate in the land of their fathers. Sinasos belongs in the class of Cappadocian communities, such as Gelveri, Nevsehir, which were urbanized and Hellenized because their emigrants in the major urban centers channelled their economic surplus into education, and in so doing becoming agents of the dissemination of Greek national education. Thus, it is not fortuitous that Grecophone Sinasos was given the sobriquet 'Athens of the East', just as it is not fortuitous that the camera lens in the photographs taken in 1924 focused on whatever is Greek. Not one Muslim building is photographed, not even the elegant medrese. The landscape of Sinasos is limited to the Greek neighborhoods. The choice declares the ideological orientation of Sinasian society, its confinement within the mantle cast around it by the protective policy of the expatriates.

Alongside the photographs of the mansions, churches and schools, of the countryside around the village, are immortalized moments of daily life, such as spinning wool, carrying water from the fountain, photographs of excursions and entertainments, of persons in Sinasian society. All indicate the concern to record the setting of a life in Asia Minor that was ending irrevocably, to be transferred together with the refugees to the new, unknown life that awaited them in Greece. And all show the material culture of a society which believed that wealth, social status and property should be conspicuously displayed.

I wonder how these photographs functioned when the one hundred copies of the album circulated, immediately after the settlement of the Sinasian refugees in Greece.<sup>5</sup> Were these the proof for the Greeks of Greece when they heard suspiciously from the mouth of the refugees, 'in our homeland we had ...'? Were they a refuge and subconscious escapism from the harsh reality of Greece, of the tents and the shacks in the refugee settlement of Nea Sinasos? We shall never know.

This year, eighty years after the publication of the album of the Exchange, the CAMS is to publish a new album on Sinasos, sponsored by Yusuf Örnek and the Sinasian lady Loula Kertzikov. Its pages will include the photographs of Sinasos taken by the Pantazis cousins from Ürgüp in July 1924, those taken by Lazaros Takadopoulos from his pilgrimage in 1953 and corresponding ones taken by CAMS collaborators in 1959.

<sup>5</sup> As Rizos notes, the photographing was not confined only to Sinasos. In the copy of the Sinasos album in the CAMS, one of the one hundred copies that circulated in 1924, alongside the 82 photographs of Sinasos are added 8 photographs of Prokopi, 3 of Jalela and 13 of wall-paintings from churches in Göreme: essentially it is an endeavor to depict the Christian region neighboring Sinasos.