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Efforts of the Paxiots for gathering the water

All great civilizations were born and developed in places where the land was rich, near forests, rivers, lakes, the sea.

Our people here on this rock called Paxos, unfortunately never had rich land nor fresh water.

Our ancestors were forced to work hard to dig deep underground only to find a bit of salty water, to carve the rocks to create tanks for the rain water, a vital element for the survivor of their animals and themselves.

By working the stone with endless love and passion they managed to give breath to a heartless material creating miniature Parthenons. The stone built houses and the thousands of meters of dry stone walls testify to that.

Every corner of Paxos has something special to offer; the smell of thyme, the taste of the salty endless blue sea, the soundly built churches with the tall bell towers full of faith and whispered prayers, the windmills, the ancient forgotten oil refineries, the three light houses: the one on the island of the Virgin Mary (Panagias) built in the year 1825, the one in Lakka built in 1831, which actually in 1913 fell in the sea and was rebuilt in 1919 and finally the one in Antipaxos built in 1906; the masterpieces that both the various water reservoirs and the self filling wells that endlessly sip the salty and sweat sea drops.

Paxos, at one time a dry rock, has bloomed and has been tamed by the constant caring and excessive love of its inhabitants.

The locals plowed the barren land and tall, silver - leafed, immortal olive trees came out of their efforts. The Paxiots saw their fruit ripping, their vine yards growing, they saw the divine oil and the immortal wine filling their lives with happiness and pride and their poor dinner table became slowly more rich and beautiful.

Today our island in its full bloom offers itself to the whole world like an enormous bouquet full of scents, made of olive branches, scented plants, carnations, roses, basil and honeysuckle. The whole island smells of lemon and almond flowers. But most of all, our picturesque, seductive island nestling in the arms of a dark, mysterious and relentless but also sweat sea, offers the world its culture.

Our culture runs through our everlasting values and traditions that are continuously renewed and evolving through our spiritual leaders, our stone masons, our land workers, our fishermen and the lovely ladies of this island.

Our mythology is full of water Nymphs, called Nereids or fairies (Neraides) that even today are seen washing their hair by the waterfront.

You only have to shut your eyes for a second and you will see them passing by you or bathing at a Paxos port or beach under the moonlight. You might see them coming out of the water when the full moon shines through the fortress' s pine trees and then the magic of the starlit night will move your souls.

From Poseidon, Zeus's brother and god of the sea, the wind and waves master we borrowed our island's symbols, the trident and the holy dolphin. According to the myth, God Poseidon is the divine spirit of the third element. His bride to be Amfitriti, one of the Nereids, trying to avoid a marriage to him, hid in one of our island's caves.

But God Poseidon ordered a dolphin to search and find her and the dolphin did finally find her hidden in the cave of Ipapandi. After her marriage to Poseidon, Amfitriti became very powerful. She was named "Queen and Posidonia" and our sailors sacrificed in her name. This is why the Ionian Sea is practically always calm.

The Paxiots got slowly used to the great mistress, the sea. They learned to fight and control it with oars and sails. With their sailing boats they managed to communicate with the inhabitants of the Mainland and of Corfu. Gradually with the naval force of their 40 sailing ships they also managed to push the Mediterranean pirates away and to reach far to all corners of the world. Through trade they became richer in both material and spiritual goods.

Our island became the bridge, the crossroad and the mixing bowl of every significant culture. The Venetians, the French, the Russian Turks, the English left their cultural signature for over 600 years on our already cultured island.

Many years have gone by and the locals, generation after generation have fought against the nightmare of water shortage.

The Paxos Mayor, Mr Spyros Bogdanos in a Happy New Year' s note for 2004 writes:

"Paxos came out of the sea, lives in its arms and benefits from it. Sea water is an element of wealth and abundance, fresh water characterizes wealth for the one that possesses it in abundance but also poverty and ingenuity for the one that suffers from lack of it. The Paxiots have been suffering from water supply shortage for centuries and so have turned water management into such an art form that people from all over the world never cease to be amazed at how clean, proper and all green everything is on the island. And thus they have made themselves an example for the planet at a time when wars for the control of water resources do not seem very far".

Only some years ago steps were made towards the solution of the water problem with the construction of two large water reservoirs. The first inhabitants of our island in their struggling effort to gather water, managed to dig wells of salty water by the sea or carve small water tanks on rocky ground. Nowadays all these constructions are considered masterpieces of craftsmanship, monuments of our civilization and we owe it to our ancestors to preserve and honor them. They are a priceless heritage left to us by hard working, wise, faithful loving people that never stopped enduring and persevering.

And so today I am honored to point out and present to you all these stone carved water reservoirs, private and public and some of the most significant wells, still bravely and proudly standing through the centuries, patiently waiting for us to finally look after them healing their wounds.