

# LITERARY FEATURE

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FEATURE and BOOK REVIEW

CYPRUS

## A TASTE OF YESTERDAY

*by*

**Eleni Protopapa**

**‘Cyprus – A Taste of Yesterday’ – what a subtle and evocative title for this gem of a book about life on the island seventy years ago.**

When Eleni Protopapa retired to Coral Bay in the 1990’s, she felt a growing desire to write a description of her early life in Arghaki, a small village near Morphou. To quote her words in the introduction of her fascinating book, it was to be ‘*a record of our past lest it be lost for ever*’. This yearning was heightened by the absence of her children and grandchildren, who live permanently in America and Britain.

At the recent launch of '*Cyprus – A Taste of Yesterday*', Eleni explained why she had written her book in English.

*'I was so concerned about my grandchildren. I felt they were losing touch with their heritage, so these stories from my childhood will, I hope, help them remember their 'roots'. My four grandchildren in London understand Greek, but my other grandchildren in Boston and Connecticut don't, so I decided to write in English. It was frustrating, but very rewarding, but Nicos (her husband of 51 years) and my mother Stella, who passed away two years ago aged 96, helped me with many details.'*

As you read Eleni's book, you are indeed transported back seventy years to an age when Cyprus was a peaceful, idyllic island. Life was hard, but rewarding; people grew what they ate and made what they needed. Camels and donkeys plodded along the deserted roads. Village life was governed by the supply of water, the quality of the harvest and the influence of the church. Feast days, weddings, births and funerals guaranteed a colourful social life, long before the distraction of television and the disaster of invasion.

Eleni Protopapas' book portrays beautifully this forgotten era, with captivating details and humorous anecdotes, set out in chapters that describe the important things in their village life. Some of these intriguing chapters include 'The Wash Day', 'Olive Oil – a Food or a Medicine?', 'The Watermelon Fields' and 'Keeping the Cellar Full.'

The narrative is excellent, whilst the watercolours and line drawings by Costas Economou, Athinodoros Georgiou and others, portray the scene perfectly.

### **Culinary Treasure Trove**

However, this is *not* just an enthralling social history of great merit, but also a culinary treasure trove; for cookery is Eleni's passion. The aptly entitled '*A Taste of Yesterday*' contains an astonishing 55 recipes for traditional Cypriot dishes. Cleverly, when she has described an Easter celebration, a wedding feast or simply watermelons, Eleni had added a recipe for an appropriate dish. As she says in her book, their diet then was far healthier than it is today, with everything grown organically.

This charming book should appeal to both old and young. The older readers will nod in agreement as they recognise or remember something that has almost disappeared. Yet, their grandchildren will shake their heads in disbelief: did Eleni really go to school by train? They had to *make* yeast and use wood ash to wash clothes? Perhaps this book should be made compulsory reading in schools. Newly arrived residents would appreciate Eleni's book, too, in order to learn something of the culture of their new home. And, of course, tourists would find 'Cyprus - A Taste of Yesterday', a perfect souvenir.

Eleni's six-year-long labour of love, has produced a social anthology containing unique recipes to tempt the minds and palates of all those who love Cyprus.

After the Turkish invasion of 1974, when the family lost everything, she and her family became refugees in their own country. In the front of her book is the simple dedication,

*In memory of my parents and the people of Arghaki who died in exile.*

**'Cyprus – A Taste of Yesterday' by Eleni Protopapa, is published by Nikianna Press and is available throughout Cyprus from Hellenic Bookshops and other good bookstores, at £6.99.**

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