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7. Religion

7.1. The Religious Zeal

One of the characteristic elements which distinguished Alatsata it was the religious zeal of the inhabitants. All Alatsatians were raised in this atmosphere of the reverential devotion to the divine.

An expression of the strong religious feeling was the «chatziliki» i.e. the pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Jerusalem. It was a dream that all Alatsatians sought to make. As a result of this dedication was the large proportion of young men wished to appeal to the monastic or priestly life. Hundreds of clergymen born in Alatsata were educated in Jerusalem, in Chalki and Rizaris' school in Athens. They served the Orthodoxy from the Holy Land and Romania to England, France, America, South Africa and Australia.

The Alatsatians bishops occupied important positions in the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Alexandria and Jerusalem. In Mount Athos monasteries were abbots or lived countless Alatsatians and over 84 years (1848-1932) [Simonopetra](#) Monastery in mound Athos was considered as Alatsatian monastery.

It was of a great interest the rites of the various professionals groups (called sinafia), which were performed during the day of the Saint, who they considered to be their protector. These were called "Syliturga" because the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by the bishop and many priests. Then followed the "artoklasia" (breaking of bread). All the families of the specific professional groups participated in common liturgies. This is an urban feature which strengthened through religious ceremony, the consistency of this professional group.

7.2. Churches of Alatsata

According to the statistics published in December 1904 in the magazine "Xenophanis" concerning the churches situated on Cesme province, it was indicated about Alatsata, that there were three (3) churches, eighty five (85) chapels and one (1) monastery.

The above mentioned report coincides with the statistics given through 1911 report, which was submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and which is supplementary to the first report where it is mentioned the information of the presence of twelve priests who were officiated in Alatsata.

The Greek settlers of the region, in 1670, will build their first small church (probably on the ruins of the old prayer house of Nea Moni monastery of the island of Chios) in the name of Saint John the Baptist, which was located in the Upper Village and was originated from Anachorias or Anachorion, then called «Ano Chorio» (Upper Village).

In 1685, in some distance from the built-up area of the Lower Village (Kato Chorio), named in contrast to the Upper Village (Pano Chorio), was built the small church of Agios Nikolaos. There, the monk Agapios will establish the homonymous monastery, in 1862. At the exact point where the Upper Village (Pano Chorio) and the Lower Village (Kato Chorio) were united was built in 1803-1804 the first church of Mary Virgin, in the property donated by Ioannis Bountroyiannis, in the place where today stands the mosque of market. The study for the construction cost of the church was made by the Metropolitan Dionysios Kalliarchi of Ephessos and bears the date " αωε of October κη" (October 28th, 1805).

After 30 years the church was not enough as the rapid population growth has come to unite the two villages into one city. The same problem faced the city of Cesme. When its Cathedral church of Saint Charalambos, burn down in 1823, then the two communities decided to ask the permission of Kapoudan Pasha to rebuild the two churches. Kapoudan Pasha had under his orders the area (eyalet) of the White Sea. In order to achieve the desired results Alatsatians decided to be represented by an experienced mariner from Cesme, named Nikolaos Iliadis and /or Lia and also known as Tourkolia (Turk-Elias). This name was given to him because he offered to the Turks an important service during the national revolution.

Nikolaos Iliadis transacted successfully his mission to Istanbul. He obtained the imperial firman with the permission to reconstruct both churches. He also obtained the ropes, which were sealed at the two edges and with which the dimensions of the temples were set.

According to his judgment the dimensions of the two temples were not satisfactory. He bought more rope and during his travel back he succeeded to lengthen the ropes, by cutting them in to two pieces and then add pieces from the new rope, by using his marine art knowledge of the splicing (lengthen). He overdid it for Saint Charalambos church, he add more rope and the temple's length became ever greater.

In Alatsata, the name Nikolaos Iliadis was put it over the main entrance's lintel of the church of Presentation of Virgin Mary, where a founding marble inscription was placed to remind the history of the church contraction. During the most recent renovation of the store house which now exists in the place of the main entrance of the old temple, the marble inscription was discovered almost unattached. According to the scholar Theodoros Kontaras, the foundation marble written in capital letters is having impeccable spelling and today is the most important "speaking stone" in the history of Alatsata city. The text of the inscription is as follows:

THIS CHURCH OF MARY'S VIRGIN PRESENTATION

ACCOMPLISHED THIS YEAR

ON THIS EARTH WITH THE GRACE OF GOD AT PUBLIC EXPENSE AND ENERGY.

THE RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP MAKARIOS BLESSED THEM.

NIKOLAOS ILIADIS CARRIED OUT ADMIRAL'S ORDER,

UNDER WHOSE AUSPICES THEY WERE. THE CHURCH WARDENS:

CHATZITZANIS DELBOY AND CHATZIDEMETRIOS SPANOUDIS

ANDCHATZIDEMETRIOS MICHAELSWERE THE TRUSTIES WHO WORKED HARD

AND ALL TOGETHER HELPED WITH ALL ONE'S SPIRIT AND HEART,

IN [THIS PLACE] CHRISTIANS WERE

PRESENT 18[32 AUGUST]* A' ALATZATA

* At the point of the exact place and date there is a recent intervention with white color.

The Architect of the new church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, built in 1832 , was the known Emmanuel Kalonaris from Smyrna. In 1838, the precinct of the temple all covered with small white and black pebbles forming various designs. Department of the precinct still exists with the two-headed eagle and the date of manufacture, 1838.

The magnificent marble temple which adorns the church built by John Chalapas from Tinos island (or Chalepas and father of the famous Giannoulis) in 1874. It's a mixed pattern, with many new classical and baroque elements. The cost of the temple was in too high for that time amount of 710 Ottoman gold liras. The great painter Sakellarios Maglis from Kalymnos made the religious painting in impressionist style.

After the church of the Virgin Mary built the church of St. George (opening 1848) in Agrilia already been the port of Alatsata and there loaded for export products, especially raisins. The initiative, care and cost of construction due to George John Vlamos called Diakogiorgis. The most important of masonry were transported by sea from the Erythrae area. Among them, two ancient incised stones" resolutions". One of them built-in façade of the church and the other

was placed in the center of the floor. The church of St. George became the attraction of the relocation of Alatsatians to Agrilia to create the homonym settlement.

In 1861 the cornerstone was founded for the construction of the temple of the Holy Trinity on Upper Village, but the works stop for tax reasons. In 1870 the works repeated and accomplished in 1872. The architect of the temple, in the original architectural church project was again Emmanuel Kalonaris. When Emmanuel Kalonaris died, then Markos Lampaditis, from the island of Tinos took over. The marble works were undertaken by Ioannis Halepas' party, led by his second son Nicholas.

Giannoulis Halepas , the eldest of the six children of Ioannis Chalepas, at that time was in Alatsata but did not attend works because of his poor mental health which led him to a suicide attempt. For the hagiography of the church worked the painter Ioannis Sitaras from the island of Paros and Sakellarios A. Maglis from the island of Kalymnos. The precinct of the temple was elaborately paved with white, black and red pebbles.

In 1911 German engineer Richard Hirsch who was working in Alatsata in the construction of the wireless station built in the precinct a sundial. Some years after the persecution of the Greek inhabitants, it was decided to demolish this church. Today in place of this church are the remains of the base of its masonry. In 1901 the foundation stone deposited in the church of St. Constantine in place of a hut used by nearby residents of Lower Village to worship the memory of Saints Constantine and Helen. The plan of the temple took care by Praxiteles Chalepas, fourth son of Ioannis and youngest at 20 years of Giannoulis. Praxiteles undertakes the supervision of construction work and settles permanently in Alatsata. In 1901, Ioannis Chalepas died and was buried in Alatsata.

All residents of the Lower Village took part to construction works voluntarily; many of them were the donors of various structures. The templon (iconostasion) was constructed temporarily of wood. The church of St. Constantine, on the opposite side of the small bridge in the Lower Village, was razed to its foundations and there is nothing in that place now.

After the construction of the church of Presentation of Virgin Mary (1832), was built the mosque of the city close to slaughterhouses place for the religious needs of Turkish residents who then numbered about 600 to 800. Over the years the Turkish inhabitants spilled out of town, creating small settlements in the valley. Thus the operation of the mosque ceased.

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