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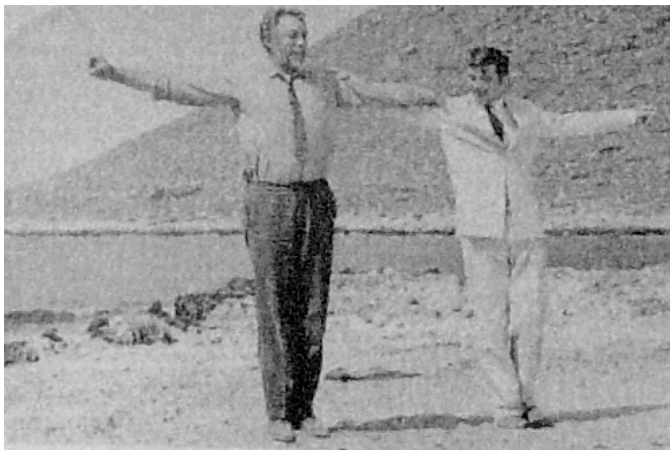
On the trail of Alexis Zorbas in Stavros [to love life & not to fear death]

(An article of our NLUK members *Diana P. Bailey* und *Maria Eleftheria*, Agios Nektarios, Crete)



Who loves Greece and especially Crete, knows in all likelihood *Alexis Zorbas*, the hero of the same-titled novel penned by writer *Nikos Kazantzakis*, who created the partly autobiographical opus mid of forties of the last century. 1964 the Greek Director *Michalis Kakojannis* filmed the award-winning novel starring *Anthony Quinn*. A key scene near the end of the film was shot on the beach of *Stavros*: *Alexis Zorbas* teaches the intellectual English writer *Basil*, who has engaged him as a helper and companion, to dance *Sirtaki*. This dance is symbolic *Zorbas'* life-motto, who fearless love and enjoys life despite all misfortunes.

Even if the *Sirtaki* was not a "real" Greek dance, but was extra choreographed in 1964 for the supposedly little talented as a dancer *Quinn*, it is an impressive and permanent in mind scene (**fig.** below left). Nowadays barefoot sun seekers are "dancing" through the hot sand at the picturesque beach of *Stavros* (**fig.** below right). However, the place has kept a sleepy Idyll. There are no large hotel bunkers and even in high season is more beach to see than beach-chairs (in contrast to other places).



The much-vaunted film production of Alexis Zorbas, with the music of *Mikis Theodorakis*, co-starring *Alan Bates* and *Irini Papas*, was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won three of them in 1965: For the best supporting actress (*Lila Kedrova*), equipment (*Vassilis Photopoulos*) and camera (*Walter Lassally*).

Walter Lassally liked this area so much that he built a house in *Stavros*, where he still lives today. Directly on the beach in his favourite Tavern Christiana (fig below left) is his original “Oscar” displayed in a glass cabinet (fig. below right). The walls of the restaurant are decorated with large-format photographs of the shooting (fig. on 1st page)



Stavros is located in the north-west of the peninsula *Akrotiri*. Coming from *Chania* or *Souda* drive in the direction of the Airport *Nikos Kazantzakis*, turn left towards *Kounoupidiana* and drive via *Kalathas* and *Chorafakia* to *Stavros*. The road bifurcates at the entrance of the village, turn right towards the beach. If you expect to find unchanged setting of Alexis Zorbas here, you will be disappointed. There is a small, old heart of the village; otherwise *Stavros* is a settlement with widely scattered houses, an example of Greek and Cretan construction rage. Tourism has arrived even in this place, but to my sense in a modest way, and the inhabitants have preserved their friendliness and warmth.



During a exploratory walk, a certain extent north-west of the bay, I found a approx. 300 square meter large, interesting rock formation (fig. above), which looks artificially created and imply to a former, small stone pit.

On the hillside, overlooking the Bay is a cave (fig. right) which shows, based on archaeological reports, traces of human presence from the Neolithic period. Probably findings indicate that the site was used in later times as sanctuary. Unfortunately, at the time of my visit in August 2009 it was so hot, that I have moved an exploration of the cave to a later date. A report about the cave will happen with a separate info leaflet in due time.



Information to Alexis Zorbas can also be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexis_Zorbas] and to Stavros at [<http://www.elgreco.de/Pages/Kreta/stavrs.htm>].