

# Sinasos

IMAGES AND NARRATIVES



EDITED BY  
EVANGELIA BALTA



BİRZAMANLAR  
YAYINCILIK

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Cover illustration  
The narthex of Saint Nicholas monastery.

Back cover illustration  
The cover of the album "Sinasos. Diamond of Anatolia", 1924.

Edited by  
Evangelia Balta

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ALEXANDRA DOUMAS



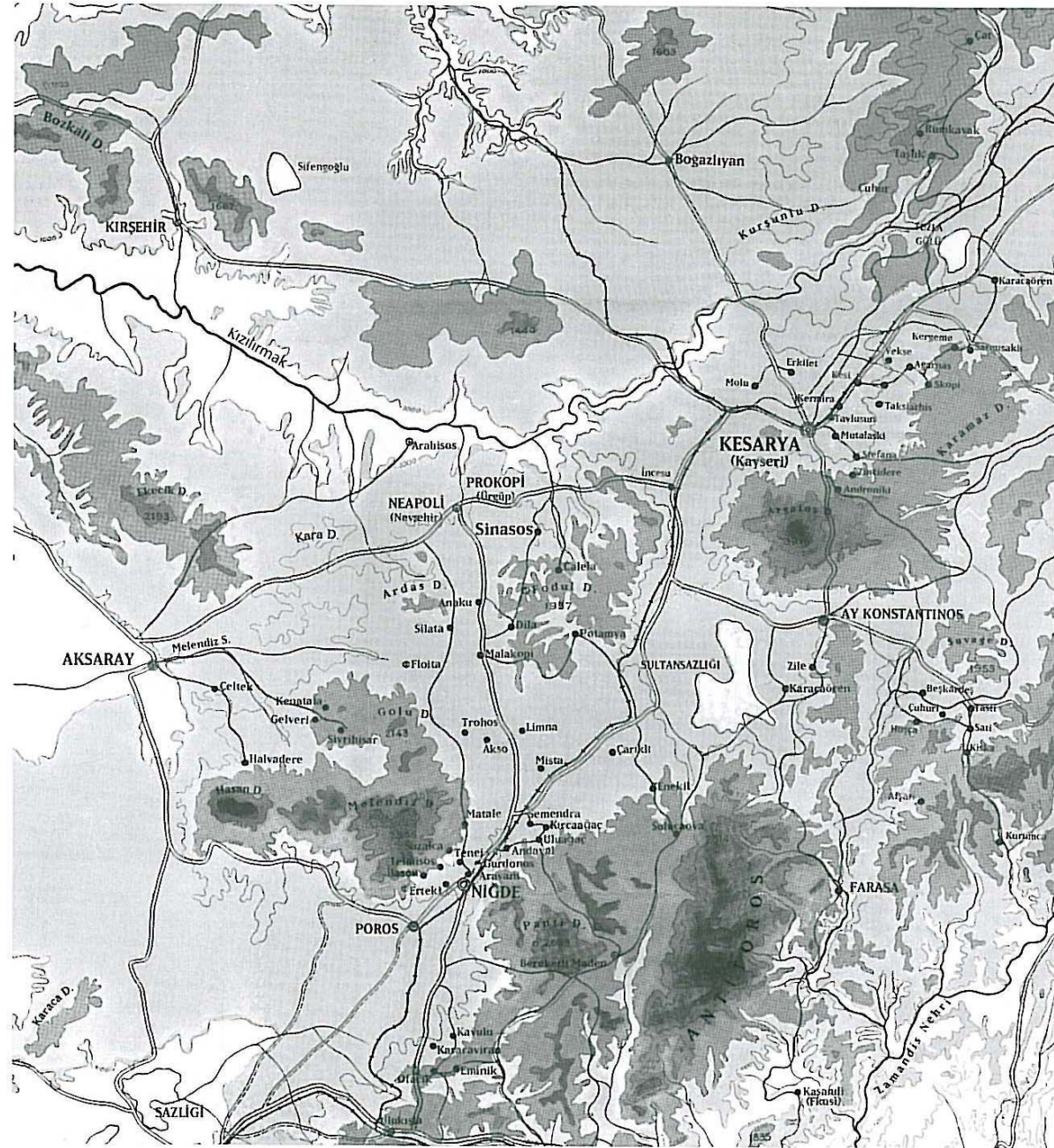
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Map 1  
Cappadocia. (CAMS Archive)



It was initially intended to include the unpublished photographs of Sinasos (pr. Mustafapaşa), from the Archive of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, together with their counterparts of Ürgüp, in a single album. But as work progressed, the material for Ürgüp acquired the structure of an independent volume, and so I decided that it was preferable to produce another independent volume with the photographs of Sinasos. The album on Ürgüp (*Ürgüp: Photographs from the Archive of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies*, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens 2004) concludes with the photograph of the fountain from the monastery of Saint Nicholas at Sinasos, heralding – beyond other significations – the publication of a second album, devoted to Sinasos.

In the course of organizing the unpublished photographs of Sinasos from the CAMS Archive, the "Nea Sinasos" Association and the Lambis Papadis family, the need to include as well the photographs from the album "Sinasos. Diamond of the East", which circulated in 1924, became apparent. Without doubt the photographs in that old album, representative of the topography of Sinasitan memory, are a reference point for all others, earlier

and later, which of necessity should be compiled together with them.

So, eighty years after the publication of the first album, a new one is now available, enriched with photographs dating from before 1924 and others taken by the Sinasitan refugees Lazaros Takadopoulos and Vasilis Isopoulos, when they visited their former homeland in 1951 and 1959, as well as by the CAMS collaborators during their mission to Cappadocia, also in 1959.

What, we may ask, was the album of Sinasos, which circulated immediately after the Exchange of Populations? Shortly before the Exodus, and whilst numerous committees were involved with finding a new place of settlement in Greece, as well as with collecting and recording public and private property, it was decided to make a photographic record of the village; in other words, to do what would be done for any other material good: to record, to immortalize as image and memory the immaterial essence of time and place, in order to transfer it and to safe-keep it together with the other heirlooms in the new homeland. The photographing of Sinasos, in July 1924, constitutes a

unique phenomenon in the behaviour of the Cappadocian population during the dramatic period of the Exchange of Populations. The place is printed on photographic paper, in order to preserve it in memory, and the landscape never ceases to be an inextricable part of both the collective consciousness and the personal fantasy: it returns to protect the collective identity and links the narrations with the interpretations, which every era vocalizes or silences correspondingly. The photograph is chosen because this, rather than narrative, seems to crystallize sentiment more succinctly and to diffuse it more poignantly. A picture is worth a thousand words. They say, of course, that when passion takes on the form of narrative it does not wane: but photographs haunt us.

This unique initiative of the Sinasitans, to photograph their beloved land before the final farewell (we should remember here the folk practice of immortalizing loved ones who depart for ever), is combined with social and economic peculiarities of the inhabitants. The Sinasitans' consciousness of their land and their solicitude for its immortalization are characteristic of the 'bourgeois mentality' of their society, outcome of the thriving guilds of caviar merchants and ships' chandlers (*boyacıs*) in Constantinople. In comparison with the other communities of Cappadocia, Sinasitan society exemplified a different cultural conception, conveyed to and cultivated in the homeland by the expatriates' long service in the Greek milieu of Constantinople, as

well as by the influence of the educational system which emigration introduced and supported financially. Sinasos belongs to the category of Cappadocian communities, like Gelveri (Güzelyurt) or Nevşehir, which were urbanized along the lines of Greek models, because their emigrants to the major urban centres channelled their surplus money into schooling, and thus became agents disseminating Greek national education.

Thus, it is not fortuitous that Greek-speaking Sinasos was dubbed "Athens of Anatolia", just as it is not fortuitous that in 1924 the camera lens focused only on what was Greek. The Sinasitans did not photograph a single Muslim building. The handsome medrese of Mehmed Şakir Paşa, intrudes at the side of just one photograph. The landscape of their village is confined exclusively to the Greek neighbourhoods. The choice declares clearly the ideological orientation of Sinasitan society, of its self-encapsulation in the sheath that the expatriates' protectionist policy had created around it.

When Serapheim Rizos, inspirer and prime mover of the photographing, recounts the events concerning its conception and realization, in his manuscript entitled "The Exchange" (1957), he bequeaths us the most accurate testimony on the Sinasitans' perception of their land. The adoption of the enlightened and sensitized Rizos's idea by the Council of Elders attests that the Sinasitans were well aware of the particularity of their 'urbanized' village. In the heart of Cappadocia, the land of

mud-built Turkish villages and troglodytes, Sinasos was truly an exception: "Setting off southward, from lovely Prokopi (Ürgüp), the administrative centre of the land – after passing through our wonderful countryside of the Zengi çayı, where the towering fruit trees and other trees were reflected in the crystal waters of our east river – one reached, after 45 minutes of enjoyable walking, a small upward slope, behind which was hidden, like a happy and playful child, the beautiful entrance to our beloved village, which was called Kapitalos. The traveller, who had spent so many days and nights in the mud-built huts of the previous Turkish villages, was dazzled when he saw suddenly, rising before him, the first buildings of the village, high, stone-built and imposing".

The album published then does indeed dazzle the traveller-reader today with the photographs of "the first buildings of the village, high, stone-built and imposing". But alongside the photographs of the mansions, the churches, the schools, the countryside around the village – taken by the Ürgüplü photographers Anastasis and Isaak Pantazidis – moments of everyday life were recorded for posterity: spinning wool, carrying water from the fountain, excursions and entertainments, personages in Sinasitan society. All show the concern to capture the setting of life in the hospitable land of Asia Minor, which was coming to an irrevocable end, so that it could be brought together with the refugees to the inhospitable life that awaited them in Greece. And everything shows the material culture of a Greek

society which believed that wealth and social status should be conspicuously displayed. Consequently, the movement, the disorder, the drama of the Exchange remain outside the camera lens. It gives no hint of what was to come.

I wonder how these photographs functioned when the one hundred copies of the album circulated, immediately after the settlement of the Sinasitan refugees in Greece. Were they the proof of the wealth and prosperity of the Sinasitans' fatherland, to the Greeks who heard with suspicion from the refugees' lips "Oh, what we had in our homeland"? Were they the demonstration of their identity, the image and the conservation of memory of their loved ones, as well as some haven and subconscious escapism from the harsh reality of Greece, of the shacks in the refugee quarters of Nea Sinasos? All functions are equally possible, along with others about which we shall never learn.

If we suppose this to have been the function of the old album, what, we may ask, is the role of the new one? A first reply would be: 'The fullest possible record of old Sinasos'. Of course, I do not forget that both the taking of photographs and the selecting of photographs for inclusion in the album, however much they are extolled as a lucid record of reality, are no more than the picture chosen by someone. To photograph means to frame, and to frame means to exclude, some point us out by Regarding the Pain of Others. I, in my turn, maintain that I do not exclude, but select. I make my own selections, a 'construct' based on the

photograph and the refugee testimony; because I also know that the reasons why the refugees and the CAMS collaborators wanted to imprint Sinasos in word and image are linked absolutely with the historical conjunctures of the time. I hope that the new album will show how the photographs functioned then, and what they can reveal today about the multiple past.

I chose the testimony of the Macedonian Anastasios Danas, teacher in the Seminary of Caesarea in 1909, to lead us to Sinasos. We then visit in turn the neighbourhoods, the churches, the chapels, the schools and, guided sometimes by the lens of the cousins Anastasis and Isaak Pantazidis, sometimes by the Sinasitan refugees and the CAMS collaborators, we pause at the houses of the Rums. My concern was that the photographs, earlier, contemporary with and later than 1924, would converse with one another.

Frequently the buildings are scarred by the ravages of the time that intervened from the Exchange of Populations until 1951 or 1959: some buildings well kept, others deserted and ruinous – but all completely recognizable – represent the old grandeur. In other cases, the absence, their disappearance from the space, underlines the change that came as an ultimatum with the Treaty of Lausanne. And just as time elapsed affected buildings and spaces, so it affected people too, in some instances relations between co-villagers of different religious remained unaltered and in others new ones were created. Greek refugees who visited

the land of their fathers 25 or 35 years after the Exchange are photographed in embrace with their Turkish compatriots, friends from the old days, who wander companionably with them through Sinasos and its environs, as if the tragic event of the Exchange had never happened, as if life was re-mustering its forces.

As the viewer-reader halts at each house, with the help of the accompanying texts he learns about the life of the people who made them and dwelt in them. So, apart from what the photograph declares, the refugee testimony fills the buildings and gives them meaning, as it recounts episodes in the adventure of the people and their society. Truly, our need, our desire to speak of things is based less on the things themselves and far more on the representation of states and situations, ultimately on the persons associated with them.

Sinasos today does not move me as an ensemble of romantic ruins. For me history there is alive and vital, not preserved at all. Sinasos combines the physical, historical and mythical reality of Cappadocia with an unrivalled urban architecture, which is based on the landscape and is an intimate part of it. But just as the buildings change and spoil, so do our mechanisms of perception.

As I was working on the album of Sinasos, the pictures, which I had to put in sequence, became lighter day by day: it was a relief for me to learn and to see the efforts being made to conserve this cultural heritage, as the inhabitants of the village themselves call it. The organization of a conference

for this purpose in September 2004, the willingness of Süreyya Aytaş to help me identify certain houses by traipsing around with me with the file of photographs under arm, as well as of all the Sinasitans, the catalogue compiled in 1990 by the local former mayor and later parliamentary deputy İbrahim Boz, with the names of the Greek and of the present Turkish owners, demonstrate the concern for the conservation of the historicity of the place. Some would perhaps note an implicit ideology of ambitions; but juxtaposed to it is my own human ideology. The naivety and the benefit of the twinning of imaginings and images ... And the click of the lens immortalizing moments in order to define new frames, new terms in the life of the

people. I could not get enough of hearing the elderly İbrahim Boz in the Kervan restaurant of Ürgüp telling the tales he had heard from the old folks about his compatriots, the Rums. Today, locals and refugee Macedonian Turks, and I with them, we feel, we dream that this whole 'world' is truly ours. All emanate an uplifting human warmth. Memories of living and dead compose a thrilling whole. Wise is the maxim that still adorns the doorway to the Rizos house: "Today mine, and tomorrow someone else's and never no one's".

*Evangelia Balta*  
*Sinasos, Gül Konakları*  
*5–20 September 2004*

