

# NON “RELIGIOUS” KNOWING IN PILGRIMAGES TO SACRED SITES

## *Greek Cypriots’ “return” Pilgrimages to the Monastery of Apostolos Andreas (Cyprus)*

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### **Abstract**

Even though pilgrimages may often be directed toward what can conventionally be seen as “religious” sacred sites, religious and ritual forms of knowledge and ignorance may not necessarily be the only, or even the most prominent, forms in their workings. Focusing on Greek Cypriots’ return pilgrimages to the Christian-Orthodox monastery of Apostolos Andreas (Karpasia) under the conditions of Cyprus’s ongoing division, in this article I explore the non “religious” forms of knowing and ignoring salient to pilgrimages to sacred religious sites, the conditions under which they become relevant, and the risks associated with them. Showing how pilgrimages to the monastery of Apostolos Andreas are situated within a larger framework of seeing “our places,” I will argue that remembering and knowing these places is the type of knowledge most commonly sought out by pilgrims, while also exploring what the stakes of not knowing/forgetting them may be felt to be. An exclusive focus on “religious” forms of knowledge and ignorance would obscure the ways in which pilgrimage is often embedded in everyday social and political concerns.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage, non-religious knowledge, memory, conflict, Cyprus

Although pilgrimages are often directed toward what are conventionally seen as “religious” sites, religious and ritual forms of knowledge may not necessarily be the only, or even the most prominent, forms in their workings. Such types of knowledge may in fact be unimportant to pilgrims (see Cipriani 2006: 228) while other forms of knowledge may become important

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in motivating and forming the pilgrimage. Work on guiding such as Jackie Feldman’s (2007: 355) and Vida Bajc’s (2007: 402) has, for example, indicated the importance of the guides’ historical and geographical “[k]nowledge of the Land” (Bajc 2007: 402; Feldman 2007: 356) in shaping the experience of pilgrims to the Holy Land. In this article, I would like to explore such “non-religious,” less obvious, perhaps, forms of knowledge involved in pilgrimage, the conditions under which they become relevant for pilgrims, and the risks associated with their ignorance.<sup>1</sup> An exclusive focus on “religious” forms of knowledge and ignorance would obscure the ways in which pilgrimage is often embedded in everyday socio-political concerns.

## The Monastery of Apostolos Andreas in Occupied Cyprus

My focus is the monastery of Apostolos Andreas (AA) in Cyprus. Cyprus has been *de facto* divided ethnically and geographically ever since the 1974 Turkish military invasion, and the subsequent occupation of the island’s northern part. Its two main communities, the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots (TC), have respectively resided in the island’s south and north.<sup>2</sup> The opening of the checkpoints in 2003 allowed people to re-visit places they were forced to abandon.<sup>3</sup> In this framework, Greek Cypriot (GC) pilgrimages to the monastery of AA have been revived (Kokkinoftas 2009: 181). The monastery is located on the island’s eastern end, in the Turkish-occupied peninsula of Karpasia, and it had been an established, pan-Cyprian (Kokkinoftas 2009: 79), mainly Christian Orthodox pilgrimage destination up until 1974.

Examining GC pilgrimages to the monastery after the opening of the checkpoints, I will show how these are situated within a larger framework of seeing “our places.” Arguing that remembering and knowing these places is the type of knowledge commonly sought out by those who travel to the monastery, I will show how, in light of the ongoing conflict and the long period of movement restrictions, the location of AA means the pilgrimage functions as a medium of getting to know the island, and especially that part of it which for many years was largely inaccessible to the great majority of GCs. I will then explore what the stakes of not knowing/forgetting the occupied areas may be felt to be for the future, looking at the new knowledge acquired along the route about the present situation they are in, the ways in which this is interpreted, and the reactions it provokes.



**Figure 1:** Cyprus Map with AA Monastery and Dividing Line  
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## Setting the Context

### *Knowledge and Memory in the Divided Society of Cyprus*

As Papadakis et al. (2006: 12) note, “[p]olitical conflict and displacement lead to intense preoccupations with issues related to memory, whether of homes that have been lost or events that ought to be remembered.” Pointing out that memory in Cyprus has been used by both communities so as to legitimize “political claims,” they note that for GCs the claim legitimized by the past is the island’s future reunification (ibid.: 12–13).<sup>4</sup> In this framework, “[n]ostalgia . . . became a patriotic duty,” since displaced GCs “were officially condemned to live in perpetual exile,” considering as their home the one they were forced to abandon and not the one they currently reside in (ibid.: 13).

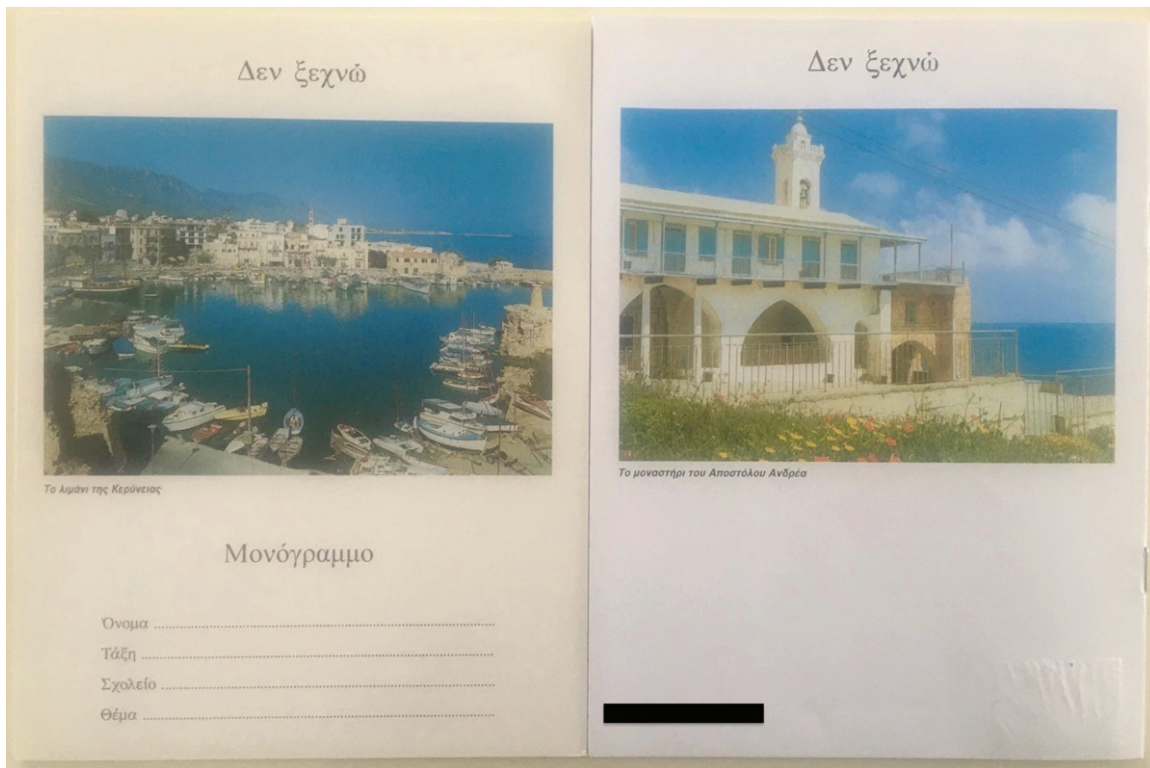
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In many ways, this state of “perpetual exile” was extended to all GCs, regardless of whether they had lost their home in the north; what refugees and non-refugees<sup>5</sup> had in common was that they were not allowed to visit more than thirty percent of the island (Loizos 2009: 74). The state of “perpetual exile,” along with what anthropologist Olga Demetriou calls “a sense of generalized refugeehood” (2018: 3, 52, 62–69; 2014: 179), was also formulated through “the policy of ‘I Don’t Forget and I Struggle’ . . . [which had] emerged as a major objective in Greek-Cypriot education” post-1974 (Zembylas et al. 2016: 60, 61; Papadakis 1998: 316).<sup>6</sup> The aim of the policy is to keep the war and the occupied areas alive in people’s memory (Christou 2007: 712 cited in Charalambous et al. 2014: 83). In the 1990s, “I don’t Forget” was, as an objective and a slogan, expanded into “I know, I don’t forget and I struggle” (Zembylas et al. 2016: 62; Charalambous et al. 2014: 84). As this expansion indicates, the risk of forgetting, in the case of the post-war generation, is in reality the risk of not knowing; in order for one not to forget what he/she hasn’t experienced in the first place, one needs to have knowledge, not only of the occupied areas but of the occupation itself. Knowing and remembering therefore became equally important in Cyprus, one presupposing the other, “as . . . ways to help the younger (post-1974) generations to maintain the necessary ‘militancy’ for ‘fighting’ to claim the occupied territories” (Zembylas 2012: 474).<sup>7</sup>

### *The Symbolic Character of the AA Monastery*

The opening of the checkpoints allowed older generations to remember and younger generations to personally know Cyprus’s occupied area (cf. Zembylas et al. 2016: 64). As Rabia Harmansah (2016) notes, “the Apostolos Andreas monastery, more than any other place, has been an emotionally charged, symbolic key religious site for Greek Cypriots that links them to a lost land they miss deeply . . .” (ibid.: 479).

The monastery’s symbolic status, reinforced by the fact that its picture features on the covers of school exercise books along with the phrase “I do not Forget,”<sup>8</sup> relates to its location in the occupied, most eastern part of the island, which owing in part to its long inaccessibility, became symbolic in itself (cf. Papadakis 1998: 309 on the mountain range of Pentadaktylos).



**Figure 2:** School notebooks with the phrase ‘I Do not Forget.’ The front cover has a picture of the occupied Kyrenia port and the back cover a picture of the monastery of Apostolos Andreas, presumably as it was before 1974. (Photograph is author’s own).

Together with the living memory of its associated pilgrimages, which are seen as part of a distinctively Cypriot culture, heritage, and identity, the symbolic status of the monastery makes it an ambiguous, liminal site that lies in between “*lieux*” and “*milieu de memoire*,” (Nora 1989 cited by Papadakis et al. 2006: 15) or “between history and memory” (Papadakis et al. 2006: 15),<sup>9</sup> “analytical divisions,” which, as Yiannis Papadakis et al. (2006: 15) note, “are difficult to draw” in Cyprus partly because of the existence of “living memories of the recent events which led to the current situation” (ibid.: 15; Papadakis 1998: 321).

In combination with the “I do not Forget” policy, this living memory, revived, transmitted, and sometimes compromised by the present situation during the pilgrimage, has helped formed a powerful “postmemory” (Hirsch 2008) of the pilgrimage site and of the occupied areas, the remembering and



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desire for first-hand knowledge of which motivates and shapes the pilgrimage experience.<sup>10</sup>

### The Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages to AA resumed immediately after the opening of the checkpoints.<sup>11</sup> Today, pilgrims go in privately organized pilgrimages in their cars or in mini buses that they rent. Such pilgrimages may combine visitations to the monastery with visitations to lost homes. Bus pilgrimages may be organized by families, or upon the initiative of a group of friends and/or neighbors, village communities, local churches, or clubs (religious or secular). The routes are on such occasions either set by the bus driver/company or they may be customized according to their organizers’ requests. Bus pilgrimages are also offered by private bus companies, which either advertise them via their company websites on a permanent basis asking for participation or via text messages and social media pages on particular periods or dates such as the thirtieth of November, the saint’s feast day. Although pilgrimages are organized throughout the year, they are more frequent during certain time periods such as the Greek Orthodox Easter, the summer (especially around August), and November.

Routes to and from the monastery usually differ so that people can see more places while on their journey. In most pilgrimages there is no formal guiding involved. Bus drivers or “knowledgeable” pilgrims may point out where the bus is passing through, naming the villages, and at times sharing with the group stories about AA, the monastery, and the pilgrimage. They may also point out changes that have occurred over the years in the landscape, such as the construction of housing, marinas, and so on. During the journey, pilgrimage participants may sometimes comment with discontent about being “toured” in their own country (cf. Dikomitis 2005: 8–10). They may try to recognize the villages or places they had a previous knowledge of, commenting on the “development” of certain areas or the ruination of others, churches in particular.

Bus pilgrimages usually take up the whole day, often starting at 07:00 in the morning and finishing at around 17:30–18:00. On the way to the monastery almost all bus pilgrimages (even some private ones) make a stop for coffee at a seaside site. During the pilgrimage some may make a stop at the

monastery of Apostolos Barnavas, near which the latter's tomb is thought to be located. Pilgrims go to the tomb but do not usually enter the monastery, which has been turned into a museum requiring paid entrance. Other stops on route to or from the monastery are made for coffee or food at places run either by enclaved GCs or by TCs. Stops may also be made to Famagusta, or the port of Kyrenia.

On bus pilgrimages, time spent at the monastery itself (usually thirty to forty-five minutes) is disproportionately short in relation to the duration of the journey and this is sometimes negatively commented upon by pilgrims. Pilgrims light their candles, kiss the icons, place their votive offerings (if any) on AA's icon (Figures 3.1 and 3.2), and give the priest pieces of paper with "names for commemoration" (della Dora 2012: 967). Pilgrims also go to the holy spring for the carrying of the water, for which they usually use small bottles that they carry with them (Figure 3.3). They may pass by the sellers who are located opposite the monastery and sometimes even buy small things. In their interviews, some people negatively comment on the existence of sellers and the fact that these are not Christians selling icons of AA. In the pilgrimages I have travelled with there were occasions on which pilgrims negatively viewed fellow pilgrims who bought things from the sellers.

In order for pilgrimages (or any other crossing) to take place, ID cards need to be demonstrated at the checkpoints. This is sometimes negatively commented upon by pilgrims either while on their pilgrimage or in their subsequent interviews (cf. Göker 2012: 121; Dikomitis 2005: 9; Navaro-Yashin 2007: 86; 2012: 115 on GC attitudes). Such practices and the comments they provoke point to the "semiotic" and "social risks" discussed by Simon Coleman (2015, interview) in relation to "non-believers or . . . lapsed Christians" visiting Walsingham, who may "unwillingly . . . find themselves drawn into the rituals on offer" at the site (ibid.: 162). In the case I explore, such risks may be thought to relate to "religious" (see Petros Savvides 2019 on the Islamization of Cyprus's northern part), as well as "secular" semiotic forms of "sovereignty" (see Navaro-Yashin 2012: 45 on the "Turkey-fication" of Cyprus's northern part). Such semiotic forms also entrap people to non-desired forms of participation in "ritual" activities, sometimes religious (as when GC Christians need to take their shoes off to enter a church that has been converted into a mosque), and sometimes non-religious (as when GC pilgrims unwillingly participate in border-like procedures that may at times feel like an implicit recognition of the illegally self-declared "state" instituted in the north [cf. Dikomitis 2005: 9]).<sup>12</sup>

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**Figure 3.1:** Taking oil





**Figure 3.2:** Apostolos Andreas icon inside the church with pilgrims' *tamata* (votive offerings)



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**Figure 3.3:** Taking water from the *ayiasma* (holy spring)

## The Data

The data derives from semi-structured interviews with GCs who travelled to the monastery soon or years after the opening of the checkpoints, once or multiple times, as part of privately organized pilgrimages and/or bus tours. Interviewees included men and women who were born before or after 1974, some of whom are first or second-generation refugees. Information on interviewees' social characteristics are reported in the analysis of the data.

Many of my interviewees are not the obvious religious performers often looked at by pilgrimage scholars (see Coleman's 2014). Some do not practice religion regularly within the institutional context of the church or keep what they see as formalities such as going to church every Sunday. At times, they say that they have their own, personal, way of believing or of relating to religion. They may for example believe in God and the saints and feel the need to pray or light their candle at a church or chapel and they may also have saints that are special to them either because they bear their name or because they believe they have received a miracle. Some may even have vows to particular saints and some say that in their time of need they may address holy figures, such as the *Panayia*.

This type of religiosity, in combination with the particularity of the shrine—the fact that it is occupied, located on the island's edge, and very much part of people's collective memory and imagination—shapes a spectrum of motivations for the undertaking of the journey; conventionally religious reasons of *proskynisis*<sup>13</sup> and/or vows are sometimes cited by pilgrims alongside other motivations, such as having heard about the monastery and having seen its picture, and/or wanting to see and get to know the island.

## Getting to Know AA: An Important Place for Cypriots

Because it is a *tama* [promise/vow], . . . they had to go to see that place, to do a *proskynema* [προσκυνήσουν] [perform their devotions] to it, to know it, like they went to their father's village and know that, where their father was born, to also know AA that the whole of Cyprus has perform a *proskynema* [προσκυνήσει] [to] Apostolos Andreas.

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These are the words of a non-refugee woman in the age group of 46–55 who as a child before 1974 often went to the monastery with her family. The trip she is referring to in the quote cited above was her second pilgrimage after the opening of the checkpoints—her first time was her parents’ *tama*<sup>14</sup> (vow), a sort of tribute to her family’s past pilgrimages—and it was prompted by a family member’s promise to the saint to take the whole family to the monastery. Noting this as the reason she took her children on this particular pilgrimage, she added the need for her children to know AA, a place so important to Cypriots that they would venture on a pilgrimage journey.

The devotion to AA, a saint whose name many bear in Cyprus,<sup>15</sup> and the pilgrimage tradition that developed around his monastery, established the site as worth knowing, an integral part of Cyprus’s religious and cultural heritage. The monastery’s presence in the occupied areas is at times thought to have kept this heritage alive in an otherwise altered and estranging landscape in which traces of Christian and Greek presence are sometimes felt to have been erased (cf. Göker 2012: 130). This is demonstrated in the words of another, older (66–75) female interviewee, who went to AA for the first time after the war a few years after the opening of the checkpoints. Born and raised in a now occupied village located relatively close to the monastery, but not officially a refugee, she characterized the monastery as a:

Great religious symbol, I feel that for Christianity let’s say, for me [interviewer: symbol why? . . .] Symbol because it is occupied, and it is a border/end point and . . . there is big, lust of the Greeks, it draws the Greeks to go to their place [*topos*]. Symbol of Christi[anity] like Constantinople I think, that remained and many Greeks visit it, St. Sophia, this is how I feel Apostolos Andreas, like St. Sophia . . . [interviewer: Because you told me border/end point] yes [interviewer: Why?] Because it is, it is on the edge, eh, it is the edge of Cyprus there and it is a place that remained . . . it maintained the cultural heritage of our *topos*, . . . Christianity was kept with the monastery.

Owing to its location and occupation, AA is here presented as an enduring religious symbol of great significance—one that has maintained the Christian religious and cultural heritage of Cyprus as “*our topos*.” This view of the monastery connects to the feeling that seeing “monasteries . . . ruined, . . . churches . . . plundered” had caused her, that “the Greek element has



been destroyed, nothing testifies that there was Hellenism [*Ελληνισμός*] here forty years ago.” (cf. Göker 2012: 130). Presenting religious structures as traces of Greek presence in the occupied areas, she identified Christianity with Greekness. In this context, her view of the AA monastery as having maintained Christianity can be interpreted as also having preserved Greek presence in Cyprus’s occupied part.

The monastery’s location on the island’s edge and the fact that it is occupied and was for many years inaccessible to GCs living in the south also seemed important to other interviewees, especially those born after 1974. For the post-war generations, the monastery and the occupied areas more generally existed—until the opening of the checkpoints—in the sphere of imagination, shaped by familial recollections of the past and by the policy of “I do not Forget,” the school exercise books with the slogan of which interviewees in their mid to late thirties often mention.

A woman in her late thirties whose both parents are refugees talked of her monastery visit as an

. . . experience that I had visited another . . . monument of Cyprus which from kids we had it in our heads as something impressive . . . it is on the edge of Cyprus, this spot always created an impression on us as kids, that there is a monastery at the edge of Cyprus . . . and that it is in the occupied areas, that the Turks hold it and we cannot visit it. It was always this feeling of the forbidden . . . and with the “I don’t Forget” notebooks, maybe because we are closer . . . to the war and the invasion, we had grown up with this “I don’t Forget” and it [this trip] was its realization . . . I am visiting a space that I should not forget, really, because the space first of all . . . does not let you forget it, it will be etched in your mind . . .

Although identifying herself as a Christian who believes in God and Jesus, my interviewee is not concerned with what she characterized as formalities such as going to church every Sunday, but expresses her religious sentiment in other ways; by quietly lighting a candle, praying in an awe provoking, preferably quiet and empty of people space such as a chapel. The monastery was important for her not so much as a religious but as a historical space that was impressed in her mind from the time she was a child who would hear about it without being allowed to go. Its visitation

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transformed “I do not Forget” from a slogan into an experience. This was a monastery that should not be forgotten; and indeed, its impressive location does not allow it to be forgotten.

## Getting to Know the Occupied Areas: AA as Part of Cyprus

The distance one has to traverse in order to reach the monastery molds the pilgrimage into a medium through which to remember, get reacquainted, reconnect, know, and connect with the occupied areas. This is so both for those who are religiously motivated and who sometimes cite “seeing our places” and *proskynisis* side-by-side as reasons for going on a pilgrimage, and for those who do not cite religious reasons for going to a monastery that they want to get to know both in itself and as part of the occupied areas that they consider to be part of Cyprus too.

Asked about her motive for going to AA for the first time after the opening of the checkpoints, the woman who characterized AA as a great religious symbol that has kept Cyprus’s cultural heritage and Christianity present in the occupied areas, cited religion along with the love and desire to see “her place,” as reasons for going.

The motive was religion and the love of my *topos*, that I wanted to see my *topoi*, where I was born, where I was raised. The *topos* I was born and raised was “pulling” me.

This particular interviewee feels a special connection to AA as the saint of the area her village is in and one to whom people would do their vows, and also has a promise to perform an annual pilgrimage to the monastery. Although feeling a “pull” from the place where she was born and raised, her first pilgrimage to AA was not joyous: “I felt a sadness [μια στεναχώρια] and I was saying let’s say, ‘look at this village, it is [names a village on the way to AA] it is [names another village on the way to A]’ . . .” She could remember the villages, and felt that she was passing by very familiar places that had, however, become unknown to her. Although they had become unknown, though, these places were not forgotten by her and she still felt them as her own. “They were rooted inside of me. They remained, they are in, in my soul that this is my *topos*.”

Performing a pilgrimage and seeing places were also cited together as reasons for going to the monastery by those who did not originate from the occupied areas as this woman did. Expressing the shocking feeling many people had when the checkpoints first opened, a non-refugee woman between forty-six and fifty-five years of age attributed equal importance to seeing “those places again” and to the religious act of *proskynisis*.

As soon as the checkpoints opened . . . it was something unprecedented for us, we didn’t believe that we would be able to go see those places again and so, we wanted to go see them and perform our devotions [*προσκυνήσουμε*] . . . at the same time . . .

The ways in which pilgrimage becomes an opportunity for knowing the occupied areas is even more visible in the ways in which people of the post-war generation talk of their monastery visit. The female interviewee in her late thirties, with a historical interest in the space of the monastery, said that what she wanted to see was not only the monastery but:

the total; the environment, the monastery and the edge in general, that it is the most Eastern part . . . that I hadn’t been before and because I want to visit the other side and I consider that this is also Cyprus . . . it is part of Cyprus . . . and this is why I wanted to go.

By saying that she wanted to go to the monastery because she wanted to visit the “other side,” which she also considers to be part of Cyprus as one and a whole, she emplaced her visit within the wider framework of seeing the occupied areas, presenting the pilgrimage as an opportunity for acquiring first-hand knowledge of what was, until 2003, inaccessible to GCs. This is not unique to this interviewee. Others also inserted their monastery visit into a wider framework of seeing Cyprus. A male interlocutor in his mid to late thirties, of whom one parent originates from the occupied areas but is not a refugee, was conducting the pilgrimage to escort a person close to him whose parent had an unfulfilled vow that was only now being completed. However, he said that he would go to AA even if it wasn’t for the vow:

Eh not for religious reasons, mainly . . . to see that edge of Cyprus, . . . that monument, we would hear so much from when we were kids . . . Ee

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these basically eh, in the framework of getting to know Cyprus with the opportunity that was now given to see it on the other side too.

Like the previously cited female interlocutor of the same age group, he inserts his monastery visit within the more general framework of “getting to know Cyprus.” As my interviewee said at another point of his interview, the monastery, which he characterized as “iconic,” was one piece of the puzzle of what the occupied areas were in his mind. Going to AA, a place among others he wanted to get to know, seemed obvious to him since he wanted to get to know “every corner of Cyprus . . .”

### *Spatial Awareness*

Knowledge of Cyprus’s occupied part, the fascination with which was accentuated by the movement restrictions people were subjected to, was something else my interviewee commented on when explaining why the route to the monastery was interesting to him.

It was the Cyprus that I didn’t know / as a geography let’s say. Eh it is a place that you see in books, that . . . you used to hear . . . how beautiful it is. Eh it was in the sphere of fiction [μυθοπλασίας; myth making] . . . Ehh and ok, it was / I didn’t believe that I was seeing that place which before 2003, I knew that I would never see. Eeeh so yes, it was interesting because the route was very long . . . I am going on the other side and I am going up to the other edge of Cyprus . . .

In this quote, my interlocutor pointed to the type of knowledge he had acquired while on his way to the monastery: a spatial/geographical knowledge of a part of Cyprus that up to the opening of the checkpoints he had only seen in books. When asked why he talked of the edge as something he wanted to see, he said:

. . . It somewhat intrigues me that I have reached the tip of Cyprus . . . and there is no more. There is no Cyprus from that point on. And it is a tip, there is nowhere else that you can see that Cyprus narrows down and disappears as you go. . . .



While Cyprus was spatially narrowing down as he travelled to the monastery, his mental horizon of what Cyprus is was widening. Travelling into the occupied areas opened the island's geographical space up in his mind, changing the ways in which he spatially experienced the island. This was not unique to this particular interviewee. A woman in her mid-thirties, one parent of whom is a refugee, who went to the monastery for several reasons including the fact that she believed in God and AA, said that when she found the opportunity to go to AA for *proskynisis*, for lighting a candle and seeing that side of her country, she felt that she ought to go:

in the sense that I have to see, . . . the stories and how I grew up and on the other hand, the consciousness you have for your *topos* . . . I have to at last see how my country is on the other side.

When she visited AA, she said that she realized that she was in Cyprus and that Cyprus is indeed an island “and God and the Saint are present.”

### ***Learning History: The Distant and the “Living” Past***

Apart from the geographical knowledge and spatial awareness of Cyprus that people acquire while traveling to AA, there is also historical knowledge that may interest people and motivate their journey. This may be especially so for those born after 1974. Talking of her second monastery visit, the female interlocutor with a historical interest in the general space of the monastery said that she was looking forward to seeing the “impressive” route to the monastery again:

[s]eeing the changes in space, seeing places you don't see every day, and monuments that have to do with the history of Cyprus, it is always impressive to see them each time, . . . and see that they are there and they still endure . . .

Talking in relation to seeing spaces one does not get to see on a daily basis and monuments linked to the history of Cyprus, this particular interviewee indicated her interest in the non-religious aspects of the journey, namely her interest in the island. This non-religious interest is illustrated further

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by the fact that during her second visit, which took place many years after the opening of the checkpoints, during the period in which the monastery was being restored, she did not feel it necessary to go to the icon because she had done so the previous time and didn't want to stand in line (owing to restoration works the icon was housed in a small space and not in the church). As she said, she preferred to do other things that related to getting to know the place better, and seeing the changes that may have occurred.

By saying that on her second monastery visit what she expected to see was the route, she indicated the latter's importance in motivating the journey and in shaping the experience. At times the route may in fact be almost as important as the pilgrimage site itself. This is illustrated by what my next interlocutor, a woman in her late-fifties who has roots in the occupied areas but was not officially a refugee, said:

Our journey's destination was all the way up to Rizokarpaso<sup>16</sup> and Apostolos Andreas because I felt that I wanted to take, I told my children that we will go and we will go to the edge of Cyprus for you to get to know it.

In this case, the pilgrimage's destination is the sacred center and the island's edge, where it is located, plus the journey; the whole route that one has to follow in order to reach it. The road is therefore important not only for where it leads, but in itself because of the distance and space it allows one to traverse. This particular interviewee said that on their trip to AA they also made a stop in Kyrenia to show their children and explain as much as they could. This points to the ways in which pilgrimage not only serves as a medium for acquiring but also for transmitting knowledge of the occupied areas and of the past, as older pilgrims with experiential knowledge may “guide” pilgrims of the post-war generation. In her interview, the woman quoted at the beginning of the article who took her children to AA on the occasion of a family member's promise (*tama*) said that they talked a lot along the way, each narrating what they remembered and also explaining to their children what they used to do when they would go before the war: “it was a bit in the style of a guided tour with words . . . ‘those villages’ and ‘that’ and whatever each could remember to say.”

Because they were with their children, during this trip they also made a lot of stops both to rest but also “to see places. To see villages.” This kind of transmission of “living history” was something that impressed my female

interviewee with an interest in the history of the island and the monuments that testified it.

Seeing the villages, they [older pilgrims] remembered things and they were telling us, the younger people . . . and the impressive thing with the route is this too; that you learn things about places you don't know from people who lived in the areas . . . they are . . . testimonials . . . oral tradition . . .

This type of “guiding” is a form of “witnessing,” not of a “religious” experience but of a bygone life violently interrupted by war. What was being transmitted, and what my interviewee liked learning during her journey to AA, was a living history of places, habits, and events (some of them related to religious practices), which she had only heard about but had not seen apart from in pictures. Her historical interest was not, therefore, exhausted in the past embodied in the monuments one may see along the route, but also extended to the recent past that the generation born before the war had experienced.<sup>17</sup>

Another thing she had found impressive was that she was hearing names of villages she did not know and seeing villages she had only seen on maps or the “I do not Forget” school exercise books. As work on guiding has shown, naming is important in pilgrimage (Feldman 2007: 355). In this case, however, what impressed my interlocutor was the naming not of spaces necessarily related to a religious tradition, but of villages. The naming of villages along the route was also important for some pilgrims I have travelled with. There were, for example, instances in which people complained that the street signs with the villages' names were not written in English (although in most cases this wouldn't matter since many of the villages' Greek names were changed into Turkish<sup>18</sup>), but also occasions on which they brought with them maps with both the Greek and the Turkish village names given. Recalling the villages' Greek names retrieves the past and preserves and transmits its knowledge.

### ***The Risk of Not Knowing***

In the context of the unresolved conflict, not knowing the occupied areas is sometimes seen as entailing risks for the solution of the “Cyprus Issue,”<sup>19</sup>

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and ultimately for the island’s future. These concerns have at times been expressed by interviewees born both before and after 1974. Answering a question about what she feels she has gained from her visit to AA, a woman in her late thirties who has one refugee parent, said for example that you have to go and see the occupied areas so that you know what you are talking about when you are saying that you do not want a solution:

Eh I believe that, what they say that we won’t go to the occupied areas, no, you have to go to see your *topoi*. To know, when you are making a decision that “I do not want a solution,” . . . what you are talking about. You hear about your *topoi* for so many years, you have to know what you are talking about and that OK the Turkish Cypriots are the same like us . . . your fear for, for the TC, is basically lessened.

Answering the question about what she had gained from her visit to AA in a general way of getting to know one’s *topoi*, this woman too emplaced her pilgrimage in a wider framework of seeing and knowing the occupied areas. The risk of not knowing them, and of not realizing the TCs’ similarity to “us,” the GCs, seems for her to be that one’s views in relation to the Cyprus Issue will not be informed and therefore correct. By saying “[t]o know when you are making a decision that I do not want a solution [to the Cyprus Issue],” she implies that ignorance carries with it risks for Cyprus and its future reunification.

A different but related risk of ignorance was expressed by the non-refugee female interviewee who took her children on a “guided tour” on the occasion of her family member’s promise to take the whole family to the monastery. This woman, who was very moved during the interview, at times crying, expressed the concern that as older generations who have lived through the war die, younger generations with no knowledge of the areas lost to the war will be indifferent and unwilling to “fight” for their country. If knowledge and memory are seen as necessary for maintaining the will to keep trying for the island’s reunification, then the risks of not knowing and of not remembering are grave for the future of Cyprus. Talking about her expectations at present, she presented religious spaces as reminders, noting their importance in keeping the memory, transmitting the knowledge, and therefore preserving the wish for a solution to the Cyprus Issue.



[M]y generation, everyone says, is the last generation that remembers the war and after us other things will begin, harder [things]/ because *when you do not know, the pain is not as much* . . . if our generation is gone / that has memories/ another generation will come [and] as much as you want to fight for your country, to love it, when you do not have things in your mind it is easier for you to get lost by other situations. So, if Apostolos Andreas and each monastery, . . . church is there, they will remind us of things [my emphasis].

In this woman's words, knowledge (of the war and presumably of what was lost to it) is linked to pain but is nevertheless necessary; in order to love and want to "fight" for your country you must know and therefore feel the pain of loss. This view reflects the logic behind the policy of "I do not Forget" (see Zembylas 2012: 474), as this was noted above.

### ***Knowledge About the Present and Concerns About the Future***

For this particular interlocutor, physical structures such as the monastery serve as traces of a living history and thus as reminders not of religion so much but through religion and its material structures of what "our" goal should be. What this goal is may be understood in relation to what this particular interviewee said at another point of her interview when talking of her impressions of the route the third time she went to AA as part of a bus pilgrimage. This importantly took place more than a decade after the opening of the checkpoints, shortly after which she had gone to AA twice. Noting the many new mosques she had noticed in the occupied areas, she talked of the "development" she has observed with new roads and houses being built. The latter was interpreted as a sign that a solution to the Cyprus Issue seems to be becoming impossible. Comparing the three different times she went to AA, she said that the first time the pain was stronger and that she was moved more but that the last time she went she was saddened by what she was seeing:

... [W]hen we went as soon as they opened [the checkpoints] . . . they hadn't started building . . . houses . . . roads and it was that feeling "ah, ok, here they are [small, sad laugh], a solution will be found and they

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will arrange things” . . . now I feel that it is like, we are getting far, it is like, that dream is becoming unfulfilled . . . like it is being confirmed that it is unfulfilled. Maybe it scared me a lot that something cannot be done on the level of politics. . . . they [TCs] want more progress? More progress to reach another level, and it brings this thought to me that eh all these sends us [GCs] very far from [interviewer: OK] our goal that was what? To be able at some point for everything to be well, to the degree that they could.

As the above quote shows, the pilgrimage does not only allow knowledge of the past but also knowledge of the present state that some places are in. The knowledge of what happened to certain places (i.e., ruination, preservation, or “development”) causes people to think about the probability of possible futures. Commenting upon the changes they have witnessed over the years after the opening of the checkpoints, many of my interviewees interpret the “development” of some areas in the form of construction works as a sign that these areas will not be returned to the GCs in case of a solution to the Cyprus Issue. “Development” of areas therefore turns future possibilities into probabilities, and it is also commented upon by bus pilgrims, who may sarcastically say things like “yes, we will get them back,” or, “yes, they are going to give them back to us.”

## Conclusion

In this article, I have explored non-religious knowledge forms pursued and acquired by Greek Cypriots through their pilgrimages to AA; the spatial knowledge of Cyprus, especially of its occupied part where the monastery is located, and the historical knowledge of its distant and living pasts. Having shown how the pilgrimages are inserted by many of my interviewees within a framework of “seeing our places,” I have illustrated the ways in which the perception of the monastery and its associated pilgrimages as important parts of Cyprus’s religious and cultural heritage/tradition, in combination with the monastery’s location on the island’s distant, occupied eastern end, prompt a pilgrimage that becomes a medium of traversing and getting to know “that part of Cyprus.” Through this journey, the spatial

and geographical perception of the island is transformed, and knowledge of the past is uncovered, recalled, and transmitted.

The kind of spatial/geographical and historical knowledge, pursued and acquired through GC pilgrimages to AA, is not the kind of knowledge Holy Land pilgrims need in order to experience “biblical events” related to their religion (Feldman 2007: 355). They are rather types of knowledge that are intrinsically linked to the memory and “postmemory” (Hirsch 2008) of the occupied areas, as these have been formed by the family narrations of those who lived before 1974 and by state educational policies such as that of “I do not Forget.”<sup>20</sup> In this framework, this particular pilgrimage is extraordinary in that it allows one to see and learn about places that until 2003 could only be imagined and which even today one does not get to see every day. The pilgrimage’s extraordinariness is therefore connected to the extraordinary and yet very much mundane conflict situation in which it is taking place.

The unresolved character of the Cyprus conflict and the uncertainty it engenders in regards to the future<sup>21</sup> (see Bryant 2014: 683), makes remembering and knowing Cyprus’s occupied areas not only desired but also necessary, according to some, for wanting or “fighting” for a solution to the Cyprus Issue. At the same time as it allows spatial and historical knowledge, pilgrimages to AA also allow knowledge of the situation the occupied areas are currently in. Such knowledge may lead to disappointing conclusions concerning the prospects for a future settlement of the Cyprus Issue.

The shift of focus from the more to the less obvious forms of knowledge sought and gained through pilgrimages allows for an understanding of the ways in which macro-level events such as war and conflict may reconfigure what are conventionally thought of as religious pilgrimages, as well as the kinds of knowledge that become relevant in their practice. These kinds of knowledge (or their ignorance) may become important as well as risky, affecting in their turn the pilgrimage experience by pushing religion in and out of the pilgrims’ focus (see Bandak 2012 on foregrounds and backgrounds). Their study can therefore help us understand the multiple, complex, and ambiguous ways in which people understand, construct, and experience sacred sites and the ways in which what is deemed as “sacred” is constantly recreated and re-signified not as “separate from, or standing into contradistinction to, the profane world” (Reader 2014: 30) but in relation to it. At the same time, it allows us to examine the ways in which the

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meaning of pilgrimage may be redefined in relation to the context in which it is taking place.

In the case of GC pilgrimages to AA, which I have focused upon, pilgrimage is linked to wider issues related to the politics of an unresolved conflict that transforms it into a religio-political act through which to resist the occupation and exercise agency in forming a future that is desired, no matter how implausible it may at times be felt to be. GC pilgrimages to the monastery are at the same time journeys to a place that is deemed as sacred in the conventional sense, but also journeys through and to what are sometimes called “our sacred grounds” (*ta ayia homata mas*) (cf. Dikomitis 2012: 99); journeys to a religious site, as well as journeys to and through an enduring place, which although at times is felt to have become unknown is still felt as one’s own.

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## Notes

1. In focusing on the less obvious knowledge forms involved in pilgrimage, I am following Simon Coleman’s (2014, 2018, 2019a, 2019b) call to look at the less visible, informal, fragmented, and ambiguous ways in which people engage with religion.



Such an exploration reveals the ambivalent character of many shrine visitations, which defy easy characterization as “religious pilgrimages,” as well as the blurring of the boundaries between pilgrimage, ritual, and everyday practices (Coleman 2018: 6, 5).

2. “The dividing line or ‘dead zone’ . . . had never been crossed by Cypriots without an official permit” (Göker 2012: 121).
3. Lisa Dikomitis (2005: 11–12, 2009, 2012) sees the crossings as “pilgrimages.”
4. For the TCs, the claim legitimized by the past is that of division (Papadakis, Peristianis, and Welz 2006: 13).
5. As Roudometof and Christou (2011: 169) note, “according to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, those not forced to leave their country are internally displaced people and not refugees. Still, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) has described the Greek Cypriots’ condition as a ‘refugee-like’ situation (see Zetter 1994) while the term ‘refugee’ (*prosfyges*), along with its connotations of social status and identity, is uniformly used in Greek Cypriot discourse.”
6. On the policy see for example, Charalambous et al. (2014), Zembylas et al. (2016), Roudometof and Christou (2011). For an ethnographic study of how the phrase is interpreted by students and teachers see Christou (2006).
7. In 2013–2014 the policy became “I Know, I Don’t Forget and I Contend” (Zembylas et. al 2016: 64).
8. Other sites in the occupied areas such as the port of Kyrenia also feature on school notebooks’ covers along with the phrase “I Don’t Forget.” The notebooks are often mentioned by interviewees in their mid to late thirties.
9. Papadakis et al. (2006: 15) note this in relation to “social spaces in Cyprus,” which they see as “lying . . . in between” Nora’s (1989) categories.
10. Marriane Hirsch (2008) uses “postmemory” to describe the relationship that a generation has to the traumas experienced by previous generations. This relationship is fostered by the images, narrations, and behaviors through which the original experience is inter- or trans-generationally transmitted (ibid.: 106). In this article, I adopt an extended notion of “postmemory” that goes beyond younger generations’ relationship to the trauma of preceding generations to include their relationship to past generations’ previous (but interrupted) lives more generally. In the context of Cyprus, the term is used by Bakshi 2017, Bryant and Papadakis 2012: 20, and Bryant 2015.
11. Citing an article published in the GC newspaper *Politis* (Ανώνυμος, “Το Ιστορικό Μοναστήρι του Αποστόλου Ανδρέα,” Πολίτης, 28.11.2004), Kokkinoftas (2009: 183) notes that, “in a counting that took place on May 1, 2003, from the 25,800 GCs who went to the occupied areas, 24,000 approximately stated AA as their destination” (my translation). Kokkinoftas (2009: 181) also notes limited times when GCs were allowed to go to the monastery before the opening of the checkpoints.
12. “[T]he ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (1983), was declared legally invalid by the UN and is recognized only by Turkey.” (Charalambous et al. 2014: 82). Navaro-Yashin (2012: 68) notes that “[t]he border demarcating a zone separate from the south is probably the single most important mechanism and symbol of sovereignty in northern Cyprus.”
13. The Greek word *proskynema* is used for what is referred to by the English term “pilgrimage” but it also refers to the devotions performed in the church (Håland 2009: 98) “or [a] monastery, or in front of an icon” (Rahkala 2010: 80) i.e., lighting candles and kissing the icons (ibid.). See also della Dora 2012: 965–966.

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14. *Tama* refers to both the act of making or fulfilling the vow and to the material offering which represents it (Dubisch 1988: 124; Dubisch 1995: 88).
15. According to the 2011 census, Andreas is the most common male name in Cyprus. Androulla, a derivative of Andreas, is also among the most common female names. Although one has to consider the habit of naming children after their grandparents, the popularity of the name is indicative of Apostolos Andreas’s popularity in Cyprus.
16. The last village on the road to the monastery and one where enclaved Greek Cypriots reside.
17. Citing Sant-Cassia (1996), Bryant and Papadakis (2012: 18, 22) talk of the “culture of witnessing” in Cyprus, whereby “people often feel compelled to tell their version of the events in order to correct what they believe are other, incorrect versions” (ibid.: 18). In this “‘culture of witnessing’ . . . personal memory is actively employed for political ends” (ibid.: 22; see also Papadakis, Peristianis and Welz 2006). What I am referring to here when talking about “witnessing” is the narration of a more personal and intimate memory and history of the occupied areas, which is nevertheless framed by the “sense of generalised refugeehood,” which Demetriou (2018: 3, 52, 62–69; 2014: 179) talks about.
18. For this see, for example, Navaro-Yashin 2012, chapter 1 (pp. 37–50).
19. This is how the unresolved conflict is referred to (Roudometof and Christou 2011: 183, note 2).
20. “[T]his call to remember” is, according to Bryant and Papadakis (2012: 20), exemplary of the “postmemory” Hirsch (1997) describes, as it is mainly addressed to younger generations whose memories are not experiential (Bryant and Papadakis 2012: 20).
21. Rebecca Bryant (2012: 339; 2014: 683; 2016: 23) and Bryant and Knight 2019: 35 talks of the “threshold of anticipation.”

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