

Walking along history

By **Anna Marangou**, Archaeologist and Art Historian

Limassol has a wonderful path running all along its coastline.

Try it. Its pleasant, its interesting and enlightening, its explains Cypriots and their attitudes towards life, sea and history, and above all it can use up a fair amount of unwanted calories. Limassol offers, through its beautifully designed pedestrian path along the coastline a wonderful experience; walk along with the history of the city, from antiquity to the early 20th century, take a break at a local coffee shop and sip a «metrios» and a cold glass of water, learn about the history of the shore line and its people, the numerous conquerors, the battles, the love stories that formulated the history of this unique island of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Enjoy the walk early in the morning with the brisk sea breeze, or again experience a unique sun set from the acropolis of Amathus, viewing the basilica and the deep blue sea, the passing sailing boat and the accompanying swallows. You can start on either side. If you choose to start either from the old port, either from the ancient port of Amathus. Both ways it's a nice way to discover the history of this city.

Starting point: The Ancient city of Amathus. The easternmost point of the walk.

It's a special city inhabited since the 11th century B.C. and destined to become one of the leading states of the Cypriot Iron Age, no less powerful and prosperous than the Greek city kingdoms. Since the dawn of its day the city traded with both Greek and Levantines, accepting and receiving ideas from both worlds. They were an indigenous community – the Eteocypriots- meaning the 'true Cypriots' that spoke a dialect of their own.

During the Ionian revolt, the attempt of the eastern Greek cities to rid themselves of Persian rule, broke out in 499 B.C. all the kingdoms of Cyprus except Amathus joined in at the instigation of Onesilos, the king of Salamis. This ended in failure and eventually Persia firmly kept the control of all cities. It is a vast city, that arose the interest of illicit diggers and lovers of antiquity back in the 19th century, and a fair amount of the remains are to be found today in leading museums of Europe and the USA.

Walking along the pathway you can see and the inner and outer harbour, at the lower level the Agora with its baths and other buildings, the basilica, the walls that surrounded the city, the palace, and high above the acropolis with the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the byzantine basilica and the aqueduct. Walking along the shore you will notice the jetties of the old harbour that was constructed in the 4th century by

Demetrius Poliorcetes and had a very short life. Already in the 3rd century the harbour was only used by fishermen.

The city of Amathus is tightly connected with the cypriot version of the myth of Ariadne, the wife of Theseus who died while giving birth to her two sons, Stafylos and Oinopionas. Ariadne was buried in the adjacent sacred forest that bears her name. To honour his wife Theseus decided to organise in Amathus a celebration where men pretend they are pregnant give birth.

The city of Amathus and the surrounding ancient locations that flourished during antiquity and Byzantium were destroyed by the Arab invasions. Pilgrims that travelled through medieval times to the Holy Land usually stopped for refuelling and other services at the known port of Limassol. No mention is made anymore of the harbour of Amathus, it was silted and destroyed.

Continuing your walk toward the West you come across the walls of the ancient city of Amathus, and a lot of modern apartment buildings with private beaches and of course little and big restaurants where you can enjoy fresh fish and a cold beer. At the beginning of the century Limassol used to be the major industrial town of the island and many factories were built along the coastline. Some of these still exist today, others were unfortunately pulled down to give way to modern hotels and apartments. You pass in front of the Nautical Clubs of both Famagusta and Limassol and you approach the centre of the city of Limassol through a little forest, right on the front line, named Dasoudi.

As you walk of jog towards the west you come closer to the known area of the Harbour of Limassol. The old jetty still stands proud and part of the old harbour is used as a little marina for small fishing boats.

The harbour has a long history as it was a main point of reference during medieval times. Richard the Lion Heart, the King of England on his way to the third crusade in 1191 stopped in Limassol to refuel. There he found out that the local Byzantine prince Isaac Comnenus, mistreated his fiancée Berangere of Navarre and her cousin Joanna, who had to anchor in Limassol because of a terrible storm. His revenge actually changed the course of history and Cyprus was in the hands of the King of England. Having other things though on his mind, Richard decided to sell the land to the Templars, who in return sold the island to a French noble family the Lusignans. From 1191 to 1571 Cyprus became a stepping stone of trade, a melting pot for Western merchants who travelled. Catalans, Venetian, Genoese, Pisans all rich merchants settled in Limassol in exchange to the rich privileges offered to them by the French Lusignan kings. But it was not only Limassol that attracted the Westerners. The areas around the city were rich in vineyards and the dark sweet wine produced there attracted the

merchants. Sugar cane was also a product of the area. As the island changed hands again, the Venetians and especially Andrea Cornaro used the harbour of Limassol to export the sugar, salt and of course the dark wine of Cyprus known as the Commanderia wine.

As the island fell to the Ottomans in 1571 the trade ceased, and the city together with the well known harbour fell to oblivion. It was only after the arrival of the British in 1878 that the harbour acquired its old glory. The wine factories flourished and exports were made to the Middle East and Europe, all from the harbour of Limassol. Limassol became a pioneer industrial city and set the standards for the rest of the island. A whole new town developed around the busy port. Little hotels made their presence felt, maritime and assurance companies sent representatives to the city, banks from the Greek mainland arrived and the wealthy Limassolians built around the harbour their impressive mansions and expensive homes. The city lived close to the sea and experienced through the various activities and celebrations its relation to the sea and the surrounding.

Jog along the Zoo, it won't be long before its gone, take a look at the Public Gardens, take a swim and a break for some fresh orange juice, and visit the old Stadium of Limassol and the Catholic church, gaze at the buildings of the beginning of the century that house today various activities, the Continental Hotel, the church of St. Napa. Enter the park of Modern Art, sculptures of known artists from Europe with the assistance of the Municipality managed to make an oasis of creation much appreciated in the hot months of this island. All that happens in Limassol happens on this main road. The Carnival in February, the Flower Celebrations in May, the Wine Festival in September. Limassol is a town that lives aloud.

If you happen to be at the old harbour at sun down, take a right from the round about and visit the Old Carob Mill, the newly established Evagoras Lanitis Centre and the Time machine and of course enjoy the beautiful cafés around the square. To visit the Castle you have to come in the morning and its really worth the trip. It takes you to those bygone days when Cyprus belonged to Royal families; the castle houses the tombstones of the noble kings and princes of the Lusignan era, the armours they wore, the everyday pottery.