

MYTHS & LEGENDS



North Cyprus





Cyprus Myths and Legends

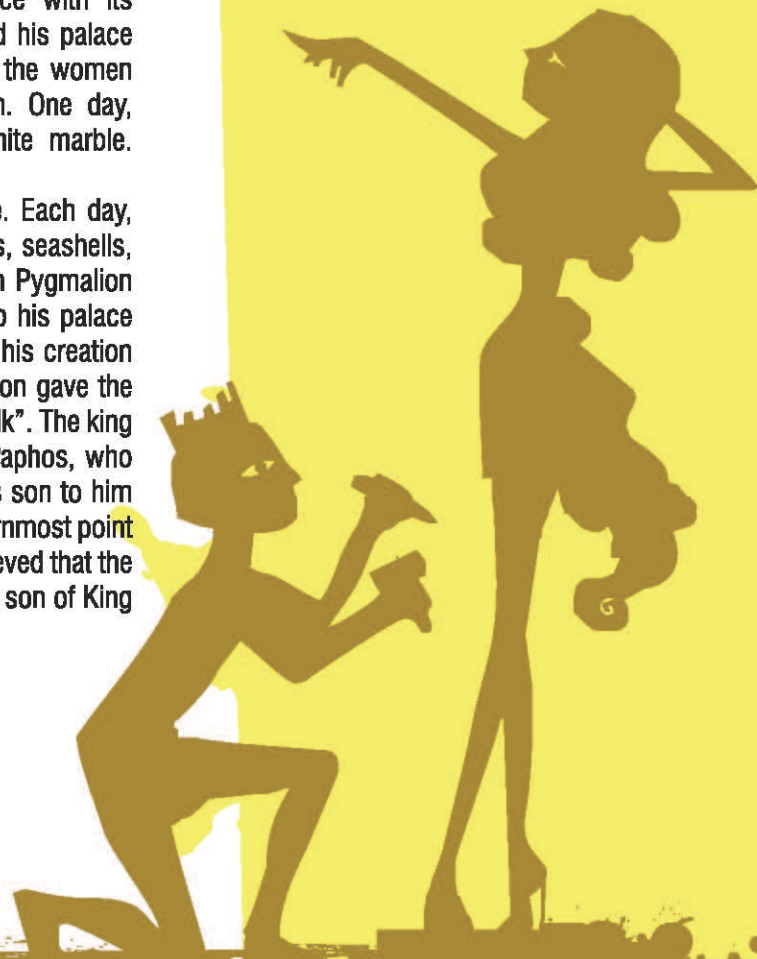
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The Legend Of Pygmalion And Galatea

The ancient city of Carpasia was a harbour town located on the coast 4 km west of today's Dipkarpaz village. It was established during Pagan times as a city-state before Christianity. Today, it is possible to see the fortification walls and columns of the palace, as if waiting to be discovered, in the clear waters of the sea.

It was the legendary king Pygmalion who founded this city, one of the oldest cities in Cyprus. It is also this city, which has given its name to the Karpaz Peninsula. During his reign Pygmalion lived alone in his palace with its magnificent sea views. He had an artistic character and decorated his palace with his own carved marble sculptures. He wasn't satisfied with the women around him, but was waiting for his ideal woman ...his queen. One day, he began to carve a beautiful woman, sculpted from snow-white marble.

Day by day, Pygmalion fell in love with his own carved sculpture. Each day, his love grew deeper. He stroked its cheeks and hair; gave it pearls, seashells, jewellery and flowers. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, took pity on Pygmalion and wanted to end his sorrow. One day, when the king returned to his palace and hugged the sculpture, he realised that it had come to life; that his creation had colour in its cheeks, and was looking at him lovingly. Pygmalion gave the fair-skinned woman the name Galatea, which means "as white as milk". The king had found his queen. He married her and they had a son named Paphos, who grew up to become a strong, handsome man. Pygmalion called his son to him and said "Dear son, I have established my kingdom at the very easternmost point of the island. Go to the west and found your own kingdom." It is believed that the city of Paphos or Baf, was founded by and named after Paphos, the son of King Pygmalion.



The Legend Of Aphrodite And Adonis

Kinyras (Cinyras), the King of the Cyprus, had a daughter who was a legendary beauty, called Smyrna. One day her father let slip the claim that his daughter was more beautiful than the goddess Aphrodite. When Aphrodite heard this, she was angry and decided to make the king and his daughter fall in love with each other. They both fell under the effect of the spell, and she became pregnant by her father. The King's daughter, ashamed and afraid, sought refuge in a forest. The King, meanwhile, looked everywhere for her with the intention of murdering her. Smyrna begged to the gods and Zeus took pity on her, turning Smyrna into a myrtle tree to save her from this terrible situation. (Incidentally, the name of the Turkish city of İzmir comes from Smyrna). After nine months, the princess, who was pregnant when she was transformed into a tree, gave birth to her son Adonis by ripping apart the trunk of the tree. The goddess Aphrodite found this beautiful baby on the trunk of the tree and took care of the child, taking him to live with her.

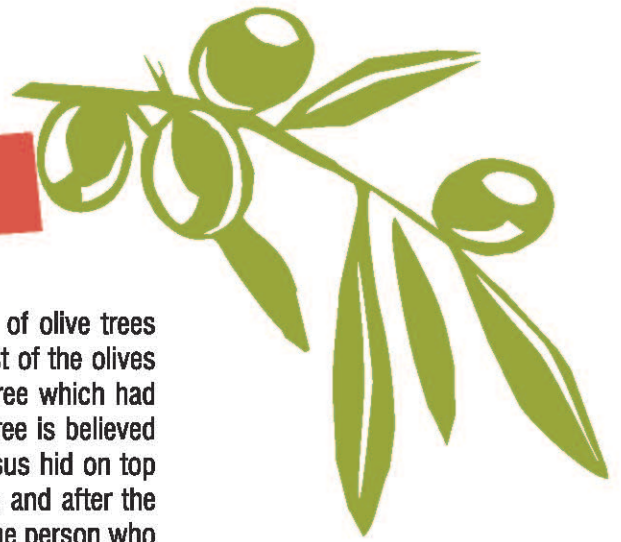
As he grew up, Adonis became a very handsome man, which is why the goddess Aphrodite and the goddess of the underworld, Persephone, came into conflict over him. Zeus and Olimpos ended the battle between these two goddesses by taking the decision that Adonis should live for 6 months of the year with Aphrodite and 6 months of the year with Persephone. As he prepared to meet his lover, Aphrodite, Adonis was engaging in his favourite activity, hunting, when he encountered a wild boar. A very serious fight took place between Adonis and the wild boar. At the end Adonis was terribly wounded. Bleeding and in pain he attempted to reach Aphrodite, but lost all his strength, collapsing to the ground and taking his final breath. As it turned out, the life of Adonis was very brief ...like a flower.

Aphrodite could not accept this death and cried for many days. From that time onwards, nature stepped in to make this love immortal. The red and white anemones, a flower with a very short life span, blossom in Cyprus, in the place where the one and only lover of Aphrodite, Adonis, died. The red anemones symbolise the blood spilling from the wounds of Adonis, the white ones the tears of Aphrodite and the yellow ones represent this tragic end.



The Legend Of The Olive Tree

In the past, the wealth of people was measured by the number of olive trees that they owned. Weddings were only scheduled after the harvest of the olives in Templos, today's Zeytinlik Village. The olive tree is a sacred tree which had economic, cultural and spiritual value. The sanctity of the olive tree is believed to be based on a legend about Jesus Christ. It was said that Jesus hid on top of an olive tree while he was trying to escape from his enemies and after the enemies went by, he said this prayer: "live 100 years more than the person who cultivated you; give plentiful fruit, be a tree which gives fruit and oil and makes your owners rich". The olive tree asked: "what will happen if they cut and burn me?". He replied: "the smoke which comes from your wood and leaves will protect you from devilry and envy". Today, for the people of Cyprus, as for the Zeytinlik villagers, the olive leaf has a sacred meaning offering protection from evil.



The Legend Of St. Mamas

St. Mamas was a priest who was born in Cyprus and gave his name to the church in Güzelyurt. He was renowned for having ridden a lion while holding a lamb on his lap. Once upon a time Mamas was living in a cave in this region. According to a mandate, everyone was forced to pay taxes. However, Mamas refused to pay taxes saying that since he was living in a cave he didn't enjoy any of the government's facilities. As a result of this speech, he was arrested. On his journey to Lefkoşa, a lion jumped into the road whilst chasing a lamb. As Mamas raised his hand, suddenly, the lion paused. Mamas picked up the lamb and mounted the lion, riding on its back until he reached the throne room of the duke who proposed the tax rule. The duke was so shocked that he agreed to waive Mamas's payment.



The Legend Of Five Finger (Beşparmak) Mountains

There was a very beautiful girl who lived in a village in the range of the mountains which form a backdrop to today's Girne. There happened to be two young men who loved this girl. One of them was a good-hearted person and the other one was not. They had a bet as to who would win the girl and they decided to have a duel and that it should take place on the edge of a marsh in Meserya. The malevolent youth made a crafty plan to overcome the good-hearted one. He wounded the good man by pulling him into the marsh. The good-hearted youth gradually started to sink in the marshy area while he was trying to push himself up out of the mud. He raised his sword with a final effort, and as the sword slipped from his grasp, he was buried with five fingers open to the sky. In time, the marshy area dried out and the good-hearted youth's hand turned into mountains resembling his five fingers.

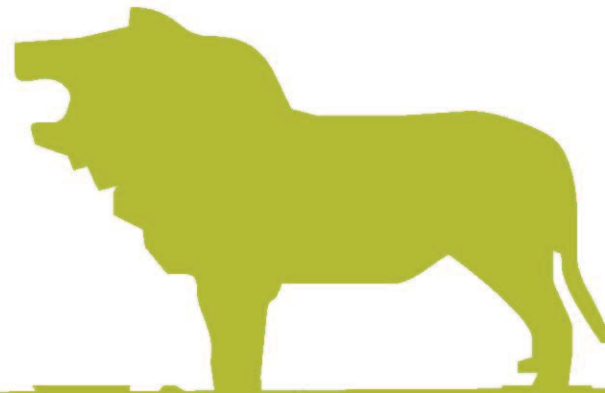
The Nursing Rock On Top Of The Fortifications Of Gazimağusa

There is a location on the fortifications of Gazimağusa where a white liquid flows like milk. The people of Gazimağusa think that it has a specific and extraordinary power. Women who have just given birth who have difficulty in breast-feeding come to this place to make a wish. It is also visited by women who want to have children, who come to touch the rock.



The Petrified Lions Of The Gate Of The Harbour

The sculptures on the right side of the sea gate of the Othello Castle belong to a lion and its cub. According to a legend, the lion had tried to eat its own cub and then they were turned into stone. One of the sculptures is lost. According to another legend, the lion opens its mouth at an unknown time of an unknown day once a year. It is believed that the person who puts his or her hand into the mouth of the lion, will find an unbelievable treasure.



The Legend Of Canbulat Pasha

The Venetians had placed a rotating wheel with knives around it at the gate of the harbour to cut every invading soldier in half. Canbulat Bey was fed up of the siege as it was taking so long and rode his horse towards the wheel. He was decapitated and then replaced his head and he continued to fight. After the conquest of the war, he lay down in peace and died a martyr.



The Legend Of St. Barnabas

St. Barnabas was born in Salamis as a Jewish person, and met Jesus Christ during one of his journeys to Palestine. He came to Cyprus 46 years after the death of Jesus Christ. He was killed by the Jewish people when he attempted to go to Salamis to spread Christianity. His corpse was hidden in a marshy area from which they planned to throw it in to the sea. The followers of St. Barnabas found out what had happened and they buried his corpse in a cave to the west of Salamis. They put a copy of the Bible, written by St. Matthew, with him. The place of the grave was not known and was kept as a secret. 432 years after his death, the bishop Anthemios says that he saw the grave in his dream, identified its location and asked for it to be opened. When the people opened the grave, the Bible was found and the grave was easily identified as the grave of St. Barnabas. In AD 477, the monastery was built on the site of that grave. It is one of the most important religious places for Greek Orthodox Cypriots.

The Castle Of St. Hilarion

The castle of St. Hilarion was constructed in the 6th century AD and took its name from the hermit saint of the same name. In the village of Zeytinlik (Templos), St. Hilarion is known as "Yüzbişevler". The castle is located to the south of the village and is said to have 101 rooms. According to legend, a group of young men visited the castle on what was known as "WISH DAY". This day was the only day of the year on which wishes were accepted and the one day in every forty years when the door of the 101st room was opened. The young men, finding this door open swarmed into that room. The room was full of rich treasure. Their eyes opened wide and they charged in to grab everything they saw. But the problem was that each one tried to take more than one object. The one who grabbed the crown also tried to get his hands on the sceptre whilst also struggling for the sword. In their greed they didn't realize that their time was up and the doors slammed shut. They slept for 40 years in the room and when the day came, the doors opened again and they returned back to their villages. After returning to the village they realized that although they had stayed the same age as when they first entered the room, their children had grown old and many of their peers were dead already.



The Legend Of Apostolos Andreas

The Monastery of Apostolos Andreas is a sacred place for both Turkish and Greek people. The sanctity of that place comes from the water which flows through the rocks. A monastery and a church were constructed on this sacred place because it was believed to be a place visited by St. Andreas. The legend of Apostolos Andreas is that the Romans had learned about his attempts to spread Christianity around the Mediterranean and Black Sea. That's why they had punished Apostolos Andreas and decided to send him to Rome. The captain of the ship was worried because they were out of water. Apostolos Andreas said "I can find water for you" and asked for permission to land. When he stepped ashore they discovered the spring flowing through the rocks. The captain set him free and the saint decided to settle there. Following the spread of Christianity, the news of the miracle of Andreas also spread. People began to believe the healing effect of the water and the monastery became a shrine. According to Muslims, this sacred water is "the miracle of Hz. Süleyman" they believe that anyone who drinks the water will be healed; a blind person will see; and a paralysed person will walk. Those who visit drink from the sacred water and take away little bottles of water with them for those who don't have a chance to visit. Turkish people make wishes by lighting a candle like Christians. The Christians also shape their candles according to their wishes and bring bottles of olive oil.





The Queen Of Yüzbirevler

During the Lusignan Dynasty, the name of the castle of St. Hilarion was changed to "Dieu d'Amour" which means "The Castle of the Goddess of Love". The castle was also known as "The Castle of Regina"; which means "The Castle of Queen". The queen was famous not only for her beauty but also for her evil nature. According to the legend, the queen was sitting on top of a high rock controlling the building works during the construction of the castle. She didn't give permission for the builders to rest, as they carried sand, water and pebbles from the sea to the mountain. Finally the construction was completed and the queen moved into the palace. Having no further use for the builders, she called them all to the palace and threw them out of the window. She also threw soldiers from the window after they had finished their guard duties. It was said that she didn't want anyone alive who took a role during the construction of the palace. Today, the Gothic style decorated window, facing to the northwest is known as "the Queen's Window".

The Castle Of Buffavento

As with other castles on the island, Buffavento – which takes its name from the Italian meaning 'disobeying the wind' - also has a story related to a queen. According to the legend, a Byzantine princess contracted leprosy, and retired to the castle, thereby isolating herself completely from other people. The princess had a dog, which, like her was afflicted with leprosy. This dog would leave the castle every day and disappear behind the southern peak, returning to the castle some time later. The princess noticed one day that the dog's had returned to good health and the next day she followed the dog and watched it take a bath in a natural spring. She also bathed in the spring and after some time she was cured. She had the Monastery Church of St. John Chrysostomos built over the place where she had discovered the healing spring.



The Legend Of Fire Rock

A villager who always complained about God, blamed God for the bad harvest season. The shepherds meeting around the rock of fire after releasing their animals to herd them into the Mountains of Five Finger, heard him complaining and said to the farmer that he should go to the rock of fire and make his complaints directly to God there.

The farmer, who always blamed God for every negative event in his life, climbed to the top of the mountain. He raised his hands and began to shout at God like a mad man. At that moment he was hit by a lightening bolt and turned into stone. If you visit the rock of fire which shines very brightly during sunset, you will see that it definitely looks like a human silhouette.



The Legend Of Phoenix

There is a big stone in the Ciklos region, which looks like a huge half-divided egg which is known locally as the Soil Stone or Egg Stone. According to the legend, the Ciklos region of Girne is the nest of the phoenix and after the death of his mate, he protected his last egg. He sat on the egg day after day during incubation. However, because he got hungry he left the egg to find food. During that time the egg was about to hatch. When the infant moved, the egg overbalanced towards the ground and the crows ate the newly-hatched phoenix, and the race became extinct. It is said that the crows always circle on top of that rock because they have not forgotten the taste of that creature.



The Legend Of Hz. Ömer's Tomb

One day, a shepherd, known as Mad Hasan of Çatalköy, spotted a pirate ship at sea and began to pray. Suddenly, seven Arabic cavaliers appeared. According to the legend, these cavaliers rode across the surface of the sea to reach the ship with sparks coming out of their horseshoes. They sank the ship and then quickly disappeared. In this way, Çatalköy was protected from attack of the pirates. No one believed Mad Hasan, until they saw the marks left by the horseshoes on the rocks. They understood that the people were the cavaliers of Hz. Ömer. As a result of this legend which is based on the horseshoe prints on the rocks, the Ottomans have constructed seven graves and a shrine which have a symbolic meaning. Since then, this place has become a sacred place for the Muslims who live in Cyprus and they visit this shrine especially during the religious festivals when they pray and make offerings.





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