

# INTRODUCTION

---

My father's family came from an island in the Aegean called Andros. When I was eight years old, he told me a story from his childhood that I never forgot. In the mid-1800s, there was a mysterious man living on Andros by the name of Kairis, pronounced *Ka-ee-rees*. Kairis was a child prodigy, and folklore had it that, like Jesus Christ, he disappeared from age twelve to age thirty. When he returned to Andros, he preached that Jesus was not the Son of God, and that Jesus' miracles were all deceptions.

There were more amazing and disturbing things told about Kairis. He was supposed to have used mass hypnosis to make people think someone was blind or paralyzed or even dead, and then would wake everyone up to witness the "miracle healing." He convinced people they were drinking wine and made them feel intoxicated when all they had really consumed was water. On one occasion, he made a large group believe they were in a vineyard and instructed each one to cut off a bunch of grapes with their knives. He woke them just as they were

getting ready to cut off each other's noses. At a different time, Kairis went to the barber and upon seeing there was a wait, pulled off his head and left it for the man to cut his hair, saying he would return for it later.

For these and other reasons, the villagers feared Kairis, and the Church considered him evil and wanted him dead. His enemies tried to murder him on numerous occasions but he always managed to survive—at least until they found the one way to utterly destroy him. They threw him into a pit of slake lime, a caustic solution used to whitewash stone buildings, and he completely disintegrated.

Kairis had an extensive library that contained all his writings, in addition to all the books he claimed were the source of his knowledge. When he was killed in 1853, the library was ordered sealed by the Church for one hundred years. Shortly before the time elapsed, the Germans occupied Andros during WWII and broke into the library. According to my father, the Germans claimed to have burned all the books, but everyone knew they had stolen them and sent them to Germany instead.

Kairis' story intrigued me as a child, and I often asked my father to retell it. After almost half a century, I started to research this curious man and found that not only was he a real person, but his life was even more remarkable than my father's tale. The most perplexing part of all was that the more I delved into his life and the history of that era, the more unanswered questions I had. The most important one, it seemed, was why and how a single man caused so much fear and loathing among the Church leadership that they not only ordered his torture and imprisonment, which led to his death, but also suppressed and distorted his mere memory. It was not until the very end of my research that it finally all made sense. It was then I decided to write this book.

A historical biography of Theophilos Kairis, spanning the 70 years of his life and encompassing the Greek War of Independence, would have been a long, dry, academic work. I wanted to make his story readable and accessible to the modern reader, and for this reason I have chosen the style of creative nonfiction. In this way, I have tried to stay accurate to the known historical facts, and only embellished the story with occasional anecdotes and dialog.

A final note: To accurately depict the events of that period, especially during the Greek War of Independence, I have had to describe some of the brutal acts committed by both Greeks and Turks. This was the time that Kairis lived in, and to understand the environment as well as the makeup of the key players in his life, these descriptions could not be omitted.

I wish to thank my wife, Linda, for her unfailing support and countless reads over a four-year period. Also thanks to my friend Stratos Theodosiou, without whose support this book would not have been published.

P. Z. Mantarakis