

## **Stroumbi. Memories from the 1953 Earthquake** **[Στρουμπί. Μνήμες από το Σεισμό του 1953]**

**Kleopatra Papageorgiou-Sofianou**

**En Typosi**

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*In sad contrast with the Coronation celebrations, the close of the year was overshadowed by the earthquake which shook Cyprus and did much serious damage at the western end of the island on the 10th September. The main shock, which occurred at 6.03 a.m. that day, was followed by a succession of lesser tremors which persisted at increasingly long intervals for seven weeks. Tremors of diminishing intensity were felt at later dates, the latest at Christmas. Forty people lost their lives and one hundred were seriously injured.*

*By good fortune, most of the able-bodied inhabitants of the villages were out in their fields at the time of the earthquake, so that, by comparison with the severe damage to house property, casualties were light.<sup>1</sup>*

The above is an abstract from the British administration's annual report for the year 1953. Despite the obvious attempt to downplay the significance of the event, the 10th of September earthquake in Paphos was by far the greatest natural disaster in Cyprus during the British era.

The book by Kleopatra Papageorgiou-Sofianou, *Stroumbi. Memories from the 1953 Earthquake*, is one of the few books about the 1953 earthquake. In a way the above book is a sequel of her previous book, that she co-wrote with her husband, Chrysostomos A. Sofianos, about Stroumbi, their common birthplace, published in 2011, where one can find detailed reports on the impact of the earthquake for the village.<sup>2</sup>

Stroumbi is one of the six villages in the district that was completely destroyed, while in another 35 villages in the Paphos district, between 50% and 90% of the buildings were destroyed. Out of the 40 deaths, 14 were Stroumbi inhabitants.

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<sup>1</sup> Κρατικό Αρχείο Κύπρου (ΚΑΚ) SA1 1413/1950/4, Colonial Reports, Cyprus 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Χρυσόστομος Α. Σοφιανός-Κλεοπάτρα Ι. Παπαγεωργίου, *Στρουμπί. Ένα Κεφαλοχώρι της Πάφου*, Λευκωσία 2011.

The book, written in Greek by Papageorgiou-Sofianou, starts with the history of the village, from prehistoric times up to 1953. It then presents the earthquake events in the village through press reports, as well as the British administration's response and the measures taken to restore normality the soonest possible. Emphasis is given on the encouragement given by the British to the inhabitants (they were promised free land) to build a new village near the destroyed one. Only seven inhabitants were not in agreement and did not sign the decision made by the Stroumbi villagers to abandon their old village.

The biggest part of the book contains a number of personal stories (51 in total) of the inhabitants of Stroumbi about the day of the earthquake and the aftermath. I consider the idea of the author brilliant. This way, we are able to see how the tragic event traumatised the people and how they handled it. Almost all the villagers mentioned that, following the tremor, they developed a constant fear of earthquakes. Athinoula Filippou Konioti stated that, from that day on, she could not live in an apartment unless on the first or the ground floor (p.181). Along with the fear, at that time Stroumbiotes also felt astonished and thankful to the people of Cyprus for their help (clothes, food, etc.), that reached them even from distant villages. Chrysostomos Sofianos remembers a truck from the village of Athienou (p. 59-60) containing bread.

The new village, Kato Stroumbi (below the old village, thus the word 'Kato', meaning below), built after the earthquake, was the new home for the devastated people, although some, after a number of years, decided to return to the old village.

The recorded statements in this book I consider a treasure regarding the 1953 earthquake and a valuable tool for every new researcher who wants to study and write about the greatest natural disaster in Cyprus during the British era.

**Kyriakos Iakovides**