



Source: Brian Whitaker, 'Illness leaves party a ship without a rudder', *The Guardian* in *The Age* online, 06/01/06.

Tags: [art](#), [countryside](#), [religion](#), [home](#), [travel](#)
Writer/s: [Diana Wood Conroy](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

Underneath the pleasures of the day there was a sense of uncertainty. I woke to the sun coming over the mountain in the small valley of Kalopaniotis in the Troodos mountains in Cyprus. The calls of sparrows and swallows in the eaves, a few village chickens, the sound of water rushing below, crystallised in the cold air.

The two men, the guides who offered to take me to the painted churches, had worked long years abroad. Iannis, who opened the doors of the church with a huge Byzantine key was thin and small, speaking fragments of many languages. He had worked in Saudi Arabia as an electrician for six years to pay for the dowries of his three sisters as his father had died when he was fifteen. The other man, Kyriakos, who had a charming smile in a weathered face had worked as a businessman in the Congo for thirty-six years and spoke Swahili. 'Africa is the source of our wealth in Cyprus', he said.

The heavy door creaked open. Every surface in the church of Saint Sozemos was a maze of colour enhanced by a particular light emerald green, deep ochre, two shades of russet and carmine red linked by deep indigo blue. Everyday life was re-figured through the life of the saint—here were images of people going away, or arriving and eating with friends, or being ill in bed surrounded by children. Finding out one is pregnant, greeting a stranger, drinking water from a cup, eating bread around a table—a constant narrative shaped the vaulted space. Angels participated, with telling glances and helpful gestures, scattering the demons that lurked in the corners of bedrooms.

The small museum at Galata, set up by the school teacher, was full of tools once central to survival, now obsolete and almost incomprehensible. Spindles and whorls, combs and reels for working silk, cotton and wool,

carved looms for weaving as big as small rooms, containers for boiling silkworm cocoons; shears, awls, spikes, and hooks of worn iron; knives for butchering animals, mattocks, rakes and prods for mining copper crowded together in a strange installation, like refugees in a detention centre. A whole series of intricate reed baskets, for housing silkworms, collecting olives or firewood stood below woven and embroidered cloths hung on the walls, stiff with dust.

Since the two guides Iannis and Kyriakos were born here, village life has lost its immemorial pattern. The arduously constructed terraces carved into the hills are wild and uncultivated, the olive trees unpruned and neglected. There are no more donkeys, hardly a horse or a cow in the valley. War, migration and the European Community have broken the mould of tradition. The village is a retirement place, a place of homecoming from Africa or Australia. Many languages, not only Greek, are murmured in the cafe.

The ancient Greek word 'epiphany' hung in the midwinter air on January 6th. It means to suddenly appear, in a fresh manifestation of events. The old house I stayed in had been bought as a ruin by Arianna's father and slowly remade, with a dancing floor for her and a studio for her artist husband. Out of the great pile of objects left in the house abandoned by the family thirty years before, from the poetry of burnt, worn, indecipherable documents and cloth, the artists had made new art works. With glimpses of the templates of ritual and performance, mirroring the instinctive shapes of artefacts, they had gradually assembled another pattern, full of richness and unfamiliarity.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Diana Wood Conroy.