THE LEGACY OF THE LARNACA SALT LAKE
By Alexis Michaelides

The bay of the Salines with the goddess protector (Medieval map 16th century)
There are 4 lakes which all together compose in Larnaca an important wetland. Only one, the largest, is a natural salt lake.
The salt lake was a natural habitat of sea life for 3 million years, as fossil shell life of this age can be found in its surrounding hills.
The salt lake (Salines) has been a reference point throughout history and one of the main reasons why the city of Larnaca lived for 4000 continuous and uninterrupted years, which is a rare record.
The effortless production of salt, ready for collection every summer, was a riddle explained only as a blessing of God.
The salt of the lake is not derived by the nearby sea, but it springs from a gigantic geological stock buried deep under the surrounding area.
The rain water dilutes the underground salt and make it extremely dense. The evaporation in the summer time dries the lake up every August, delivering the salt for collection.
The lake is metamorphosed into a wetland in the winter, a home for thousands of migrating birds. At the time of no hunting prohibitions, which started in the 20th century, the salt lake wetland habitat was providing free food to the people.
The area was thought to be under the blessing of Artemis, the goddess of hunting. Her most important temple in the island of Cyprus was at the shores of the salt lake. The temple was decorated with her beautiful statue of the 4th century B.C. Today it is considered the finest statue ever found in Cyprus,
In the extremely salty water, a tiny unique shrimp known as “artemia salina” is providing food for its flying visitors. This tiny shrimp is the reason why thousands of migrating birds choose the Larnaca salt lake in their winter voyages.
Among the first sea people to visit and trade with the city, were the Phoenicians from the city of Tyr. Legendary queen Elissa, founder of Carthage, firstly emigrated at Larnaca.
A new religion was born in the area. Jesus Christ had a closed friend called Lazarus, who left Palestine in fear after the crucifixion of Jesus. He arrived in Larnaca and became its first Bishop. From then onwards the salt lake is thought to be a miracle of the Saint. His church is 300 meters from the lake.
In the Venetian period salt collection started with a religious processing starting from the nearby church of Saint Lazarus, ending at the salt lake, where there was a religious blessing.
When the Ottomans occupied Cyprus they built a beautiful mosque at the shores of the salt lake. They named it Hala Sultan.
Today, in peaceful coexistence you can walk around the wetland area and see the remains of a Greek temple, a Christian church of 1225 years of age and a beautiful Moslem mosque, all enjoyed by the locals and visitors. This is the great magic of the legacy of the Larnaca Salt lake.
The other part of the salt lake legacy is the wealth that has been generated over the millennia and recently from tourism as a place of attraction levying the civilization of the city.
The first battle was won against the ambitious oracle of the business sector to maintain the salt lake into a permanent lake, which could develop the area into a very attractive tourist resort.
The second battle was lost. The controversy was fought over the question of the large expansion of the airport in the area of the wetland for the benefit of the national economy and its tourism.
I think that ecology face similar dilemmas all over the world. The opponents are very strong and laborious. Therefore, strong voices and ecological reason are vital if we can invest on any hope for the planet.

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