

## CHAPTER 6 ASKYPHOU AND DISTRICT

[Itinerary: Komitades – Nimboros [now officially called Imbros] – Askyphou – Prosnero [now officially called Embrosneros]; Asphendou; Kallikratis]

The coast to the east of Hora Sphakion is not as precipitous as it is to the west. There is a strip of low barren land between the hills and the sea, and this strip reaches almost as far as Rodakino; hence as far as Myrtos [near Hierapetra] the coast is steep. On the low-lying strip by the sea is Frangokastello. At the foot of the hills is a series of small villages: Komitades, Vouvas, Kapsodasos, Patsianos, Skaloti and others. In the winter these are full of people, in the summer they are all but deserted. And the reason is that they serve as winter villages for the people who all the summer live up in the mountains. For these hills are cleft by a series of gorges already mentioned, and at the top of each gorge there is some little plain amongst the hills containing a village, and the people have in general two houses, one in each, for winter and summer use, much like the people of Magasa and Karydi who at the season come down to the lowlands of Palaikastro [in eastern Crete].

Of these upland plains perhaps we may count four. By far the largest with several hamlets in it is Askyphou, approached through a gorge [Imbros gorge] from Komitades. A path from the plain leads northwards over the hills and descends to Prosnero and Vamos and so to Canea. A little south of the Askyphou basin is the smaller hollow of Nimboros. South-east of Askyphou is Asphendou, the summer village no doubt of Vouvas, which is reached by a path probably through a gorge, but I have never traversed it. When I went to Asphendou it was over the hills from Kallikratis on my way to Askyphou. Asphendou differs from the others in being more open to the sea, which is in fact visible over the top of the hills from the village. The situation of the place is thus not so much like a basin as like a coal shovel.

Kallikratis, which is to the east again, is like a smaller Askyphou and is reached by a gorge from Skaloti.<sup>1</sup> This gorge drains the plain; in fact all these places have thus no need of *katavothra* [limestone swallow-hole] to keep them from becoming lakes like the plain of Lasithi see ch. 24]. The road through the gorge is new. The lower part of it is V-shaped and in the upper part there is fine rock scenery, but it is in no part so fine as the gorge between Komitades and Nimboros.<sup>2</sup>

All these villages should now be described on their respective routes. I begin from the west.

Komitades I have already described [ch. 5] as one of the villages on the coast route from Myrthios to Hora Sphakion. It is situated just at the mouth of the narrow gorge which opens first on the hollow containing the hamlet of Nimboros. I went over the ground in July 1917, starting from Hora Sphakion. At Komitades the path enters the gorge through which it goes for two hours between steep rocks, wooded with wild cedar. Dittany grows on the rocks. The gorge is extremely narrow, in some places only about eight feet wide between the rock walls, clearly cut out by water. Then the gorge opens upon the little mountain-surrounded plain of Nimboros, and then passes over a col and down into the larger basin of Askyphou.

All this region of the White Mountains is full of local stories. At Suda Bay I met a Greek lieutenant called Mikhali Koutroumba, and he took me to see his parents who live in the winter in a little cottage above the road from Suda to Izzeddin. The house is just above a café by a big plane tree which served as bounds for our sailors. The father is from Nimboros and they live there in the summer. The wife [MK's

mother] is from Kapsodasos. [The following sentence is from a separate sheet dated 31 March 1919:] They told me the versions of the stories I have recorded from Askiphou [ch. 12]. They told me that near Nimboros there is a cave and in it lived a monster (*therio*). A shepherd nearby found that his *yiaourti* [yoghurt] was always eaten and set his boy to watch. The boy saw the monster come out of the cave and eat the *yiaourti* and then the monster ate the boy. The father vowed to build a church at the place where he should kill the monster. The dying monster vomited up the boy but he was already dead (δεν ήζειενε). The church built was the old church of Christos at Askiphou, which is still standing.

Askiphou is a larger place in a larger basin. The hills are still fairly well wooded, and the hamlets are all round the edge of the plain, like an inhabited Nida [see ch. 15] or a smaller Lasithi. A sign of modernity is the red roofing, common and ugly, of which Kallikratis as yet has none. On a double-peaked low hill which juts out into the plain are the ruins of two Turkish forts. These were built like many other forts by the Turks in 1869 at the end of the great insurrection and held by them until 1877. The ruined castle which overlooks Hora Sphakion from the east is another.

Askiphou stories [overlap with Nimboros stories above]. In the gorge near Nimboros a little above the path (I think on the east side just before reaching Nimboros from Hora, but I did not note this at the time) is a cave called *του φιδά το σπήλιο* [the serpent's cave]. A hunter who used to deposit his game near the cave noticed that it was always eaten. He found it was a snake and pursued the snake as far as the hamlet of Goni (*Γωνί*) in the Askiphou plain, vowing to build a church at the place where he should kill it. He killed it where the church *του Χριστού* at *Γωνί* stands, the oldest church in Askiphou. I did not visit the church. According to another version the snake had eaten the child of the man and when it was killed the child was found alive inside the snake.

A woman of Askiphou was carried away by the Turks to an island. She prayed to the Cross to bring her back and was miraculously removed and recovered consciousness in the church *του Σταυρωμένου* [of the crucified Christ] at Μουρί near Khora Sphakio to the north [south].

Prosnero, called locally Proinero, is most famous for the now ruined house of Alidakis, a wealthy Turk who was besieged and killed in his house by the Christians from Sphakia in the year 1774. He had large property in lands but above all in flocks of sheep and goats, and it was with the inevitable result of quarrels with the shepherds of his neighbours.

A notable possession of Alidakis was the great cistern of Krapí, a big open-walled cistern still to be seen. It lies south [north] of Askiphou not long after the path passes the lip of the basin and begins to descend. From Krapí, where there is however no village, there was a carriage road going down to Vrisi [Vryses] and leaving Prosnero to the left.

The story of Alidakis' death is given us in Gregorios Papadopetrakis' *History of Sphakia*, pp. 158ff., and is preserved also in a long ballad. In both cases it is of course presented from the Sphakiote point of view.<sup>3</sup>

The immediate cause of the attack on Alidakis was a quarrel between his people and the shepherds of Papisiphis at the place called Poros tou Mantili at Kallikratis. This place is a valley leading out of the Kallikratis plain to, I think, the west; at the mouth of the valley are a few houses. I have been a little way up the valley from Kallikratis. They quarrelled about the limits of their grazing grounds. Then some of Papisiphis' flocks were carried off by Alidakis' people to Prosnero. Papisiphis then pillages Alidakis' flocks and dairies. Papisiphis captured and killed.

Alidakis collects forces both Turks and Christians. The Christians gather together forces at Askiphou. The tower at Prosnero attacked. The first attackers were posted to shoot Alidakis as he came out of the house (I suppose the gate of the court) in the morning. They missed fire. Then some of Alidakis' people fled and the remaining 120, mostly Christians, were besieged with him in his house. All were killed and the house burned, and it and the village pillaged with the Turkish and the Christian houses. The spoil was taken to Askiphou. Killed: Turks 150, Christians 50, Sphakiotes 18 men and two girls. Date spring of 1774 but the quarrel began earlier; I note the date about 1770.

I note that the fact that Alidakis had so many Christians with him and that the Sphakiotes pillaged the Christian as well as the Turkish houses in Prosnero indiscriminately looks as if the affair was just as much a quarrel between hungry the mountaineers of Askiphou and Kallikratis and the richer landowners, as it was between Turk and Christian. But the narration in Papadopetrakis admits that both Turks and Christians were enemies of the Sphakiotes and upbraids other Cretans for their ingratitude to the Sphakiotes. There is not much doubt that sheep-stealing brigandish mountaineers can never have been popular with the lowlanders, whatever their religion.<sup>i</sup>

### Prosnero Tower of Alidakis, 22 July 1917



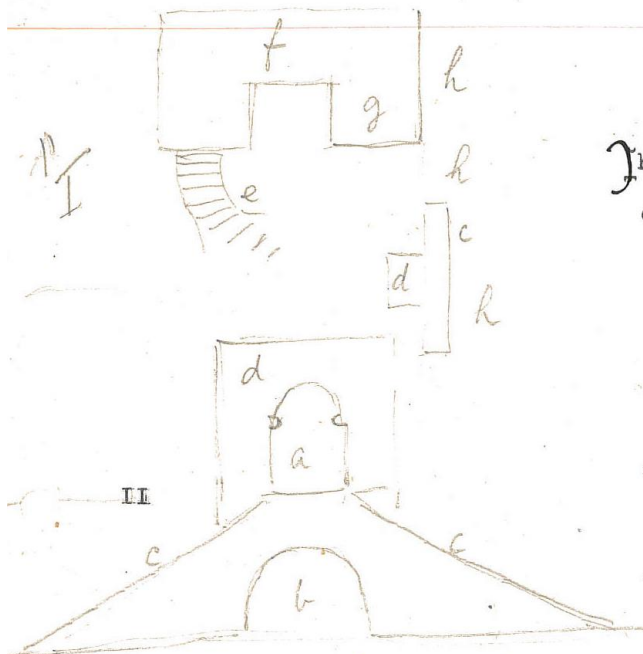
Alidakis' house, April 1992

Finely built with stone mouldings and strong stone ashlar corners. The entrance is to the south by a square gate with an arch which is approached by two inclined planes, one on each side. This brings one into the court and there on the right are a set of steps which lead up to the first floor of the house. The house has a ground floor of a long vaulted hall, perhaps 20 yards long, entered directly from the court. On each side of

<sup>i</sup> v. T[revor] B[attye], 82-83 & Spratt I 53 for Sphakiotes plundering both Turks and Greeks in 1859, and Pashley I 313 for Sphakiotes plundering Arkadi worse than Turks [also ch. 10 here].

the entrance is a wing, the right-hand one destroyed and shown as a ruin in Pashley's sketch, the one on the left being a vaulted room containing an oven. The steps from the court lead up to a terrace (G), from which opens the door of the upper rooms. The first entered is H, which has on the left a big arch and below it a hearth and behind it a chimney (I). From this chimney one can see that there was no higher storey, although people now say that there was. Pashley shows it as it is at present; no higher. The destroyed right wing had also a terrace, as is shown by broken fragments left at its edge by P. Over the right half of the big hall is a terrace open to the sky and, although walled round, it was always open as the door Q to the spiral staircase has a dripstone over it. Round this terrace K is a wall with a double loophole (T) at the back, at the corner (N) the corbels for a turret which has now disappeared, and to the right, at M, a large arched window. The wall round this terrace was originally all about 8 feet high. The side towards the front of the house had no continuous wall, but an opening stepped up at each side (P). Through this opening one got out on to the (open, unwall) destroyed terrace L answering to the terrace G, and the steps towards A served as access to the roof of H and Q. These steps are well preserved; those on the opposite side which led nowhere are much more destroyed. This terrace K with its wall was perhaps protected by an awning. [Small sketch of roof H & Q, and destroyed steps, not reproduced here]

The great hall was the public room opening on the court. The oven is probably where it was originally. The upstairs rooms are the private part of the house with private access to the hall by the spiral staircase. The terrace K gave a view out from the private part of the house and is protected from observation by its wall. This type of two-winged house [can be found] also at Kephali in W. Crete.



I. General plan of house and court  
The court now neglected with a few outbuildings round it

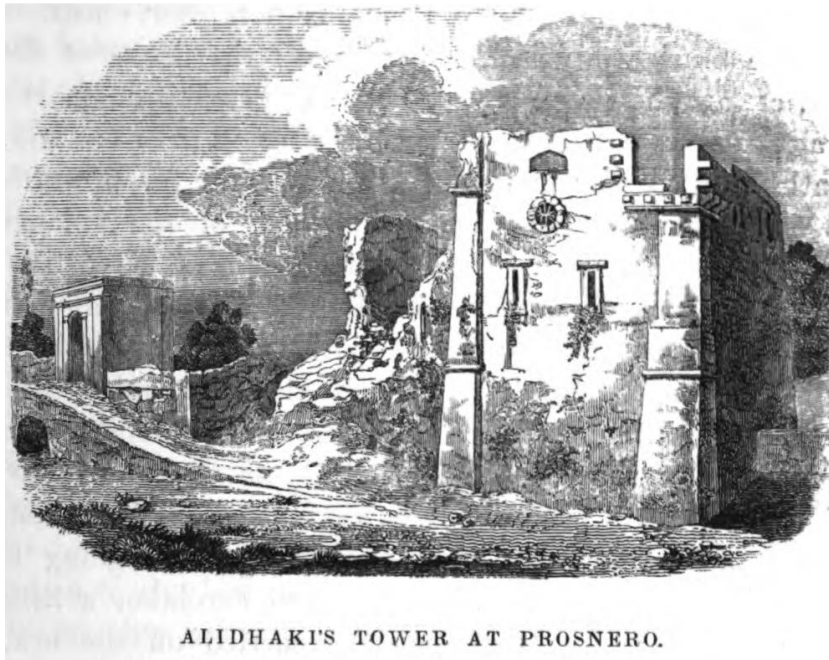
II. Elevation of gatehouse and approach to court.

- A. Entrance
- B. Archway over which the approaching sloped ways, C C, are constructed
- C C. Approaches to the entrance to the court, which is at a higher level than the road, in elevation in II, in plan in I
- D. The gatehouse in elevation in II, in plan in I
- E. Steps leading up from the court to the entrance on the first floor of the house

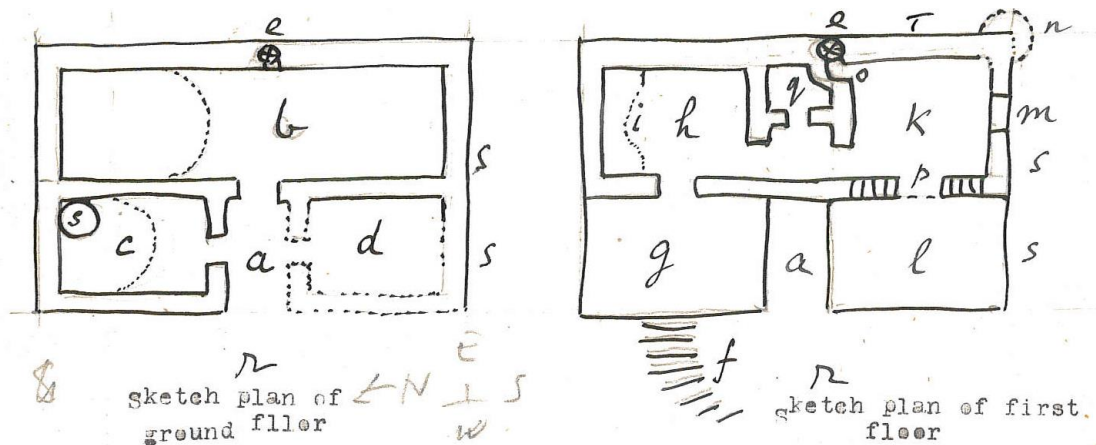
- F. The house itself (for details see plans on next sheet)
- G. The rebuilt part of the house
- H H H. The public road

The house stands in the outskirts of the village of Prosnero and still bears the name of Alidakis. It is inhabited by Christians as there are now no Turks at Prosnero. I spent midday there coming down from Askyprou to Vamos.

Good drawing of this house in Pashley.



Pashley II 159



- A. Entrance to ground floor hall, open to sky
- B. Big vaulted hall occupying all back half of ground floor
- C. Vaulted room with oven (S)
- D. Rebuilt wing with red tiled roof in place of *doma* [flat roof]; nothing old here.  
Pashley's view shows this wing as in ruins, perhaps result of siege.
- E. Spiral staircase from ground floor hall to upstairs rooms
- F. Steps leading from court (R) to first floor rooms
- G. Open terrace

- H. Room with hearth (I) with arch over it to catch smoke
  - I. Hearth
  - K. Open terrace with wall all round it
  - L. Red tiled roof of new wing. Originally no doubt a terrace like G and approached by opening in the wall P
  - M. Window in wall surround terrace
  - N. Ruined turret at corner of walled terrace
  - O. Entrance to spiral staircase E
  - P. Entrance to destroyed terrace. On east side the terrace wall rises in steps; those on the right evidently led up to the roof over H and Q; now broken down
  - Q. Inner room. Of the details of how the stair fits into this room I am not sure, but I know that the stair is in the thickness of the wall
  - R. Courtyard
  - S. Public road
  - T. Double loophole
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The next gorge to the east is that at the top of which lies Asphendou and at the bottom Vouvas. The day I came to Asphendou all the village was out of doors by the church at the funeral of a girl. As she was carried to the grave the coffin was open to show the face of the dead, an old practice now being suppressed.<sup>4</sup> The church has a flat roof like a house.

Of churches with flat roofs I have seen only three and all in Sphakia. Two are in Askyphou, one at the hamlet of Kare and the other at Amoudari. And this one at Asphendou is the third. I have been into the second and third and took especial note of the Asphendou church. Outside they look just like a house with a flat roof [δῶμα] and a dome. Internally they are vaulted and all these three are of the double type, with two barrel-vaulted naves separated by a pillar, so that the vaults spring on the outer side from the side walls and on the inner side from the crowns of two arches which span the spaces between the east and west walls and this central pillar. In such a church the vaults usually show on the outside and form a double-gabled roof. But where the roof is flat, the walls are all carried up to the level of the crowns of the vault and the whole space then levelled up with earth. The plan, owing to the double nave, is not far off a square, with the two apses protruding from the east wall [sketch not reproduced here].

The next pair of villages to the east is Kallikratis in the hills and, at the bottom of the gorge, the winter village of Skaloti.

Of Kallikratis there is a good deal to be said.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sphakia country. Journey from Kallikratis – Asphendou – Askyphou to Vrises. 27 August 1917**

Kallikratis is like a smaller Askyphou. The plain is drained by the gorge leading south, the road in which is new. The lower part of this gorge is V-shaped and the upper part narrow with fine rock scenery but never so narrow as the Askyphou gorge. The plain is mostly vines. The only red roof is that of the new church.<sup>6</sup> Near the church is the opening of the ravine called *O poros tou mandili*, the boundary between the lands of Alidakis and of Papisiphis who lived in Kallikratis.

Patsianos is one of the villages on the coastal plain, but I was told at Kallikratis that somewhere to the south, and so not far from the sea, there are two deserted villages, Old Patsianos and Xiropolis. They seem to have been destroyed by



Algerine pirates: an excellent hint to the inhabitants of these parts to have a second village in the hills to flee to when the village by the sea was threatened. The people at Kallikratis, however, believe that they were destroyed by a vampire, a *katakhanas*, who used to come down at night from the church of St George in the eastern part of Kallikratis.<sup>ii</sup> It is also in the eastern part of the Kallikratis plain that the Drakolakkos [Dragon Pit] was pointed out to me.

Στην Άμπελο ο Γερλή Αγάς εκάτσε τυροκόμος,  
μα χάλασέν του το τυρί και βρώμισεν ο κόσμος.  
[At Ambelos Yerli Aga stopped to make cheese,  
but his cheese went off and stank the place out.]

I was told at Kallikratis that this Aga in 1866 went from Candia to Sphakia to carry off girls; at Ambelos between Asphendou and Askyphou the Sphakiotes killed him and all but one of his men, and made this rhyme.<sup>7</sup>

Phoradolakkos [Mare Pit] is the place near Kallikratis where the people of Alidakis had a quarrel with the people of Papisiphis of Kallikratis. I don't know where this is, but I think it is distinct from Alidakis' big cistern near Krapí on the way from Askyphou to Prosnero.

## BEEHIVES

In the gorge leading up to Kallikratis, on the western side, is an extraordinary apiary. The gorge is narrow and the rocks on both sides precipitous, but fifty or sixty feet above the floor of the gorge the cliff is broken by a sloping shelf and on this are placed about a hundred beehives of the flower-pot shape\* with holes round the bottom [sketch not reproduced]. Access is gained by a tree-trunk which serves as a ladder. The hives are set on little walls (terraces: δέτες, sg. δέτης). The present owner's father put them there and ate the honey at Kallikratis. I saw hives of the same shape in a big apiary on the road from Bali to Melidoni. It is more common, at least in old Greece,<sup>8</sup> to have longish clay tubes placed horizontally with a disc of wood at each end.

\*[Ms note:] These are common at least [?] central Crete. Later (1918) a man was taking honey and brought down a loose boulder which fell on his mule which was waiting below and killed it. John<sup>9</sup> told me he had heard this.<sup>10</sup>

## BOOTS

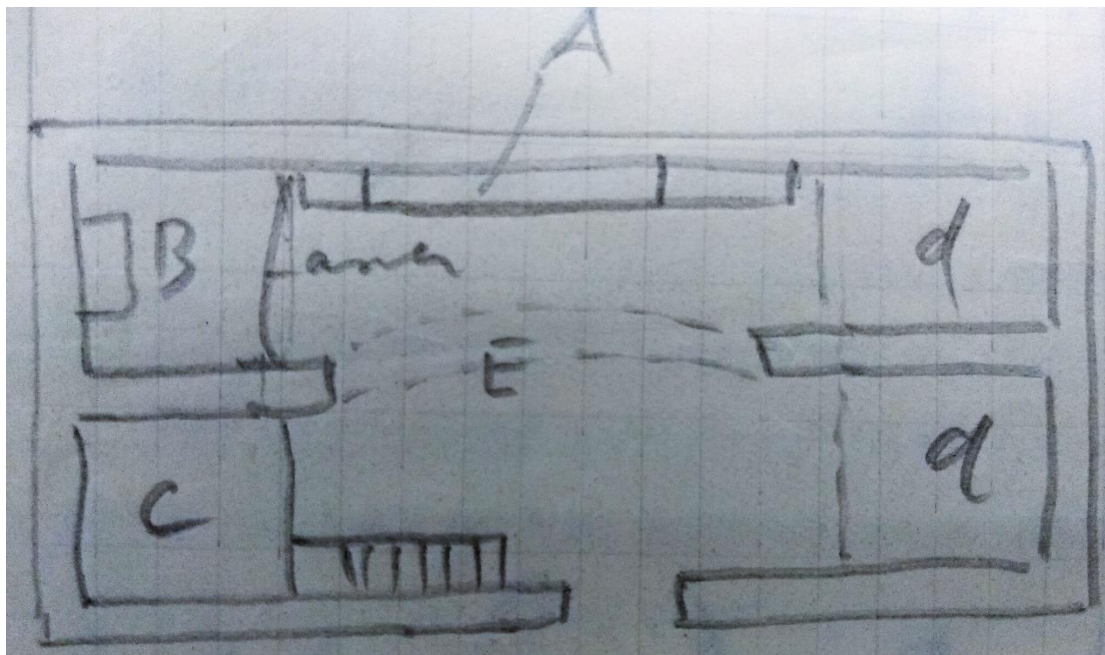
Kallikratis 26 August 1917. At Askyphou 21 July 1917 I said that δόμος (pl. δόμοι) was a wooden sandal with leather straps. This was a misunderstanding: At Kallikratis I learned that it is a pad made of a rolled-up strip of leather. Two of these are affixed to each boot, one on the sole and one on the heel, and they save the sole from wear, but it requires some practice not to trip up. They have all but passed out of use, but one man is said still to wear them at Askyphou.

<sup>ii</sup> *Istoria ton Sphakion* by Greg. Papadopetrakis, p. 24. See Pashley, II, 226, who has the story wrong. P. 28. In describing Kallikratis he says "in the east of the plain is the little church where the *katakhanas* was".



Later I saw a man wearing them at Kritsa, where they are called δομάρια.<sup>11</sup>

## HOUSES



Plan of *kamaroto spiti* of which I saw several at Kallikratis.<sup>iii</sup> Often no windows. Glass never. The recesses are much deeper than in such houses in Siteia and therefore the plan is much more oblong and less square. They are better built altogether than such houses in Siteia, floor earth; the flat roof supported by the trunks of trees called *dhokaria*, not by the imported sawn and planed rafters called *traves*.

Key to sketch:

- A Built bench.
- B Hearth under open chimney. This recess has an arch in front of it to keep the smoke from the rest of the house.
- C Sleeping platform (*sofas*) reached by built staircase.
- D Sleeping platforms reached by wooden ladders.
- E The main arch of the house.

<sup>iii</sup> Original sketches rather squarer than this.



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**Peter Mackridge's notes**

<sup>1</sup> In fact the Kallikratis gorge goes to Patsianos.

<sup>2</sup> According to Simon Price et al., “Sphakia in Ottoman census records: a *vakif* and its agricultural production”, in Antonis Anastasopoulos (ed.), *The Eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman Rule: Crete, 1645-1840* (Rethymno 2008), p. 89, Askyprou belonged with Vouvas, Imbros to Vraskas, Asphendou to Kolokasia, and Kallikratis to Patsianos and Kapsodasos.

<sup>3</sup> The story of Alidakis is also told briefly by Pashley II 169.

<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, this is still normal practice in the Greek Orthodox Church.

<sup>5</sup> Yet he says very little!

<sup>6</sup> The double-naved church of the Panagia was built in 1890.

<sup>7</sup> The lengthy song from which this couplet is taken actually refers to a battle fought in July 1821, during the Greek Revolution. According to the song, the Yerli Aga (a title given to the leader of the native-born janissaries) came to Sphakia from Candia with several thousand troops to kill, loot and abduct women. They were routed on the small mountain plateau of Ambelos.

<sup>8</sup> After Greece's territorial gains from the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan Wars (1912-13), it became customary to talk about the New Territories (the northern mainland and various islands, particularly Crete) in order to distinguish them from the “Old Greece” (the southern mainland and many other islands) which had constituted the Kingdom of Greece until then.

<sup>9</sup> I don't know whether Dawkins means John Pendlebury or some local Yannis.

<sup>10</sup> Dawkins provides fuller details of Cretan beehives in ch. 14.

<sup>11</sup> These additions to the soles of Cretan shepherds' boots had already been described by Spratt II 155.