

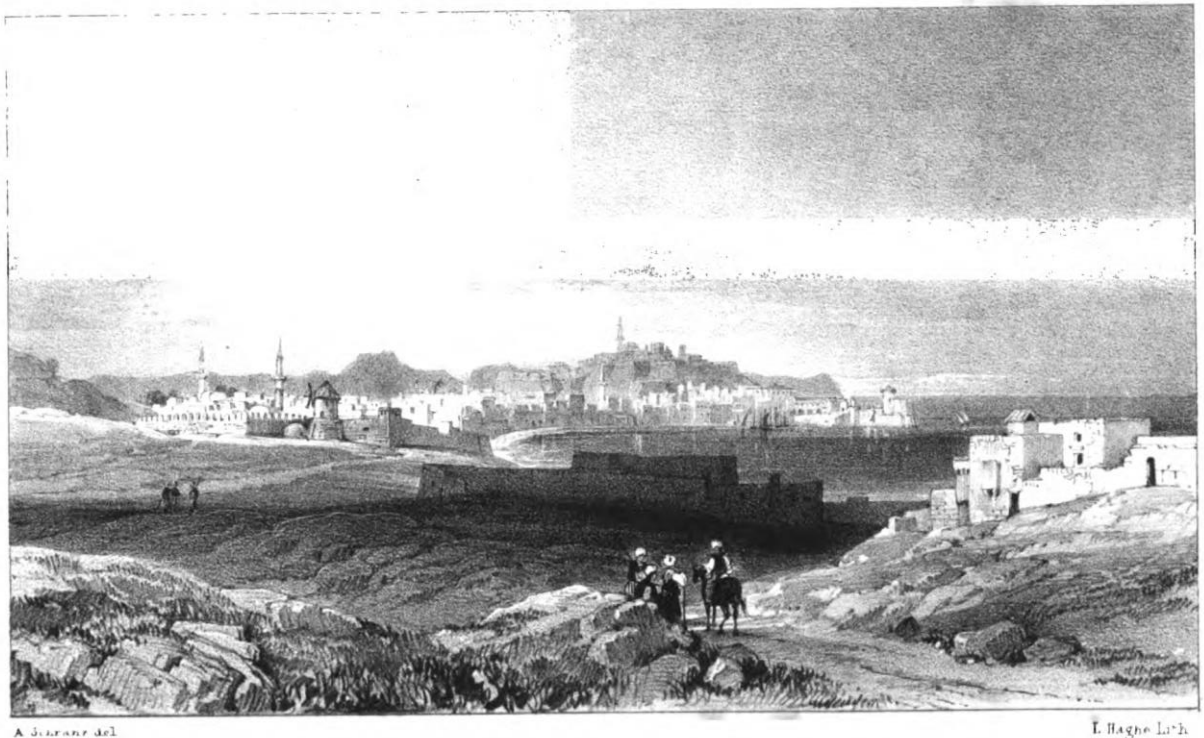
CHAPTER 8

SUDA BAY TO RETIMO; THE MONASTERY OF ROUSTIKA

The carriage road runs along the southern slopes above Suda Bay [i.e. on the south side of the bay] with a view across the water to Akrotiri and, at the mouth of the harbour, the fortified island of Suda. At the mouth of the bay it passes the fort of Izzeddin, now used as a prison, and then descends to the village of Kalyves, The Huts, by the sea. Somewhere at this point the road stopped for many years, but by the time of the war it had been continued as far as Retimo, which tended to put out of use the old mule road to Retimo which went along by the sea. From Kalyves the road goes on to Vamos, which has become for all traffic the centre of the province of Apokoronas. To it descends the track that leads over the mountains from Sphakia. From Vamos the road continues to the place marked on Kiepert's map as Halmyros, where salt springs rise near the sea much as they do at the other places of the same name in Crete. There is one near Candia and another near Agios Nikolaos. At this Halmyros, called more commonly Armyro [now officially Almyros], the salt springs are about half a mile east of the new village of Yoryoupolis, close to the old path to Retimo just after it leaves the new carriage road.

Yoryoupolis, *Γεωργιούπολις*, is quite a new place and is named after Prince George, during whose term in Crete [as High Commissioner] it was founded. The houses are on a knoll and grouped round a rustic square. To the west a river flows out to the sea. An abundance of eucalyptus trees have been planted to dry the air and help to keep away fever. The people are, I believe, for the most part from Askyprou. The object of the foundation was, I suppose, to provide a convenient port for the villages of Sphakia and to save the people the necessity of taking their goods either to Canea or to Retimo. Hora Sphakion itself, being on the inhospitable south coast, is not of much use as a port.

The carriage road to Retimo goes on eastwards, passing always a little inland through a series of villages, the last of which are Atsipopoulo and Prines. The road winds down over the bare slopes around Atsipopoulo over country well wooded with the *velanidi* oak. Before reaching Retimo it coincides with the old mule-path by the sea and enters Retimo in the same way. This old path from Yoryoupolis first passes along the beach and then all along the rocky coast as far as Retimo. This seaboard route is extremely rough and toilsome and is called by the very fitting name of the *Kakon Oros*, the Bad Mountain.¹ I have passed it several times, once in heavy rain and once by night [*added from another sheet*: I did this beach once in the night with the post from Retimo to Vamos, which was the least pleasant]. As it approaches Retimo it leaves the coast and goes a little inland, joining the new carriage road. All through it is paved with the roughest and most irregular *kalderimi*.



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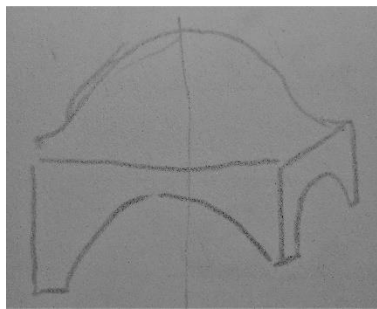
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R E T H Y M N O S

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Rethymno from the east (Pashley I 100)

The approach to Retimo is fine and was not long ago very much finer. The castle, on the eastern side of which the town lies, stands up very impressively; on the very top is a domed mosque, but the loss to the effect by the destruction of the minaret has been



very marked. Just before the town was reached there is a spring and this was covered by a very beautiful Turkish dome resting on four open arches; these dome roofings, whether open like this one or closed as over a tomb, are called by their Turkish name of *koubé* [*kubbe*]. This particular *koubé* no longer exists. During the war it was already in bad repair and in 1918 I noticed that it had either fallen down or been destroyed. It is a thousand pities that this and so many

other beautiful buildings have disappeared owing, of course, to the very natural revulsion of the Greeks to anything which could remind them of the Turks. Patriotism is much stronger than aesthetic feeling, and it has been of no avail that these Turkish structures had a quality of elegance and quietly natural beauty that placed them in quite another world than anything constructed by the Christians in Crete one may say since antiquity.

If now we leave aside both the new and old roads from Yoryoupolis to Retimo and make a detour inland, we shall pass through some of the most beautiful scenery in Crete and also be able to visit the monastery of Roustika. My own route to Roustika was by way of Dramia and Episkopi and Ariyropolis [Argyroupoli], and I thus passed very close to the Lake of Kurnas, the only lake in Crete. I did not myself visit it, but it has been excellently described by Mr Trevor-Battye.



Aryiropolis is in a fine situation on a kind of spur of the hills, on what the Cretans call a mouri, *μουρί*. In the village are two Venetian churches, Agios Nikolaos and Panagia Baroutsis [Μπαροτσιανή], named from the [Barozzi] family. The latter is a fine church with columns close to the walls inside, though the effect has been rather spoiled by whitewash. It has a chancel-arch decorated with trefoil-shaped holes; this is figured by Gerola.² In the village over a door on a lintel is a part of a Latin inscription: OMNIA·MVNDI·FVMVS·ET·V. At each end of this lettering is the capital of a column and on the right there is a piece of a further lintel block which evidently once had, as the villagers say it had, more letters – of course, the rest of VMBRA.³ This was noted too by Pashley [I 84]. Near the village are, as far as I remember, for my notes are not clear on the point, the remains of a sort of laid out pleasaunce for walking in. Like this inscribed lintel, it must have belonged to a good Venetian house. Another trace of the Venetians is at Agios Constantinos, a village nearby. Here there are the ruins of a fine house of the Venetian period. Over the door is a coat of arms, a good deal worn and of the bearings I could only make out a horizontal band.

Xanthoudidis told me that Aryiropolis was until recent years called The City, *η Πόλις*, but as the neighbours used to laugh at this name, I suppose because the village was not much like Constantinople, which is to the Greeks *η Πόλις* – the City par excellence – and insisted upon calling it *Γαῖδουρόπολις*, Donkey Town, or *Σαμαρόπολις*, Saddle Town, the people changed its name to Aryiropolis, *Αργυρόπολις*, the Silver City. Khourmouzis, writing in 1842, calls it *Γαῖδουρόπολις*, Donkey Town, but adds a note to say that it is also called the Silver City. Spratt in [1858] (II, p. 119) says that Lappa – this is the ancient name of the places, the ruins of the ancient Lappa being quite nearby – was in his time called *η Πόλις*, the City, and mockingly Donkey Town. The reason for this, he says, was that the people behaved in a cowardly manner in the struggles with the Turks that preceded the battle of Navarino.

Such changes of names are not very uncommon in Crete and the spirit which leads to them, mockery and the desire to escape mockery, has led to the disuse of several old names of both interest and beauty. The substitutes are invariably dull and, like most modern municipal inventions, without either charm or interest, but for the inhabitants they have the immense advantage of being so exactly like other names as to offer no handle of any sort for derision. Here are some other examples from Crete. There was, on the coast of the Gulf of Mirabello, a city called in ancient times Istron, and this name, in its modern form Istronas, survived as the name of the present village near the old site at least until Pashley made his map of Crete in 1837.ⁱ Since then it has totally disappeared. Again, it was Xanthoudidis who told me the reason. The name Istronas reminded the people and, what was worse, their satirical neighbours, of the phrase *strono to moulari*, *στρώνω το μουλάρι*, “I set a saddle on the mule”. The old name therefore began to seem comic and derogatory and the people therefore simply gave it up and now call the place by the quite colourless name of Kalo Horio, the Good Village; and so it is likely to remain, at least until the next local movement towards fishing out and refurbishing ancient and obsolete names. So too even more recently the village in East Crete which was called, when I was first there in 1903, Stravodoxari, the Crooked Bow, has changed its old name for the banal Stavrochori, the Village of the Cross.⁴

The neighbouring village, now called Agios Stephanos, was then called Ghra. This name was given up probably because it seemed comic that a village should have the name of a kind of gun, or perhaps it was too near to *γραιά*, which means an old woman and in East Crete is pronounced *γρά*, *ghra*, exactly like the name of the village. Here again the general modern mania for banishing any of the local oddities or peculiarities which give an interest to life has played its usual melancholy part.ⁱⁱ

Roustika⁵

The monastery of St Elias, commonly called Roustika, lies about five minutes' walk from the village of the same name. The buildings lie on three sides of a square court; the north side is closed by a rail and in the middle of it is the gate of the monastery with an inscription over it dating to 1641. The church is close against the south side of the court and near it is the abbot's room. This is a pleasant little old-fashioned place, very far from the modern ideal of high rooms and ostentation. On the right as one enters the monks were, when I was there, building a high two-storey guest-house, but

ⁱ Robert Pashley, *Travels in Crete*, 1837.

ⁱⁱ Here I draw upon a paper called ‘Folk-Memory in Crete’, published in *Folk-Lore*, XLI (1930); the special reference is to p. 17. For instances of these changes in place-names in other parts of Greece I refer to an article by Politis in *Λαογραφία*.

it was not then finished. Its height makes it very much out of keeping with the old low buildings. As is usually the case, the new guest-house, whilst it adds to the comfort, detracts immeasurably from the beauty of the place. Here at Roustika, though most of the roofs are now of the new French tiles, the general effect is extremely pretty. I know of no monastery in Crete which has the same quiet compelling charm. The court slopes slightly to the north, and the ground is just the bare rock, in the cracks of which trees have managed to find a living; they are not large but apparently flourishing. I noticed lemons, a walnut, vines on trellises and especially a beautiful myrtle. This grows up with three quite clean stems and a spreading head like an olive tree. When I saw it in November it was heavy with berries. This and an old tree growing in a similar way with a trunk in front of the club at Nicosia are the two finest myrtles I have ever seen.

The inscriptions on the buildings support Xanthoudidis' opinion that the monastery, like many others in Crete, was built at the end of the Venetian period. The oldest inscription is on the belfry. It runs: '1637, July 20th. With the prayers and at the expense of the servant of God, the priest and monk Metrophanes Vlastos, abbot'.⁶

Next after the belfry, and no doubt the church, the monks built the gate. The inscription over it, which I have already mentioned, runs [not reproduced here].⁷

The formula is the same as the first inscription: '1641, July 1st. With the prayers and at the expense of the servant of God, the priest and monk Metrophanes Vlastos, who was also abbot, formerly called Markomanopoulos'. Thus we have recorded the activities of the abbot Metrophanes, surnamed Vlastos and descended from a man called Marco-Manoli.

The last of these building inscriptions is in capital letters on the north wall of the church. It runs [not reproduced here].⁸

That is: '1831, in the month of This church except the belfry was built from the foundations at his (? whose) expense and with the co-operation and contributions of certain Christians'. The name of the month was left a blank because when the inscription was cut the exact month was not known, and afterwards it was never filled up. This building in 1831 involves some previous destruction, and Xanthoudidis is probably right in his conjecture that this was in 1821 or about then.⁹ Nothing else has been built since then except, I think, the new guest-house.

But we have another inscription dated to 1596 which mentions the family of the abbot Metrophanes who built the belfry and the gate. A few yards north-west of the monastery is the now ruined church of St John the Evangelist, called the Fragrant [Αγ. Ιωάννου του Μυρωδῆ]. In this church Xanthoudidis saw and read, but only by means of a glass and with great difficulty, an inscription in capital letters. A few years ago the church fell into ruins and the monks brought the inscription to the monastery and put it under the arch of an altar-tomb in the south-west corner of the court. It was broken across by its fall and the last line damaged, so that where Xanthoudidis read *Μανολη*, only an *η* is now left. As I copied it in so much better circumstances, it is not strange that I can give a more correct copy than he was able to. It runs [Greek text not reproduced here].¹⁰

And in English: 'This church was built in the name of the holy (and) glorious apostle and evangelist, the friend and virgin, John the Divine, in the year 1596 on the eighth of the month of October, at the expense and by the zeal of the lady Viola Vlastopoula, one time (wife) of Master Constantine, and of Master Gerasimos Petropoulos, one time Marko-Manoli'.¹¹ In this inscription the occurrence of the names Vlastopoula and Marco-Manoli make it plain that the persons are some relation

to the abbot Metrophanes, who surname was Vlastos and he was kin to the Marko-Manolis.

In the abbot's room are some old books, but they say that in 1866 two monks took away their treasures for safety and the Turks seized the caïque. But the books they now have are in a lamentable condition mostly with the frontispieces gone. In particular I noted an apparently old Psalter in Turkish in Greek characters; two copies of the *akolouthia* [liturgy] of John the Eremite [see ch. 4]; Lausiatic history; a fine set of *Minologia* [books containing the lives of the saints celebrated in a particular month] printed at Venice; a gospel book presented by the Russians during the occupation [1898 onwards]. Many of the books contain the formula, which I neglected to take down in the Greek, 'This book belongs to the Moni of Agios Elias Roustika and whosoever alienates it may he fall under the curse of Agios Elias'. In one book there is the addition 'until he return it'.

Roustika: the bells

Pashley, Vol. I, p. 97 [99], tells us that in the courtyard were suspended three bronze bells of Venetian make, bearing the founders' names and the dates 1634 and 1636. Of these two are still there. The larger one hangs in the belfry. It bears four reliefs of the usual kind – Gerola shows examples – and the inscription, which I give from Xanthoudidis' copy: DOMENICO MACHARINI FECE MDCXXXVI.¹²

The small bell hangs outside the church below the belfry. It has the date MCLXV [MDLXV] and in a square cartel the inscription SANTINUS / DE. REGIS / MEDIOLANN / SI.F. OPVS. Above the inscription is a relief of the virgin, on the other side of the bell a relief of St George.¹³

As for Pashley's third bell, on the margin of the copy of Xanthoudidis' paper in the monastery library someone has written in Greek: 'There is also another small bell in the little church of Kera with an inscription in relief in a square cartel: DOMENICO / MACHARINI / F. MDCXXIII (1624)'. I know nothing of the church of Kera, but it would seem to be near the monastery and, though the date is 1624 and not 1634, this may well be Pashley's third bell.¹⁴

Of such Venetian bells in Crete Gerola gives a list of no less than [48],¹⁵ to which I can add the bell at the monastery of Agios Pandeileimon near Phodele. Dr Xanthoudidis has told me that Venetian bells are sometimes dug up in Crete. They were brought to the island in the Venetian period. Then, when the Turks came, the people buried them to keep them safe as the Turks have a great dislike of bells: they think, it seems, that in every bell there dwells a demon who speaks with the soul and that the sound of the bell is his voice. This hatred of the Turks for bells partly accounts for the use in Greek monasteries of *semantra* instead of bells, though there is also the fact that the *semantron* is cheaper and more suited to everyday use because it does not carry with it the idea of festivity which is almost inseparable from the bell. At least since Turkish times *semantra* have been in common use in Cretan monasteries. The common form I have noticed is a half hoop-shaped iron bar suspended by a cord passed through two holes in it. Struck, it produces a loud harsh clangour. The wooden *semantron*, a long plank generally split at the ends and suspended by the middle, of which Curzon in his *Monasteries of the Levant* gives a drawing, is certainly not usual in Crete: it seems to belong to Athos and monasteries further east, where again I have never seen the Cretan iron hoop *semantron*. At Toplou they have several of the iron hoops, and one iron slab used for the purpose. The bells there are all new and were put up when Cyril was abbot, that is around and

about 1910. They all bear his name. Not only bells were hidden from the Turks. Eikons, too, were sometimes buried and therefore sometimes found. These real discoveries give a basis to all sorts of miraculous finds of the sort. A dream of such a hidden bell led to the British School excavation of a Minoan house at Plati in Lasithi in 1914. A woman dreamed that a bell was hidden underground. The peasants dug in the place indicated and found Minoan walls. These were reported to the authorities and we obtained a permit to excavate the place.

Roustika to Retimo

From Roustika to Retimo is three hours. The first two hours we follow the old *kalderimi* paved road, and then join the new carriage road to Retimo. All this first part of the journey is through a deep luxuriant valley with a view behind towards the White Mountains and below a view over the sea. This is I think the most beautiful part of Crete. It has not any of the wild grandeur of Sphakia, but for charm and the contrast between fertility and snowy mountains and sea it is only rivalled, and on a much smaller scale, by Zakro.

Peter Mackridge's notes:

¹ The Kakon Oros is marked on the Kiepert map on the Rethymno side of Petres; the path, and indeed the old road that succeeded it, seem to have run closer to the sea coastline than the modern road. There is also a Kako Oros east of Herakleion, mentioned, e.g., by Pashley I 265.

² Gerola II Tavola 6 ("S Maria dei Barozzi").

³ "Everything in the world is smoke and shadow". Gerola IV 370 reproduces the whole inscription; at that time, he notes with an exclamation mark, the piece of stone with the letters MBRA projected to the right of the right-hand arch.

⁴ Dawkins includes a similar reference to the names Argyroupoli and Istron(as), among others, in his article "The place-names of later Greece", *Transactions of the Philological Society* 32.1 (1933), p. 11-12. The stories of Istronas and Stravodoxari are retold in his "Folk-memory in Crete", p. 17-18.

⁵ Psilakis II 147ff. calls it Μονή Προφήτη Ηλία Ρουστίκων.

⁶ Greek text in Xanthoudidis 153, Gerola IV 476 and Psilakis II 154.

⁷ Greek text in Xanthoudidis (and photo 12), Gerola IV 476 and Psilakis II 154. Dawkins, like Xanthoudidis, reads the date as 1641, while Gerola reads it as 1644.

⁸ Greek text in Psilakis II 156 (photo) & 169 (transcription).

⁹ Pashley I 98 was told by abbot that the monastery was destroyed by Muslims in the Revolution.

¹⁰ Cf. Xanthoudidis 154, Gerola IV 475 and Psilakis II 174. Gerola's transcription corrects the name of the foundress that Xanthoudidis had misread. Dawkins' reading, which dates from well before the publication of Gerola's volume, is identical to that of the Venetian scholar.

¹¹ I think a more accurate rendering of the last part of the inscription would be "the lady Viola Vlastopoula, (?wife) of the late Master Constantine, and of Master Gerasimos Petropoulos, son of the late Marko-Manoli".

¹² Xanthoudidis 154

¹³ Curiously, Dawkins makes the same mistake as Xanthoudidis, who prints the date as MCLXV, i.e. 1165 (!); this was clearly a misprint, since X adds “(1565)”. This was the only bell we looked at carefully; I read the date as MDLXV.

¹⁴ Xanthoudidis, like Dawkins, only saw two bells. The “church of the Kera” is presumably the church at Livadi in the village of Roustika, which is dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin.

¹⁵ Gerola II 370-375.