

CHAPTER 9

RETIMO – PROVINCE OF AGHIOS VASILIS¹

Of Retimo I do not find much to say.² It has lost much since Tozer was there in [1874]. He tells us (p. 46): “Turkish town [...], lined with bazaars, and wooden houses with projecting roofs and balconies.” I have been told of these balconies which were a feature of the place. They belonged to the Turkish houses and behind their screened windows the Turkish women could look out on the street. The town during the occupation was in the hands of the Russians, and it was at this time that the balconies were removed.³ The pretext was public health; there can be little doubt that the real reason was to pay off old scores and annoy the Turks. Public health, too, is as a rule invoked for the removal of Turkish street fountains, previously, it is true, allowed to become choked up and, to prevent the cleanly Turk from using them, converted into receptacles for rubbish. The town walls disappeared at about the same time. Of mosques I note two: the Anghebet mosque near the police station, converted in 1917 into a church of the Panagia,⁴ and the Khatzi Ibrahim mosque at the corner of the two main streets and so near the little harbour.⁵ This has a very Venetian exterior with rusticated blocks. Both of them were Venetian churches, the details of which are to be found in Gerola.



IMG_5394 Our Lady of the Angels, 13/4/2013
(see endnote iv)



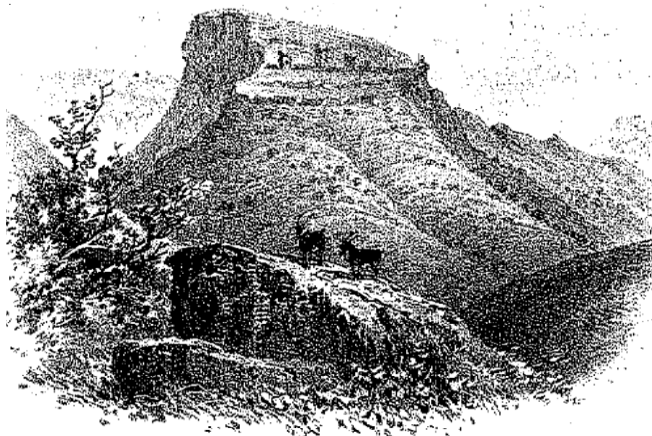
The former Venetian loggia (see endnote v)

On the other side the new built up sea-front is an undoubted improvement and it will be hard to deprive the tiny harbour of all its charm. The view of Ida is delightful; from here it shows itself as a snowy wedge, more striking than the long ridge which it appears when seen from Candia.

Icon-maker's workshop.

Retimo to Myrthios

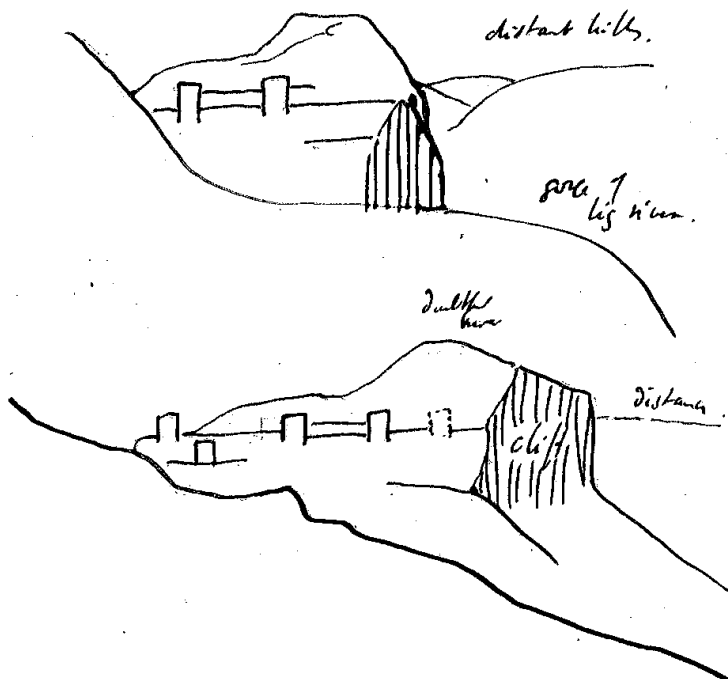
The road from Retimo due south to the province of Agios Vasilis ascends the hills and comes to the village of Armenoi, which lies in a beautiful basin thickly overgrown with *velanidi* oak trees. Thence the usual road goes on south through Photeinou, a ruined Turkish village in a pretty glen.⁶ But we turned west just before reaching Armenoi and rode through its [huge deciduous] oak wood to Kástellos and thence (1½ hours) to Monopari village, which having been formerly Turkish is now almost all in ruins. From it we had a good view to the south of the castle of Monopari,⁷ which it would have taken too long to visit, the ground being very rough. From the village we descended and crossed the river by a stone bridge, this being the river which enters the sea east of Georgioupolis [actually Petres, I think]. Thence by Kato and Epano Malakia [Malaki] and so over the *khalepa*, leaving Oi Koumoi on the left, down to Ais Yannis. Before the village the path gives views to the east over the valley of Koxare and passes through wood [sic] of oaks and female cypresses. Thence to Myrthios through the gorge called Tou Kotsiphou to pharangi. Fine views all the way but bad road. Country round Monopari very rough and beautiful.



Monopari Kastelli (Spratt II 115)

IMG_2678 Ruins of Monopari castle from road just below Monopari hamlet (14 Oct. 2010)

Monopari is a crag precipitous on the west side and with the sloping north end fortified with towers; see sketches:



a) From the road near Monopari village: distance 1 to 2 miles. Only the middle wall is quite certainly a wall.

b) From below the village of Monopari. Distance rather less. Only one wall is quite certain.

Just below the village [of Photeinou] as one approaches it from Retimo is a wayside shrine with a printed *eikon* representing an angel with a flaming sword in his right hand and a pair of scales in his left, standing upon a dead body. There is no lettering, but it represents no doubt St Michael as the angel who takes the souls to judgement: St Michael in his role of Psykhopompos, the conductor of the dead.

The road then crosses the watershed of the island with a fine group of female cypresses, and then passes through mountainous country with views down upon the valley of Agios Vasilis and the village of Koxare. The view to the south is indeed fine. On the left is Ida, then the mountains of Kentron [Kentros] and Vouvala,⁸ then the two gorges which lead down to Preveli, and then on the right the gorge through which the path goes down to Myrthios. Going further south we can go to Agios Yannis and then down the gorge to Myrthios. This gorge is called the Gorge of the Blackbird, *tou kotsyphou to pharangi* – *kotsyphos* is the ancient *kossyphos* – and whilst impressive enough is not so fine as the Preveli gorge further east [*scarcely legible handwritten note*: which has more character [?]]. If we go through this we make for the little village of Phrati which stands at the top of the two Preveli gorges on the narrow sharp ridge which separates them. The eastern gorge has no path through it; the western is the Kourtaliotiko Pharangi and leads us straight down on the right bank of the Megapotamos to the upper monastery of Preveli [Kato Preveli, I think].⁹

Also, instead of going down the Kourtaliotiko Pharangi we can, after getting into the Agios Vasilis valley, turn east to Spili, a big village facing west under a conspicuous cliff. To the north of this cliff the path to the east winds up the hill, crosses the watershed between Spili and Mount Kedros and descends to the Amari valley and the Monastery of Asomaton by way of the village of Yerakari.

Yerakari as a name is the genitive of Gerakaris and means the Village of the Hawker, a reminder that in Venetian Crete this was a favourite sport. It is now quite forgotten. A trace of it, however, survives in the name given to the little bells attached to the bow of the little Cretan fiddles played at village dances, the *lyra*. These bells, shaped just like those worn by English children when they play at horses, are called *yerakokoudouna*, hawk bells, as similar bells used to be attached to the hawks' jesses. There is also a now much ruined fresco in the church at Galia reproduced by Gerola which shows a man with a hawk on his wrist.¹⁰

Yerakari village. 8 April 1918¹¹

In the village of Yerakari is the old church of the Venetian period of St George with a patch or two of frescoes still left.¹²

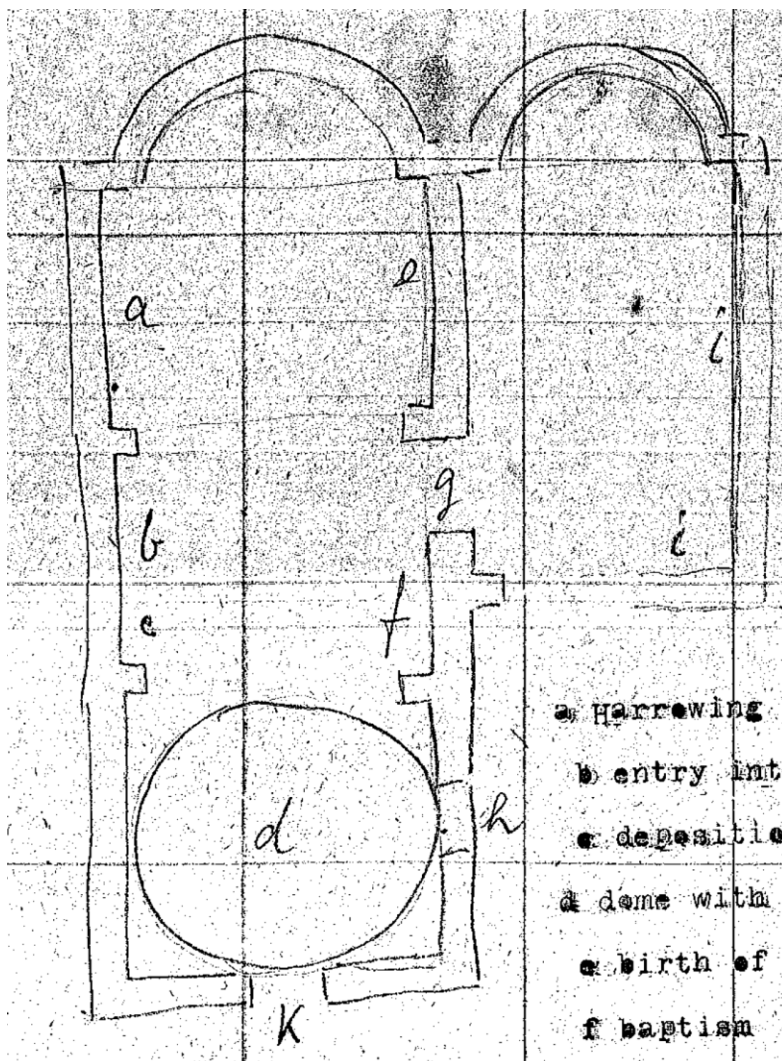


Figure in a. has scroll:

Inscription on c: [these two fragmentary inscriptions not reproduced here]

- a. Harrowing of hell
- b. Entry into Jerusalem
- c. Deposition from cross
- d. Dome with Christ Pantokrator
- e. Birth of Christ
- f. Baptism
- g. Archway
- h. Blocked door
- i. Destroyed
- k. West door

a Harrowing
 b entry int
 c depositio
 d dome with
 e birth of
 f baptism

On the left of the road as one comes down the Yerakari valley to Amari is the much finer church of St John. [8 April 1918:] Much ruined double church on left of road as one comes down the Yerakari valley to Amari. The south church has no roof. The frescoes in the north church are much above the usual standard. Quite ruined, no door, not used any more for service, too ruinous. Dome on pendentives. Drum very rustic with blind arches on its outside and three slit windows.

IMG 0342 (21/4/09) St John below Gerakari, now re-roofed and somewhat restored



Peter Mackridge's notes

¹ The former province of Agios Vasilis is now known as the Municipality of Agios Vasileios.

² Tsougarakis 1988: 330-1 writes that Rethymno is completely unknown to Byzantine sources, but that the persistence of the name since ancient times suggests continuous occupation, though there is no archaeological evidence to prove it. It is difficult to justify Dawkins' neglect of Rethymno, which is one of the most attractive towns in Greece, containing whole streets that have remained almost unchanged since Venetian times.

³ Some covered balconies are still there today – unless they have been restored.

⁴ In an earlier version Dawkins writes, after Anghebet “(vel. sim.)” and adds “at end of street running from harbour to east [= west]. [...] No doubt a Venetian church.” This is the Κυρία των Αγγέλων (Our Lady of the Angels, also known as Μικρή Παναγιά) in the square of the same name, at the corner of Abatzoglou & Nik. Foka Streets) – originally S. Maria Maddalena of the Dominican Order (cf. Gerola II 144-5, whose photo shows that the façade has since been altered beyond all recognition). The minaret of the mosque, added in 1680, collapsed soon after it was built. Angebut Ahmet Paşa was appointed *beylerbeyi* of Crete after the capture of the city of Candia. The police station is still in the square now named Πλατεία Ηρώων Πολυτεχνείου.

⁵ This was the Küçük Hadji Ibrahim Ağa mosque, the former Venetian loggia (not a church as Dawkins says), built in the 16th century by Michele Sanmicheli. It is situated at the corner of Palaiologou and Arkadiou Streets. For a time it used to be the Archaeological Museum, then (from 1991 to 2015 when the museum housed was in the Fortress) the Archaeological Museum shop, until the museum was moved to the former church of St Francis, originally a Venetian Catholic church which was later converted into a mosque (see photo in Gerola III 66) whose minaret was demolished in 1930. At least six other former mosque buildings remain in Rethymno, only one of which was purpose-built rather than being a converted church. This exception is the Valide Sultana mosque, built in 1670 and under renovation and not visitable in April 2019. It is situated within the block bounded by the following streets: Tombazi (where the entrance would be via no. 17), Kapsali, Dimakopoulou and Ethnikis Antistaseos. The minaret of this mosque, likewise being restored, was apparently built in 1878. For the mosques of Rethymno see

<http://www.patrickcomerford.com/2012/07/in-search-of-surviving-mosques-of.html>.

⁶ We visited this village (του Φωτεινού) on 14 Oct. 2010. It is on a branch of the road south of Armenoi, and the road has recently been continued towards Agios Vasileios. A thriving village, with well-kept houses, nestling in a dip between rocky hills. A Christian population seems to have settled there after 1922 from other parts of Crete, including Sfakia. In the village there is a Venetian fountain photographed by Gerola II 54.

⁷ The name is apparently from Bonriparo (Gerola I 265) or Boni Reparii; it was built or renovated by Pescatore (see ch. 2, note 10).

⁸ Βουβάλα: Melambes and Orne are on its slopes.

⁹ Some of this information is repeated in ch. 11. Dawkins usually writes Kroutaliotiko; we have corrected this throughout.

¹⁰ For this fresco at Galia see ch. 21.

¹¹ Dawkins doesn't mention that Gerakari is famous for its cherries. Gerakari (including the church Dawkins describes below) was razed to the ground by German troops on 22 August 1944. Psychoundakis wrote an elegy for the village, which is published in his book *The Cretan Runner*; reproduced in Stoneman, *A Literary Companion to Travel in Greece*, 283-5. The German occupiers carried out similar reprisals against the partisan villages of Kendros (Gerakari, Gourgouthoi, Kardaki, Smile, Vryses, Drygies και Ano Meros), as well as Krya Vrysi in Agios Vasilis.

¹² Gerola has no photo or plan of this church, but he mentions it in a footnote, II 288. The art historian Olga Gratziou (personal communication 16 May 2014) informs me that she had not been aware of this church, but that, to judge by Dawkins' sketch, it is another of the Cretan "double churches" which, she claims, were used by both Orthodox and Catholics.