

CHAPTER 21 MESARIA [MESARA]¹

CASTEL BELVEDERE, Greek Kastellos²

At Candia, 13 May 1918. At Skinies [Skinias]³ two days ago I saw clearly the hill of Castle Belvedere (ο Κάστελλος) and was told it had Venetian ruins on it. Even at the distance I was there seemed to be walls on it.

I have never been up to the castle, but it stands on a conspicuous hill between Pyrgos and Skinies near the river. I saw it nearest from the left bank of the Anapodaris river near enough to see walls.

April 26 1918. At Hierapetra a *khorphylax* [rural policeman] from Skinies told me that at Kastellos (Castle Belvedere) there is a spring. There were two sisters, of whom one was betrothed. The girl who was not betrothed went to the spring and saw an old man with grey hair and money in a cup (*tasi*) which he gave her on condition that she told no one. She took money from him day by day and hid it in the *pithari* [storage jar] among the corn. Her father found it and pressed her to tell the secret. She said that she would tell him but that he must prepare for her funeral as she would die. She lay down on the bier, told the secret and died. The next day the other sister was married and is said to be still alive. The old man was a Sarakinos.⁴

There is an idea that when a Sarakinos gives a girl money he does not allow her to marry. If she does, the Sarakinos comes and strangles the wedded pair.

The same man told me that there are at Castle Belvedere 100 churches, but only 99 can be found, or 101 and one can only find 100. Cf. Axedi with the 60 churches,⁵ and Oxa above Elounta with the cisterns.⁶ He said the ruins of the castle are *στοιχειασμένα* [sic].

Charakas (Χάρακας)⁷

I note at Pyrgos 13 April 1918 that between these two villages is a ruined Turkish village Doraki (Δωράκι). I saw still a few Turks at Pyrgos.

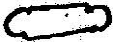
Charakas [Boulder] is so called because of the great rock that rises at the edge of the plain just below the village with the remains of a castle upon it. Both Charakas and Pyrgos are just at the edge of the plain where the mountains begin to rise.⁸

Kofinas

On the summit is a small church built without mortar, Tou Sotiros,⁹ as on Psiloritis. The summit is an oval plateau 75 steps across. A little below the top on the north is a church of the Panagia. Abundance of dittany grows on this mountain, Chourmouzis p. 72.¹⁰

Vagionia (Βαγιωνιά) in Mesara. 13 April 1918¹¹

Gerola's photo in Curuni and Donati, *Creta Veneziana*, p. 401

Cruciform domed Church of Panagia, with new north and south windows.¹² Outside the west door are two old Byzantine marbles, one a fragment of a cross in relief and the other the shaft of a window of section . Clearly from a yet older church.

AGIOI DEKA, November 29th 1917¹³

The old church of the Ten Saints. The old part of the church has a good floor and monolithic columns and frescoes under the twelve [ten] arches connecting them. Below the *eikon* of the martyrdom of the Ten, which is in the *proskynitarion* [stand for holding an icon or relics], is a slab of marble covered by a curtain.¹⁴ This has some more or less deep hollows in it and these are said to be the marks of the knees of the Ten as they kneeled down for their execution.

In a chapel at the NE corner of the church they now talk of digging to find the bodies (λείψανα) of the Ten, and this they are pretty certain to do.

Just by the village there is a new church over the supposed site of the graves of the Ten.¹⁵ In front of the church is a door¹⁶ which gives access to a kind of crypt in which are to be seen 5 graves, each a simple oblong pit made of, I think, masonry,¹⁷ and they say that in another part of the crypt are the other five. But I am rather of the opinion that the other five are not there at all and that they say this and believe it to explain their absence. Why the graves should be here and they looking for the bodies in the old church I don't see, but these things are not very consistent.¹⁸



The village fountain has in front of it a sarcophagus which serves as a trough. In a cartel it bears the inscription published by Xanthoudidis. The fountain is dated 1197.¹⁹

Photo by Fred. Boissonnas (Baud-Bovy & Boissonnas 1919: 111); they have mistaken the Cretan pronunciation of Άγιοι (Saints) for the (originally Muslim) term Hadji ‘pilgrim to the Holy Places’.

GALIA, 30 Nov. 1917: Hawking in Crete²⁰



IMG_5559 Panagia at Monochoro near Galia: west door with ruined narthex in foreground



IMG_5562 The tomb and door on south side

Now quite unknown, but practised in Venetian times. At Galiá north of Moires is an old church of which Xanthoudidis has published inscriptions and two photographs of a fresco. It lies ten minutes south of Galia on the road to Moires. It is a Venetian church with a new red tiled roof and a brand-new screen. Most of the frescoes have

been whitewashed. Of the *ktitoriki epigraphi* [foundation inscription] over the west door perhaps more could be made out than Xanthoudidis has done [X 137]. There is a north [south] door and east of this an arched tomb in the Venetian style. Good Venetian west door with inscription above it and frescoes. In front of this a later narthex now ruined.

There is a now much ruined fresco on the north wall of the narthex of the church at Galia, reproduced by Gerola and published by Xanthoudidis, which shows a horseman with a hawk on his wrist. This shows a little in Xanthoudidis' photograph in *Athena*; Gerola's copy shows only a confused object, clearly because the copyist (Bagge) did not know what he was looking at. But Xanthoudidis, who saw the fresco when it was much less destroyed than now, is quite positive that it was a hawk perched on the rider's wrist. When I saw it the weather had made this unrecognisable.²¹

Xanthoudidis told me that [Iosif] Hatzidakis of Candia told him that when he was in Thrace in his youth the Turks there used to go hawking.ⁱ

March 1918 Church of St Paul near the village of Agios Yannis just south of Phaistos in the plain²²

Long inscription round the base of the dome inside recorded by Xanthoudidis. I read a bit to identify it [fragment of inscription not reproduced here].²³



Church of St Paul near the village of Agios Yannis.
IMG_0989 Baptistery (RMD's *koube*), 21 Oct. 2009



IMG_0988 Fresco of St Luke and part of the inscription

This inscription is over the body of the church and there is a second dome over the chancel space. Most of the frescoes have been destroyed but the evangelists in the dome pendentives remain.²⁴ In front of the church is a later narthex like a flat-topped *koube* with three arches.²⁵

AGIA TRIADA church on the site of the Italian dig near Dibaki. 5 June 1918²⁶

On the top of the knoll where the Minoan palace is, is the now deserted church of Agia Triada – see Xanthoudidis and Gerola. It has a good Venetian west door with

ⁱ [in hand] Γερακάρης often in *Μαχαιράς* and laws about hawks in Cypriot Assises. Cf. in Zante Γαρακαρείον & cf. Σπ. Λάμπρος in *Νέος Ελληνομνήμων* Β [vol. 2], 369. cf. *Απόκοπος*.

billet moulding and dog-tooth ornament. Above it there was once a belfry which has now disappeared. There is also an inscription, but with letters too small to read.

Outside the south wall there is a ruined arched tomb and outside the north wall another with, on the tomb itself, an illegible coat of arms and the inscription [not reproduced here].²⁷



IMG_8137 North wall



IMG_8138 West door

Inside there are many graffiti, many with the words *εκοιμήθη ο δούλος του Θεού* [the servant of God has gone to sleep] followed by an illegible date.

Over the west door inside is a painted inscription in capitals in two lines:

[PM's translation of Xanthoudidis' transcription: "The holy and venerable church of the holy and glorious great martyr [George] was [erected/renovated?] from the foundations and illustrated at the expense of Constantine Skinoplokos and Epraxia and the nun Katafygi and the child[ren?] in the month of January in the 15th indiction Αω[.]."²⁸

Peter Mackridge's notes

¹ In Greek: η Μεσαρά. I've arranged these locations from east to west. In Dawkins' day the Mesara plain would have been chiefly planted with wheat, but nowadays, probably as a consequence of European Union subsidies, it is largely planted with olives.

² On the Anavasi atlas Kastellos is the name of the hill, north of Ano and Kato Kastelliana, on which the ancient site of Priansos, the church of Κοίμησις Θεοτόκου and Castel Belvedere are located. Priansos is mentioned in ch. XXII. See Ananiadis 75-6: the castle was built by Pescatore in the early 13th cent. We couldn't find a road to castle but took a photo. Pashley I 288 notes that the castle was already ruined by the end of the 16th century. Pendlebury adds a note to Dawkins' typescript: "Castel Belvedere now called Rhizokastro". This was confirmed by Kostas Tsiknakis at a conference on Gerola held in Athens in September 2012. Pashley defines the province of "Rhizó-kastron" as "bounded to the north by Lassíthi and Pedhiádha, and to the west by Mesará" (I 272).

³ There are two villages in Crete called Skinias. Dawkins is here referring to the one in Monofatsi rather than to the one NW of Elounda. The same Skinias is mentioned in ch. 26. The same probably applies to the provenance of the policeman below. Cf. note on Skines in ch. 2.

⁴ The word means literally a Saracen, but in Cretan folklore it may denote a certain kind of spirit in human form, usually evil and sometimes superhuman.

⁵ See ch. 18.

⁶ See ch. 27.

⁷ We passed by on 22 Oct. 2009.

⁸ The Anavasi atlas shows Φρούριο Χαράκι nearby.

⁹ Τίμιος Σταυρός on the summit (1230 m) according to the Anavasi atlas 79 1 B-C; also an ancient peak sanctuary.

¹⁰ Kofinas is the highest peak of the Asterousia Ori. Dawkins says in ch. 22 that he never climbed it. In fact, this entire note is based on Chourmouzis.

¹¹ We visited on 22 Oct. 2009.

¹² Georgios Neonakis told us that this church was demolished c. 1935 and that his parents were the last couple to be married there; he also said that the church was originally called η Παναγία η Βαγιά [Our Lady (of) the Palm-tree], which is the origin of the village name. The present church of the Κοίμησις της Θεοτόκου [Dormition of the Virgin Mary] was built on the same site. Gerola II 224 has a ground plan of the old church.

¹³ The village is next to Gortyn. We stayed the night of 21 Oct. 2009 there. There are photos and a detailed description of the church in Gerola II 187-191.

¹⁴ The church has a vaulted roof with pointed arches. It has three apses. Nice old wooden iconostasis, kept clean and shining. The martyrdom took place in AD 250. The marble slab marble is now in a glass case just inside the entrance, before going down steps into main part of church.

¹⁵ The new church stands 150 m from the old one. Between the two churches in the street is a lone marble column. The new church now has dome and roof painted dark red and hideous roofed area outside W door.

¹⁶ Now an opening without a door.

¹⁷ So it seems.

¹⁸ They dug at the east end of the old church but didn't find the other 5 tombs. A square *koube* with a dome and an apse has been built against each of the S and N walls towards their E end.

¹⁹ These are presumably Arabic numerals, i.e. 1196 [AD 1781/2]. The fountain is no longer there. According to Xanthoudidis, (1903: 127-8), the Christian inscription is later than what he calls the monolithic larnax, which was originally Roman. Xanthoudidis writes that the larnax was brought to the village from elsewhere. The inscription translates as follows: "Mother of God help Evlambios and Stephania amen". Gerola IV 553 prints a photo of the inscription.

²⁰ We visited on 23 April 2013 and viewed the church from outside the locked precinct. For hawking in Crete see also ch. 9.

²¹ There is now absolutely no trace of this fresco. See Gerola II Tavola 17 (Batte's painting) and IV 544. Xanthoudidis 1903: 135-6 notes the following: "The village of Monochori near Galia: small Turkish village destroyed during the recent revolution." Outside the village to the north, "a ruined church of the Panagia", of which only the narthex and the south wall of the main building survive. Three horsemen on red horses on north wall of narthex (left and middle horsemen visible in Plate 11; the right-hand one in Plate 11a carried a bird (hawk?). The figures probably represent Georgios Mousouros and two servants [or two sons: PM]. Mousouros' name appeared in the inscription on the same fresco, transcribed by Xanthoudidis on p. 136. The bracketed and queried "(hawk?)" is Xanthoudidis'. Xanthoudidis' photos are blurred,

but a decorative motif of pomegranates is clearly visible. Gerola himself (II 339), who refers to the pomegranates, was in no doubt that the figure was holding a hawk.

²² We visited on 21 Oct. 2009. Gerola has a photo of the exterior of this church from almost the same angle as ours (II 237) and another of the frescos (II 323), with Luke at top right. His photo of the church “before restoration” (which must have been carried out between two of his visits) is reproduced in Curuni and Donati, *Creta Veneziana*, p. 371 (photo no. 790; the detail “before restoration” has been erroneously placed under no. 1378 on the same page).

²³ The inscription, transcribed by Xanthoudidis (1903: 129) and Gerola (IV 538, and copied by him IV 594-5), records the renovation and painting of the church; therefore the original building must have been much older than the present 14th-century structure. It also refers to the name of the location as Βαπτιστήρα (Baptistery). Xanthoudidis cites the phrase in the inscription “the rule of our Orthodox Christian monarchs, Lord Andronikos Palaiologos and his most pious consort Lady Eirini and their son Lord Michail” as evidence of “the national consciousness of the Cretan people under Venetian rule”. Andronikos II reigned 1282-1328, after Crete had been detached from the Byzantine empire by the Fourth Crusade and had come under Venetian rule. Xanthoudidis reads the date of the inscription as 1304, exactly one hundred years after the crusade.

²⁴ Now only St Matthew (SW) and St Luke (NW) remain.

²⁵ This was the baptistery according to the modern signage.

²⁶ Actually the church of St George Galatas on the Minoan site of Agia Triada, which we visited 2 May 2015. Dawkins seems to have been confusing the name of the church with the name of the archaeological site. There is a photo of the west door in Gerola II 289. There is also an impressive ruined church of Agios Georgios at a location named Falandra immediately above the site of Phaistos, which Dawkins doesn't mention: see Gerola II 362-364 & III 185.

²⁷ Xanthoudidis (1903: 132) reads: “... του Μιχαήλ του Τριβύζη” [“of Michail Trivyzi”] and the date ΑΦΠΑ = 1581. Gerola prints a photo of the slab (IV 537), pointing out that it bears a relief of a double-headed eagle and that the name Trivyzi corresponds to the Venetian surname Trevisan. The presence of the Byzantine double-headed eagle adds further weight to Xanthoudidis' remark (see endnote xxi) regarding the “national” (or at least “Byzantine”) consciousness of Cretan Orthodox Christians even at this advanced stage of Venetian rule.

²⁸ Dawkins omits to mention that this painted inscription is on the *inside* wall over the west door. He reads the date as ΑΩΝ = 1342, adding “but very doubtful.” Xanthoudidis (p. 131 and plate E, no. 6) reads the date as ϚΩΙ = 6810 = 1302 or ϚΩΚΕ = 6825 = 1317. The inscription is badly damaged, and less of it is now legible than a century ago. Gerola IV 537 prints a photo of the inscription; he opts for 1302 as its probable date. A “κτητόρισσα Καταφυγή” is also mentioned in an inscription in the church previously described (Agios Pavlos at Agios Ioannis). The church seems to have been much battered since Dawkins saw it. There is now no sign of the arched tomb on the south wall, and no sign of an inscription on the arched tomb on the north side.