

## CHAPTER 22

### COAST FROM TSOUTSOUROS TO AGIA GALINI

Tsoutsouros is a cluster of small one-storey flat roofed houses on the beach at the mouth of the Tsoutsouropotamo.<sup>1</sup> The only remarkable object there was a monk named Isaac; from what monastery I do not know, but he was living there at least for the time. This man, no longer young, was what is called a *Spanos*, that is, one of those men, not at all uncommon in Crete, who are marked off by having either no beard at all or only the very scantiest. Their age it is always next to impossible to tell: it could only be said of Isaac that he was not young. Standing apart from ordinary humanity, these unfortunates, by reason of their prolonged but odd-looking youthfulness and their miserably shrivelling but seemingly timeless age, remind one, sadly, of Swift's terrible invention of the deathless Struldbrugs. The Cretans in general are a well-bearded race and look upon the *Spanoi* with an odd mixture of derision and fear. In folktale they are always cruel and cunning, and generally villainous. What the Greeks of the middle age thought of them may be seen from the satirical parody of the liturgy called the Mass of the Spanos, a long torrent of scurrility directed against one of these unfortunates. In modern Crete they are credited with having the evil eye. The keeper of a *kapheneion* at Chersonnesos, where I have often spent the midday halt, is one of them. After passing through once on the way from Neapolis to Candia, my muleteer's mule stumbled badly. He at once put this down, and not wholly in joke, to the evil eye of the beardless café-keeper. "The beardless fellow has cast the eye upon us," he said, - "*Μας εφτάρμισε ο σπανός.*" The old word for eye, *οφθαλμός*, has completely disappeared now in favour of *μάτι* (*ομμάτιον*), but in this Cretan word *φταρμιάζω*, I cast the evil eye, it still survives.

After Tsoutsouros the beaches and low soft cliffs which form the coast all the way to Hierapetra come to an end. All the way to Cape Lithinos and round the corner to Matala and so on to the opening of the Mesara plain, the coast is now rocky and steep with no beaches and only occasional inlets and coves. It is formed, in fact, by the southern slopes of the mountains which bound the Mesara plain to the south and fall abruptly into the sea. These little landing places have generally a few houses and at the back of each a rough path leading over the mountains to the villages of the plain. These places are, in order [east to west]: Maridaki, Three Churches (Treis Ekklesies), the Monastery of Koudouma, Leda [Lendas] (ancient Leben), Kaloï Limniones (Fair Havens); then comes Lithinos and the coast turns north to the cove of Matala. North of Matala is the Minoan harbour of Komos discovered by Evans, and then the hills drop to the long beach bordering the Mesara.<sup>2</sup> This beach has on it the little landing station of Kokkinos Pyrgos and at its north end the ground rises again where the coast turns eastwards towards Agia Galini.

Maridaki I visited only from the sea. To Komos I have never been at all. All the other places I have been to, both by sea and by land, which means that I have crossed these mountains in five places. The really notable feature of these hills is the high flat-topped peak of Kophinos [Kofinas], the Basket, which rises to a height of four thousand feet almost immediately above Koudouma. Kophinos is conspicuously by far the highest point of the range, and is visible from a very great distance. A ship does not have to go far north from the harbour of Candia before the characteristic square top of Kophinos is visible above all the intermediate heights. I regret very much that I have never had an opportunity of climbing it. There can be no finer view-point in all Crete.<sup>3</sup>

Maridaki, the first of these places, is quite close to, but by land almost inaccessible from Tsoutsouros. It can only be approached by land from Mesokhori [Μεσοχωριό] by way of Akhendrias, and the path must be of the very worst. From the sea one sees a little beach between the cliff and upon this beach a tiny valley with a stream opens. The path up the valley leads shortly to a little chapel and a cottage surrounded by a few gardens, the whole set in a hollow among the bare and rugged slopes. When I was there the cottage was occupied by a monk, I think from Koudouma. He was in great fear for his life and besought us – I had landed from a trawler – to take him away, anywhere so long as it was out of Crete. The precise reason for his fear was not very apparent. He had been concerned in some scandalous affair with a woman, which had somehow carried him to Greece. Now he was at home again, but I rather gather in a sort of disgrace. That his fears were not without good cause was shown from what happened shortly after my second visit to him. Some men came down by a path from Akhendrias, beat him and robbed him of his money. I do not know what happened after that.

Just east of the Maridaki valley the map puts the remains of the ancient city of Priansos.<sup>4</sup>

Next comes Treis Ekklesies, on the coast, below the mountain villages of Mournia, Etia and Prinias to which it serves as a sort of port. I have visited it once or twice from the sea, and once at the end of March 1917 I walked over the hills from Pyrgos in the Mesara and back again. On the ascent from Pyrgos we are far enough south and high enough – enough detached from the main body of the island – to see from one point the three great mountain masses: Dikte, Ida and the White Mountains. This gives a suggestion of what the view from Kophinos must be. The path crosses the ridge, goes through the village of Prinias and then descends by a steep gully to the sea. Above the gully is a hollow with a sheepfold and in the damp soil by the stream masses of wild *polyanthus narcissus* (μανουσόκλια), at this season a little over. The path down the gorge is very steep, and for beasts almost impassable. When it reaches the sea it turns east to the place called Three Churches [Treis Ekklesies]. These are of the usual small type and lie on a little cove below the hills. By them are a few cottages inhabited by two or three monks from Koudouma. The bareness of the slopes is broken only by a few carob trees. The contrast between the aridity of these southern slopes and the fertility of the Mesara plain is very striking. The mountains are here so low that it is only two or three hours' walk from Pyrgos to the sea, though owing to the steepness of the gorge a good deal more must be allowed for the return.

### MONASTERY OF KOUDOUMA<sup>5</sup>

After Treis Ekklesies we come to the little monastery of Koudouma. It is on the coast almost exactly below the peak of Kophinas, but the slopes fall so steeply to the sea that they cut off all view of the high peaks. At Koudouma I have landed several times, and in the summer of 1916 on a very hot day I went there from the Mesara plain, passing through the village of Kapitaniana [Καπετανιανά]. I slept at the monastery and left next day by trawler.

The monastery buildings lie close to the sea. As has so often happened, the hard upper stratum of the rocky slope has been undermined and collapsed, leaving a ravine-like subsidence with steep sides littered with broken fragments of their fallen upper skin. This little hollow has a beach and directly on the edge of this is the little church and above this the enclosure containing, on its upper side, a simple row of

## 22: COAST FROM TSOOTSOUROS TO AGIA GALINI

*kellia*. All this is on the east side of the ravine. On the opposite side are a few buildings with the primitive guest-house. There are no gardens, and for water only a brackish well. The slopes and the ravine are dotted with small pine trees and in the background the mountain rises rapidly. Westwards there is sloping ground above the sea and a path to the little hermitage of St John where we once landed. To the east there is an impressive piece of sea cliff. By land the approach is by a very bad path from the Mesara crossing the range just before the village of Kapitaniana and thence winding down the slopes and reaching the sea somewhat to the west of the monastery.



There are only a few monks and the present abbot is one of the founders. He and his brother, now dead, were monks somewhere else and came to this desolate spot to lead the ascetic life, and a few others have collected around them and built the monastery. This abbot, quite a peasant, has a considerable reputation for sanctity. I believe that people come here for their feast, but I do not know the dedication of the place or consequently the date.<sup>6</sup> They do not lay themselves out for visitors. Here alone of Cretan monasteries there is a notice outside the enclosure (for it cannot be called a court) that entry is forbidden to all *kosmikoi* [laypersons] – not that they objected to our coming in – and the guest-house is a mere square room with benches. When I slept here I slept on my camp mattress on the ground in front of it and I don't remember that they gave me any food. In any case, they live very sparingly indeed and have apparently no resources. The monks are entirely illiterate to all seeming. Treis Ekklisies and the little hermitage church of St John west of Koudouma [below Kapetaniana] depend upon Koudouma. St John lies on a little sloping delta brought down by the rains from the mountains. A cell or two and a tiny church are tucked up under the rock and on the fan-like ground in front is a well, a tiny sheepfold and a few half-wild olive trees. The present monk there was formerly the general shepherd of the monastery and comes from Kapitaniana. He was consecrated in 1916 only. The Maridaki monk came I think too from Koudouma. It is a good example of the smaller monastery and owing to its newness has no treasures. The position is impressive from its very loneliness, and no monastery is so remote. Agios Yannis Kapsas is its only rival. Five minutes west of it I bathed off the rocks and there is there a hollow rock,

through a hole in which the water is forced by the compression of the air inside and rushes out in a jet of spray.

NOTE: I don't remember frescoes in the church of St John, but Gerola records some in a church of this name which must, I think, be this one.<sup>7</sup> Between Koudouma and St John in a rock shelter is a church too of St Anthony which I have not visited.<sup>8</sup>

*[Manuscript notes written in the margin by another hand [Pendlebury?] referring to Koudouma:*

A great gathering of people here at Easter 1936.

We were welcomed very warmly in 1936 and given coffee and raisins and a flat roof on which to sleep. The monastery certainly seems very poor.

Also the *metokhi* at Agios Nikolaos between Sternais and the summit of Kophinas. I stopped there in 1937. Three monks from Koudouma. They take it in turns.]

### Leben<sup>9</sup>

The next point along the coast is Leben, now a few houses lying on the shore sheltered from the west wind by a great promontory [Ακρ. Κεφάλας]. Here there was in antiquity a shrine of Aesculapius. The whole place shows many remains of the Roman period, but the excavation of the shrine led to very small results. The shrine was very popular: Philostratos, p. 429, tells us that “just as Asia resorts to Pergamon, so Crete was wont to resort to this sanctuary, and many too cross over to it from



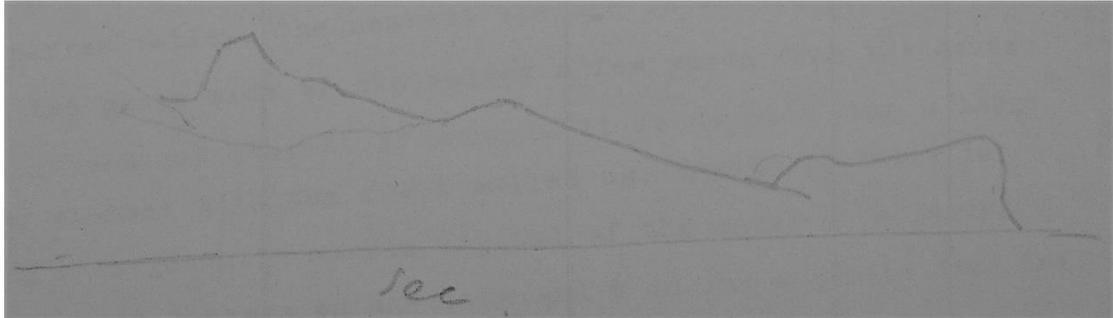
Libya. For it faces the Libyan sea near Phaistos, ...” The promontory seen from the side is strikingly like a couchant lion: the head is too small, but the curve of the back and hindquarters is very lifelike. This was remarked in antiquity, and Philostratos continues: “and they say that the sanctuary is called that of Leben, because a promontory juts out from it which resembles a lion, a suggestion made here as in many places by the chance

arrangement of the rocks. There is a legend too about the promontory how it was once one of the lions yoked to the chariot of Rhea.” This punning derivation of Leben from Leon, a lion, is of some interest.<sup>10</sup>

From the plain Leben is reached by a mountainous track ascending from the Mesara plain and passing by Miamu [Μιαμού], where a grotto with very early remains was excavated by Taramelli.<sup>11</sup> I did not see this grotto when I passed through

Miamu in 1913: it is below one of the houses but is hardly likely to be of much interest at present. [Note by Pendlebury: Grotto now filled in.] I was then with Grigori.<sup>12</sup> After digging the Kamares cave he and I made a trip to look for Minoan remains.

When Fair Havens, Kaloi Limniones, is reached the hills have become much lower.<sup>13</sup> The little harbour with its island, its chapel of St Paul and the few houses have been described by Spratt. The landwards path leads up the slopes to the Monastery of Hodigitria, which I describe in another section.<sup>14</sup> The view eastwards along the coast is so interesting that I made an outline sketch of it.



[Dawkins' caption:] Looking east from Kaloi Limniones. The high mountain is Kofinas. The lion-shaped headland is Leda. Below Kofinas on the coast is Kountouma. Λέντας is λέοντας; Ξανθουδίδης, *Ερωτόκριτος* [1915] 599.

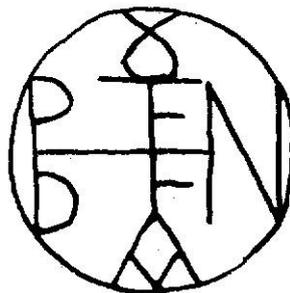
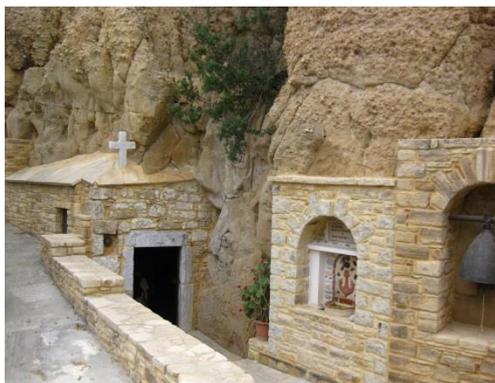
Jutting out into the sea on the right is the promontory of Leda [Lendas], looking very much like a couchant lion. To the left of the sketch is the peak of Kophinos showing very well its basket-like form.

After passing Kaloi Limniones the ship must round Cape Lithinos and shortly arrives at the narrow opening of the harbour of Matala. I have been there several times by sea, once only by land in April 1918 when I came from Agia Galini. The path went inland of Evans' Komo [Κομός], of which I then knew nothing, passed through the village of Pitsidia and so came to Matala. Leaving it I went across the hills to the Hodigitria monastery and so down to the sea again at Kaloi Limniones.

### **Matala**<sup>15</sup>

Matala is a narrow entrance between the rocks, so narrow that one can hardly make it out from the western coast [= the south coast further to the west?]. The rocks on one side [north] are honeycombed with tombs, some of them partly submerged as the land has sunk.<sup>16</sup> At the top of the inlet is a beach and a few houses and then a rather narrow flat-bottomed valley. The nearest village is Pitsidia.

On the south side of the valley, a few yards from the houses, is the rock-cut church of Panagia. It is not more than a large grave chamber with the front walled up. Inside it there lies a large marble capital of square, tapering shape with a cross on one face and on the opposite face the monogram I sketched:



(left) IMG\_5573 Rock-cut chapel of the Panagia at Matala, 23 April 2013, recently rebuilt on the outside; (right) The capital described and sketched by Dawkins, but no longer in the chapel.

### **Kokkinos Pyrgos<sup>17</sup>**

The shore below Timbaki had a [handful?] of houses called Red Tower from a tower there. According to Khatzigakis, p. 147,<sup>18</sup> by one of the towers was a church of Panagia Pyrgiotissa, destroyed by the Germans but rebuilt. There are now on this beach three towers; once there were more, some ten.

---

### **Peter Mackridge's notes**

<sup>1</sup> We visited Tsoutsouros on 22 Oct. 2009. Tsoutsouros and Treis Ekklisies (to its west; see further down) were two of the chief evacuation points for Allied personnel in late 1941. Tsoutsouros was also the point where Patrick Leigh Fermor landed on 4 April 1944 (Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Abducting a General* (London 2014), p. 50, 154). The place name perhaps derives from the Cretan verb τσουτσοιρίζω ‘whisper, speak quietly’.

<sup>2</sup> I was told in November 2011 that plans for a container port near Tymbaki – which a Chinese company very much wanted to build – have been abandoned because of the nearby Minoan site of Komos. There is also a tourist beach at Komos, which is a nesting site for sea turtles. The Minoans seem to have saved the area from total environmental destruction.

<sup>3</sup> Kophinas (1231m) is the highest peak of the Asterousia Ori; see also ch. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Castel Belvedere, on or near this site, is referred to in ch. 21.

<sup>5</sup> The monastery is approachable by sea excursion from Tsoutsouros. We have never been there. The road from Διονύσι passes near one of the peaks of the Asterousia (1133 m) and looks very steep and wiggly on map. We were told that the road is passable only with a 4 x 4.

<sup>6</sup> The monastery is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and consequently the feast is held on 15 August. The monastery was founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by the monks Parthenios and Evmenios, who were brothers from Pitsidia. They built it on the ruins of a medieval monastery. The brothers were sainted after their death.

<sup>7</sup> Gerola II 314-315 prints a photo of frescoes of figures flanking the doorway of a church of St John. One at least of these figures is an angel brandishing a sword. Gerola specifies that, unusually for Crete, these figures are painted on the outside wall – but they are somewhat protected from the elements because the church is in a vast cave. There are extensive graffiti on this same wall; in a letter, Gerola describes the chapel of St John as “a treasure-house of graffiti, inscriptions and frescos” (Curuni

and Donati, *Creta Veneziana*, p. 74). His photo of some of them is reproduced *ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>8</sup> St Anthony is marked on the Anavasi Atlas 71 B1.

<sup>9</sup> Leben (Λεβήν) is the archaeological site at the village of Lendas: we stayed at the attractive Gaitani Studios in the village on 21 & 22 April 2013. The place was remarkably unspoiled at that time, but when we returned two years later a lovely flower-filled meadow above the sea-cliffs to the east of the village had been devastated by bulldozers preparing for the construction of the Levinthos Retreat Centre, whose website now proclaims its eco-friendly credentials.

<sup>10</sup> It's more likely that the modern name Λέντας is derived from the medieval form λέοντας 'lion'.

<sup>11</sup> The grotto and some of its human remains and prehistoric artefacts were discovered by Anagnostis Manidakis while he was digging the foundations for a house he was building in the village: Antonio Taramelli, "Cretan Expedition, VIII: The prehistoric grotto at Miamù", *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 1, no. 4/5 (July-Oct.1897), pp. 287-312.

<sup>12</sup> Dawkins doesn't mention this Grigori anywhere else in the material. He is likely to have been a Cretan workman.

<sup>13</sup> "The fair havens" is the rendering of the ancient Greek name Καλοί Λιμένες in the King James Version of Acts 27: 8. Dawkins uses the popular early modern version name, Καλοί Λιμνιώνες, which is also used by Nikos Kazantzakis in his novel *Καπετάν Μιχάλης* [*Freedom and Death*], but the name has now reverted to the ancient version.

<sup>14</sup> See ch. 23.

<sup>15</sup> We visited on 23 April 2013.

<sup>16</sup> In the 1960s the rock-cut tombs became a resort for "hippies", including, according to Wikipedia, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin and Cat Stevens. According to the same site, during the military dictatorship the "hippies" were expelled on the orders of the Metropolitan of Gortyn. The tombs are now part of a fenced archaeological site, which is still open to the public.

<sup>17</sup> This section was written in or after 1954. We stayed the night at Kokkinos Pyrgos on 20 Oct. 2009. Kokkinos Pyrgos is just north of Timbaki. Agia Triada, just south of Timbaki, is referred to in ch. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Alexandros K. Hatzigakis, *Εκκλησίες Κρήτης: παραδόσεις* (Rethymno: Maria A. Hatzigaki, 1954). This book is not in Dawkins' library or in the electronic catalogue of the Oxford libraries. He notes that he borrowed it from Gareth Morgan.