

CHAPTER 26

COAST FROM HIERAPETRA TO TSOUTSOUROS¹

The southern slopes of Lasithi from Hierapetra to Vianos²

This piece of ground is traversed roughly in two ways. Either one can go along the coast all the way from Hierapetra to Tsoutsouros, or one can start from Hierapetra by the sea but ascend at Myrtos and then go through the upper villages, Mournies, Kalami, Pefkos and so to Vianos.³ The former route is not so usual, for it leads as good as nowhere. The latter among the high villages is not only extremely beautiful in itself, but leads to the big village of Vianos, whence one can go conveniently to Skinias and Pyrgos and so anywhere in the Mesara, or one can go north to Embaros and so to Kasteli Pediada⁴ and so to Candia. This upper route, with its numerous possibilities of going through different villages, is of very great beauty. The villages are surrounded by luxuriant growth of trees: in particular the myrtle forms great hedges as hardly anywhere else in Crete. The harmony of the flat grey roofs and the green was hardly as yet broken by the hideous tiled roofs. The bare slopes of the mountain above are in contrast with the riches of the villages. But of these delectable rides I have very few notes. I can do no more than set down the series of villages as I have from time to time passed by. And as it has always been with the intention of wasting no time, each of the routes has for one reason or other commended itself.⁵

One route, then, is from Vianos by Agios Vasilis, Kalami, Gdokia, Myrtos, and so by the shore to Hierapetra. I find on another occasion on this route I passed through Pefkos. A third journey took me from Vianos by Amiras, Pefkos, Mournes, Mythoi and the upper village of Males, whence I went to Hierapetra not directly by the shore but by the upper villages of Anatoli and Kalogeroi, which fall on the route from Lasithi to Hierapetra. It is possible too to combine the routes, for example going from Hierapetra along the coast as far as Arvi and thence up inland by Amiras to Vianos. And on my first journey in Crete in 1903 I went from Vianos by the upper villages to Kalamafka and thence to Kalo Khorio and Kavousi. But, however this district be covered, it is always beautiful.⁶

Traditions

Sarantopikhos. 4 March 1918 at Males

The road between Pefkos and Myrtos in one part descends on the right (W) bank of the stream which debouches at Tertsa. The valley is narrow and the road close to the stream. The road at one point crosses a rocky knoll and the piece of this knoll, here fairly earthy, which is between the road and the stream is called the grave of the *Σαραντόπηχος* and the locality in general is called *του Σαραντοπήχου*. He is said to have been a man 40 metres high⁷ who lived in a cave near here which no one could go in or out of. For this story, see Pashley [I 271-2], and [allusion?] in Spratt I, 291-2.⁸

Coast from Hierapetra to Tsoutsouros and Vianos⁹

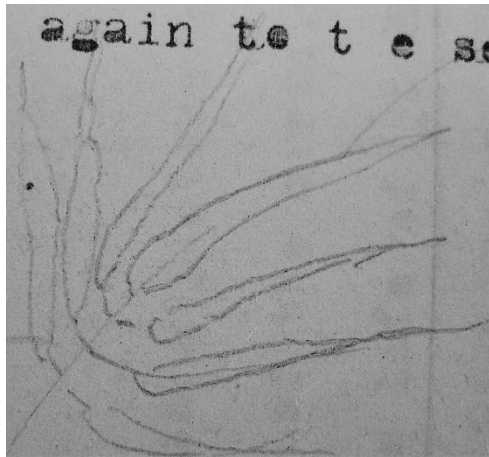
The road passes among gardens on the flat ground near the sea till we come to the lower villages of Myrtos. But before reaching Myrtos we pass below Males, close to which is the little monastery of Xakousti.¹⁰ The name is in full, The Famous Virgin. It

is built on a flat piece of ground which faces west from the slopes of the hills, in all this district thinly sprinkled with pine trees. The view is westward to Males, half an hour off on the other side of the valley, and southwards to the sea. The church, in no way remarkable, is in the front (west side). To the east and north are the low buildings of the unfinished court. The buildings are simple and poor, with the old flat roofs. No new guestroom has been built, as has been done in all the richer monasteries often very much to their disadvantage in appearance. There are only three or four monks and it is one of the poorer and more rustic of the Cretan monasteries.

Like Koudouma it is quite a new foundation. It was founded only about 40 years ago by the uncle of the present abbot. He was called Ananias and died in 1907 or thereabouts. He was succeeded by Methodios who is now Abbot of Toplou, and when Methodios went to Toplou the present abbot, Dorotheos, took office.

Myrtos proper is inland some way up on the right bank of the river, the Myrtopotamos, and the hamlet by the sea is, as it were, its port. As I have said elsewhere, the settlements by the sea are everywhere growing and becoming more important than the parent village in the hills – a result of increasing security and growing export trade.¹¹ Thus the police station is now by the sea. The *chorophylax* at this time was a certain John Milakis, in whose house in the upper village I have stopped more than once. He was at this time in some trouble. He had had custody of a prisoner and had shut him up in the lock-up in the lower village, and this lock-up is, like several of the houses, built not on the rock, but on the sand of the beach. In the night the prisoner had dug through the sand at the base of the wall and escaped: trouble was expected from headquarters about the matter.

It is at Myrtos that the upper road from Vianos through Pefkos and Kalami to Hierapetra comes down to the sea.¹²



11 May 1918

From Myrtos first along the shore to Tertsa. There are a few houses on the sea and, behind these, fine gardens where we picked the last of the *mousmoules* [*mousmoula* 'loquats'] and I found the fern, which is rare in Crete.¹³ Thence by land path to Arvi, coming down again to the sea half an hour before reaching Arvi.

Arvi¹⁴

IMG_5507 Bottom of Arvi gorge



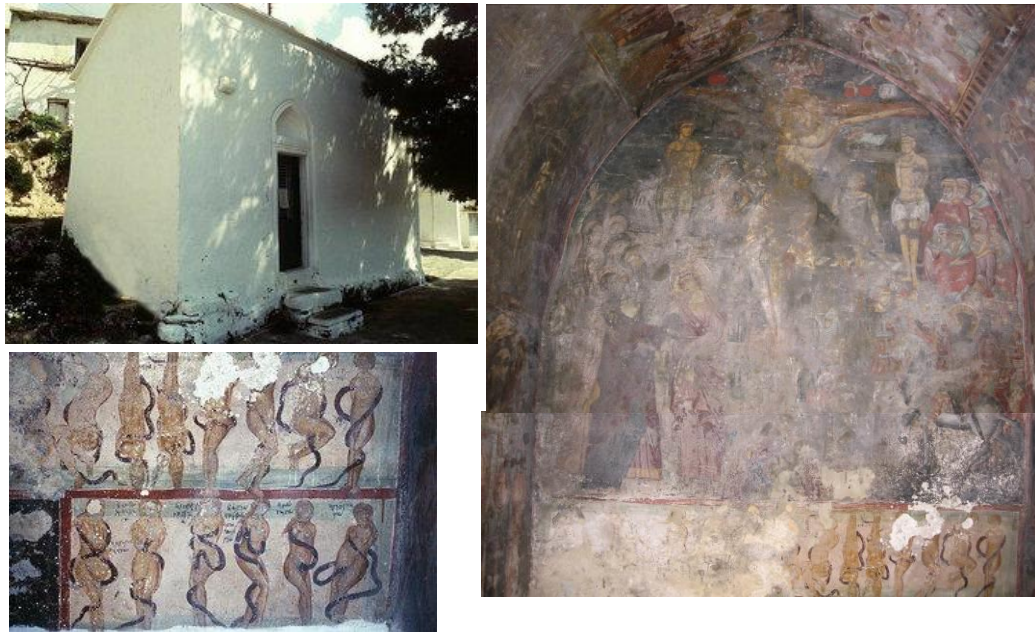
IMG_5508 Monastery of Agios Antonios, Arvi

Arvi is the name of a flat valley which runs up from the sea to a small hamlet and is then closed by a high, very steep and sheer wall of rock, broken only by a few bushes which cling to its face. There are also a few houses by the sea.¹⁵ This wall of rock is divided right down from the top to the bottom by a deep cleft, of which the lower two thirds is only a few yards wide. Water flows down through this cleft from Agios Vasilis above, and so waters the Arvi valley and then finds its way out into the sea. The path up from the sea passes westwards along the foot of the rock and so ascends to the Agios Vasilis valley, whence there is a striking view of the cleft from high above it. This path leaves the village of Agios Vasilis to the right, goes through Amiras and then over the ridge to the west, and so descends to Vianos. This I have done and I have also continued along the beach westwards from Arvi beneath the low cliffs which fringe all this shore and so reached Tsoutsouro.

Shut in in this way, the Arvi valley is well watered and pretty fertile but extremely hot. At the foot of the rock a little to the east of the opening of the cleft is the monastery of Agios Antonios, founded in 1861 by a certain pilgrim, the Khatzi Anthemios.¹⁶ The buildings are built one above another up against the face of the rock and present little of special interest. At least from the uppermost cells the sea is just visible. Below the monastery bananas have been planted and do well in the hot, sheltered garden.¹⁷ Water is drawn up to the monastery by a cord on which the bucket automatically, by its weight, closes and opens the tap – an arrangement also used at the loftily built monastery of St Paul on Mount Athos. The monks here are very rustic and live in a very poor way.

Trevor-Battye did not himself visit Arvi, but the people at Kalami told him, p. 147, that in a gorge nearby, and it can hardly be other than this cleft at Arvi, the wind makes loud noises like the blows of a great hammer. The same sort of thing is to be heard in the Kroutaliotiko Pharangi near Preveli.¹⁸

Vianos. 3 March 1918¹⁹



IMG_5514 & 5515 Agia Pelagia, Ano Viannos, showing west wall (with blow-up of the Punishments in Hell in bottom left corner of wall)²⁰

Saw church of St Pelagia with a picture of hell on the west wall underneath a big painting of the crucifixion. On the north wall there are scenes from the life of St Pelagia. The church is right in the village, rather high up the side of the hill upon which it is built.²¹

Vianos (Hatzigakis, p. 126)

Somewhere near Vianos is the *exoklisi* [rural chapel] of St Dimitrios. The legend is that a pious woman dressed as a monk came and became abbot. She was so severe that the monks rebelled and accused her of an affair with the female cook of the monastery. At the trial she opened her breast and said: “Can a woman have an affair with another woman?” She went away and said, “May half my curse fall on that rock,” and she pointed to the rock opposite, “and the other half of my curse on my accusers.” Then the curse of this pious woman availed and the rock was split from top to bottom as through by a knife. The monks all ran away and they came to Apezanes, so called because there they got off (apezepsan) from their mules and there they built the present monastery of Apezanes; nowhere nearer did they dare to dismount.²²

This cleft is plainly the great cleft I saw in the wall of rock at the top of the Arvi valley.²³ But where exactly St Dimitrios is I do not know.²⁴



IMG_5506 Looking down to the top of the Arvi gorge, 21 April 2013

Peter Mackridge's notes

¹ The material in this chapter is arranged from east to west.

² We drove through much of this in April 2013. The southern slopes of Lasithi are known as the Λασιθιώτικα βουνά (= Dicte).

³ This is the route of the modern road.

⁴ This too is the route of the modern road.

⁵ The next route is the same one as above (except in the opposite direction), while the following ones present slight variations of a single route.

⁶ It certainly is!

⁷ Strictly speaking 40 cubits or possibly ells, each of which measures about 2/3 of a metre.

⁸ The Sarakina Gorge, N of Mythoi and S of Malles, is also called Φαράγγι Σαραντάπηχου (Gorge of the 40-cubit giant). According to legend, as the giant was crossing the mountain, he stooped to drink water from the river, and his beard split the mountain in two, thus creating the gorge. Spratt places the giant's grave near Sykologos, a few miles WNW of Myrtos.

⁹ The route Dawkins describes here is not along the coast; he seems to climb up to near Malles in order to go west along the coast. We followed this route from west to east (Tsoutsouros to Hierapetra) in Oct. 2009.

¹⁰ Η Παναγία η Εξακουστή. "Built in the midst of a pine forest, near the village of Males, it had been totally abandoned until 1960 when it was restored and opened again" (Internet). See also ch. 24. We approached it but did not enter.

¹¹ And now tourism.

¹² This is approximately the route of the modern road.

¹³ The gardens were still there when we visited.

¹⁴ We went there on 21 April 2013, but we didn't walk through the cleft.

¹⁵ Most of the buildings are now (naturally) by the sea.

¹⁶ In Islam, a *hadji* is one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Greek Orthodoxy, *hatzis* (a derivative of the Arabic word) denotes one who has made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and especially to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

¹⁷ When we visited, we saw wheat, vines, olives and oranges growing, but no bananas.

¹⁸ Κουρταλιώτικο φαράγγι. See ch. 11.

¹⁹ Ano Viannos is on the site of ancient Biennos. It was twice destroyed by the Turks, in 1822 and 1866, in reprisal for Greek uprisings. “Between 15 and 16 September [1943], the Germans slashed through seven villages in the Viannos area. Every building was bombed, animals were driven away, fodder burnt, and over eight hundred and fifty people were taken hostage. Every house in every village was reduced to rubble, and over five hundred people were killed, including women and children.” This was a reprisal for the upsurge of partisan activity after the capitulation of the Italians (Artemis Cooper, *Patrick Leigh Fermor*, p. 164). Viannos was the birthplace of the writer Ioannis Kondylakis (1861-1920). We visited on 21 April 2013.

²⁰ Gerola’s photo of the two bands of figures (II 345) shows the fresco to have been in a better state of preservation than in our photo.

²¹ The church is apparently dated 1360.

²² For Apezanes and another story concerning its foundation see ch. 23.

²³ This is the top of the Arvi gorge: see our photo 5506.

²⁴ There is an Agios Dimitrios marked on the Anavasi atlas outside Βαχός (west of Αμυράς), but I have no idea if this the same one.