

CHAPTER 30 PALAIKASTRO – MAGASA ETC.

PALAIKASTRO¹



View of Palaikastro with Kastri hill in the background (internet)

Plakáloni is the dairy in the hills to the south of the Palaikastro plain to which a path runs up above Patema and Roussolakkos. We dug a rock shelter there in 1905 or thereabouts. The place belongs to the Katsarakis family and the old Dragatis and his wife used to work there.²

Siteia to Palaikastro

From Limani Siteias to Palaikastro is about three hours' mule walk. The path goes first along the beach, passing below the village of Agia Photia. On the right are the outer slopes of the plateau on which Magasa and the other high villages lie. Just behind the skyline are Palaio Mitato and Khonos.³ The path leaves the beach and goes up and down the steep slopes, descending to the sea. Then, at the angle of the coast, we reach the place called Agios Antonios from a chapel somewhere near,⁴ and the road turns inland to cross the isthmus and descend on the other side to Palaikastro. From Agios Antonios too another road goes off to the left up the hill to Toplou. It crosses the skyline at a point marked out by a little whitewashed shrine called the Stavros: this marks the boundary of the monastery lands. Towards the top of the isthmus is another pass going up the hillside to the right, passing just east of the cone-shaped hill called Modi, and so to Magasa.⁵ At Agios Antonios water comes down to the sea and the road passes through what were, when I began going this way, groves of oleanders ten or twelve feet high. These were cut down in the war, but have no doubt grown again, for the oleander was only of use in that time of stress. Raisins or sultanas were made in Crete and these when drying need to be dressed with potash. This could not be got from abroad during the war, but the ashes of oleanders make a

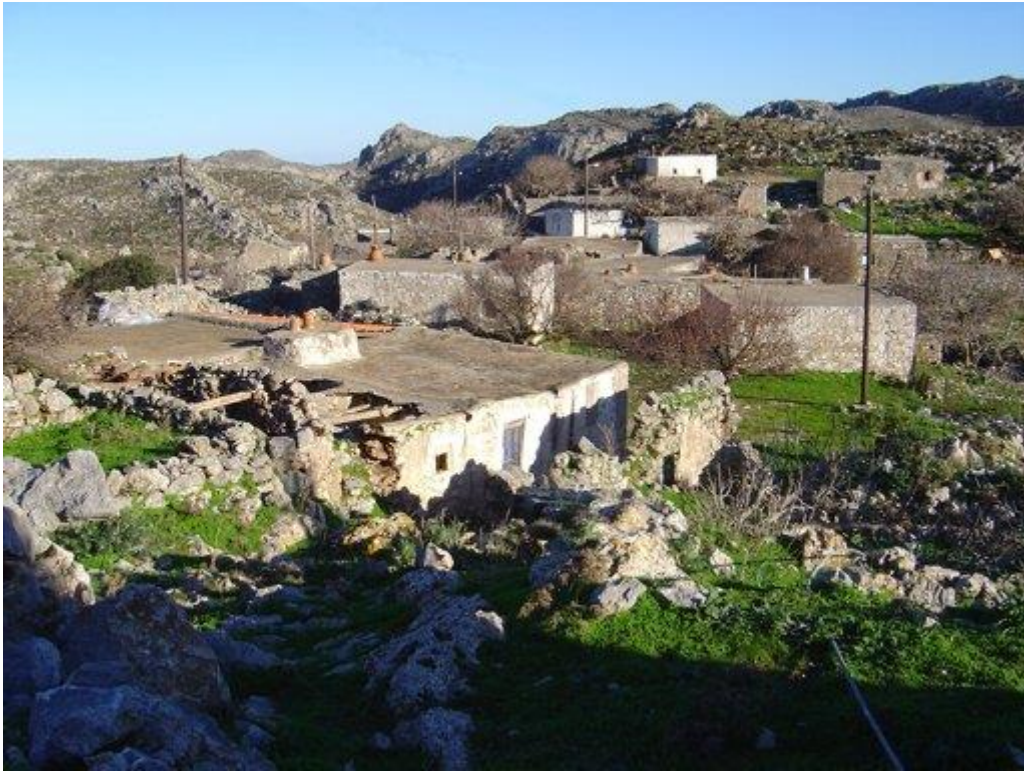
lye with so much potash in it that it could be used for this purpose. Otherwise the oleander is used only for plaiting into fences. Even the all-destroying goat finds that it is the one plant even he cannot eat, it is so bitter. And the goat, the Cretans say, tries every year to eat the leaves and every year finds them too much for him, hence the usual Greek name bitter laurel [πικροδάφνη], though the Cretans call it *sphaka*, which elsewhere is the name of the yellow Jerusalem sage, called in Crete (?) *angarathia*.⁶ From the long shoots of the oleander too boys make a kind of trumpet. When the branch is sappy a length of some four or five feet is taken and the wood coaxed out and the bark left like a long tube. When this is blown into it yields a note. This I have seen done once only by Pandeli, Evans' cook, a boy from Retimo.⁷ *Angarathia* reminds me that there is in Crete a plant of this name like Jerusalem sage, but the clusters of flowers are smaller and the plant is less solid in appearance.⁸ Like the oleander it is refractory: it is [said to be] the only flower from which bees can get no honey; and this because God has closed up the tube of the corolla in his goodness, because if the bee could get at this honey its sting would become fatal. This same plant, another man told me, is said to be a good charm against the evil eye. The reason for this is that the leaves and the whole plant are covered with a kind of dust which is regarded as bad for the eyes. But neither this nor the closure of the corolla have I verified.

Just before this path reaches the upper village of Palaikastro a path goes off to the left. It leads up the hill to Toplou and is the regular way from the village to the monastery.

Magasa etc.⁹

From Palaikastro one may visit Zakro and on the plateau a series of villages, Magasa, Karydi and lastly Khandras.¹⁰ The path from Palaikastro ascends the hills to the south-east [south-west]. At the top of the ridge the path forks: to the left the way goes along through a valley below the high plateau to the east [west?] and the sea to the left, and passing by Khokhlakies and [Αζοκέραμος/Azokeramos]¹¹ reaches after [blank] hours the village of Upper Zakro. The right-hand path ascends to the plateau by a series of zigzags, which are visible from the path from Palaikastro across the isthmus, and so reaches the plateau. To the right is the conical hill of Modi, the Measure, at the foot of which goes the direct path from Magasa to Toplou, on which hill one day by a boulder I suddenly found Ανδρέας Σαντιμπαντάκης, red-haired workman.¹²

Magasa is the first village reached in a dip in the rocky plateau. It is, as I have said, the parent village from which Palaikastro is a colony.¹³



Magasa (Vrisidi) seen from St George's church (<https://www.crete-today.com/vrisidi/>)

In *Zographeios Agon* (1896, p. 34)¹⁴ I find a **local tradition** worth inserting. This limestone plateau, and indeed all limestone regions, is pierced by swallow-hollows into which water disappears, to appear again sometimes as a river at what may be a considerable distance. This tradition goes that all swallow-holes – *alatsides* as they are called in Crete¹⁵ – are inhabited by a bear, an *arkoudi*, a creature which may remind us of the she-bear at the cave below Gouverneto [ch. 4]. Near Magasa there is a swallow-hole, a very deep one. Many people passing by have seen the *arkoudi* lying outside the hole sunning himself on the feast of the Virgin which falls on February the second. One day a man found the *arkoudi* there and by him was an *arapis*, a black man, in all Greece the common guardian of any hidden treasure; they were sitting together enjoying the sunshine with the treasure beside them. They called to the man and asked him how much of the treasure he wanted. “I want it all,” said the man. The *arkoudi* then set the negro on the man and the negro devoured him. What he ought to have said was, “As much as you are willing to give me.”

It is possible that this is the curious and very deep hole called Simidali which lies close to the road between Magasa and the hill of Modi; it is on the left as one goes to Modi. The hole goes down sheer like a small shaft in the rocky flat ground and, unless one knows where to look for it, would be very hard to find. The story I heard of it is this. At the beginning of the 1897 insurrection two Christians killed a Turkish pedlar called Hadzi Mounidis on the road between Magasa and Karydi. I know the place quite well. According to one account the two men buried his body in a cleft nearby, a cleft which is still shown, but the Turks came afterwards and took it away to Siteia. Another account is that the Turks heard that the Christians had thrown the body into the Simidali gulf [sic]. They let a man down on a rope to find the body, but the man cried out that the hole was full of fire and they pulled him up again.

The massacres of Turks in East Crete seem to have begun in this way, by isolated murders, no doubt on account of personal grudges. It is not easy to get many

details of these doings, but I gathered a few notes at Magasa in 1918. From some villages the Turks escaped to Siteia. Papaplatanakis, who was in 1903 the *demarch* [mayor] of Zakro and a Christian, is honourably mentioned as having enabled a number of Turks to escape in this way. There was a mosque at Khandras opposite the house of Antonios Papathanasakis, but it was destroyed; I have seen its ruins. But the local centre of the Turks was at Ziros near Khandras, a big village half Turkish half Christian, and here too there was a mosque. The Turks took refuge in the mosque which was besieged; a massacre followed. The Turks from Katalionas [now Katelionas], now deserted except for a few Christians who have gone there, fled to Ziros. At Zakathos, another entirely Turkish village, there was a massacre; so too at Etia [ch. 29]. At Daphni, on the road between Siteia and Roukaka, there was a slaughter and it is said that the Turks were burned alive in the mosque. At Palaikastro there were no Turks.¹⁶

I cannot here enter into this history, but it seems certain that the Turks were contemplating a massacre of Christians when they [following pencilled words indecipherable].

Folklore

21 September 1917 - For this see passage in Joan Evans, *The Unconquered Knight*.¹⁷

Yanni Katsarakis, seeing the moon ☾ on the second night, told me of the saying:

*Δίπλα φεγγάρι, όρτσα γκεμιτζή·
Όρτσα φεγγάρι, δίπλα γκεμιτζή.*

☾ = δίπλα = furl sail
☾ = όρτσα = set sail

i.e. sail when the moon is young.

21 September 1917 at Palaikastro. I said to George Katsarakis' wife (she is from Zakro) how firmly the baby grips. She said "We say that babies grip so hard that snakes are afraid of them: *Τόσο δυνατά σφίγγουνε τα μωρά ώστε τα φοβούνται τα φίδια.*" Compare the infant Hercules.

21 September 1917

At Palaikastro I was told that water should be added to wine in all the months with no *rho* in the name, i.e. in summer. Cf. our saying about oysters in season only when the month has an r.

22 November 1917, coming from Retimo (we had slept at Perama), Yanni of Palaikastro and I were on the road from Stsi Koubedes (Servili)¹⁸ to Candia and night fell. Yanni told me this story (we were both tired). In a cave by Plakalona, where his family has a *mandra*,¹⁹ a shepherd and the boy who helped him (his *παπαχέρι*) were making cheese by night in winter. Some Turks in a caique saw the light of the fire and came up to get what they could. They first drank as much milk as they wanted and then demanded *mizithra* [soft cheese made chiefly of whey], not unlike ricotta. The shepherd said it would need some time to boil and said to the boy:

<i>Πήγαινε πάνω μοναχός</i>	<i>Go thou up thyself alone,</i>
<i>κ' έλα κάτω με πολλούς</i>	<i>Come thee back with many a one.</i>
<i>Του Γενάρη το φεγγάρι</i>	<i>The moon of January lights our way,</i>
<i>Παρά λίγο σαν ημέρα.</i>	<i>'Tis very near in brightness day</i>

The boy understood that the shepherd meant that he should go in the moonlight to get help from the village (?Kokhlakiés) and went off. The Turks said to the shepherd “What were you saying to the boy?” “I was saying a charm over the pot that the *mizithra* may be plenty (εγήτευγα το καζάνι για να είναι πολλή η μιζήθρα). He also said that the boy had gone to fetch wood. So the Turks lay down half asleep and the shepherd got boiling milk and put it into the *κανκί* (a cup made of half a gourd) and poured it over their faces, scalding and suffocating them. When the man whom the boy had gone to fetch came from the village they all went to the caique and found there a Turk whom the others had left to guard it. He said that they were not his friends and fled away. Yanni’s grandfather, who had the *mandra*, near the cave (? the same *mandra* that Yanni’s father now has and to which I have been) used to relate how he was once there cutting a piece of timber for a rafter and the dead Turks called to him out of the cave “Shall we come to help you?” He said “I want none of your help” and they vanished. It is not clear if he thought he saw them or only heard them. I have never seen this cave.

The verse about the brightness of the January moon is a regular saying.

7 April 1918. Conversation at Myrthios with Pan. Khatzidakis and Yanni of Palaikastro.

Χερικάρης means *τυχερός* – lucky, a man who has a good *χερικό*, that is whatever he puts his hand to will prosper. The idea is much like that of *ποδαρικό*, which means the luck, good or bad, which is brought by the entrance of a person.²⁰ Certain people are unlucky and have such a *κακό ποδαρικό* that if anyone meets them he turns back from his journey. My servant Yanni Katsarakis told me that such a man was the Hatzi Stratakis of Magasa, and both Yanni and his brother George, now secretary at Toplou, if they meet him when they are going out shooting, turn back again. This man was a workman of ours at Palaikastro and was a sort of general butt; it was a great joke to call him the *Ειδήμων*, ‘the knowing one’. He used to drink to excess but has now given it up and does not touch wine. I remember being at Magasa in his drinking days before 1906 and seeing him as *kandilanáphtis* [lamplighter or sexton] in the church at Magasa trying to set up the 12 candles for the service of the 12 Gospels and, owing to his clumsiness and the shakiness of the stand, the thing always breaking down under the weight. At last the priest stuck them anyhow on a ledge of the screen.

Peter Mackridge’s notes

¹ There is very little about Palakastro, considering the time Dawkins spent there. But it was only while he was excavating that he gradually began to be interested in medieval and modern aspects of Cretan history and culture.

² A major Minoan town, the largest after Knossos, was discovered at Rousólakkos near Palaikastro at the east end of Crete. It was first excavated in 1902 by R.C.

Bosanquet, who was joined by Dawkins for the 1903-6 seasons. For more on the excavations at Palaikastro, including Dawkins' role in them, see T.F. Cunningham, "TFC thesis chap. 1; Palaikastro Crete"

(https://www.academia.edu/5054887/TFC_thesis_chap.1_Palaikastro_Crete). See also R.M. Dawkins, "Folk-memory in Crete" (1930), pp. 38-39. The name Rousólakkos (Red Pit) is due to the red clay in the area. Yannis Katsarakis from Palaikastro acted as Dawkins' servant, guide and foreman for some time. A *dragatis* (δραγάτης) is a person employed by the community to guard the fields, and especially the vineyards. The rock shelter that Dawkins excavated would have been a shallow cave, with its mouth partially built up with stones, used by shepherds in ancient times; such rock shelters continue to be used until the present day.

³ The village is marked as simply Mitato in the Anavasi atlas, 95 C3. Chonos is the name of a sinkhole, a hamlet and a high hill to the west of Mitato.

⁴ This point is probably at the inlet near the modern monstrosity cynically named "Dionysos Greek Village" (Anavasi atlas, 96 A3).

⁵ By "isthmus" here Dawkins presumably means the north-easternmost tongue of land in Crete, ending in Cavo Sidero. The hill named Modi is marked on the Anavasi atlas 98 A1. The name Modi ultimately derives from Latin unit of volume *modius*.

⁶ Angáráthos is one of the names for Jerusalem sage given in Argyropoulo's *Wild Flowers of Greece* and elsewhere [JW]. For more on *angarathos* see ch. 20.

⁷ Our friend Yannis Neonakis from Amari gave us an impressive demonstration of (perhaps using the same species of plant) while on our way down from Arkadi to Rethymno. Evans was of course the renowned archaeologist Arthur Evans.

⁸ This is probably *Phlomis cretica* as opposed to *Phlomis fruticosa*, both called *angáráthos* though I've found no mention of its refractory properties [JW].

⁹ The name Ma[n]gasas (Μαγκασάς) is of unknown origin but seems to be very old. Local people however seem to have had the false impression that it was a Turkish name. In 1955 some misguided central or local authority replaced the old name by the more "decorous" name Βρυσίδι (Vrysidi), which means 'little spring'. Ironically, this name is pronounced the same as the word βρυσίδα (*vrisidi*), which means 'stream of abuse'. Perhaps for obvious reasons, locals continue to call it by its old name. We have never managed to visit this out-of-the way and now virtually abandoned village, which in Dawkins' time was a significant administrative and transport hub but is now accessible by road only from the west (via Mitato). Dawkins excavated a small Neolithic settlement to the west of Magasa in 1905: see R.M. Dawkins, "Excavations at Palaikastro. IV", *Annual of the British School at Athens* 11 (1904/5), pp. 260-68.

¹⁰ These three villages are strung out north-west to south-east.

¹¹ I have inserted the placename where Dawkins has left a blank. There is still a path marked on the Anavasi atlas from Azokeramos to Kato Zakros, which would much more direct than taking the roundabout modern road.

¹² The surname Saltimbangakis (which is probably what Dawkins means) is still current in the Palaikastro area. The name derives from Italian *saltimbanco* 'acrobat, tumbler'.

¹³ Manolis Katsarakis at Metochi Vai (see ch. 31) confirmed Dawkins' information that Palaikastro was settled by people from Magasa. Mr Katsarakis must be a relative of the members of the Katsarakis family mentioned by Dawkins, but he tells me he must be on a different branch.

¹⁴ The journal *Ζωγράφειος Αγών*, subtitled "Monuments of Greek antiquity still living among the Greek people", was published in Constantinople by the local Greek literary

society in the late 19th century. The journal took its name from an annual competition for the collection of folklore material; the competition was funded by the Greek banker Christakis Zografos.

¹⁵ There is also the placename Latsida, near Neapoli: see ch. 25; cf. *khonos*: see ch. 24 & 27.

¹⁶ This paragraph is mostly copied from a later draft, but a few phrases have been inserted from a first draft marked “Written at Magasa 8 Mar. 1918”.

¹⁷ Dawkins is referring to Joan Evans’ translation of the mid-15th-century Spanish chronicle [JW]. The art historian Joan Evans was the half-sister of the archaeologist Arthur Evans. Her book was published in 1928.

¹⁸ See ch. 13.

¹⁹ For Plakalona see the beginning of this chapter.

²⁰ Χερικό derives from χέρι ‘hand’, ποδαρικό from πόδι ‘foot’.