

CHAPTER 31

TOPLOU¹



IMG_0262 Toplou Monastery

The cultural centre of the almost desolate peninsula of Cavo Sidero² is the famous monastery of Toplou, officially the Holy and Stavropegiac Monastery of Our Lady of the Promontory. The foundation is certainly as early as the Venetian period, probably earlier. The name Toplou is, however, Turkish and means the Place of the *Top* or Cannon from a cannon which was at one time mounted over the door of the monastery. The name on Spratt's map, *To Plou*, is an error arising from Spratt having supposed the name to be Greek and that the *To* was the Greek article.

From the monastery there are naturally several paths. One leads west to the slopes of the Gulf of Siteia and on these slopes are the principal gardens of the monastery with a small chapel of St Andrew and a cottage or two. Below the gardens is, I believe, a landing place, though I have never been down so far. The gardens themselves are a delightful place of refreshment and repose.

From the monastery northwards goes the path to the farm of Vai [see below] and the lighthouse of Cavo Sidero. It turns to the right from the gate, descends with the gardens to the right and crosses the ravine. At the top of the ascent from this there is a small church: Agios Elias.

A third path leads across the moors to Palaikastro. A fourth goes down into a second ravine to the south of the monastery and so to Siteia; it reaches the sea at Agios Antonios.

In the ravine is a boulder with a heap of small stones upon it of which I shall speak later. From this ravine the path ascends and at the lip of the valley, running across from sea to sea from Agios Antonios to Palaikastro, there is a whitewashed shrine called the Cross. This is visible all the way to Siteia and forms the boundary of

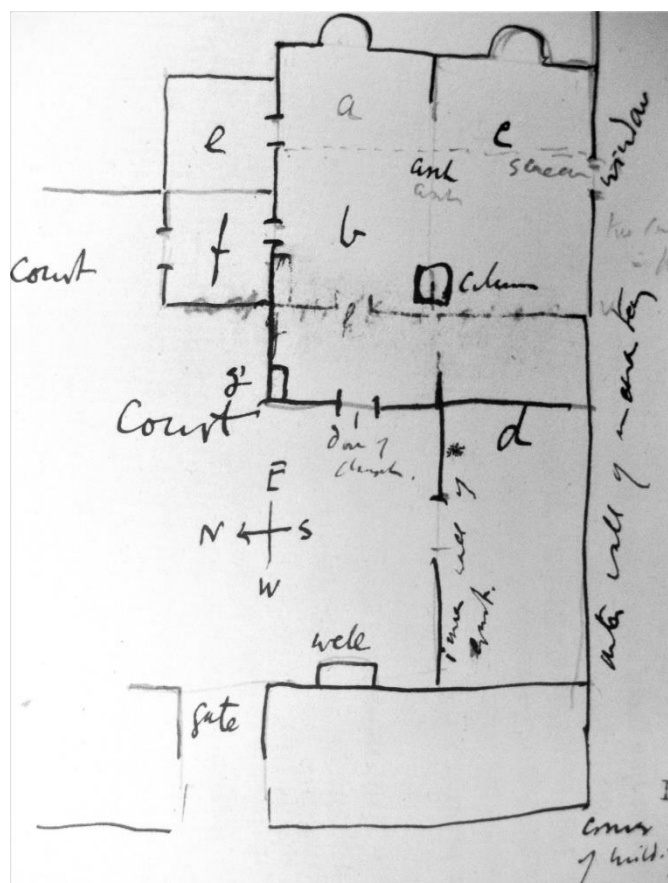
the monastery lands. From the Stavros [Cross] the path descends rapidly to the sea. The view from it to the south is across this great valley and on the opposite side of it are the uplands of the Magasa plateau, with the cone-like peak of Modi rising at the nearer edge. It is plain that the ground on which Toplou stands and this plateau are one and the same, with the valley running between them like a great rift.



Two photos of Toplou monastery from Dawkins' archive; the windmill is visible on the right of the right-hand picture

I return to the monastery itself. The monastery is a square tower-like building, giving a fine impression of height, narrowness and strength. It stands out of sight of the sea on the edge of a ravine which runs down to the west. South of it the plateau is cut by another ravine through which the road to Siteia passes. The buildings are out of sight of the sea and, being in a slight hollow of the plateau, are not visible from far off in any direction.

Round the monastery itself are a few outbuildings: a church, a windmill,³ a few cottages – one occupied, when I knew Toplou, by the old monk Evmenios. They are of various dates: one bears the date 1855. On the Siteia side are these buildings and a small field. The monastery garden lies in terraces on the side of the northern ravine to the east side of the buildings. On the opposite side of this ravine, which is crossed by the path to Vai, is a small church.



Plan of Toplou church [see PM's notes]

The block-plan shows the general arrangement of the court. The church is double, the two naves separated by a square pier and to the east of this an arch. The oldest part of it is the chancel marked **a**, dedicated naturally to the Virgin. This was at some date lengthened towards the west and now runs out into the court; this part is marked **b**. Later still, to the south of this, the second church was constructed. It is dedicated to St John the Divine. The space where this now stands was originally one with the present store-house, **d**. (The cutting of this store into two and the making of the eastern half of it into the church of St John is almost within living memory.) As **d** opens on the court, it follows that the church is underneath the upper roofs on this side of the court; these are cells and a guest-room. At the corner of **b** marked **g** there once stood a belfry. It was there when I first came to Crete but was pulled down, probably when the bells in the tower were arranged. Lastly, **e** is a vestry opening into the church and **f** is a part of the church occupied by the few old nuns who form a part of the establishment.

The small and perfectly plain gateway is on the west side. In front of it is a courtyard surrounded by one-storey buildings and entered by an arched gateway with benches for men to sit and rest or, if at night, to repose without going further into the monastery. The roofs are of course flat. On the left side of this court is a door, on the square lintel of which is the inscription: ΕΙΣ ΔΟΧΗΝ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΣΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΩΝ – “For the reception of visitors”, which marks it as the old guest-room.

Among the buildings on the left-hand side of this outer court is the bakery. The danger of fire is thus reduced to a minimum. The object of having the guest-room outside the monastery proper was obvious in troublous times. Unwelcome guests, for

the most part Turks, could be put up, housed and fed and at night the monastery itself be effectually bolted and barred against them.

Over this court there towers the high fortress-like front of the monastery with its tiny windows, and the tower which rises above the narrow entrance. This is low and very narrow and leads directly into the court, small, irregular in shape and paved with pebbles; the present floor dates from 1914.⁴ In front of us we see the church. On the right hand of the entrance is the well. Steps to the left lead up to the upper floors; the various rooms and cells are reached by picturesquely rambling galleries and staircases supported on arches. The space is so contracted that there are no internal staircases at all. Further, the church, far from standing free in the court, reaches through to the outer walls of the monastery.⁵

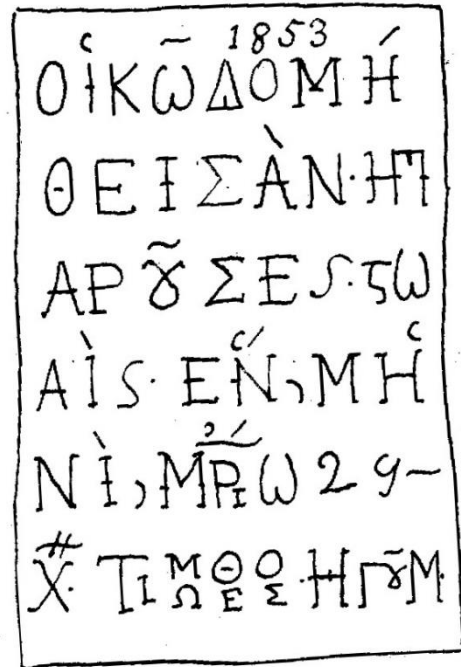
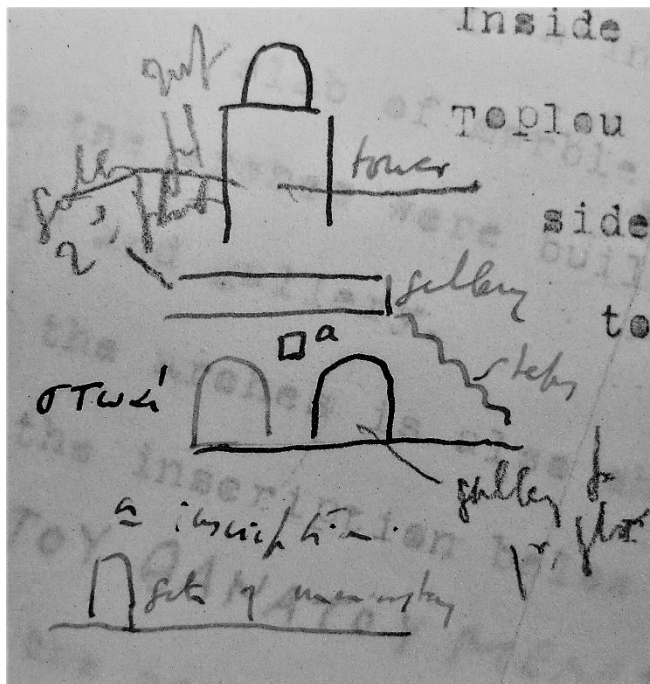


Two more photos from Dawkins' archive



IMG_0257, 15 April 2009

The west side of the court and the tower have several inscriptions. There are two floors and then, from the flat roof, the tower rises. The earliest ascertainable date is of late Venetian times when the monastery was built. This upper floor is reached by steps leading up to a stone gallery upon which the rooms open.⁶



[Legend of left-hand sketch (clockwise from top right): tower; gallery; steps; gallery of 1st floor; gate of monastery; a. inscription; στοαί [arcades]; gallery of 2nd floor; roof]

2 March 1918. Inside the court of Toplou on the western side just below the tower the top (2nd) floor is reached by a stone gallery onto which the rooms open. This gallery rests upon two arches built in 1853; this we know from the inscription here given, which is on a small marble slab built in between and above the two arches. It runs: '1853; the present galleries were built, March 29th, when the Pilgrim Timotheos was abbot'.

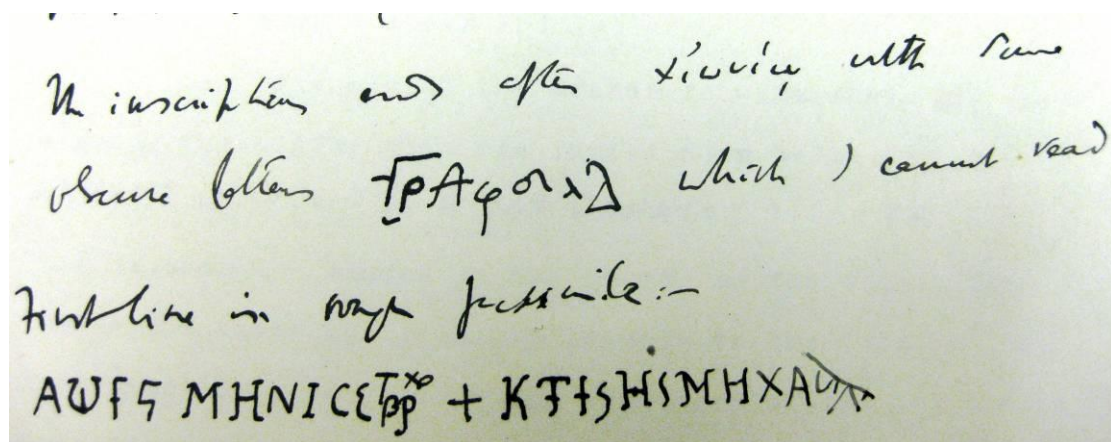
Previously these rooms were reached by a wooden stair and gallery. The arches are carelessly built up against the old wall and partly cover the southern arch, partly cover a window on the ground floor immediately below the tower. Over this window⁷ is the inscription: ΑΛΗΘΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ Η ΤΟΥ ΘΑΝΑΤΟΥ ΜΕΛΕΤΗ - 'True philosophy is the meditation upon death'.⁸ It seems to belong to the period of the first building of the monastery in late Venetian times. The new gallery leads from the abbot's cell to the new guest-rooms which are on the second floor on the south side of the court. The abbot's cell is the private cell of the present abbot; the permanent Hegoumeneion [abbot's quarters] is on the east side of the court.

The southern range consists of, on the ground floor, the store-room already mentioned. Above that are cells and a room used until lately as the guest-room; very shortly before the war the present guest-room was built above this old guest-room. The northern range is cells, kitchen and, somewhere near the kitchen, a tiny refectory. Here too the abbot in the war period had his cell, but this was only because it was his own personal cell which he had made when he was a monk; the real official abbot's

quarters are on the NE corner of the court. Here the abbot Jacovos always received his guests.

The tower is mentioned by Gerola and dated to the Venetian period. However this may be, there is now an inscription of 1816 over the door leading from the flat roof of the monastery to the tower. The entrance is on the south side of the tower. This inscription runs: “1816; in the month of September; built by Michael the builder who contributed to the belfry; in the time of the Egyptian rival sultan, our heroic leader.⁹ Cyril was abbot of the holy monastery of the [maiden] Mother of God, who protects her flock before her Son who is the God of all men, and may the above-mentioned abbot have his reward paid to him in the coming eternal life above”. It is in accented capitals. Below I add the first line in rough facsimile.

The last letters of l. 6 ko I cannot understand. The inscription ends after αωνίω with some obscure letters which I cannot read.¹⁰ First line in rough facsimile:



Gerola can, I think, hardly have seen this inscription. The upper part of the tower also has had a pretty thorough rebuilding since I was first there in 1903; this [rebuilding] was, I think, between 1906 and 1910 or so, probably at the time when Cyril was abbot, for his name is on at least one new bell now in the tower. Thus it was at this time too that the old belfry on the corner of the church was pulled down. This Cyril succeeded when Jacovos retired, was then mixed up with a woman and fled, I think to Simi, and Jacovos was put in again until he retired to die at [the monastery of] Yanni Kapsa, and Methodios, formerly (2nd) abbot of Ξακουστή, succeeded him. Cyril is now leader of the opposition.

Of the earlier state of the monastery we have some evidence from a small bird's eye view which is in the bottom left-hand corner of the icon of the Unfading Rose, which I describe lower down. The date is 1771. The view is taken from the east and so designed as to show the inside of the court. The principal points are marked by figures for which a key is given, written in tiny letters. The tower, the cells, the gate and the well are all marked just as they are at present. The only difference seems to be that, naturally, the new guest-room is now shown. In fact, it seems that the only structural alteration of importance is the building of the new guest-room in the first decade of this century. The outer court and the buildings round the monastery are not shown at all.

The great picture [in the church] is called “Μέγας εἶ Κύριε” [Thou art great, o Lord],¹¹ the opening of a long prayer said at the Epiphany feast, which the scenes in

the picture are said to illustrate. In any case, the central scene of the picture is the Baptism in Jordan. This is signed below by John Kornaros, with the name of the abbot of the time and the date 1770, αψο, in Latin and Greek figures. The inscription is unfortunately partly covered by the new, and very unsuitable, frame, so I could not verify the statement that it gives the artist's village as Αρμένιοι [Armeni] near Χαντρά [Chandras], the native place of the present abbot. Another inscription on the picture tells us that it was offered by a certain pilgrim Dimitrios. These inscriptions mentioning the name of the abbot suggest that it was painted at Toplou, and in any case the Savvathiana story of the cave is not worth much. But at Toplou also it is said that the artist killed his [...] out of jealousy. He is then said to have escaped to Toplou and painted this picture there. The same story has clearly been appropriated by each of the two monasteries.

Besides the great eikon there is in the church at Toplou a smaller picture representing the Virgin as the Unfading Rose, το Αμάραντον Ρόδον. This is signed by Stamatis the Cretan, 1771, and is said to be by a pupil of Kornaros. The style is inferior to that of the big picture, but it is interesting as having in the bottom left-hand corner a small bird's-eye view of the monastery, taken from the East, and so designed to show the court. [...]

I may conclude this account of the monastery by some notes on these buildings outside: the mill, the granary, the fountain and a few cottages. The fountain is on the left as one enters the monastery and a few steps down the slope leading north across the ravine [on another sheet: which runs between the monastery and Agios Elias]. On the front containing wall of the water-chamber is the inscription of 1862: "On the 16th of August 1862 this fountain was built at the expense and toil of Neophytos and Nektarios, priests and monks, and when Anthimos was archbishop of Hierapetra and Siteia; in the days of the Abbot Meletios". In the Greek which is, as far as I remember, in imperfectly accented capital letters:

Εἰς τοὺς 1862 ἀυγούστου 16 ἐκτὴ
 στη αὐτὴ ἡ κρήνη δι' ἐξόδου καὶ μόχθ
 ου Νεοφύτου καὶ Νεκταρίου τῶν ἱε
 ρομονάχων καὶ ὄτου ἀγίου Ἱεροσιτίας
 ἀρχιε[πισ]κό[π]ου Ἀνθίμου
 εἰς τὰς ἡμέρα[ς] Μελετίου καθηγουμέν[ου]

I respect the spelling but add the often missing accents and breathings.¹²

The abbot showed me an Ευαγγέλιον (book of gospels), printed at Venice I think, 1745 bound in vellum on which are silver plates embossed with the evangelists and sacred scenes. One of these plates has the inscription "Save, Our Lady, save from the injury of his foes Emmanuel Kornaros and his wife who gave this as a gift to the monastery 1808. [Greek original not included here]

Greek monks have often had the practice of recording on blank leaves in their manuscripts or books any event of interest in the history of the monastery, and there are two such notes in the Toplou library. One is on three blank leaves at the beginning of a 370-page manuscript containing lives of the hermit saints and is dated September 19th 1811. It is written by the abbot Zacharias Kornaros, and describes an incident which shows how the Turks could treat the Christians. It runs thus:¹³

“In the days of King (i.e. Sultan) Mahmout there was a ruler in Crete called Bekir Pasha. In his days there was a monastery called Our Lady of the Promontory and a very great trial happened to this monastery. And by the help of the devil there was a certain Hagarene (i.e. Turk), a vessel of the devil, and he murdered the abbot who was called Jeremiah and after him another abbot was elected called Zacharias Kornaros. And in his days it happened that this murderer went to the monastery to kill the others and to pillage the monastery. But by the good pleasure of God it fell out that there was there another Hagarene and he killed the murderer that the word of Christ might be fulfilled when he said that he who taketh the sword shall perish by the sword. But a great injustice was done to the monastery for the Janissaries all rose up to go and burn the monastery, and also the mother (of the murderer of the abbot) went to the pasha and roused the *siliktari* – esquire or armsbearer to his lord¹⁴ – of the pasha and eight more of his men and with many Janissaries they went to the monastery and stopped there for thirty days and who can tell the unrighteous acts which they did there. Also they took the abbot and the other fathers and brought them to the pasha and he laid them in bonds and they were there in prison for fifty days, and God alone knows their sufferings. But our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Lady the Mother of God who wait for our repentance put it into the heart of the agas to intercede with the pasha, and he took us out of that stinking prison and we went back to the monastery. But it cost the monastery fifty purses in money (a purse is 500 piastres, about £5) not to mention all the gear they took away from the monastery. But no tongue of man can understand the injustice and misfortune of the poor monastery and the oppression of the unhappy monks and the grief of the Christians. But this happened because of our sins and unrighteousness and for the transgressions and for the hatred which we have one to the other, for he who hateth his brother his God hateth, for if we had preserved brotherly love this injustice would not have been done to us and he (that is, God) would have slain the sinner in some other way; for he is a righteous judge and awaits our repentance and for this reason chastened us. But he did not desert us finally that we might recognise that we are dust and ashes. Now this happened in the days of Zacharias, priest and monk, wearer of the great and angelic habit, in the world Kornaros, and a sinner, and whoever is a Christian may he pardon me.”

It appears from this story that the mother of the murderer of the first abbot Jeremiah, finding that her son was killed in the monastery, concluded that the monks had done it out of revenge and the pasha took this view very likely largely because the monks could be made to pay. The second “Hagarene” who actually killed him seems to have got off scot free.

This event has left a local tradition which I was told by Mr Panayotis Hatzidakis¹⁵ who was in Siteia some thirty or more years ago. The monks finding the body of the murdered Turk in the monastery got frightened and set it on a mule and drove the mule away in order that they might not fall under suspicion of the murder. When the Turks found the body they noticed that it was splashed with the droppings from wax candles and concluded that it must have come from the monastery and took their vengeance accordingly. Whoever has seen the service books in a monastery or still more any embroidery that has been used in a Greek church will have no difficulty in believing that the monks in examining the body dropped a good deal of candle grease about. It is not hard to imagine the scene in a dark corner of the monastery at night with the frightened monks staring at the body of their enemy with many ejaculations of ‘Lord have mercy and God protect us!’, and at last hitting on the scheme of sending the mule off home with the body of his murdered master. But for it

to be true it is a little too like the story of what happened to the head of the Turk Tsouli when he was killed at the passing leading into Lasithi [ch. 24].

11 March 1917. In the copy of the Lousaikon (Venice 1758) at Toplou is a manuscript note at the beginning in the same hand that wrote the account of the occupation of the monastery by the Turks in 1811 and is presumably that of the abbot Zacharias Kornaros. This note tells us that he bought it at Athos from Iveron and asks for the prayers of its later owners:¹⁶

[The present Lousaikon is the property of me Zachariaias ordained monk surnamed Kornaros. 1808. I bought it from the Holy Mountain of Iveron and (they charged me 100 [piastres])¹⁷ and may whoever receives it after my death beseech God to forgive my many sins, Amen.]

In the last leaf of the folio manuscript of sermons of Isaias after the anecdote about Sinai¹⁸ another and better hand has written the following. It is odd that it is in another hand because it purports to be by the same Matthew Blavakis, ordained monk and pilgrim; possibly he wrote better at some times than at others; the spelling is equally bad:¹⁹

[The present book is the property of Our Lady of the Promontory and may whoever removes it from the monastery be cursed by all the saints, and by Our Lady the Virgin Mary may he be unforgiven. It contains various fine sermons and it is called the book of the holy Isaias. 1846 February 10. By the hand of Matthew Blavakis pilgrim from the village of Sitanos.]

Folklore (at Preveli 7th April 1918)

Yannis of Palaikastro told me that, à propos of the cursing of Venizelos by the Metropolitan of Athens,²⁰ who at this time was a semi-prisoner in exile and disgrace at Preveli, there are near Palaikastro two heaps of stones. One is near Toplou. The road from Toplou to Siteia goes down into a gully near the Moni and then rises to the Stavros and to the point where the road to Ai Andreas branches off to the right. In the gully a side gully goes off to the left and this point is called τ' αναθεμάτου το ρυάκι [the stream of the anathema]. By the path is a flat stone with a lot of pebbles on the top and the first time a person passes by it is lucky to throw a stone on the heap.

The other is at the foot of Modi where the road to Toplou branches off from the road to Palaikastro. Here there is a heap of stones (τρόχαλος) upon which passers threw stones in the same way.

I have been to both places but not noticed the heaps. (Note later: I have seen the Toplou heap and added my stone. I did not learn the story of the Modi heap.)

Toplou, 3 May 1918. Το ρυάκι τ' αναθεμάτου

This is the name of the ravine into which the path from Toplou to Siteia descends immediately after leaving the monastery. It then ascends to the Stavros, a little white shrine on the edge of the sharp descent to Analouka[s]; the Stavros is conspicuous a long way off from the Siteia direction. In the bottom of this ravine near where a side ravine runs up to the left (as one leaves the *moni*) is a big flat-topped boulder on the

right side of the path with a heap of small stones on the top of it. Everyone, the first time he passes by, is supposed to add a stone. The story is that the monks killed a very bad Turk here and tied the dead body onto his mare, which carried it down to Agia Photia, where he was buried. The Turks followed the bloodstains on the road up to the monastery, where they took vengeance on the monks. Since then this boulder where the Turk was killed, which is about ten minutes or less from the monastery, has had stones thrown upon it. This time I saw the boulder, which I had often noticed before without knowing its history. This story sounds like an echo of the 1811 attack on the monastery recorded by the abbot Kornaros, the excuse for which was the murder of a Turk.

The place at Agia Photia where the Turks is buried is shown by the path along the sea just below the village. There is nothing there to mark the grave, but the place is just pointed out.

On 6 June 1918 the abbot gave me another version. A very bad Turk, Hasapametakis, was killed by other Turks in one of the rooms in the monastery and his body thrown down into the court over the edge of the gallery in front of these rooms. The body was taken and buried at Agia Photia. The Turks traced the death to Toplou by the wax spilt on the clothes. the event was commemorated by throwing stones on the boulder of the ρυάκι τ' αναθεμάτου. It was to revenge this that the Turks occupied the monastery.

This links together the story of το ρυάκι τ' αναθεμάτου and the account by the abbot Kornaros of the 1811 incident, when a Turk was killed at Toplou and the abbot imprisoned and the monastery occupied by Turks.

Traditions

Why the dove coos (hisses).

At Toplou Father Evmenios told me, 4 May 1918, that the Turks have a story that the swordfish made a hole in the side of Noah's ark with his snout and the ark was in danger of sinking. The snake then stopped up the hole with his tail, but in time the snake got cold and seemed likely not to be able to hold out. The dove then came and sat upon the snake to keep him warm so that he was able to go on keeping his tail in the hole. Whilst doing this the dove imitated the snake's hissing and so learned to coo. The same word is used for both in Greek.

From 14th-century English MS (Brit. Mus. Royal 2. B. vii) called *Queen Mary's Prayerbook*: The devil has got into the ark by the cunning of Noah's wife. "The sequel to this is portrayed in *Queen Mary's Prayerbook*. Noah, on seeing the dove return, says 'Benedicite' [bless]. The Devil, unable to bear the sacred word, bursts out through the hull of the ark, but the hole he makes is stopped by the snake who thrusts his tail into it. Many forms of this legend are collected by Daehnhardt" (M. R. James, *The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, SPCK, 1920, p. 15).

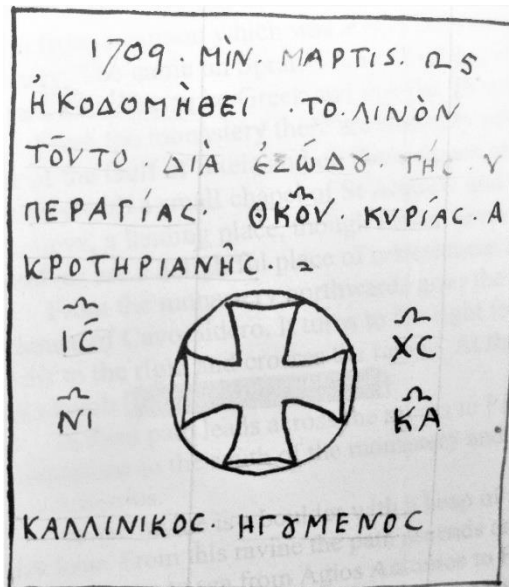
Zographeios Agon 1896, p. 31. The monks at the Great Monastery, a name for Toplou, quarrelled and would say neither vespers nor mass. On Saturday evening the bell rang and not a single monk left his cell out of bad temper. About midnight a *voui* (ox) came out of the oil store – a dark place – and went outside every cell and roared and the then went back to the oil store and disappeared. At dawn the monks came together and prayed the Virgin never to let the ox come to them again; at every roar the monastery had shaken.

VAI²¹

The one place which I know in Crete where the wild palm grows in any abundance is the marshy flat valley of Vai – “the palm tree” – about an hour from Toplou on the path to Cavo Sidero. The valley is a flat bottom between the low hills which runs into the sea between Eremopoli [Erimoupoli] and Palaikastro, but nearer Eremopoli.²² On other places in Crete the palm grows: [ms note: a few at Suda by sea E of arsenal and one on [?] west of Suda near Βλιτέ²³], at the [river] Armyro west of Candia there are a number of bushes, but only bushes, and when planted it reaches a good height and fresh dates may be sometimes seen in the Candia market, and it is a favourite tree in monastery gardens where it furnishes the palms for Palm Sunday services and in the process suffers a good deal in appearance. But nowhere is the tree really abundant as it is at Vai. The grove mostly consists of bushes, but there are numerous specimens that have shot up into trees. They fill the valley for some distance up from the beach where the water makes a muddy lagoon and almost reach to the farm of Vai.²⁴



Views of Vai: (left) from Dawkins' archive, showing the islets known as Grandes; (right) our IMG_0273 (15 April 2009)



[24 June 1917] At Vai, the farm near Eremopoli through which the path to Toplou passes, just at the head of the valley of palms, there is a built wine-press with an inscription on a built-in block of marble telling us that it was built on the 25th of March 1709 at the expense of the “Most holy Mother of God our Lady of the Promontory” when Kallinikos was abbot.



IMG_0270 The inscription on the wine-press, 15 April 2009

The farm still belongs to the monastery and Kallinikos' wine-press is still in use.²⁵ It is an almost universal custom in Greece to sign and date even quite humble buildings and surely a very laudable one. A building without a dating inscription always seems to me to lose in savour. The inscription, like those of the Popes everywhere in Rome, no doubt proceeds to some degree from vanity, yet it preserves history, it gives us a glimpse into the past and is in some sense a protest against our mortality, a humble expression of that appetite for fame which Dante saw was so sincere a feeling in human nature.

[manuscript addition] At Vai, farm near Toplou, over [still?] is the inscription 1719 ΟΚΤΟΒΡΙΟΥ 4.²⁶

Peter Mackridge's notes

¹ We visited the monastery on 15 April 2009. Gerola (III 193-7) gives a description and two photos of the buildings, plus another photo on II 367. More of Gerola's photos are reproduced in Curuni and Donati, *Creta Veneziana*, pp. 419-20.

² For decades the "the almost desolate peninsula of Cavo Sidero" has been protected from development by being a low-scale naval installation which is out of bounds to the public. The windswept peninsula has been uninhabited for about one and a half millennia, and it has no natural water supply. It is apparently an important habitat for endemic plants, and the archaeological remains have so far been left untouched. Since 1991, however, Cavo Sidero has been threatened with a huge and destructive tourist development (including sleeping accommodation for 7000 people) by a company

named Minoan Group plc registered in Croydon, Surrey. According to its website (<http://www.minoangroup.com/crete/>), the project was approved by the Greek authorities in 2007, but permission was revoked by Greece's highest court, the Council of State, in December 2010. A revised plan was then proposed by the company. According to the website <http://www.chaniapost.eu/2017/06/27/itanos-gaia-luxury-project-on-crete-gets-green-light/>, permission for land use for the new project, cynically named Itanos Gaia (after the nearby ancient site of Itanos and the ancient Greek goddess of Earth [!]), was approved in June 2017 following a presidential decree and a subsequent decision by the Supreme Court. Opposition to the project has come from local residents and environmental organisations and was expressed in a petition led by Oliver Rackham and Jennifer Moody, authors of the magnificent study *The making of the Cretan landscape*; this was signed by 11,000 people from 88 countries (40% of them from Greece). According to the Minoan Group website, under the revised plan “650 rooms and individual suites will cater for the more sophisticated needs of today’s travelers. The amenities of the Project will include a multitude of land based and water sports. A heathland golf course designed around the natural contours of the land will include the latest techniques to encourage the regeneration of eco-systems and their wildlife. Together with a number of spas and wellness centres, cultural and environmental activities will ensure the successful year round operation of the resort.” All along, the company has been supported by Toplou Monastery, which claims to own the land – a claim that has been disputed on legal grounds by opponents of the scheme. Having said all that, I should add that the man who ran the restaurant next to the monastery in April 2009 lamented the possibility that the development wouldn’t take place, “because of the ecologists, who don’t care that people are hungry”.

³ The church is the rather fine funerary Venetian-era chapel of the Holy Cross with baroque decorations. When we visited, the chapel and the windmill had been recently restored.

⁴ This very attractive floor of the courtyard was still there when we visited. It must have replaced the white and red stones, described by Gerola, that had survived from the original paving. Although vol. III of Gerola’s study was published in 1917, I don’t think he had visited Crete since before the First World War.

⁵ In our photo on p. 4 we see the pebbled paving of the courtyard and the west end of



IMG_0259

the church. To the left of the church door we see the fine (and very rare) relief sculpture of the Virgin and Child inscribed “H KYPIA H AKPΩTHPIANH” (Our Lady of the Promontory”, see photo 0259) and the two fine inscriptions below it and

to the right of it, which are not mentioned by Dawkins. The relief and the inscriptions are photographed, copied and transcribed by Xanthoudidis 1903: 86-89. The relief is photographed by Gerola (II 325), who also copies and transcribes the inscription beneath it (IV 587-9); he copies and transcribes the second inscription at IV 409. According to Xanthoudidis, the second of these inscriptions was found in the 1890s by a local Muslim next to the church of St Constantine near Siteia and was subsequently brought to the monastery, where it was placed on the wall. Whereas the first inscription refers to the founding of the monastery itself, the second refers to the founding of St Constantine's church as an outpost of the monastery. Both of the finely carved inscriptions, in ancient Greek language and metre, record the founder's name as Gabriel Pandogalos and specify the year as 1619.

⁶ The two staircases to the first-floor terrace were closed to visitors when we were there.

⁷ This window is on the first floor; the window sinks into the arch on the right.

⁸ Possibly a paraphrase of Plato, *Phaedo* 64a: "those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and bring dead", or 67e: "true philosophers practise dying".

⁹ Dawkins mistranslates here. A more correct rendering would be "the Egyptian viceroy, the heroic prince", referring to Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt.

¹⁰ Dawkins' transcription of the Greek (of which I've recorded only the first line in the main text) is fairly accurate. The enigmatic date, which he reads as 1816, is most likely to be 1836, since the inscription was placed there during the Egyptian occupation of Crete (1830-41). Psilakis' transcription (II 492) completes the KO that puzzled Dawkins as KOPHΣ 'maiden' (which I have inserted in square brackets into Dawkins' translation. However, Psilakis' transcription fails to make sense of the final phrases: he writes the nonsensical [...] INA OMION OΣ EKΠΛHPΩΘH TO ANΩ B TH MEΛOYΣH ZΩH TH AIΩNIΩ whereas Dawkins writes [...] ἵνα ὁ μιστὸς ἐκπληρωθῆ τῷ ἄνω ἐν τῇ μελούσῃ ζωῇ τῇ αἰωνίῳ [so that the reward will be paid to the above [abbot] in the eternal life to come]. Psilakis, like Dawkins, cannot make sense of the truly puzzling final word of the inscription.

¹¹ This icon is reproduced at https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Αρχαίο:ΜegasEiKyrie_MoniToplouLasithiKritis.jpg. For the Savvathiana version see ch. 14.

¹² This inscription, which Dawkins recorded on recorded 10 March 1918, is now completely worn away (probably by the wind), except the first word, in capitals.

¹³ The following is Dawkins' own translation. I am omitting his manuscript transcription of the Greek text, which is dated 25 June 1917.

¹⁴ Turkish *silâhdar* 'sword-bearer'.

¹⁵ This was at Myrthios on 17 July 1917 according to another page of typescript, where Dawkins says he read to Hatzidakis his transcription of Kornaros' account of "the 1811 events".

¹⁶ The *Lousaikon* (Λουσαϊκόν) is a collection of narrative accounts of the lives of famous Christian ascetics of the 4th century. Iveron is one of the monasteries on Mount Athos. I do not quote the Greek original recorded by Dawkins; instead I have substituted my own translation.

¹⁷ The material in brackets here is a translation of Dawkins' conjecture.

¹⁸ I have not quoted this (uninteresting) anecdote here.

¹⁹ Once again I quote my own translation rather than Dawkins' transcription of the Greek.

²⁰ In the second half of 1916 Greece became territorially divided between two governments, the royalist government in Athens, which wanted Greece to remain

neutral during the First World War, and the government in Thessaloniki, led by Eleftherios Venizelos, which wanted Greece to join the Entente Allies (Britain and France). In December 1916 the Archbishop of Athens Theoklitos and the Holy Synod the Church of Greece organized a rally in Athens, during which Venizelos was anathematized and participants were encouraged to throw stones on a heap. When Venizelos became prime minister in Athens in 1917, the archbishop was deposed – until a different government took power in 1920.

²¹ I first visited Toplou and Vai with my brother Ralph in August 1967, when we spent a night on the beach. (The traditional name of the beach is Ψιλή Άμμος [Fine Sand].) There were a small number of other people on the beach, and there was a bamboo hut from which drinks were served. I was reluctant to go back there until Jackie and I plucked up courage to visit the beach on 15 April 2009. It was admittedly out of season and nobody else was there, but I was delighted to find that the place looked more or less unchanged, apart from a big new car-park (which presumably necessitated the destruction of some of the palm trees) and a restaurant built discreetly at the south end. (However, the photo of Vai Beach on Google Maps, taken more recently in the summer, shows the beach defaced by loungers and parasols.) At the time of our visit the trees along the beach looked rather the worse for wear. The Athens newspaper *Ta Nea* (5 Feb. 2006) reported that the red palm weevil *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* was attacking the palm forest at Vai. It had already attacked dozens of trees, while many trees had been uprooted in order to stem the phenomenon; this is also referred to by Dimitris Kalokyris, *Athens Review of Books*, July-Aug. 2020, p. 37. When we visited again on 29 April 2019 (during a holiday period between Easter and Mayday) we found many people on the beach, but no parasols and loungers (at least yet).

²² Erimoupoli is the medieval and modern name of the ancient site, which is partly on land and partly under water. Nowadays it is usually known by its ancient name of Itanos.

²³ Βλητέες is located next to the westernmost recess of Souda bay, near the (modern) harbour.

²⁴ The fruit of the Cretan date palm (*Phoenix theophrasti*), is rarely edible. There are other places in Crete where wild palm trees grow in abundance, notably the little estuary at Limni, near Preveli Monastery on the south coast.

²⁵ When we visited on 15 April 2009 we found that the farm that Dawkins mentioned had been very tastefully converted into simple rooms for visitors, with a taverna where we had had a beer and a snack. The establishment, which is called Metochi Vai, is run by the friendly Manolis Katsarakis. He told us that the wine-press was still in use. It's pleasant to record that, as far as the exterior of the buildings is concerned, very little seemed to have changed there in the 100 years since Dawkins visited it. Ten years later, on 29 April 2019, we had lunch there and found that despite the success of the taverna, the guest rooms were not functioning. There are palm trees either side of the former farm buildings.

²⁶ We didn't see this.