

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS
AND
DISCOVERIES IN THE LEVANT.

——
LETTER XXX.

MYTILENE, *July 20, 1855.*

SINCE my return from Calymnos I have been much occupied with enrolling recruits for the Land Transport Corps, and shipping them off for the Dardanelles, where they remain at the *dépôt* till they are organized for service in the Crimea. As I have to give them each £1 bounty money on their enlisting, and as they are very ready to desert, I am never happy till they are shipped off. How such a motley lot of vagabonds as are now collected at the Dardanelles will ever be kept together and drilled into shape is very difficult to imagine. The Albanians, who have enlisted in great numbers, are already beginning to give a good deal of trouble. About 200 of them deserted the other day, and nearly succeeded in sacking the hospital at Renköi.

I went last week to the group of villages called Kalloni, at the head of the gulf of the same name, which I have already noticed in the account of my visit to Ereso (I. pp. 101-2).

VOL. II.

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

This district forms one of the three cazas or provinces into which the Turks have divided Mytilene, and is governed by a Mudir, assisted by a Mejlis and Cadi.

In the plain of Kalloni are seven villages lying close together, — Daphia, Keramia, Papiana, Sumaria, Achyrona, Argenna, and Agios Cosmas, or Tzumali.¹ The name of Kalloni is given to the whole group. The most important of them is Achyrona, where the Archbishop of Methymna resides in a large uncomfortable house, with little of the dignity which we should associate with an episcopal dwelling. The diocese of Methymna extends over the northern part of the island. The revenues of the see amount to about £1,300 a year, or one-half that of the see of Mytilene.

The present Archbishop is a good specimen of his class, and received us very hospitably. On riding into his courtyard, I found his secretary, a good-looking young monk, walking up and down, reading a French translation of Locke, of whose philosophy he seemed to have a clearer idea than could have been anticipated, considering the uncivilized society in which he dwells.

At the distance of about a mile and a half from Achyrona are two monasteries, one for monks, the other for nuns, founded by a certain St. Ignatius, about A.D. 1500. That for monks, called “the Monastery of the Meadow,” τοῦ λειμῶνος, and dedicated to St. Michael, is pleasantly situated in a little valley surrounded by hills. It is an irregular stone building running round a courtyard. The chambers

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

of the monks are on an upper story, to which stone steps give access, as in a *pyrgo*. Over the entrance gate is a fresco representing St. Michael. Formerly there were a hundred and fifty monks here, but now not above one third of that number. They are governed by an Hegoumenos or Prior, of very unprepossessing and dirty aspect. At 11 a.m., when I first called on him, he was still in bed, and there was about the whole monastery a look of squalid sloth which disgusted me much. There is a small collection of MSS. here, which I had only time to glance at. The books which I opened were chiefly old services of the Greek Church. I noticed a 4to MS. on paper, of the 15th century, entitled 'Αριστοτέλους φυσική ἀκρόασις, much wormed and in bad condition. It contains the first four books and part of the fifth of the Physics. On a previous visit, Colnaghi noticed a MS. of the New Testament illuminated with a miniature of St. Mark, much injured, but in a bold style. He thought that the age of this MS. might be the 10th or 11th century. On cross-examining the Hegoumenos, I found him very little disposed to give information about the collection of MSS.

The church of the monastery contains some frescoes executed by monks of Mount Athos in the 18th century. Between the nave and the chancel is a richly-carved wooden screen, the work of native artists and of the same period as the frescoes.

The nunnery at Kalloni is a penitentiary, to which ladies who have led naughty lives are banished from Mytilene. All the specimens of the sex, however, who were exhibited to me here were so very old,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ugly, and repulsive, that if they had ever done anything wrong, it must have been a very long time ago. They were beguiling the long summer hours with knitting and spinning, by which they maintain themselves. They do not live in common; each nun has her own chamber and a little garden, which she cultivates herself.

Attached to the monastery is a small church elaborately decorated inside with pictures of the Panagia and various saints, in which the old Byzantine style of painting has been handed down with Chinese fidelity from the time of Cimabue. In the porch are some mural paintings with subjects from the Old Testament. Here is also represented the trial of the celebrated heretic Arius before the emperor Constantine at the council of Nicæa. In the church are several scenes from the life of the Virgin, and representations of the different parables in the New Testament. Among these I particularly noticed the picture of the Broad and Narrow Gate, in which a lady dressed in red and green has given her hand to a fantastic devil, and is tripping down the broad path at the head of a goodly company; while a number of monks are creeping with infinite difficulty through the low entrance of a mediæval fortress.

I observed that a picture of the Panagia had a gold Turkish coin stuck like a beauty-spot on the cheek, and from the chain hung a little silver hand with a list of names attached to it. I inquired what all these things meant, and was told that the coins and the hand were votive offerings made by sick people, and the writing was a list of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the names of invalids cured by the saint to whose picture the paper was attached. This custom illustrates an expression in a Greek inscription, which contains a list of offerings, *anathemata*, in the temple of Amphiaraos, in Bœotia, and gives direction for the repair of such of them as required it.² Among these offerings are mentioned silver ornaments from which coins had fallen off. These coins had probably been attached to votive objects, in the same way as they are to this day at Kalloni.

About half an hour from Achyrona is a bridge called Ennea Kamaris, where is a Byzantine inscription referring to the building of the bridge.³ In the neighbouring village of Daphia I found an inscription on a step outside a mosque, recording how one Claudius Lucianus, of Alabanda, dedicated a hound to the Artemis of Thermæ.⁴ In a garden at Achyrona I noticed the capital of a large Corinthian column.

The plain at the head of the Gulf of Kalloni, now called Campo, is formed by alluvial deposit, and the part of it to the east of the group of the villages is evidently of recent formation, as will be seen by reference to the Admiralty chart, where a lagune is marked. Small rocky eminences rise like islands out of this monotonous level, which is traversed by a raised causeway. This must be that plain of Methymna mentioned by Strabo, for the country immediately round Molivo is rocky and barren. The city of Napé, situated, according to the same author, in this plain, probably occupied the site of one of the small rocky eminences which overlook it.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

XXXI.

MYTLENE, *August 21, 1855.*

LAST week, having occasion to go to Plumari, on the southern coast, I took the opportunity of exploring some of the district lying between the gulfs of Olivieri and Kalloni. My first halting-place was Ayasso, where we arrived in the middle of a great festival, or *Panegyris*, celebrated there every year in this month. It was formerly frequented by an immense concourse of people from the neighbouring islands and continent; but the attendance has much diminished of late years.

A great sale of manufactured goods takes place at this festival; so that it serves the purpose of a fair. During its duration, the church is used as an inn, and the women are allowed to sleep there at night. When I entered it on the second day of the *Panegyris*, a multitude of both sexes were lying about on the pavement eating and drinking. Towards the close of the festival the Archbishop arrives, and drives out this *profanum vulgus* from the church, which is then duly purified. At Rhodes, as I have already mentioned in previous letters, more suitable accommodation is provided for the reception of the visitors at the feasts held at Zambika and Kremastò. (See I. p. 184.)

The pilgrims who thus profane the church of Our Lady of Ayasso, have, however, made some atonement by the value of their votive offerings at her

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

shrine. These offerings are allowed to accumulate till they amount to a large sum, when they are converted into money. The priests receive a portion as their emolument, and the rest is expended in some public work for the benefit of the community.

It is by this discreet application of sacred things to secular purposes that the village of Ayasso has been supplied with an excellent aqueduct. A large school at Morea has been built from similar resources.

Such a mode of appropriating the treasures which piety had invested was not unknown to the ancient Greeks; but they regarded such resources as only to be used in cases of extreme emergency, when the safety of the state required it. In the Peloponnesian war, Pericles told the Athenians that the ornaments of the Chryselephantine statue of Pallas Athene, weighing forty talents of pure gold, were so attached as to be removable, if it were necessary, and that the votive objects, deposits, and sacred plate in the temples of Athens amounted to more than five hundred talents. These he reckons among the resources of the state, only to be resorted to in case of need, and if so used, to be replaced on the first return of prosperity.

In a later age, when religious feeling was much weakened among the Greeks, Dionysios the Elder, of Syracuse, had no such pious scruples. He stripped the gods of their golden mantles and wreaths, substituting ordinary ones, such as mortals wear; he took the gold cups out of the very hands of the statues, and having persuaded the women of Syracuse to propitiate Demeter by dedicating to her

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

all their jewels, he took the liberty of borrowing these offerings from the goddess immediately afterwards. These pilferings were far surpassed by the audacious sacrilege of the Phocians, who a few years later sacked the vast treasures stored up at Delphi. It is clear, therefore, that, though the ancients regarded their temples as banks of deposit, the ruler who appropriated these offerings to state uses without due cause was sure to incur the charge of sacrilege. It was as if the Bank of England were to invest their sacred metallic reserve in ordinary commercial speculations.

The Panagia of Ayasso is held in special reverence as possessing the power of miraculously curing the sick or insane, who are brought to the church and left to pass the Saturday night there, the result of which is a perfect cure on the Sunday morning.

This custom seems a relic of the ancient *ἐγκοίμησις*, or *incubatio*, which I have described in a former letter in my account of the Amphiaraïon. (See I. p. 30.) The church at Ayasso is one of the finest in Mytilene; two rows of seven columns divide the interior into a nave and two aisles. The altar-screen is of polished grey marble; in the panels are portraits of the Panagia and other saints.

From Ayasso I rode along the base of Mount Olympus through a picturesque and beautiful country, full of rushing torrents and park-like glades, shaded by immense chestnut-trees, whose ample verdure shut out the fierce rays of an August

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

sun. The lower ravines were fringed with a rich luxuriant growth of pear and other fruit-trees; the atmosphere was deliciously cool and bracing, like that of the lower levels of the island in November.

As I crossed a high ridge, I saw the coast of Asia Minor stretching far away towards Smyrna and Scio, and behind me a most picturesque background, broken into endless ravines by the intersecting spurs of Mount Olympus. As we descended towards Plumari, the rich forest timber gradually dwindled away into a few scanty pines scattered over a wild and barren district.

The village, or small town, of Plumari, formerly called Potamo, is picturesquely situated on a bold cliff by the mouth of a little river. It contains about four thousand inhabitants, who trade in olive oil and corn. This village has an aspect of stir and activity about it which is rare in Mytilene. The inhabitants are a fine race; but notwithstanding their healthy appearance, leprosy, *λώβα*, is very prevalent here. The dress of the women is very picturesque. They wear bright scarlet trousers, and jackets embroidered with gold.

I was hospitably entertained here by the Archbishop of Mytilene, who is now making his annual progress through the island to collect his dues. He has lived much in Macedonia, and told me some curious particulars about the peasantry there, who have retained many ancient customs which have nearly disappeared in the Archipelago.

A marriage in Macedonia is in this wise. On the wedding morning, the bride proceeds on horseback

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01743-5 - Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, Volume 2

Charles Thomas Newton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

from her home to the bridegroom's house, after taking leave of her parents, on which occasion a loaf is cut in half, one portion being left in her old home, the other taken with her. Before quitting her own village, she takes a solemn farewell of all the inhabitants, old and young, kissing their hands and asking their pardon, if she has wronged any of them. She then sets out on her journey, conducted by her brothers, or nearest of kin, one of whom walks on either side, with his hand on her bridle, and holding out two daggers crossed to avert all evil influences. When she arrives at the bridegroom's house, he entreats her to dismount, an invitation which she declines by shaking her head, in token that she has arrived portionless and that she looks to him for a dowry. He then offers a lamb; then, a second lamb: the lady still shakes her head; and so they go on with a succession of bids and refusals till a satisfactory bargain is struck. Then the bride is taken into the courtyard, still on horseback, and her horse led round a fire three times to purify her from evil spirits, a ceremony which recalls the ancient rite of *Amphidromia*, a rite in which new-born infants were carried round a blazing altar. After this ceremony, the bride is at length lifted from the saddle either by the father-in-law or the bridesman and carried upstairs in the state-room, where she is placed on the divan in the most honourable place. In passing into the house her feet are never allowed to touch the ground, for fear, probably, of such an ominous casualty as stumbling.