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William Martin Leake

Excerpt

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T R A V E L S

IN

N O R T H E R N G R E E C E .

FOURTH JOURNEY

(*continued.*)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ACARNANIA.

Island of Petalá—*Echinades*—Port Platiá—Lutzianá, Tragamésti, Vasilópulo—Mount Velúzi—*Critihote*, city, cape, and mountain—*Astacus*—Makherá—Bambíni—Paleókastró of Porta—Aetós—Return to Katúna—*Alyzia*—Islands *Carnus* and *Taphus*—*Thyrium*—*Palærus*—*Sollium*—Return to Balímbeý—Ai Vasíli—Return to Vónitza—*Echinus*—*Heraclia*—*Myrtuntium*—Return to Prévýza—Remains of *Actium* at Akri or Punta—Harbour of *Actium* or Prévýza—Battle of *Actium*.

APRIL 3, 1809, continued.—Having descended from Tríkardho into the plain of the Aspro, we proceed to a mill two miles distant from the ruins, which is turned by a derivation from the river flowing from the marsh of Tríkardho. In summer this river is said to contain nearly as much water as the *Achelous*; as its sources never

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fail. Finding an Ithacan boat at the mill, we engage it to carry us to the port of Petalá, sending thither by land the horses and as many of the palikária as the boat will not contain.

After dining at the mill we descend quickly with the wind and stream for about four miles, when a calm ensues, followed by a heavy fall of rain with furious gusts of wind at intervals. Our boat having grounded at the mouth of the river, we are conveyed in monóxyla to the island of Petalá, which in the middle is separated only from the main land by a narrow channel connecting two harbours, both of which are well sheltered by the island, but have in no part a depth of more than six feet. The river of Tríkardho discharges itself into the northern harbour: in the southern the boat is lying which I had ordered from Mesolónghi to convey me to Tragamésti; but such is the violence of the gale, that although the wind is quite favourable, the boatmen will not venture even to pass through the narrow channel uniting the two bays, still less to proceed to Tragamésti. We are obliged, therefore, to submit to be devoured by the fleas in the hut of Hassán Agá, son of Yussúf Arápi, the Vezír's Hasnadár, who commands sixty Albanians placed on the island by the Vezír to prevent its occupation by the Kleftes, who were in the habit of making incursions from hence into the neighbouring country. Hassán treats us hospitably as the friends of his master, giving us fish and lamb for supper, and excellent Ithacan wine which he has obtained by levying contributions of it from the boats which put in here.

His hut, dignified with the name of a kula or tower, is twelve feet square within, and serves for every thing but a kitchen, which among Albanian soldiers is generally *sub dio*. His palikária occupy two other huts of the same size, but formed only of heaps of stones covered with branches, in which they all assemble when the weather is bad : when fine, they repose on the lee-side of skreens made of branches supported upon rough posts, and which may easily be shifted according to the wind. The Agá's hut alone is tiled. The men consider themselves in luxury, having fish from the harbour for the trouble of catching it, and bread gratis from the villages. Hassán complains that in summer the air is unhealthy, and the winged insects very troublesome ; but adds, that gnats, the worst of all, are seldom seen after June, the place being too dry for them.

Petalá consists almost entirely of rugged rocks, having small intervals of soil which are covered as usual in such situations in the winter and spring with a luxuriant growth of herbage, and a great variety of succulent or aromatic shrubs. On the summit are some veláni oaks, and wild olives, and on the western side of the island a few fields which were cultivated by the Ithacans until Alý Pashá occupied the island.

A series of low swampy islets borders the main coast opposite to Petalá, extending from a narrow stripe of low land which separates the marsh of Tríkardho from the sea to the heights which rise from the northern side of the mouth of the *Achelous* over against Kurtzolári.

April 4.—We sail in the Mesolonghite boat in four hours to the Skáloma of Tragamésti, vulgarly Dragamésti¹, passing between the *Echinades* and the *Acarnanian* coast, in which, about midway, is the harbour of Platiá, or Pandeleímona. The wind without is southerly, but near the shore a calm prevails. The *Echinades* may be divided into three clusters: the Dhiapória in face of Platiá, the Dhragonáres to the westward of these, and the Módhia to the southward. All the larger produce corn; Pondikó, Prováti, and Dhragonára, which last is the largest of all, have kalývia on them. As at Petalá, wild olives abound, some of which on Dhragonára have been grafted by Mr. Zavó of Ithaca, who owns the island.

Platiá is a beautiful little bay with a narrow entrance, having a muddy bottom at a depth in most parts of twelve or fifteen fathoms. On the summit of a hill rising from the harbour are the walls of a Hellenic city, which I take to have been Astacus, as Scylax and Strabo concur in showing that Astacus was the chief maritime city and harbour northward of Œniadæ, near the *Echinades*². The bay of Tragamésti is five or six miles long, by one in breadth, and would be much exposed to the

¹ Τραγαμέστη, sometimes Δραγομέστη.

² Μετὰ ταῦτα πόλις Ἀλύζεια καὶ κατὰ ταύτην νῆσος Κάρνος· καὶ πόλις Ἀστακος καὶ λιμὴν καὶ ποταμὸς Ἀχελῶος καὶ Οἰνιάδαι πόλις.—Scylax in Ἀκαρνανίᾳ.

ἢ Ἀλυζία Εἶτα

ἄκρα Κριθωτῆ καὶ αἱ Ἐχινάδες καὶ πόλις Ἀστακος ὁμώνυμος τῇ περὶ Νικομήδειαν . . . καὶ ἡ Κριθωτῆ δ' ὁμώνυμος πολίχνη τῶν ἐν τῇ Θρακίᾳ Χερρόνησῳ· πάντα δ' εὐλίμενα τὰ μεταξύ· εἶτ' Οἰνιάδαι καὶ ὁ Ἀχελῶος.—Strabo, p. 459.

south-west, which is the direction of its length, were it not for the shelter afforded by the *Echinades*. The mountain Velútzí slopes steeply to the north-western shore with a straight coast line. There is said to be a depth of 15 orghiés, or fathoms, within 200 yards of the skáloma, or magazines, which stand on the beach at the extremity of the bay. Here is a rough mole, where several boats of Kefalonía are now lying detained by their fear of the Maltese privateers and an English brig which is cruising off Mesolónghi.

Finding horses at the Magazines, I proceed to the village of Vasilópulo, distant six miles, and the residence of K. F. Hodjá-bashi of Tragamésti, Vasilópulo, and Lutzianá, three villages occupying lofty situations on the northern side of the valley. Vasilópulo is near its extremity. Tragamésti, the largest, stands just under the summit of Mount Velútzí, and Lutzianá is about half a mile from the magazines at the head of the bay. There are not more than 100 families in the three villages; the boundary of the district follows the crest of the surrounding mountains, except to the S.E., where it extends to the marsh of Tríkardho. From the head of the bay the valley turns eastward and then northward, in which direction it is separated from the valley of Bamíni by the mountains which are a northerly continuation of Mount Khalkítza.

Between Lutzianá and Tragamésti, below a monastery of St. Elias, distant a mile from the sea, a root of Mount Velútzí projecting into the valley was the site of the town or fortress which

possessed the district of Tragamésti as well in Hellenic times as at a subsequent period: it is separated from the steeps of the mountain by a small hollow, and is surrounded towards the plain as well as on the two other sides by cliffs about thirty feet high. The remains consist of walls of mortar and rubble, erected upon Hellenic masonry of a species almost regular, but which in one place only has preserved so many as five or six courses, where it forms part of a large inclosure in the interior of the later work. Near it are the ruins of a large church, within which a smaller one has been built. At the angle of the fortress towards the sea are the remains of a tower, coeval apparently with the ruined church, and built upon a high rock. The entire hill is covered with wild almond-trees mixed with a variety of odoriferous shrubs in all their vernal beauty. On the north-eastern side of the ancient site, at the foot of the cliffs, a stream of pure water issues from the rocks, just below which are some ancient foundations. A little lower flows a torrent which rises at the head of the valley, and on its opposite bank stands a modern church surrounded with ancient foundations and sepulchres.

The Hellenic town was probably Crithote; for Strabo describes Crithote as a *πολίχνη*, of the same name as a promontory, and places the latter, together with the Echinades, between Alyzia, which was near the modern Kandíli, and Astacus¹, next to which southward was Cēniadæ: whence it

¹ Strabo, p. 459.—Scylax in *Ἀκαρνανία*.—V. sup.

seems evident that the promontory Crithote was that remarkable cape at the western entrance of the bay of Tragamésti, now called, as well as the mountain at the foot of which the Hellenic remains are found, Velúzi. Possibly it may be thought that the long bay of Tragamésti, so remarkable a feature of the *Acarnanian* coast, and the fertile valley at its head, are themselves indications that here stood the principal town of this part of the coast, which certainly was Astacus. But it is to be observed, that such a bay was not so well adapted, by its great depth of water and want of shelter, to ancient navigation as Platiá; and that Scylax expressly notices the harbour of Astacus.

The vale of Tragamésti is well cultivated: its productions are wheat, vines, but principally maize, for which they are now ploughing or harrowing. The land intended for this grain is twice ploughed, then harrowed, then ploughed again, sown, and again harrowed. The harrow¹ is formed of branches of trees roughly put together, and drawn by oxen driven by a man who stands upon the harrow. The three villages being Kefalokhória, the Greek proprietors pay an eighth to the Vezír besides *vostína*. My host K. has a landed property of between 400*l.* and 500*l.* a year, and gains about as much more, not very righteously I fear, as Hodjá-bashi. Being ostentatious, and very like a Turkish governor, his house is built and fitted up in the Turkish style, covering a considerable space of ground, and having three or four

¹ σβάρονος.

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large rooms, without any comfort. I find him much alarmed, as well as the Hodjá-bashi of Závitzza, who is with him, by a recent declaration of the Vezír that he will make them responsible for the conduct of all the robbers who are natives of their districts. Among other complaints against His Highness in this part of the country, is that of his having raised the duties upon the exportation of provisions from his territory to the islands. That upon an ox which was one piastre is now 85 parás, and the kadhos of corn formerly paying six piastres now pays 28.

The air of Tragamésti is considered healthy; a natural consequence of the valley being free from marshes, surrounded by dry mountains, and open to a free ventilation by the imbát of the bay. Mount Velútzzi, which bore perhaps anciently no other name than that of the town at its foot and of the promontory, in which it terminates, is more woody beyond the villages than on its maritime side, and contains red deer in abundance: on the hills at the head of the valley the fallow-deer and roebuck are found: the woods consist chiefly of oaks¹ of a kind suited to knee timber, and rendered doubly valuable by the facility with which they may be transported to the head of the bay of Tragamésti. The hills on the south-eastern side of the valley, as far as the marsh of *Æniadaë*, including Mount Khalkítza, are covered with the veláni oak.

April 5.—The southerly wind with rain conti-

¹ δένδρα.

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ACARNANIA.

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nues. In the afternoon, the sky clearing a little, we set out at 12.40 for Bambíni, notwithstanding the pressing remonstrances of our host Kyr K., who, finding us determined to proceed, adds to our escort a few Albanians who are under his orders, in consequence of his having received advice yesterday of the thieves having made an excursion from Kálamo and killed two Albanians.

The hedges of the cultivated fields abound in the shrub called azóiri or vromoklári¹, a kind of vetch, which takes the latter name from its stinking leaf. Beyond the valley we enter an opening in the hills immediately opposite to Vasilópulo; it is bordered on either side by a thick wood of oak of different species, among which is the prinokókki or kermes; mixed with them is the daphne in full bloom, and the usual proportion of lentisk², one of the commonest of Grecian shrubs. The white orchis is in blossom, as well as many other natives of England, which do not flower until Midsummer. The common oak here is only in bud, though a fortnight ago the leaves of some large oaks round an old church near *Calydon* were already opened.

Having crossed the hills, we descend into a valley which extends to the heights of Lygovítzi and Mánina. Both here and farther down to the south-eastward the vale consists entirely, except around Khrysovítzi and Pródhromo, of a forest of oaks; some of these are large trees with short

¹ ἀζωγήρι, βρωμοκλάρι : ² σχίνος.
anagyris foetida.

crooked stems. The veláni is not so plentiful as on the hills. Having turned to the left we skirt the foot of the heights for a mile or two, and arrive at Makherá, once a considerable village, as its ruins declare, but now reduced to eight or ten families. Here begins the fertile basin which is surrounded by the Lygovítzi mountain, the ridge of Makhalá, and those of Bambíni and Khrysovítzi. Having remained at Makherá from 2.50 to 3.18, we follow the slope of the hills, and halt, at 3.50, for the night at Bambíni, where I lodge in the house of the priest, which is very little distinguished from the other huts of the village either by comfort or cleanliness. The house of the Proestós, which is somewhat larger, happens to be occupied by some wounded Albanians returned from fighting with the thieves.

The Bolu-báshi, who was troublesome at the beginning of the journey, has since returned with signs of penitence, and has behaved like all the escort, with great regularity and discipline. Three or four in particular, who are Toshke from near Berát, are always in front, and if any steep rock or other place affording a good look-out occurs, there, as soon as we come in sight of it, they are sure to be seen, or to be heard by the discharge of their musquets, should they have any apprehension of their activity being unnoticed by us: some of them might have contended in swiftness of foot with Achilles himself. Others are teleboæ, or βοὴν ἀγαθοί, famous for their voices, for which quality Alý Pashá himself is noted. It is not, however, the loudness of bawling, or the power of