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Notes on the Harbours of S. Boeotia, and Sea-Trade between Boeotia and Corinth in Prehistoric Times

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## NOTES ON THE HARBOURS OF S. BOEOTIA, AND SEA-TRADE BETWEEN BOEOTIA AND CORINTH IN PREHISTORIC TIMES.<sup>1</sup>

(PLATE VII.)

THE following notes were made partly in the course of a voyage taken in a small sailing boat in the late summer of 1922, from Corinth across the gulf, and along the Boeotian coast, during which all the south Boeotian harbours, as well as Voulis in Phokis, were visited, and partly in the course of subsequent visits from the land side. It is hoped that the notes may supplement, if they cannot improve upon, Mr. Gomme's excellent description of this part of Boeotia, and at the same time throw some light on trading relations between the two sides of the gulf in pre-Hellenic times.

Of the three possible harbours from which Thebes could be reached from the south, the nearest to Thebes is Kreusis, or, as it is now called, Livadóstro. The difficulties of the journey from there to Plataea are vividly described by Mr. Gomme (*op. cit.*, p. 204), but there is reason to think that communication between Livadóstro and Thebes has always passed through Parapoúngia or its ancient representative Eutresis, rather than through Plataea. At the present day there are two paths to Parapoúngia, which serve the east and west sides respectively of the Livadóstro plain. Of these the eastern keeps along the bed of the Oëroë to the point where the Voroníeza brook comes in, and then climbs

<sup>1</sup> For the topography of this district, cf. : Leake, *Travels in N. Greece*, ii. pp. 501-25; Σκιᾶς, 'Ἐπερηγὶς Παρνασσού', IV. (1900), pp. 114-39; Lebègue, *De oppidis et portibus Megaridis ac Boiotiae*, pp. 82-114; Gomme, *B.S.A.* xviii. (1911-12), pp. 203-5; Frazer, *Pausanias*, Vol. V. pp. 160-4, and p. 133.

For the trade : Shewan, *Class. Review*, 1918, pp. 4 *sqq.*, and 169; Leaf, *Homer and History*, p. 212.

'There seems every reason to believe that Thebes lay on an important trade-route from the south, which passed from Corinth across the Corinthian Gulf to Thisbe, and thence to the north. Search for a prehistoric settlement in the neighbourhood of Thisbe should yield extremely valuable results.' Blegen, *Korakou*, p. 118.

'The track of the old high-road from Mycenae as it winds its way from near the Lion Gate over the foot of the hills towards Kleonae is still discernible. Future researches may yet reveal the traces of its continuation on the Boeotian side.' Evans, *J.H.S.* xlv. p. 3.

the hillside to the north; the western starts to rise at once, and keeping well above the river-bed, ascends the gorge of a small stream to the ridge on which stand the Hellenic tower and the chapel of Hágios Mámas. Both paths keep to the north bank of the Oëroë, and unite about twenty minutes from Parapoúngia; in both cases the first part of the route is easy, the latter part very steep.

It seems that in Mycenaean times the difficulties of this part of the journey were overcome by artificial means. For, in the gorge of the small stream which the western path ascends, at its steepest part, and high above it, the line of an ancient road appears running horizontally along the side of the mountain on the west. It is built of large roughly-hewn, unworked blocks, quarried on the mountains, some of them as much as a metre long and 75 cm. high, with small stones packed between. To judge from the masonry, rough as it is, these supporting walls are certainly Mycenaean.<sup>1</sup> Some sections have collapsed, but the road can be followed for nearly a mile. From Hágios Mámas to Parapoúngia it probably followed the same direction as the modern path. The peasants say that it was used as recently as Turkish times, by caravans passing between Eremókastro (Thespieae) and Livadóstro; and the existence of such a road explains why, in Frankish days, Livadóstro was preferred as the port for Thebes, and why all travellers from the west disembarked there, although the harbour itself is bad, and exposed to southerly gales which sweep across from Mt. Geráneia with extraordinary suddenness and fury. It was my experience to witness both the windless and almost unnatural calm which gave this sea its name, and one of the storms which made it notorious in antiquity. Writing of the voyage to Kreusis, Pausanias says: Πλοῦς δὲ εἰς Κρεῦσίν ἐστιν ἐκ Πελοποννήσου σκολιός τε καὶ ἄλλως οὐκ εὐδίας· ἄκραι τε γὰρ ἀνέχουσιν ὥς μὴ κατ' εὐθὺ τῆς θαλάσσης περαιούσθαι, καὶ ἅμα ἐκ τῶν ὀρῶν καταπνέουσιν ἄνεμοι βίαιοι (IX. 32, 1); and it was crossing the shoulder of Mt. Kithairon that overhangs the bay, that the Lacedaemonians under Kleombrotos were overtaken by one of these storms, so violent that their shields were blown from their hands, and many of their baggage animals swept off the track into the sea.<sup>2</sup> In Hellenic times the harbour was protected by a mole; to-day,

<sup>1</sup> Of the wheel-tracks which the peasants told Skiás (*op. cit.*, p. 128) were visible near Hágios Mámas, I found some possible, but no certain traces.

<sup>2</sup> Xen., *Hell.*, V. 4, 17.

Livadóstro is deserted, but farther east in the same bay the small port of Hágios Vassílios is used by the inhabitants of Kaparelli for shipping olives. On the south slope of the castle mound at Livadóstro I picked up sherds of grey and yellow Minyan, and part of an Ephyraean goblet. Though an isolated example, this sherd is significant, as Ephyraean ware seems to have been a Corinthian speciality and, so far, has been found north of the gulf only at Orchomenos, Eutresis and Thebes.<sup>1</sup>

A little west of Livadóstro bay, and separated from it by a high rugged arm of Mt. Korombíli, lies the 'magnificent bay of Domvréna,'<sup>2</sup> 5½ miles long, protected across its entrance by a string of islands. In its recesses are three harbours: Haliké, the most easterly, is turned to the west; Hágios Ioánnes, below Domvréna, is a deep narrow creek, exposed only to the south, and further west, in an almost land-locked bay, lies the tiny harbour of Vathý, sheltered from all winds.

Of these three, Haliké is a crescent-shaped plain, shut in by high mountains, Korombíli on the east and its high ridges on the south and north. Towards its southern end, this plain is broken by a sharp rocky spine, running east and west, and fortified along the top by a Hellenic wall of close-fitting blocks, with ruined towers and gateways, which ends in a mole projecting some thirty yards into the sea. On the southern slopes of this acropolis many L.H. III. and Minyan sherds can be picked up, and just below the summit on the same side are traces of a wall of big blocks that is probably Mycenaean.

Haliké is a strong place, but the communications with the interior are not good. The only way out (except the mountain track to Livadóstro, as rough and difficult as can be found in Greece) is over the high ridge to the north. Just before the summit a track diverges to the left and goes over a stony moor to the plain and town of Domvréna, 2½ hours from Haliké. The other track continues northward and, passing the ruins of the Hellenic fortress on the summit, drops into a narrow valley, which, bearing north-east, leads by an easy route to Xeronomé, and so to Thespieae and Thebes. All things considered, Haliké is a natural alternative to Livadóstro as a port for the Thespieae district, and in bad weather might be preferred. The few ships that call here to-day come

<sup>1</sup> At Orchomenos, to judge from sherds in the Chaironeia Museum; at Eutresis in Miss Goldman's excavations, not yet published; at Thebes, to judge from illustrations in *Δελτίον*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Mediterranean Pilot*.

to fetch the salt from which the place takes its name; otherwise it produces nothing except olives.

Hágios Ioánnēs is the regular port of Domvréna and Kakósi (the ancient Thisbe). A considerable trade from the interior also passes here, and half-a-dozen caiques at once may often be seen in its narrow harbour. Grain and maize from the Kopáis district are shipped here for the Peloponnese. It has a quay and a customs-house, and a road connects with Domvréna, and so with Thebes. The ascent from the harbour is short and soon reaches the marsh south of Domvréna, whence there is another rise, and then the road to Thebes is easy. The chief objections to the harbour are that it is small, that it is exposed to southerly gales (instances occur of boats being badly damaged when insecurely moored), and that there is an absence of drinking-water, which has to be brought from Domvréna.

Vathý, the next harbour in Domvréna bay, is safer and has drinking-water, but is very little used. It communicates by a very steep path with the road from Hágios Ioánnēs. A small bit of Hellenic wall stands just at the point where the path begins to ascend from the tiny beach, and above on the perpendicular cliff to the east is the base of an Hellenic tower which commanded a view of both harbours. No prehistoric remains have been found at either place, and while at Hágios Ioánnēs there is room for only a few houses, at Vathý there is room for none at all.

That a prehistoric settlement existed at Thisbe is now certain, from other evidence besides that of the 'Treasure';<sup>1</sup> for on the Acropolis that lies just above and west of Kakósi, Minyan and Late Helladic III. sherds can be found; and about half-a-mile north-west of the village I was shewn the site of a Mycenaean cemetery. Three chamber-tombs with dromoi can be traced, and no doubt there are more. The pottery found in one, which was excavated by the peasants, was L.H. III.

Besides commanding the road to Thebes and Thespieae, Thisbe stands at the southern end of the Steveníko pass, which, crossing Helikon by a low saddle between the main peak and the Zagorá, leads direct to Orchomenos and the heart of the Kopáis. In his account of routes to the coast, Mr. Gomme makes no mention of it, and yet it is neither high<sup>2</sup> nor difficult. The southern side is moderately steep, but the

<sup>1</sup> Evans, *J.H.S.* xlv. pp. 1-42.

<sup>2</sup> 3165 feet (Baedeker's *Greece*, 1909, p. 161).

present track mounts by easy windings, and when once the top is reached the descent into the plain is easy. At the point where the path joins the Livadiá-Halíartos road, at the entrance to the Steveníko valley, stood in prehistoric times a place of some importance, for on the large mound of Kalámai, members of the British School have recently picked up large quantities of Early, Middle and Late Helladic sherds, and the site would well repay excavation.

Sailing west out of Domvréna harbour you go between the island of Phoniá and the mainland, and just before reaching Cape Tamboúrló the small harbour of Trachíli appears, tucked away in the north-west angle of a broad bay. After rounding the cape, the harbour of Sarándi opens out, running far into the land. It is a wide harbour, and safe places may be found in it in all weathers. But there is no quay, and sudden storms rush down from the slope of Helikon, intensified by the shape of the long valley, which, sloping gently to the sea, forms a kind of funnel. Down the centre of this valley runs a rocky spur of Helikon terminating abruptly about a mile-and-a-half from the sea in a steep crag, with sheer precipices on its western side. Here stood the Hellenic fortress of Chorsiai guarding the frontier between Boeotia and Phokis, and here, in Mycenaean times, was a settlement, for on the slopes above the western precipices L.H. III. sherds as well as Minyan can be picked up.

No great trade with the interior can ever have passed through Chorsiai, as the two passes which go over Helikon behind it are too difficult. Strategically it must always have been important, for both passes might be used by armies, and it was by one of them that Kleombrotos came before the battle of Leuctra. The path to the little sea-town of Voúlis <sup>1</sup> also joins them at this point.

To sum up : Livadóstro is nearest to Thebes in point of distance by land, but the approach to it by sea is often dangerous. Domvréna bay has three excellent harbours, one of which, Hágios Ioánnes, communicates easily with the fertile plain of Thisbe, and from there by an easy road with Thebes, and by a more difficult track (suitable only for animal-transport) with Orchomenos. Haliké has a good harbour but the communications with the interior are poor.

It seems then that Hágios Ioánnes is the port that would be pre-

<sup>1</sup> At Voúlis I found one Neolithic sherd (Thessalian B 3 α) and a few Minyan.

ferred for merchandise entering Boeotia from the south; and the remains at Thisbe shew that here was, in fact, the most important of the towns on this coast. Livadóstro and Haliké could be used as alternatives; the former, as the Mycenaean road shews, being the more important. Given the necessary conditions for trade between the two sides of the gulf, there is no reason why it should not have passed by any of them,<sup>1</sup> as circumstances invited or allowed.

The question arises, at what period during the prehistoric age were such conditions fulfilled, *i.e.* when did a sufficient supply and demand exist to create active trading relations? The presence of almost identical cultures in both areas does not of necessity imply continuous intercourse. Invaders or immigrants, passing from one area to the other, would not always remain in touch with those who were left behind. One can only presuppose active trading relations when production on both sides is in excess of local requirements. As far as we can tell the Early Helladic period does not fulfil these conditions. The Early Helladic settlements have more the appearance of groups of small colonies, which, once established, developed on their own lines. Hence the difference between the culture of Korákou and that of Boeotia, between which general resemblance, but not identity, exists. There is no evidence of the unmistakable products of one region passing to another in large quantities. For the Middle Helladic period the case is somewhat different. The appearance at Korákou of Minyan goblets of so-called northern type may perhaps be taken as indications of an export-trade (from Orchomenos?), but it is equally possible that they were made locally by immigrants from Boeotia. According to Forsdyke<sup>2</sup> the Argive plain produces clay suitable for making this ware; and, if so, its manufacture in the Corinthia is easily explained, while the stratification of Korákou supports the immigration theory.

In the Late Helladic I. period Mycenae was importing pottery and other things from Crete, but had not yet, as far as we can tell, become a producing centre herself. The Thisbe treasure, however, shews that 'objets de luxe' were beginning to pass from the south into Boeotia, though the majority of them perhaps reached Thisbe at the beginning of the succeeding period.<sup>3</sup> In this period, Mycenaean vases appear at

<sup>1</sup> Haliké seems marked out by nature for smuggling or piracy.

<sup>2</sup> *J.H.S.* xxxiv. p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Evans, *loc. cit.*, p. 41.

Thebes, and as far north as Thessaly; and we may conclude that Mycenae and the Corinthia were becoming centres for the manufacture and distribution of pottery. What they received in exchange is not clear. The third Helladic period sees the Mycenaean civilisation established in Boeotia, and to this period the drainage works of Lake Kopais should probably be assigned. Boeotia would now become a producing centre on a large scale, and in return for grain and maize, which (then as now) were shipped to the Peloponnese, would receive in return the ceramic products of Mycenae, Zygouriés, and the Corinthia. Thus the conditions required for an active trade between the two sides of the gulf seem to be fulfilled only in the third Late Helladic period. How far does the evidence, necessarily imperfect, of our finds support this supposition?

At Thisbe (in addition to the 'Treasure') numerous L.H. III. sherds have been found, and a few Minyan; as also the chamber-tombs, with L.H. III. pottery.

At Haliké, 2 grey Minyan, 6 L.H. II., 10 L.H. III., and remains of a L.H. III. wall on the acropolis.

At Livadóstro, 2 L.H. II., 9 L.H. III., and a road of L.H. III.<sup>1</sup> date.

At Chorsiai, 7 L.H. III.

It will be seen that L.H. III. remains are far the most common along this coast, that there are a few L.H. II. and some grey Minyan which may also be of the same date. Matt-painted wares and Early Helladic are not represented.

The conclusion from the present evidence is that trade relations between one side of the gulf and the other, of which the beginnings are discernible in the second L.H. period, became intensive only in the third. That they were more than a 'trifling coastal traffic'<sup>2</sup> we may confidently assert. Starting from Mycenae, the caravans would follow the road via Kleonai to Korákou,<sup>3</sup> where the goods would be shipped, along with

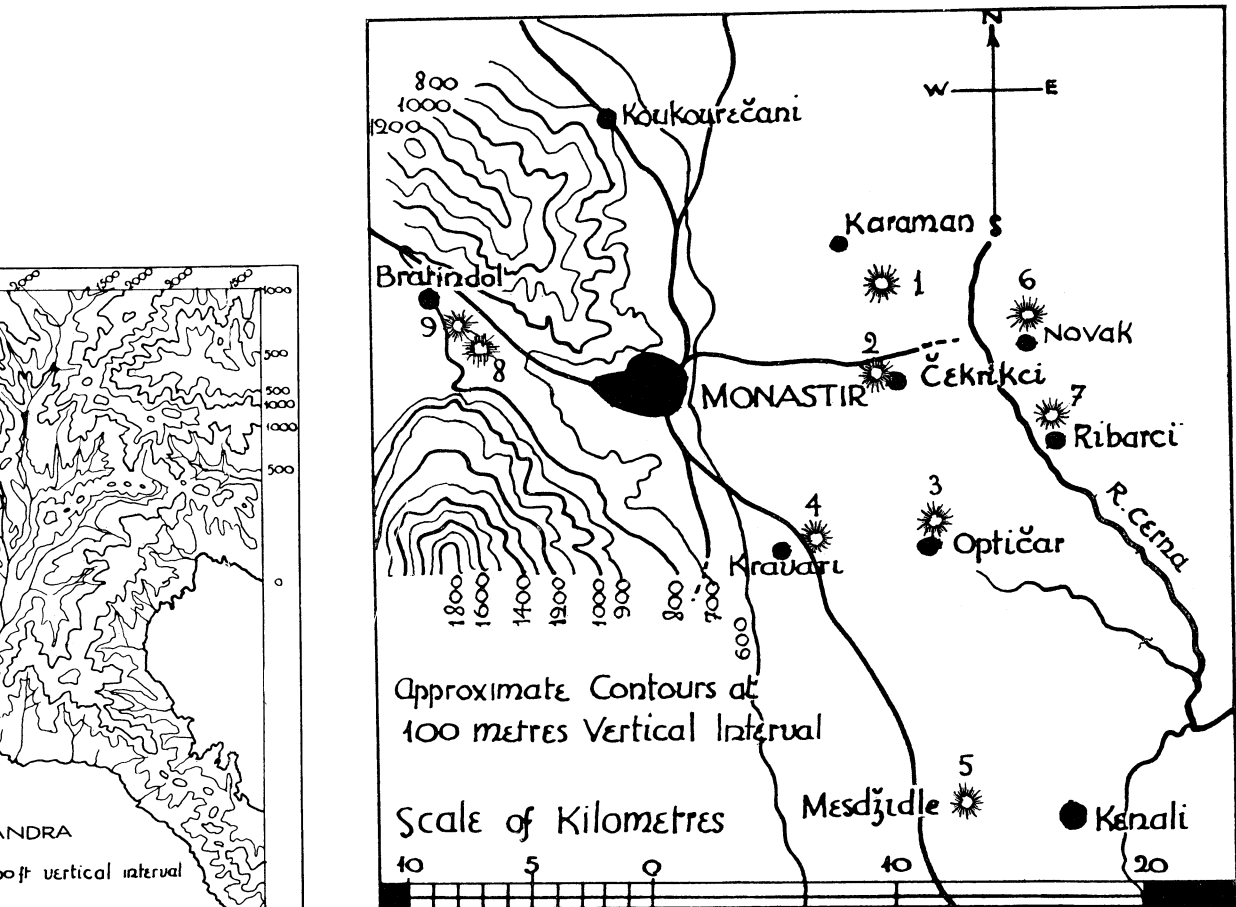
<sup>1</sup> On the analogy of the citadel-walls of Mycenae.

<sup>2</sup> Leaf, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Whether Korákou or the port of Sikyon on the southern side was the principal port of this traffic it is impossible to say, as we know too little of Mycenaean Sikyon. The voyage from Sikyon has the advantage of being more direct; that from Korákou is complicated by the necessity of rounding the Perachóra promontory, no easy task when the wind is blowing a gale straight up the gulf, as it often does. However, small harbours do exist on the south side of the promontory; one a little east of Vouliagméni, one at Vouliagméni itself, and one just below the modern lighthouse. All are safe, except in southerly winds, and here the sailor would remain until he could round the headland. In the present state of our knowledge we must regard Korákou as the 'early representative of Lechaion.'

products of the Corinthia. Once round the Perachóra promontory, the mariner would make the port of Thisbe, or, winds permitting, Livadóstro. Here he would unload his goods, shipping for his return journey a cargo of wheat or maize. Meanwhile the waiting caravans would load the merchandise he had brought from Mycenae, and bear it up the great road that climbs along the shoulder of Korombíli to the Boeotian plain, and so through Eutresis to Thebes; or turning aside at Parapoúngia would enter at Thespieae the pass that leads to the Kopais. At Thespieae they would fall in with caravans that had taken the alternative route via Thisbe, or with others returning to the coast from Orchomenos and Thebes.

W. A. HEURTLEY.



H-MAPS SHEWING POSITION OF MOUNDS.

MAP OF THE EAST END OF THE GULF OF CORINTH TO ILLUSTRATE  
PREHISTORIC SEA-TRADE ROUTES.



