

## American Geographical Society

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Source: *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1901), pp. 31-35

Published by: [American Geographical Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/198555>

Accessed: 12/07/2013 11:43

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## AKARNANIA AND ÆTOLIA.

BY

RUFUS B. RICHARDSON.

Since I took my first hasty glimpse of Akarnania and Ætolia in 1894, that region has drawn me powerfully, and I have made four other visits there, more careful and of longer duration than the first, the peculiar charm which I felt at first strengthening its hold upon me with each fresh visit.

It is a neglected corner of Greece. Not one in five hundred of the strangers who visit Greece thinks of paying it a passing visit, although for ten years the Northwestern Railway has made it possible for one to leave Athens in the morning and lodge the same night at Agrinion, in the heart of Ætolia. Whether the projected extension of this railroad from Agrinion to Arta, the ancient Ambrakia, will alter this state of things may well be doubted. Fate seems against this paradise—for paradise it is. One coming from Attica or Argolis wonders at the large shady oak groves and the broad, flowing rivers (most rivers in Greece are simply dry beds), and asks, Why don't the Greeks flock from the barren hillsides and dry plains of Eastern Greece to till this rich soil and build towns? It is also wonderfully picturesque. Here is a lake ten miles long and four miles wide—a rare thing in Greece—with high mountains a little removed, for a background on its long sides. But nobody seems to enjoy it. Not until my third visit did I see a single boat on that inviting water. Here, too, are springs of the coolest water, flowing abundantly, and nobody to drink from them, while *πολυδαψιον* Argos, and still drier Athens, are crowded with people wrangling over the question how they shall get the water absolutely necessary to keep the cities alive.

It is true that the richness of the soil has been recognized to some extent. Agrinion has become a thriving town of ten thousand inhabitants, and the centre of the tobacco industry in Greece. There are also stretches along the edge of Lake Trichonis that are almost as full of fruit trees of all kinds as is the famous Lelantine plain between Chalkis and Eretria. Mesolonghi and Anatoliko are prosperous towns on the shore of the lagoon which cuts deep into Ætolia. But in general the villages are small and far apart. One traverses the distance of thirty miles between Agrinion and the Ambracian Gulf, on the main highway, without passing through a single village, although the wretched hamlet of Sourovigli, which

is crowded into the ruins of Stratos, the capital of Akarnania, does lie close to the road.

The climate is as healthy as the soil is fertile; life and property are as safe as anywhere in Greece; and yet population does not drift that way. There is no other word but *fate* to account for this neglect of a land of such natural attractions. It seems given over to those travellers who like to feel that they are off the beaten track, who take delight in scenery that has not been enjoyed by all the world and described to death, and who can take the discomforts of bad inns and lively beds as a piquant sauce in the feast.

Perhaps the most striking feature in this fate is that it has been operative from time immemorial. Just as Ætolia and Akarnania are not included in the modern Baedeker, they were also left out of the ancient Baedeker, Pausanias. It is a territory about equal in extent to that of Attika and Bœotia; and yet while Attika has filled the world with its fame and permeated it with its influence, and while Bœotia has given us Pindar and Plutarch and Epaminondas, there has been no Ætolian or Akarnanian whose name has found a place in the world's book of fame. That a sort of rough honesty went with their destiny obscure is, in the case of the Akarnanians at least, amply attested. The Ætolians, too, who used to be regarded as a sort of robber brood, unfit to be counted with civilized Greeks, did show so much character in the later days of degenerate Greece in annihilating the hosts of invading Gauls, and in offering some real resistance to the Roman legions, that one questions whether they would not have made more of a showing if they had had one poet or historian to magnify or even to record their deeds. It is the bard who makes famous. How reverentially we follow in the footsteps of the bard!

From this lack it has come about that, whereas in other parts of Greece the search has been for sites that correspond to names famous in song and story, in Ætolia and Akarnania one has to seek—often in vain—for a name to fit a most imposing ruin. Two notable illustrations of this principle may here be adduced.

By the northern shore of Lake Trichonis, on a foothill of the great Ætolian mountains to the north, is an acropolis which is a masterpiece of fortification, with a walled town of considerable dimensions stretching from it down to the lake. For this imposing ruin practically each topographer who has busied himself with the region has proposed a separate name, always with some reserve. It has become an item of interest when a new article or a new book appears treating of Ætolia to observe what name the writer will

give to this ruin near the modern village of Paravola. The latest writer on the subject\* says:

Bazin suggests that the place was called Boukation—a name only mentioned in an inscription found in the neighboring ruins at Krionerou. This is the most satisfactory identification hitherto proposed; in the present state of our knowledge it is the only one possible, but beyond that no more can be said either for or against it.

The second case is that of the justly admired acropolis called Vlocho, about five miles back from the north shore of Lake Trichonis and about the same distance east of Agrinion. Vlocho deserves to be called a fortified mountain rather than an acropolis. It is half as high again as Acro-Corinth; and even Ithome falls considerably short of it. Of all the acropolises of Greece only the Arcadian Orchomenos overtops it by a few hundred feet, and is not nearly so impressive, because it reaches its height of over three thousand feet by starting from a plain already considerably over two thousand feet above the sea-level.

When Col. Leake, the great pioneer topographer of Greece, in 1805 saw this citadel, made impregnable both by nature and art, he felt that this, and no other, was Thermos, the capital of Ætolia. He says:

I have not entertained the supposition that Thermos could have occupied any other site than that of Vlocho, the description of Polybius, but still more the magnitude of the ruins, leaving scarcely a reasonable doubt on this head.

And yet in order to identify Vlocho with Thermos he had to do the greatest violence to the words of Polybius, who, in describing the forced march of Philip V. of Macedon, in which he broke camp on the Acheloos, near Stratos, at daybreak, and reached Thermos at evening in season to sack it before nightfall, says that he marched with his left protected by Lake Trichonis. Leake, a soldier himself, saw that no mortal soldiers could have started from Stratos and made the entire circuit of the lake—over very rough ground, too, some of the way—and reached Vlocho on the same day. But with the prepossession above mentioned, he changes the word “left” in the narrative of Polybius to “right,” with the remark:

The only conclusion seems to be that the words right and left have, by some negligence either of the historian or his copiers, been substituted for each other in the text. Experience proves that such an error, notwithstanding its importance, is one of the most common that occurs.

The last part of this remark is certainly true; and Leake has in other cases detected such an error, and earned by it praise and thanks. But in this case Vlocho had thrown a spell over him, and closed his eyes to one very important consideration, viz.: that the

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\* W. J. Woodhouse. *Ætolia: Its Geography, Topography, and Antiquities.*—Clarendon Press, 1899.

distance from the Acheloos below Stratos to Vlocho is so short that the famous forced march of Philip, which lasted from dawn till nearly evening of a long summer day, is reduced to about ten miles!

The conclusion ought to have been obvious that Thermos was not at Vlocho, and in spite of Leake's reputation for infallibility, which he almost deserved, there have never been wanting topographers who boldly looked Vlocho in the face, and said such a citadel *ought* perhaps to be Thermos, but it is not. If challenged to give some adequate name to it they frankly confessed inability, but were contented to search for Thermos somewhere near the east end of Lake Trichonis, a place capable of being reached by the forced march along the south shore of the lake, as Polybius describes it.

In the spring of 1897, when the war-cloud was hovering over Greece, I visited the ruins called Palæo-Bazari, near Kephalovrysi, with Charles Peabody, a former member of the American School; and so convinced were we that there and there only were the ruins of Thermos that he desired to put our conviction to the test by a small excavation enterprise, for which he was willing to contribute \$500. I applied to the authorities for the concession of the site, and received an oral assurance that we could have it. But the war-cloud had already burst before we had got back to Athens; and all archæological undertakings were relegated to the rear. Within less than a year a fortunate Greek, who had gone over into Ætolia with powers to explore whatever he pleased, made his first trial at this very spot; and long before he had spent the equivalent of \$500 he had abundant and incontrovertible evidence, particularly inscriptions, that he had found Thermos.

This happy man, Georgios Sotiriades, has already carried on three excavation campaigns there; and as everything lay very near the surface, the work went rapidly. Perhaps never in Greece has so great a result come from so little outlay of time and money. I felt some disposition to envy; but in the archæological circles at Athens envy is unknown. Each man sets down his neighbor's success as contributing to an end which all are striving for. Then, too, we were having good luck at Corinth. But when I was dealing with my twenty-five feet of earth I could not help envying the man who had to deal with only four feet. Mr. Sotiriades has just filled the last number of the Greek Archæological Journal with a part of his splendid results, making one of the most important contributions to the history of archaic art.

But questions about art take us too far afield from our topography. Sotiriades, having found Thermos, could have left others to find a name for Vlocho. But he has done something towards

this also by finding an inscription on the slope of the mountain, which showed that it was the stronghold of the Thestieis, who once held the rich plain of modern Agrinion, and who, if we can judge from the legends which connect the name of their ancestor king, Thestios, with Meleager and the Calydonian Boar Hunt, were the original Ætolians—the Eteo-Ætolians. It is true that we come out with an anti-climax in this mere tribal name, which must be accepted for Vlocho. Such a place ought to have had a name as famous as Thebes; but it lacked the historian, and above all, the bard.

On the Akarnanian side of the Acheloos rises a hill in the marshes. It is an irregular hill, or rather a combination of several hills, that once constituted an island. Indeed, it has a harbour, which now looks strange several miles inland. A wall with innumerable turns, and pierced by many gates of diverse structure, encloses the entire hill. The total length of the wall is about four miles, and constitutes the most extensive fortification in Greece. But, lying rather low, it does not attract the gaze from afar as does Vlocho. This is Cœniadæ, not the capital, but perhaps the most important city of Akarnania. Such walls as these seem a title to fame; and yet Cœniadæ has almost no history transmitted to us. Pausanias devotes a chapter to an episode in its history in his "Messeniaca," in which he describes how the Messenians, expelled from their homes by the Spartans and settled by the Athenians in Naupaktos, wished to show that they owed their low estate more to unkind fortune than to any lack of courage, and so without provocation attacked this stronghold; took it away from the Akarnanians, and held it for a whole year against their combined attacks.

The isolated position of Cœniadæ in the marsh, and its consequent inappropriateness for a Byzantine or Frankish fortress actively controlling the surrounding country, has prevented that long occupation of mediæval and modern population which always proves so destructive of ancient remains. It would, therefore, not be surprising if excavations should here bring to light a good deal of the ancient city, which cannot be very deeply buried. Akarnania is as likely to have been an art region as Ætolia; and the amount of objects of art found at Thermos, remaining over after the systematic pillage of Philip V., encourages the hope that something good may be found at Cœniadæ. The theatre is protruding out of the ground, and so affords a starting-point. Near by is a terrace that may well hold the remains of a temple. The Greek Government has granted the American School the privilege of making a trial excavation here this winter.