

## 2 – PAROS



Friday, 30 April

I woke at about seven this morning. As it was a good day, I got up, washed and was down at the harbour at around eight o'clock. By now I had decided to go to Paros on the Flying Dolphin hydrofoil which, although it was more expensive than a conventional boat, would get me there quicker. Despite the slightly choppy sea, I discovered that the hydrofoil would be making the journey and so bought a ticket for 676 drachmas. As I had time to spare, I walked to a nearby café, where I had breakfast. I arrived back at the pier just before 8.30, the time of departure, and watched a large ferry boat docking. However, much to everyone's horror, its anchor got caught in the chain of another boat's anchor and it was a long time before the sailors, with the help of some men in a small boat, managed to free it. While this was going on, the Flying Dolphin could be seen going backwards and forwards in the distance as it was unable to get into the harbour. When it eventually arrived and docked, an animated row between various officials and workmen took place.

After a few smartly-dressed businessmen had alighted, a group of holidaymakers and I boarded and we set off at full speed, scudding across the water. The hydrofoil was very plush and comfortable inside, and only a handful of people were in it. I was surprised that we did not go directly to Paros, but stopped at Mykonos and Naxos on the way – so much for the efficiency and speed! It was eleven o'clock by the time the hydrofoil docked at Paros; by then I was heartily sick of the noise of the engine and the pitching and rolling of the vessel.

It therefore was a delight to step out into the sunshine and breathe some fresh air as I walked along the pier towards the town of Paroikiá. Compared with the splendour and sophistication of Tinos, the little capital looked a little dilapidated, yet touristy. Many of the buildings were made of concrete, and the squares were full of

cafés, shops and tourists. Before I did any exploring, I examined all the information available about boat times so that I knew when I would be able to sail to nearby Naxos.



*The old quarter and Frankish castle in Paroikiá, Paros*

I then set off and discovered the whereabouts of the Holy Church of the Virgin Mary Ekatontapylíaní, which I had read so much about. Although this Byzantine church was very fine, it lacked the refinement of the Evangelistría in Tinos. The front of the church made a lovely picture framed in the arched gateway of the entrance. Just as I was about to enter, the door was closed in my face; when I examined a notice nearby, I discovered that it closed at midday. It would not open again until 3.30 in the afternoon.



*The Holy Church of the Virgin Mary Ekatontapylani, Paroikiá, Paros*

After I had taken a good look at the church from the outside, I made my way around the back to a little archaeological museum beside a school. Some young students emerged from the school while others played a noisy game of football in the yard. In the museum I paid 20 drachmas for a ticket and had a look around. This did not take long, as there was little to see – just the remains of statues, plaques, burial steles and the like. The only objects of note were in the courtyard, where I was able to admire part of a fine Greek mosaic and a row of sarcophagi of the Roman period. Despite the smallness of the collection, it was pleasant to see some genuine remains of ancient Greek culture.

Leaving the little museum, I made my way back to the town centre and went walking through a maze of narrow alleyways. Despite the fact that most of them lacked the charm of Tinos or Mykonos, some of them were quite pretty – especially those around the remains of the ancient Frankish *kástro* (castle), which had been made of the remains of Greek temples. I sought out the tiny chapels around it and found the ones mentioned in my notes. Only one chapel was open; the others were all locked.

Feeling hungry by now, I returned to the touristy town centre, only to discover that all the tavernas, restaurants and shops were closing their doors. I therefore had to make do with a Greek version of a hamburger, a couple of bread rolls, and an orange.

I then made my way to the bus stop and, at two o'clock, boarded a bus bound for Náousa, a town on the north coast of the island; according to my notes, this was the 'prettiest port'. Despite the number of schoolchildren on the bus, I managed to find a seat, but gave it to an English girl who was standing. The fare cost just 37 drachmas. Off went the bus through some rather bleak countryside, where I saw a number of scruffy modern buildings.

We reached the wide northern bay and Náousa fifteen minutes later. I was not very impressed by the town, which I saw in about half an hour when I went wandering around the little streets. There were some interesting-looking places and



some fine churches, but on the whole it was rather run-down and scruffy. The buildings in the outskirts were decidedly ugly.

Having stopped briefly in a café to drink some tea, I began walking back to the capital with the intention of visiting one or two of the monasteries on the way. However, I was hardly out of the town when I was caught in a shower of rain. This forced me and two girls coming in the opposite direction to take shelter in a house that was being built. Here one could see at close hand the sloppy method in which houses were built here. The workmen slapped down the bricks on a few dabs of mortar and chipped bits off with a trowel as they did so. Bricks were laid in every conceivable direction; accuracy was replaced by ingenuity and originality. Although the workmanship looked so sloppy, I was fascinated to watch the workmen laying the bricks.

As soon as the shower was over, we thanked the workmen and I said goodbye to the girls. As the sun came out, the nearby bay began to look quite pretty. Asking a couple of farmers the way, I climbed up a steep rough path towards the Agios Andréas monastery. It was tough going because of the heat, though it was worth it because of the view. The landscape, which initially had made no impression on me, now looked quite inviting. On either side of the stone walls that skirted the path were ploughed fields and meadows full of colourful wild flowers.



*The Agios Andréas monastery near Náousa, Paros*

At last I reached the tiny monastery and turned around to survey the wonderful view of the bay, now far below me. The mountains glowed in the bright sunshine and the sea was dark blue. As for the monastery, it turned out to be a collection of deserted whitewashed buildings. All I could find by way of an entrance was a rough, rotten wooden door that was locked and guarded by several hens. A lean and lazy dog howled when it saw me, but roused nobody. Slightly disappointed, I snapped a few photos and then, with the expansive view before me, I retraced my steps down to the main road. I now kept my eyes and ears open for the 4.30 p.m. bus from Náousa, but it never appeared. On I walked until I came to the tiny church of Ágioi Apóstoli (Holy Apostles), tucked in under a clump of trees. Here I rested, for I was tired by now and it looked as though it was about to rain again. Fortunately it did not and so I was able to walk a little farther until I came to a tiny shelter, which I took to be a bus stop. However, when the 5.30 p.m. bus came whizzing along and I signalled it to stop, it did not and zoomed on. Frustrated, for this was the last bus back to the capital, I shook my fist at it and, in desperation, thumbed a lift from the car behind it. As it was obvious to the driver as to what had happened, he pulled up immediately and kindly gave me a lift to the town centre.

Back again in Paroikiá, I went off in search of a room for the night. I found a very picturesque place in the old part of the town beside the *kástro*, but the lady who owned it only had one room that contained three beds, one of which was being used by a girl. However, she told me that she would be able to accommodate me on the following evening. We communicated in simple English and a little Greek.

I left her and went off to discover another place, where the young proprietress was an English lady. She showed me a plain though comfortable double room that would cost 350 drachmas. As she was a little reluctant to let it as a single room, I said that I would continue searching and come back if I had no luck. I traipsed through the narrow alleyways in drizzling rain and spoke to a couple of Greek women. One called me into her cosy little house, then brought me off to what looked like a newly-built and unused hotel in the outskirts of the town, where she showed me a bare room with two beds, no pillows and no blankets. When she asked me for 400 drachmas, I beat her down to 300, then finally refused, as the place looked so dreadful. Without apologizing, I left abruptly and made my way back to the English lady's place. She kindly took me in and recommended a place where I could eat cheaply.

I found the restaurant easily; it was away from the port, though facing the sea. I sat down to a simple, budget-style meal of bread, beans, green salad and *retsina*. The meal was delicious, as was the *retsina*, but after three small glasses of it, I was beginning to see double. When paying the bill afterwards, I explained to the waiter that I had drunk quite enough and, as far as I could see, he charged me accordingly. The bill came to just 165 drachmas, which I thought was very reasonable.

Afterwards I walked back to the main square, where I wrote down the times of the following day's buses, bought an apple and then settled down for the night in my room.



Saturday, 1 May

A beautifully bright fresh morning. I got up soon after seven o'clock, washed and shaved at a leisurely pace, then sauntered outside an hour later. The town was almost deserted; at this hour of the morning only a few of the locals could be seen ambling around. I was surprised to discover that all the shops were closed: I was hoping to buy some provisions. I therefore scouted around, found a café near the port, and sat down to a simple breakfast of tea, a bread roll and some delicious honey. I returned to my lodgings to wash my teeth and put a few things together in a bag (I had managed to buy some food and drink in the café) and, at half past nine, caught the bus to the town of Levkés in the middle of the island.

I boarded with a number of tourists, mostly English and German. I discovered that most of them had planned to do what I had intended: to walk to three small towns, Pródromos, Mármara and Marpíssa, which were not too far from Levkés. The bus drove up into the mountains, leaving Paroikiá and its untidy suburbs behind. Some English hikers got off at the first village, Maráthi, and began their trek from there. On went the bus and dropped down to Kóstos, a charming little village with a blue domed church in picturesque surroundings. I got off here, thinking that it was Levkés (a child had told me that it was Levkés) but the young conductor, who had been on the bus yesterday, spotted my mistake and called me back.

We now drove on, passing through some spectacular mountain scenery that included steep valleys and colourful terraced fields. Here and there were tiny whitewashed cottages and wild flowers, all gleaming in the morning sun.

We soon reached Levkés, a large and rather untidy-looking town. Some English visitors who had got off with me very kindly gave me directions and offered suggestions; I was very glad of their help and thanked them. I then ambled along a road at the top of the town and, after asking for directions from a Greek woman, ascended the mountainside to the tiny 'monastery' of Agios Ioánnis Kapáros, which afforded a fine view of the town and the valleys nearby. In the distance could be seen the east coast of the island, the sea, and the island of Naxos. The way up had

been beautiful, with poppies and wild flowers of many different colours growing in profusion by the path. In a meadow halfway up I met a lovely girl who was lazily picking some of the flowers; I wished her '*kaliméra*' ('good morning'). The sound of goat bells wafted from somewhere nearby and, up at the monastery, geese cackled and hens crowed. As usual the little monastery – or rather chapel – was locked, and there was nobody around to ask. Nearby I met a German couple and spoke to them.



*The monastery of Agios Ioánnis Kapáros, Levkés, and the view from the hill.*

When I had finished admiring my surroundings I quickly descended the hill, greeted an old woman who was tending some goats, and went ambling around the quaint parts of the little town. Like most villages that I had seen so far, it had a maze of narrow twisty streets with whitewashed houses and criss-cross patterns painted on the flagstones. The town seemed to be completely unspoilt despite the presence of a few tourists. Only the hardy ones made it up here, for the surrounding area was a hiker's paradise.

Through the many narrow streets I wandered, greeting the inhabitants who always smiled at me, and gazed through the windows of many tiny churches here and there, all of which were locked. There was one large church – a fine one built in 1830 – which was also locked. I stopped to look at the colourful cemetery behind it;



in it were shrines in the shape of churches with domed roofs. When I wandered off down an alleyway, an old man approached me, greeted me and, without waiting to be asked, announced that he would fetch the key of the church. He brought me to his little house, where I said hello to his wife, and then conducted me back to the church, pausing en route to deliver a loaf of bread to a neighbour.

He now unlocked the door, brought me inside and, with a great pride, showed me around and explained everything in slow and careful Greek. He pointed out the fine Parian marble, an elaborate Russian icon fashioned in tapestry and silver thread, several venerable Greek icons painted on wood (some of them with silver protective covers), the iconostasis, and various other objects. Although it was a fine big church, it was not particularly handsome; I preferred the smaller chapels as they were so intimate.

Outside, the man showed me the cemetery, which I admired again, and then I finally thanked him for his kindness and left. As I set off down the nearby alleyway, I bumped into the German couple that I had met at the tiny monastery on top of the hill. The husband was now sketching a view of a picturesque corner. I chatted to them for a while in my very poor German, then made off.

I now set off for the next little village, Pródromos, following directions that I had been given by the English tourists, but was puzzled to discover a rough pathway rather than a main road, which was what I had expected to find. Before asking for directions, I examined a delightful little blue-domed church within a grove, where I found a stream and some children who were playing near it. It was pleasantly cool here, for it was now becoming quite hot under the sun. I then made my way back, asked several people and discovered that the pathway did indeed go to Pródromos. I was very glad that I had taken the trouble to learn a little Greek, though I now regretted that I had not learned more of the language!



*The church of Agios Ioánnis Pródromos and a nearby alleyway, Pródromos*



I returned to the path and enjoyed quite an exhilarating walk across the hills, well away from the traffic and the noise. I stopped for a rest at about 12.30, sat in the shade of a tree and had my simple lunch of a bread roll, some cheese and milk. After fifteen minutes I was on my feet again, clambering over rocks. At the top of a hill I enjoyed a fine view of the coast and a monastery perched on top of a conical hill. Before me were the three little villages: Pródromos, Mármara and Marpíssa. I scrambled down the hill and arrived at Pródromos, a charming little place where the houses seemed whiter than white and where I found the main church of Agios Ioánnis Pródromos (Saint John the Baptist). Just outside it was a man repairing a fishing net; as he, the church and a tree in the foreground made a perfect picture, I had my camera out in a flash!

This time I actually found the church open and was able to step into the delightfully cool interior. This was no ordinary little chapel, for it boasted an elaborate iconostasis and many fine old icons. As usual, a glittering chandelier hung from the low ceiling. No matter how humble a chapel was, I had noticed, one always found a fine chandelier inside.

It did not take me long to see and walk through this village, where just about everything seemed to have been scaled down to miniature proportions, and soon I was back on the road, heading for Mármara ('Marble'). The famous quarry in Paros lay between Máraithi and Kóstos; we had passed it this morning in the bus.

Mármara, which was full of modern concrete buildings, proved to be not so pretty as Pródromos. I passed a few tiny locked-up chapels and ascended a hill that led me to the last town, Marpíssa. This was a picturesque little town dominated by a large modern church with a red dome, which had been built in 1960. Although Byzantine in form, it lacked any real beauty; a few tiny chapels nearby were prettier and more interesting. I noticed again that all the shops were closed and now realized that this was because it was May Day. When a few teenagers slouching beside a café saw me approaching, one of them said, 'eet's closed' and another added, '*Khristos!*'. However I did find a little café near the bus stop that was open and so, as I was tired and thirsty, I went inside and asked the old lady in charge for an *ouzo*. She gave me a small helping of the drink, a glass of water and a tiny pastry on a saucer.

I relaxed for half an hour or so, listening to some rapid conversation as the old lady chatted to two other women who had come to catch the bus. The bus arrived shortly after three o'clock and I recognized most of the people whom I had met this morning. We had all timed it nicely, for now the sky was clouding over and it was turning cool.

As the sun had disappeared behind the clouds, the scenery did not look anything as dramatic on our way back to Paroikiá. Soon we were approaching the little capital. After I had said goodbye to two middle-aged English couples who had been off hiking, I walked to the main church in order to have a look inside it. The interior proved to be quite impressive.

I then spent the rest of the afternoon and evening looking at boat schedules, working out a revised timetable, buying some provisions for the following day from what shops and cafés were open, and eating cheaply on bits and pieces. It had been a most enjoyable day, during which my estimation of the countryside here in Paros had risen considerably. By comparison with the previous day, I had been charmed by what I had seen and experienced.



Sunday, 2 May

As I had a welcome glimpse of blue sky at 6.30 this morning, I got up and caught the 7 o'clock bus to the south of the island. The driver left me at a spot where I could walk along a path to my destination: the convent of Christou Dásous (Christ of the Woods) which, according to what I had read, was picturesque. However, as the sun had by now disappeared behind the clouds, nothing looked particularly picturesque at this hour of the morning. I was quite unimpressed by the scenery here.

I ate my breakfast of a cheese sandwich (which I had made the previous evening), biscuits and an orange as I made my way uphill to the convent. The view of the bay around Pounta and the nearby island of Antíparos improved as I ascended. Once again I was back in rough, stony countryside, though all around me were colourful wild flowers. Here I could hear the buzzing of bees, the barking of dogs, and the crowing of cocks; in the distance I could see people working in the fields or leading donkeys with packed panniers. Threatening dark clouds now began to form around the mountain tops, adding a certain amount of drama to the landscape.

When I eventually reached the tiny monastery complex, I found it locked and lifeless. I shouted to a man in a nearby field and asked him if it was closed. Adopting a posture of sleeping, he shouted back to me in German, '*schlafen!*'. I thought that it was strange that a convent should be closed on a Sunday. When would it be open? At nine. I therefore made my way along another pathway, sat down to admire the view and studied a little more Greek from my phrase book. Some dogs nearby growled and barked at me.

After an hour or so I returned to the convent and discovered it still devoid of life. A man on a donkey appeared and simply informed me that the place was closed. All I could do was resign myself to the fact that I could not visit the convent. I now set off, found my way back to the main road and began walking back to the capital, Paroikiá. I had decided to keep on the main road so that I could catch a bus or hitch for a lift in case it started to rain.

Fortunately it did not rain and soon I was back in familiar Paroikiá, passing through the suburbs with their characterless concrete hotels. I returned to my room by eleven o'clock and, as I was hungry, ate my picnic lunch of cheese sandwiches, peanuts, a tomato, milk, and an apple. As the sun was now shining, I caught the twelve o'clock bus to Levkés, with the intention of walking back to the capital, for I had been very impressed by the scenery that I had seen on the previous day.

The weather was ideal for this walk, for by now it was quite warm and pleasant outside. From Levkés I clambered downwards towards an enchanting valley using a footpath that bypassed the hairpin bends of the road and skirted terraced fields. I then headed towards the next picturesque little village of Kóstos, which I wanted to see. Once again, it was wonderfully quiet and tranquil here. The only thing that spoilt the view was a dried-up stream that was full of rubbish and litter bags. Coca-Cola tins were a noticeable feature of rubbish here.

Just as I was approaching Kóstos, clouds gathered in the sky, loud thunderclaps sounded and it began to pour with rain. I took shelter under a tree and waited for the next bus back to the capital. It eventually came half an hour later. As though to thwart me, the sun shone again and it dried up as soon as I was on board. When the bus stopped in the main square of Kóstos, some people emerged from one of the pretty churches and boarded the bus, laughing and talking loudly. On we went, passing the marble quarries, and finally descended towards Paroikiá.

Once back, I pottered around and repaired to an almost deserted café by the sea, where I read some more of Homer's *Odyssey* and sipped a tiny cup of Turkish coffee and a glass of water while waiting for the clouds and rain to blow over. After a while some elderly men wandered in, swinging and clicking their worry beads, and ordered cups of coffee. The owner then switched on a black-and-white television set and they watched a comic Greek film, followed by some of Harold Lloyd's mad escapades, which were subtitled. They all had a good laugh.

When the sky had finally cleared and the sun shone once again, I wandered off through the warren of narrow streets, emerged from the town and ambled up a hill along a rough path towards a tiny monastery and a couple of small chapels. When I reached the top, I sat down to admire the fine view of the bay and the mountains in the distance. It was very peaceful here; the evening sunlight on the water looked quite magical. On my way down, I stopped briefly to sit beside a stream and a tiny chapel nearby.

When I returned to the town at about six o'clock, I went to the main church and found a baptism in full swing. I sat down at the back with a couple of other tourists and watched, fascinated. A number of people and children (mostly women and girls) stood around the priest, who chanted prayers in a strong, resonant voice. This seemed to go on forever, without a break. An old man, standing to one side, sang responses to the prayers in an offhand manner. The children fidgeted and the women walked about; there was a very informal air about the ceremony. The tiny baby boy was then stripped, blessed and then, somewhat roughly handled by the priest, was ritually dipped three times into the water. Needless to say, the little fellow howled – much to everyone's amusement. The baby was then taken away. Later he was brought back, now fully dressed in very formal clothing. The priest took him again, brought him behind the iconostasis and carried him around the altar, lowering him to kiss the four corners, and finally presented the little lad to a couple



of icons and made him kiss them. The baby, now very docile, looked quite bewildered. The old man who had provided the responses earlier now made his way to a pulpit, where he sang a hymn in a very Eastern style, complete with quarter tones and elaborate decorations.



*Church of the Virgin Mary, Paroikiá*

The baby was now carried around the font by his mother, followed by the priest (who was still chanting) and a little girl who held a lighted candle using the beautifully embroidered towel in which the baby had originally been wrapped.

At last the complicated ceremony came to an end and a lady presented everyone, including us tourists, with little medals attached to blue ribbons, which she smilingly pinned on our clothing. Afterwards, the participants received basket-shaped containers filled with egg-shaped sweets.

I then strolled outside and met two English ladies whom I had met the previous day; they were fascinated to hear my account of the baptism. Having directed me to a cheap restaurant that they had discovered, they left. I sat down beside the German man whom I had met on Santorini island, and ate a fairly good meal, though I still felt hungry afterwards. Outside I bought a *souvlaki* roll at a tiny booth, then found my way to an exclusively Greek café-bar, where I drank an *ouzo*, watched a magnificent sunset, read a little more, then moved inside to watch the men play at cards in a smoky room. Although the men were fairly easy-going, the card games were quite intense.

Later I left and wandered around some of the narrow streets, which were now lit in an attractive manner. Up in the sky I could see a bright moon and stars. At this hour of the evening, most people were dining. I eventually returned to my room and, on discovering that I had hot water for the first time here, had a very welcome shower. Afterwards I packed my bag, for I intended to leave Paros on the following day.