

Western Travellers in the 18th and 19th Century Aegean Archipelago. Images of the most “Privileged Spot” of the Ottoman Empire

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Abstract: *The present paper is a survey of travellers' accounts about the island of Chios in the Aegean Sea. It is quite interesting to include in one paper the most important information about Chios and give an insight of the social economic and ecclesiastical life of the island through the eyes and impressions of the travellers. It is even more interesting to present their description before the catastrophe of 1822 when the island was flourishing and held a special position in the Ottoman Empire due to the unique product of mastic which was intended for the use of the sultan's harem, and after the catastrophe when the island was transformed into a scene of deserted ruins.*

Keywords: Aegean Archipelago, Chios Island, Ottoman Empire, Travellers

1. Introduction

Chios according to travellers' descriptions was said to be the most flourishing city in the whole Ottoman Empire after Constantinople and Smyrna. It has been said that the prosperity of Chios was almost entirely depended upon its commerce, and that the Chiots occupied themselves with trade, and shipping due to the infertile and mountainous soil in most parts of the island.

The important geographical position of Chios had been exploited at least from the 13th century, when the Genoese saw Chios as a land of opportunity. Under the Genoese rule the commerce was flourishing and brought to the island impressive riches. However, Chios' strategic position and wealth was not overlooked by the Ottomans who dominated the island in 1566. The Chiots even under Ottoman rule enjoyed a remarkable lifestyle and Chios received comments like “the most privileged spot of the empire”.¹

2. Turnefort's Account on Chios²

Turnefort³ compares the town of Chios to other cities in the Aegean Archipelago and underlines that the town looked like “a jewel”, it was better built than any other in the Levant, whilst he does not omit to refer to the role of the

Venetians in the shaping and beautification of the town.⁴ He also speaks about the forte of Chios which was an old citadel built by the Genoese, conquerors of the island back in the 14th century, on the edge of the sea aiming at protecting the town of Chios and the island itself from the invasions of the infidels by the sea. He refers to the houses within the castle which were inhabited only by the Muslim population and certain Catholics, Latins as mentioned in the text, who had not fled the island after the Ottoman occupation in 1566. He also writes about a neat mosque that the Muslims had built inside the castle.⁵

Turnefort gives great emphasis on the port of the island which was a station for all ships heading to Constantinople on the one hand and Syria and Egypt on the other. Although he underlines the port's importance for the shipping of that time, he marks that “the port was none of the best harbours” because the entrance was narrow and therefore dangerous whilst in the entrance there were also many rocks covered with water. As for the countryside of Chios, Turnefort notes that although this was mountainous, there were certain places with abundances of orange, citrus, olive and pomegranate trees. He also supports that the quantities of corn produced in the island were not enough to fetch the population, and therefore the opposite town of Tsesme usually furnished the island with corn. In contrast with the quantities of corn, the wine produced in Chios was enough to spare and even more, it was exported to the nearby islands. Turnefort seems to admire the Chiots for the excellent quality of wine they produced, and even notes that “Oenepion the son of Bacchus taught the Sciots to culture the vine”.⁶ However, the most important mercantile was silk which was mainly used by the local manufacturers in making fabrics, such as velvet, damask, etc. The Chiots used also to export certain quantities of silk in the Ottoman Empire and France, whilst Jews and Armenians were also buyers of the Chiot fine silk.⁷ Other products of the island

¹ Psarrou, E. L., *Ottoman Rule in the Aegean: Chios during the 19th century. Centre- Periphery Relations*, Papazissis Publishers, Αθήνα 2020, pp.41-61, p. 80.

² Turnefort, Joseph Pitton de, *Relation d'un Voyage du Levant, fait par ordre du Roy. Contenant l'histoire ancienne & moderne de plusieurs Isles de l'Archipel, de Constantinople...*, vol. I, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1717, Letter IX, “Description of the island of Chios”.

³ Turnefort was born in 1656 in Aix-en-Provence, France and was a Botanist. Between 1700 and 1702 he travelled through the islands of Greece and visited Constantinople, the borders of the Black Sea, Armenia, and Georgia, collecting plants and undertaking other types of observations.

For more biographical information see:

<https://eng.traveltogues.gr/collection.php?view=102> (last accessed 30/01/2022)

⁴ Turnefort, *Relation d'un*, p. 281.

⁵ Ibid, p. 282.

⁶ Ibid, p. 284.

⁷ Ibid, p. 284.

were wool, cheese, figs, mastic, etc. As for the figs, these were produced in large quantities and also used in making brandy which was exported to the neighbouring islands. As far as the unique product of mastic, he emphasises that it was designated for the Grand Sarai and the harem of the Sultan in Constantinople whilst he records the uses of mastic and refers to the benefits of mastic for the human body. Amongst others he writes: "Mastick is likewise beneficially used in distempers of the stomach, to stop bleeding and fortify the gums".⁸

Furthermore the traveller gives accurate and in great detail information for the topography of the island, making also extensive reference to certain place-names of Chios, and it seems that he knows very well the geography of the Aegean Archipelagos. He also gives demographic information, about the population of Chios. Specifically he writes that there were no more than 10,000 Turks in the island, 3,000 Latins and supports that the Greek population raised up to 100,000⁹. He also speaks about the taxes paid by the population of the island giving, once again, detailed information whilst he emphasises that the inhabitants were not accountable to land-tax. He also talks about important personalities who originated from Chios and had a close connection with the island. For example he narrates about "the extra ordinary men of Scio", like Ion the tragic poet, Theopompus the historian, Theocritus the sophist and even Homer¹⁰. Furthermore expresses his admiration about the local women who were, according to his opinion, better bred than in any other part of the Levant and even describes their appearance and costumes. Turnefort in general praises the pleasant living in Chios and states that "the Turks used to call this island Little Rome"¹¹. Turnefort's account is very comprehensive, includes many information about the island, and it is well organized and methodically written.

3. Veryard's Account on Chios¹²

Veryard¹³ in his account also refers to the island of Chios, which he names "the island of Mastic" noting also the Turkish name of the island: "Sachez Ada"¹⁴ and explains that it was named after the great quantity of the mastic's

production.¹⁵ Veryard gives information about the geographical position of the island and describes its closeness to the opposite land of Asia Minor, namely Ionia, as it was written by Veryard. He also speaks about the mountainous landscape of the island but he notes that in some parts "it affords great plenty of fruits and wines". However the most important product of 40,000 pounds weight per year was that of mastic which was produced from the *lentiscus* tree by making light incisions in the trunk of the tree through which the mastic, namely the gum, flows. These procedure usually took place – according to Veryard – in July and August.

Following Veryard refers to the usages of Mastic by the Turks who used to mixed mastic with flour in bread making; he also notes the proportion required: "half an ounce of mastic to about a peck of flour"¹⁶. Apart from this unique product he also mentions the turpentine which according to his opinion was the "purest and most excellent in the word, of a pleasant smell and very efficacious", which in comparison to the one produced in Venice the turpentine of Chios was far better¹⁷. He also gives information about the town of Chios and the fortified castle close to the town where the Muslim inhabitants lived. Furthermore he narrates about the Christians who were free to exercise their religion, adding that both Orthodox and Catholics- whom he names Romanist- had their own convents, followed their own worship without being disturbed by the Turks. As far as the occupation of the people in the countryside, he mentions that they were livestock farmers and shepherds and he describes their everyday routine, namely that they led every morning their flocks to the fields and then at nights they use to bring them back at their sheepfold where they kept them safe. Following he notes down certain evidence about the spoken language in the northern villages of the island, with special reference to the village of "Cardemilla", apparently meaning that of "Kardamyla". Nevertheless it seems that he was mistaken as far as the village he visited, because he next gives certain other evidence about the ruins of "Homer's school", saying that this was a site close to "Cardemilla", but in fact the site is close to the village of Vrontados and not the aforementioned "Cardemilla" which was further north.

4. The Earl's of Sandwich Account on Chios¹⁸

The Earl's of Sandwich¹⁹ account is one of the longest and most detailed account about the island almost 80 years

⁸ Ibid, p. 287

⁹ Ibid, pp. 284-285.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 289.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 279

¹² Veryard, E., *An account of divers choice remarks, as well geographical, as historical, political, mathematical, physical, and moral; taken in a journey through the low-countries, France, Italy, and part of Spain; with the isles of Sicily and Malta; as also, a voyage to the Levant by E. Veryard, M. D., London: printed and fold by S. Smith and B. Walford at the Prince's Arms in St. Paul's Church Yard, MDCCI (= 1701).*

¹³ Ellis Veryard (1657-1714) was a physician from Plymtree-Devon. He studied medicine in Leyden and Utrecht before embarking on a long period of travel from 1682 to 1696, including in 1686 a voyage to the Levant where he visited the Holy Land, Egypt, Lebanon and Constantinople.

¹⁴ Sakiz in Turkish means Mastic and Ada means island, in Greek: "Το Νησίτης Μαστίχας".

¹⁵ Veryard, *An Account*, p. 336.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 336.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 336.

¹⁸ Sandwich, John Montagu, Earl of, *A Voyage performed by the late Earl of Sandwich round the Mediterranean in the years 1738 and 1739 written by himself, embellished with a portrait of his lordship, and illustrated with several engravings of ancient buildings and inscriptions, with a chart of his course, to which are prefixed memoirs of the noble Author's life, by John Cook, M.A. chaplain to his Lordship*, London: printed for T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies in the strand, MDCCXCIX (= 1799).

¹⁹ The Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu, was a British statesman who succeeded his grandfather as the 4th Earl of Sandwich in 1792 at the age of ten. During his life he held various military and

before the catastrophe of 1822. Initially he refers to the geographical position of Chios noting that the island is about 70 miles away from the opposite gulf Smyrna, and following he refers to the ancient name of the island which was Chios, whilst at his time namely the 18th century the island was called Scio. He informs us that in antiquity the island was named Chios after a son of Neptune who first people the isle with inhabitants. Next, he narrates in detail the history of the island from antiquity onwards, speaks about Chios during the Hellenistic Period, the Roman period²⁰, its submission to the Byzantine emperors, then to the Venetians and following he writes about the new conquerors of the island, namely Genoese, who subjected it to the command of the Gustiniani family in consideration of a sum of money which the Gustiniani deposited in the Treasury of the Republic of Genoa²¹. Subsequently he writes that although the island was conquered by the Turks in 1566²², it remained under the command of the Giustiniani with the agreement that the latter were obliged to pay to the High Porte an annual sum of 12,000 piastres for the commercial exploitation of the island²³.

In his account the Earl gives information about the topography of the island, the houses, the streets which, although they were not broad, they were clean, the fortifications and the citadel which were defended by a considerable number of Janissaries, whilst he agrees with Turnefort that Chios' harbour was small²⁴.

The writer esteems the number of inhabitants at one hundred thousand, five thousand of them being Ottomans and the rest were Greeks who inhabited both the town of Chios and villages. He also refers to the valuable products of Chios, namely silk, oil, fruits, wine which – according to his opinion- was amongst the most important products and commodities of Chios being of very good quality. It is worth noticing that he dedicates several lines of his account in describing the cultivation of mastic trees, the harvest of the mastic and the uniqueness of this product, which the inhabitants of the Mastic Villages were obliged to send in certain quantities to Constantinople for the usage of the Sultan's Grand Seraglio²⁵.

As far as the state of the enslaved inhabitants, the Earl believed that they were "in much better circumstances than any other people in these parts, live in a handsome manner, being more civilized ... than in any other isle of the

Archipelago"²⁶, whilst he also speaks about the gallantry of the Chiot women, their appearance and beauty, their character and behavior as well as their "extremely nice" and quite expensive costumes and their jewellery²⁷ which he also describes in every detail²⁸.

Finally he gives general information about the Ottoman Empire, for example the administration, the taxes imposed on the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, even about the people's behavior. He concludes his narration about Chios admitting that he and his companions "had had sufficiently entertained themselves in simply admiring the beauties of Scio"²⁹, whilst earlier in his account he had also expressed quite the same opinion stating: "the island of Scio ... maybe justly esteemed the most beautiful and flourishing of the whole Archipelago"³⁰.

5. Clarke's Account on Chios³¹

Edward – Daniel Clarke³² describes with great admiration Chios where the scenery "is perhaps unequalled by anything in the Archipelago"³³ whilst he also writes about "the extreme richness and fertility of the island filled with flowery, luxuriant and odoriferous plants... a magnificent slope, covered with gardens from the water's edge", underlining that Chios was "the Paradise of Modern Greece; more productive than any other island"³⁴. Clarke was also impressed by the extensive groves of the citrus trees, orange and lemon trees as well as the vineyards and the mastic trees. He also notes about the export trade of the island informing us that cargos of oranges and lemons were sent to Constantinople and the Black Sea whilst bales of silk, damask and velvet fabrics were directed to Barbary (the coastal region of North Africa) and Egypt³⁵. He continues describing the landscape of the island writing about the "stupendous grandeur of the view" and the "gorgeous picture" of the island³⁶.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 319.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 319, "In their ears they carry very large golden earrings; and those who can go to the expense wear necklaces of diamonds and other precious stones".

²⁸ Ibid, pp 319-320.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 320.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 316.

³¹ Clarke, Edward-Daniel, *Travels in various countries of Europe Asia and Africa. Part the First Russia Tartary and Turkey... Part the Second Greece Egypt and the Holy Land section the first*, Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies Strand London by R. Watts Brox-Bourn Herts, MDCCCXII (=1812).

³² Edward Daniel Clarke (5 June 1769 – 9 March 1822) was an English clergyman, naturalist, mineralogist, and traveller whilst he also had studied medicine at the University of Cambridge. He began travelling in 1799 accompanying J. M. Cripps, a British nobleman. Upon his return to London five years later he became an Anglican priest.

³³ Clarke, *Travels in various countries*, p. 184.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 186.

³⁵ Ibid, p.190.

³⁶ He also notes: "indeed the praises of this favoured island are universal in the country", p. 189.

political offices, and he also spent some time travelling to Greece, Turkey and Egypt, which at that time were parts of the Ottoman Empire. He is supposed to be the inventor of modern sandwich.

²⁰ Sandwich, *A voyage*, pp.309-312.

²¹ Ibid, p. 315.

²² In 1566 the Ottomans conquered the island under the commands of Piali Pasha. In 1595 the Florentines surprised the Ottoman castle guard and render themselves masters of the forte in Chios. Nevertheless the conquerors did not manage to hold the castle for a long time, after the Ottomans recaptured the citadel assaulting the Florentines and killing the guards.

²³ Ibid, p. 315.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 317.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 317.

He goes on describing the houses of the area of Kampos which were all white with flat roofs “like little palaces in the mist of bowers of citron, lime, olive and pomegranate trees”³⁷. This traveller underlines the importance of the two special products of the island, that is silk and mastic. Furthermore he speaks about the cultivation of the mastic trees or *elsentiscus* and the usages of mastic whilst he also does not omit to mention that mastic belonged to the Sultan and his Palace and if anyone dared to steal even a small amount, in his subsequent arrest by the Ottomans, he was punished with the death penalty. Furthermore he presents demographic information about the population of the island and their place of residence, for example he notes that twenty thousand people were living in the town of Chios. He also states that during his visit in Chios stayed in the town and more specifically in a street inhabited only by Catholic families.

Furthermore he makes special reference to the lofty rocks of granite and the mountains of the island which contained various marbles in “considerable quantity and beauty”, whilst he also refers to certain quarries of jasper in the island³⁸. Clarke also visited the convent of Nea Moni where he noticed that the monastery and especially the church was ornamented with marbles and granite. Among others, he refers to the rich library owned by the monastery as well as the collection of volumes of the Greek fathers and several manuscripts which were kept and preserved there.

Clarke also reveals interesting information about the relations of the Christian inhabitants with the Ottoman officers, their administration and governing of the island which he believed to be quite “mild”³⁹.

It is interesting to note that Clarke integrated parts of Egmont and Heyman’s original text of their traveling account, whose opinion and writings seems to respect and entrust⁴⁰.

Finally he completed his account emphasizing the reputation of virtue possessed by the inhabitants, even from the ancient time⁴¹.

6. Finlay’s Account on Chios⁴²

George Finlay⁴³ visited Chios together with C.T. Newton⁴⁴ in 1853, apparently thirty years after the catastrophe of the

island in 1822. Finlay gives historical information about the island such as the expedition of Colonel Fabvier in 1827 in order to recapture the island from the Ottomans. He also speaks about the climate of Chios as well as the topography of the island and the city of Chios itself. He describes his visit at “the School of Homer” close to the area of Vrontados which he names Vrontadha narrating that this place was populous, chiefly inhabited by ship-owners, boatmen and fishermen⁴⁵.

Finlay also visited the Monastery of Agios Minas in June 1853 which is located between the plain of the city and the mastic district. He writes in detail about the extensive ruins of the monastery due to the events of 1822 noting also that 3,000 Chiosots were murdered in the monastery when it was taken over by the Ottomans in April 1822. He continues writing that during the same time “the whole country ... was plundered and laid waste, the villages burnt and the people carried off into slavery”⁴⁶. Furthermore he refers to the mastic villages which were also destroyed in retaliation to the murder of the High Admiral of the Ottoman Navy Kara Ali, when the Greek Admiral Konstantinos Kanaris blew up the Ottoman Flagship in 19 June 1822. It was then that Ottomans burnt the Mastic villages and killed the inhabitants whilst a great number of them were sold as slaves in the East.

Furthermore Finlay too visited the Monastery of Nea Moni. He describes the route to the monastery and the scenery around it⁴⁷, as well as his encounter with the monks and especially with the Hegoumenos (abbot) of the monastery, who had been previously priest for twelve years to the Greek merchant community of London and had been frequently visiting Manchester to perform his duties there as well. Additionally he narrates about his meeting with a younger monk who had stayed for two years in Marseille and had studied at the University of Athens. All of them had a political conversation about the disputes between Russia and the Porte, as well as England’s policy in Europe. Next, he continues giving information about the building of the monastery, adding certain historical information. He describes the inner part of the church speaking about the hagiographies which were made of mosaics but notes that the expressions of the “Saviour is injured by the fire and smoke” to which the church had been exposed when the Ottomans burnt down the roof of the church. He also speaks about the monks’ way of living and their everyday life in the monastery.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 189.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 191.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 190.

⁴⁰ The authors and the title of the original work: Egmont, Johannes Aegidius van and Heyman, John, *Travels Through Part of Europe, Asia Minor, The Islands of the Archipelago; Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Mount Sinai, &c. Giving a particular Account of the most remarkable Places, Structures, Ruins, Inscriptions, etc* Translated from the Low Dutch. In Two Volumes. Vol. I. [... Vol. II.] London, Printed for L. Davis and C. Reymers, against Gray’s-Inn, Holborn. Printers to the Royal Society. MDCCLIX (=1759).

⁴¹ Clarke, *Travels in various countries*, p. 191.

⁴² Hussey, J. M. (ed.), *The Journals and Letters of George Finlay*, edited by J.M. Hussey, volume I, *The Journals*, set by Porphyrogenitus Ltd, printed by Lychnos EPE, Athens 1995.

⁴³ G. Finlay was a Scottish Philhellene who first visited Greece in 1823. He fought during the Greek War of Independence and died in Athens in 1875.

⁴⁴ Newton was a British archaeologist. In 1852, he was named vice-consul of Great Britain at Mytilene, and from April 1853 to January 1854 he was consul at Rhodes, with the definite duty, among others, of watching over the interests of the British Museum in the Levant.

⁴⁵ Hussey, J. M. (ed.), *The Journals and Letters of George Finlay*, p.327.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 329.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 330.

Following he gives an important information about the state of the island after the events of 1822. Specifically he writes that in 1853 when he actually visited the island, the Chiots had done little to rebuild their "fine monastery". He also writes about the fortress of the town which was in such a wretched state that it could be taken in a few hours by an enemy⁴⁸, whilst the streets of the island were narrow and filthy. Furthermore the produce of the mastic and orange grove had been greatly injured and many trees were destroyed by the frost in February 1850. This quite disappointing picture was encountered by the Sultan himself when he visited the island in 1851.⁴⁹

Amongst many other information about the island, Finlay notes an interesting data about the population of the island after the massacres. Specifically he writes that according to the English consul the population was 65,000 Greeks, 500 Turks (i.e. Ottomans), 300 Jews and 600 Franks (i.e. Catholics).⁵⁰

Finlay on his leaving from the island to Piraeus, bought certain local products, such as almonds, oranges and flower water.⁵¹

Finally it should be noted that Newton who visited the island together with Finlay, as already mentioned above, noted that following the massacres Chios' ancient glory seem to have departed. Trade had been diminished, the luxuriant fruit trees for which the island was so famous had been destroyed by the severe frost at the beginnings of the 1850s, the buildings of Kampos had been left roofless and windowless after the Greek Revolution "when Scio was utterly sacked"⁵².

7. Conclusion

The massacres of Chios were of great influence in enlisting European sympathy for the cause of the Greek independence. The events may have been the decisive factor, in impelling several of the powers to adopt a pro-Hellenic policy. G. Finlay specifically writes: "No calamity during the Greek Revolution awakened the sympathy and compassion of the civilized world more than the devastation of Chios"⁵³.

The island's prosperous situation completely changed after the catastrophe of 1822. In the spring of 1822 Chios, from being a most prosperous wealthy and civilised centre of

culture, learning and commerce, was transformed into a scene of deserted ruin. The massacres wrecked its prosperity, scattered its people, wholly diminished its importance, reduced the number of its inhabitants, ruined its trade, destroyed all public buildings and houses and resulted in the emigration of the aristocracy, the majority of whom never returned. The peasants fled to the neighbouring islands and for a short period of time Chios remained uninhabited whilst all her previous wealth, industries and social institutions temporarily disappeared. Trade was interrupted for many years and many important connections were lost, to the advantage of Smyrna, which had always been a keen competitor⁵⁴.

Many years after the massacres, travelers who visited Chios continued describing the deplorable images they came across and the appalling condition of the island, without failing to underline its former grandeur as "the most privileged spot of the Empire".

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⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 331.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 332.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 332. For more information about the population of the island after the massacres of 1822, see: E. L., Psarrou, *Ottoman Rule in the Aegean*, pp. 85-91.

⁵¹ Ibid, pp.332

⁵² Newton, C. T., *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, in two volumes*. Vol. I, Day and Son Limited, London W.C. 1865, p. 216.

⁵³ Finlay, G., *History of the Greek Revolution*, Edinburgh & London: W. Blackwood & Sons, MDCCCLXXI, p. 306.

See also: Catsiyiannis, T., *The Greek Community of London*, London, 1993, "The unfair devastation of the island shook the public opinion of Europe, especially England", p. 39.

⁵⁴ Psarrou, E. L., *Ottoman Rule in the Aegean*, p. 80.

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