

New light on Negropont

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Around 1895, an alliance of short-sighted nationalists and magnate property developers decided to strip away every identifiable trace of mediaeval Negropont except for one church in the south central part, and that was protected because it had become the seat of the bishop of Chalkis. Across the street from the west face of the church, a contemporary building of uncertain function was also spared. The radical obliteration of all other monuments was doubly effective in that no official photographs were taken, no drawings, whether views or plans, were made and no descriptions were recorded. Attempts during the twentieth century to rediscover the history of the city depended almost entirely on inferences from documents that were often of uncertain reliability and unevaluated local traditions. The church, was usually declared to be an early Byzantine wood-roofed basilica, and the building opposite is still known unofficially as the "House of the Bailo." A propaganda tract written after the Ottoman capture and sack of the city on July 12th, 1470, was adopted as the primary source for the description of the Venetian fortifications, together with the fantastic and often self-contradictory plans and perspectives issued and reissued by Fr. Vincenzo Coronelli in the late 17th century.

It is now possible to draw on more useful information. The 16th century plan of the city by Camocio, which was brought to public notice by the travel writer Jan Morris, provides a reliable identification of the principle features of the defense system and of the general layout of the town. In 2001 I drew the attention of David Jacoby to this map, and it was incorporated into his article, "La Consolidation de la Domination de Venise dans la Ville de Negreponit (1205--1390)", in *Bisanzio, Venezia e il mondo franco-greco (XIII-XV Secolo)*. Venice: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e PostBizantini di Venezia. 2000.

Jacoby's article brought together the most significant documents illustrating the development of Venetian Negropont, and by 2004, I was able to build on this base and to identify the mediaeval church, now dedicated to Ayia Paraskevi, as the Dominican priory church of St. Mary and St. Dominic. The archaeological evidence uncovered by Nikolaos Delinikolas, director of conservation and restoration at this church (and also at Osios Loukas and Daphni), confirmed the documentary evidence, showing that all surviving parts of the basic structure date from the 13th century or later. Along with this structural evidence, Delinikolas also exhibited the first detailed photographs of the sculptured ornament embellishing the great triumphal arch at the east end of the nave. Two figures carved in deep relief at the springing of this arch represent St. Dominic on the left, and St. Peter Martyr of Verona on the right.

The identification of the Dominican priory is of great importance since it serves as a landmark for several of the documents discussed by David Jacoby. Using this, the Camocio plan, and one or two other recently published maps and documents, it is now possible to start on recreation of mediaeval Negropont with several fixed points of reference, most of which were unavailable to Johannes Koder for his extensive study of the city in 1974. At the time of his investigations there was hardly any certain topographic location except the the Euripus itself and the small swampy inlet at the south end of the city, the Bourkos. The existence, rather than the exact location, of two mediaeval gates in the defensive wall was understood, and one of these, the Porta di Cristo was correctly assumed to be at the high point of the terrain leading out to the main road eastward from the city. The second, however, the Porta del Tempio, was mislocated by reference to the propaganda document mentioned above, the *Perdita di Negroponte*, scritta per Frate Iacopo dalla Castellana, who claimed to have been present during the siege, but who was probably drawing entirely on other people's reminiscences. He may never have actually seen Negropont.

From the Camocio plan we know that the Porta del Tempio was the same as the later Kato Porta, near the north corner of the walls, and very close to the shore of the north Euboean channel. After 1470, when Negropont became the headquarters of the

Archipelago command, this was the most important gate after the one at the bridge over the Euripus, and it is likely that it was the same under the Venetians, since it was close to the main customs dock. (Castellana's distorted view of Negropont gives no indication that this gate even existed.) The location of both the Porta del Tempio and the Porta di Cristo can be fixed in relation to the modern street grid owing to the discovery of an 1840 urban-renewal plan, which shows the complete system of walls. Excavations for building foundations in 1972 uncovered two separate short runs of the wall and the footings for the drawbridge leading out of Porta di Cristo, along with another, which allowed for a tracing taken from the 1840 map to be laid over a modern street map, so that we now know precisely the location of both mediaeval gates. In 2004, I was told by residents of Chalkis that remains of the Porta del Tempio had briefly been uncovered in the middle of the wide divided roadway, Leoforos Venizelou, but I have been unable to find any archaeological report concerning this occasion.

We can also be quite certain of the location of the Portello del Patriarcado, a smaller postern in the east wall about half way between the Porta di Cristo and the Bourkos. It is possible that there may be significant remains of this structure, but it has not been explored since it is inside the walls of the military reservation that covers a quarter of the entire area of the mediaeval walled city. This is the that was incorrectly identified as Porta del Tempio during the twentieth century. The Camocio map notes that it had been converted to an artillery casemate even before the time of the siege.


In the interior of the town, the only certain identification is the Dominican priory. The contemporary building to the west of this has been worked on extensively by Nikolaos Delinikolas, who argues convincingly that its date and shape indicate that it is the Venetian state Loggia, mentioned in accounts of the siege of Negropont as the place where the captain of mercenaries, Tomaso Schiavo, was executed on suspicion of treacherous communication with the Ottomans. There is a large underground cistern in the center of town just north of the one surviving mosque from the Ottoman period, and close to where the Ottoman aqueduct coming in from the east must have terminated. The cistern, of which I have seen only one unclear photograph, is regarded as mediaeval

rather than Ottoman in construction, but it has to be remembered that the aqueduct itself was only recently shown to be a sixteenth century building.

A somewhat dilapidated house a bit south of the bridge over the Euripus is presently regarded as Ottoman in origin, but it could quite easily be Venetian. The Ottoman traveler, Evliya Çelebi noted in 1668 that much of the housing in Negropont was preserved from the time of the Venetians, and this building was in an area beyond the range of the siege cannon that smashed up much of the northern and southeastern part of the city.

There is no physical evidence to carry us beyond this point, but a number of locations in the mediaeval town can be identified from the Camocio plan and the 1840 map, along with a few photographs taken rather as souvenirs than as historical evidence. I know of three panoramas taken from Kara Baba hill on the Boeotian mainland, although only one of them has been published, unfortunately from a mirror-image print. There are also three good views of the fortifications at the Bourkos, taken just before the destruction began. With the aid of these, we can get some idea of the Venetian defences in the last decades before the Ottoman siege.

Giovan-Maria Angiolello, who wrote the only genuine eyewitness account of the siege from the opening shots to the end, refers to three "rivellino" = ravelins, which in the normal use of the term would mean fortified redoubts outside the walls and on the other side of the defensive ditch which surrounds the wall. There is no trace of anything of the sort before 1687, and until the publication of the 1840 map this aspect of Angiolello's account was a bit of a mystery. On that map, it becomes clear that the Rivellino del Tempio, the Rivellino "il Stretto" and the Rivellino del Burchio and semi-detached redoubts built inside the walls, to provide platforms for cannon too heavy to be placed on the curtain walls or the old-fashioned towers. The Rivellino del Burchio is actually visible in three photographs of pre-1895 Chalkis. The Rivellino del Tempio is at the opposite end of town, by the shore of the north Euboean channel, and the Rivellino "il

Stretto" can be identified by elimination of the other two. Evliya elebi describes these redoubts in 1668.

Two monuments mentioned above are identified with a district known as il Tempio. Attempts have been made to associate the name, il Tempio, with the Cathedral of Negropont, with the Latin Patriarchate and with the church now identified as the Dominican Priory. It is none of these. Il Tempio is a district named for the Augustinian Canons of the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, who were assigned a church of St. Nicholas in a letter of Innocent III in 1208. Just as in Acre, the Canons gave the name of the Temple (the Dome of the Rock on the Jerusalem citadel) to their neighborhood, and this identification also gives us the location of the church of St. Nicholas, which is a landmark in one or two definitions of boundaries. The Camocio map shows that the cathedral and the surrounding neighborhood, Vescovado, is in the north third of town, and by elimination it appears that it was in the eastern half of that third. Even when the Venetians held the entire west half of Negropont, by the second decade of the fourteenth century, the cathedral does not appear to have been under their control.

We now have enough fixed points on the plan of the city to start on the more problematic identifications, which must be established in the absence of any direct evidence either from names or from archaeological remains. The location that is of most interest to this conference is, of course, the initial settlement of the Venetians, the Burgesia from which they expanded to take over the entire city. Except for some possible holdings acquired through intermarriage with local families---and these would be precarious, since they were strongly deprecated by the Byzantines---the Venetians owned nothing in Negropont in 1203, and they do not seem to have owned much more in 1205. Their situation, their safety and their livelihood depended on the church of St. Mark, which the emperors assigned to the Venetians for their use, even their exclusive use, without ever having to consider detaching it from the Byzantine ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It was still part of the ecumenical Christian church. The disagreements between Rome and Constantinople were serious, but not yet irreparable. It was the church of St. Mark that could provide a quasi-title to the other amenities required by the small number of Venetians resident in

Negropont. The church, still technically a Byzantine entity, could own or lease the minimum group of properties, a fondaco, a bakery, a bath and a hostelry, without ever raising the question of extraterritorial ownership. Until 1204, and for a few years after, St. Marks will have remained subordinate to the bishop of Negropont. When, in 1208, the Venetians succeeded in placing it under the authority of St. Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, that was probably the earliest and most significant claim of direct Venetian control over territory within the bounds of the city. From then on, we may picture a general policy of purchasing from both Greeks and Lombards, so that by mid-century, many properties, perhaps even the majority in the west half of the city were already in Venetian hands.

St. Mark's was important, therefore, not for its size and distinction in Negropont. It may very well have been a rather insignificant building, but it was the essential nucleus around which Venetian territorial expansion began. Since we now know a good deal more about the organization of the city than we did a decade ago, we may search for where it can have been by eliminating the regions where it cannot have been. It was not in the Temple district, and it was not in the Vescovado district, which seems to have been isolated from the water. The details of the first formal expansion of Venetian influence in the treaties of mutual support between the dalle Carceri and the Venetians in 1256 (renegotiated in 1262), though not as clear as we might wish, make it evident that the center of Venetian influence was somewhat to the north, and that the expansion was toward the south. It was also close to the western wall, so as to provide access to the sea, but apparently it did not control the land gate Porta del Tempio, since the Tempio district can later shown to be still in Lombard hands. By elimination, we are left with an area somewhere between the north end of town and the Euripus bridge. The Camocio plan shows a major sea-gate there, La Castagnola, and another close to the bridge at the Euripus. The Venetian district, the Campo San Marco, might center on either, but La Castagnola is a bit more likely, since it is more distant from the Euripus bridge, which was initially under Lombard control and was left that way until well into the 14th century.

If the building west of the Dominican priory is confirmed as the Venetian Loggia, it suggests that Venice moved quickly to emphasize its hold on the new properties. This

does not, however mean that the commercial center, the original *Burgesia*, migrated away from the north. Giacomo Rizzardo, in an account of the last days of the siege of 1470, identifies the north end of town, outside the walls as the *Comercio*, and the *Camocio* map seems to support this where it shows a major wharf, *el Sponton*, extending from the mouth of the defensive moat opposite the city wall. This area is conveniently accessible to incoming traffic from the north Aegean and beyond, but it is not a safe, long-term harbor like the wide bay south of the Euripus. War galleys that were sent from Candia to remain on station almost certainly remained in the south harbor. Commercial shipping came in from Venice, Crete and even the Levant, and others came in from the north, but continuous voyages may have been rare. The Euripus provides a passage between the north and south Euboean channel, but a very narrow and somewhat hazardous one. The western side between the little island and the Boeotian mainland may have been passable by small boats, but there are suggestions from previous centuries that it sometimes dammed up altogether. The eastern side, up against the walls of Negropont is estimated to be somewhere between 8 and 12 meters wide. No galley could row through such a channel even at slack water, it would have to be towed, and towing would probably restrict passage to the two reasonably long periods of slack water in each day.

I have seen only one incantus for the voyage to Negropont, and that is from the 1460s, so it is probably abnormal. Such documents probably offer the best opportunity to see how freight was handled through the Euboean channel. As a working hypothesis, I suggest that much of the trade coming in from the north arrived on various sizes of *grippi*, and was restowed in galleys at Negropont, and that customs inspection and taxation was carried out along the wharves in the north channel. A document recently published, the trial of Bartolomeo Querini provides some details of shipping in 1374. It involves *griparia* passing through the channel from south to north and then going on up the channel when they were expected to unload in Negropont. Even *griparia* probably had to wait until close to slack water before they could make the passage, so their movements must have been predictable until they got out into the north Euboean channel.