

The Medusa, Snake Symbolism & Ley Lines

In our culture, mention of the Medusa, or Gorgon, mostly evokes negative responses. Mythology which has come down to us from the Ancient Greeks tells us that the Gorgon was a 'snake-haired ogress, the sight of which turned men to stone' (Penguin English Dictionary), and the word is also synonymous with an ugly woman.

According to Greek myth, the Gorgon were legendary monsters, the three sisters Medusa, Euryale, and Sthenno, daughters of sea monsters, with fearsome teeth and hair of serpents.

The Gorgon Medusa, whose gaze could turn the living to stone, was slain by the hero Perseus, who beheaded her by using Athena's shield to see her only in reflection. Afterward, her mask adorned the shield of the Goddess Athena.

(JK Rowling paid tribute to the myth in 'Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets', when Hermione used a mirror to view the Basilisk - a giant serpent/dragon whose gaze, like Medusa's, 'petrified' living things.)



Medusa forms the centrepiece of the massive pediment which was discovered at the Temple of Artemis at Stratia in Kanoni, and which is now displayed in the local Archaeological Museum. Her grimacing face, with protruding tongue at the centre of a humourless grin and bulging eyes, resembles a mask. Her hair is formed of stylised snakes which spill down over her shoulders, and two entwined serpents encircle her narrow waist. Her body seems depicted in the act of running, and bulges with muscles.

The bas-relief sculpture is the earliest of its kind in the Greek world, and dates from 590-580 BC. But Medusa has a much more venerable and powerful ancestry. Her origins have been traced to the Paleolithic period (Late Stone Age), long before her reinvention in popular Greek myth. At this time, her power is 'represented in labyrinth, vaginal, uterine, and other female designs. Throughout the Neolithic, her forces are symbolized by the female figure positioned in holy postures and gestures of empowerment, with the presence of animals, primarily birds and snakes whom she is intimately connected with. These images appear in the Mediterranean area and continue to extend into the late Bronze Age of Minoan Crete (1600 BC) where she is represented as the refined serpent-goddess-priestess.' (Women in Antiquity, Alicia Le Van 1996)

Medusa means 'sovereign female wisdom'. She appears in Sanskrit as Medha, in Greek as Metis, and in Egyptian Met or Maat. It is thought that she was originally imported into Greece from Libya where she was worshipped by the Libyan Amazons as their Serpent-Goddess. Medusa (Metis) was the destroyer aspect of the Great Triple Goddess also called Neith, Anath, Athene or Ath-enna in North Africa and Athana in Minoan Crete around the middle of the 15th century BC.

She symbolizes the female mysteries. All the forces of the primordial Great Goddess: The cycles of Time as past, present and future; the cycles of Nature as life, death and rebirth (her intimate connection with snakes derives from this aspect; the serpent is a totem of the cycles of life and nature. It symbolizes immortality, as it was thought to shed its skin indefinitely). Medusa mediates between the realms of heaven, earth and the underworld. As a young and beautiful woman she is fertility and life. As crone she consumes by devouring all on the earth plane. She reflects a culture in harmony with nature.

'Medusa's ancient, widely recognized symbol of female wisdom was her threatening, ceremonial mask. It has wide un-blinking eyes that reflect her immense wisdom. They are all-knowing, all-seeing eyes that see through us, penetrating our illusions and looking into the abyss of truth. Her mouth is deathly; it looks like a skull. It is devouring of all life, returning us to the source. Sometimes she has the frightening tusks of a boar which is meant to scare men, yet these hearken back to the pig, an ancient symbol of the uterus of rebirth. Her tongue protrudes like a snake's and her face is surrounded by a halo of spiraling, serpentine hair which symbolize the great cycles and her serpent wisdom.' (Women in Antiquity, Alicia Le Van 1996)

By the 7th century BC, Greece was moving from being a matriarchal society, in which the world and everything in it is born of a sacred mother deity, to being a patriarchal one, ruled by a father-god. The myths that have come down to us from Ancient Greece reflect the subjugation of the sacred feminine beliefs of the more ancient people to the Hellenic and Doric male-centric religion. Thus, 'the mythological beheading of Medusa symbolizes the ultimate silencing of female wisdom and expression... Her life-giving, death-wielding powers and wild forces of nature are controlled, tamed, and mastered by the male order. The cycles of life and nature are made to conform to his linear perspective.' (Women in Antiquity, Alicia Le Van 1996). The myth also served to conceal the origins of Athena, once an aspect of the Great Triple Goddess and now 'born of Man' from the head of Zeus.

Corfu's Gorgon Pediment perhaps represents Medusa's final appearance as an important figure of worship. The Temple of Artemis was built shortly after Corfu was settled by Corinth, a city-state at loggerheads with Athens. It is certain they found an indigenous people already on the island, perhaps of Phoenician origin and worshipers of the ancient Goddess. Perhaps it was their influence that caused her image to dominate its main sculptural feature, the Pediment.

Male-centric myth tells stories of snake- and dragon-slaughter, metaphors for the parallel destruction of the cult of the Goddess, as represented by Medusa. The sun-god Apollo kills the snake-dragon Eurinaes, which embodies the old female-centric forces and matriarchal cultures which pre-date the Olympian gods (Later, his Christian counterpart, the Archangel of Light Michael, killed his own dragon). Soon, worship of the Gorgon Medusa was wiped out, though her mask remained in folk legend, diminished.

But Medusa awakes. In 1921, amateur archaeologist Alfred Watkins 'rediscovered' the ley line system, imagining it as a network of ancient trackways (The Old Straight Track, Alfred Watkins, 1921). Ley lines are alignments of a number of places of geographical interest, such as ancient monuments, churches built on older sites and megaliths, supplemented by subtle manipulations of the landscape. In the latter half of the last century, New Age writers such as John Michell speculated that the apparent alignments are geodesic power lines, the life-force of the Mother Earth, Gaia; a sort of magnetic circuit which ancient people could 'plug in to' at various locations for refreshment and healing; some of these spots later became formalized sanctuaries or holy wells, which sometimes developed into Christian sites; others have been forgotten. Ley lines are also considered to be 'pilgrim's paths' which we instinctively follow. Perhaps the point of 'pilgrimage' is not only the destination, but also the process of getting there by following the healing ley line. As Broadbent and Miller wrote, 'The traditions of pilgrimage that have been with us from the dawn of time speak of this close association between humanity and the great Being that is the Earth. For countless thousands of years people have trod the paths of the Dragon, merging their own consciousness with that of their ancestral spirits and the mind of the living Earth itself.'

The most dramatic of ley lines is the St Michael - Apollo Axis, which cuts across Europe from Skellig Saint Michael off the west coast of Ireland and crosses sites dedicated to the Archangel (such as Saint Michael's Mount and Mont San Michel). Through France and Italy, the Axis reaches Corfu, where, passing through the Temple dedicated to Apollo's sister Artemis, (the temple where Medusa dominated the structure) it transfers its allegiance to Michael's pagan counterpart, Apollo. Through Apollo's own sanctuary Delphi, his place of birth Delos and his temple in Rhodes, it completes its course at Mount Carmel, where Yahweh supplanted Baal (himself a Sun God).

Paul Broadbent and Hamish Miller, whose book *The Dance of the Dragon* brought the Michael-Apollo Axis to the attention of the public, have dowsed it. They found that it has three components - the geographical alignment, plus two energy lines which weave around the alignment, crossing it at various points to arc again across land and sea. This pattern can be represented by a symbol which cuts across time and cultures: the image of a serpent, or two serpents, coiled around an axial rod. The oldest known example of the two-serpent image, dating from before 2000 BC, is of the Sumerian deity, Ningizzida. This was preceded in Egypt by a thousand years, where a single snake deity, Wadjet, was depicted entwined around a rod. Other examples of such staffs featuring coiled snakes in mythology are the caduceus of Hermes, the Rod of Asclepius, the staff of Moses; all symbols of ley line patterns depicted as gods and healing icons. The serpents that encircle the waist of Corfu's Medusa are without doubt a manifestation of the same symbol. No doubt it was with careful thought that Broadbent and Miller used the word 'Dragon' in the title of their book.

Though lack of time did not permit Broadbent and Miller to dowse the Axis' power lines in their entirety, they established that both cross the geographical alignment precisely at the centre of the Temple of Artemis. A small hollow in the grass marks this spot, surely one of the most powerful on the Axis. Was this a place where people lay, close to the earth currents, to access the healing power of Gaia? Just as the image of serpent(s) coiled around a rod symbolizes the Earth's healing power as focused through ley lines, so Medusa's serpent-belt represents the twin power lines which cross the Axis within the Temple she guards. The axial rod is implied by the apex of the Pediment and the downward-pointing tongue.

The Michael-Apollo Axis appears to enter Corfu at Angelokastro (the church on the summit is dedicated to the Archangels Michael and Gabriel), and the dowsers picked up traces at the Paleokastritsa Monastery. One of the associated power lines heads over the central north of the island and sweeps down over the sea to Corfu Town and its rendezvous with the twin line at the Temple. Until the lines are dowsed thoroughly, all must remain speculation, but the man-made landscape provides some telling clues. The chapel of Taxiarchis stands high above the village of Spartillas. Like many of the locations associated with the Line (Saint Michael's Mount, Mont San Michel, Monte Sant' Angelo, Angelokastro, Delphi etc), the chapel introduces a human element to an elevated or isolated feature of the natural landscape. The chapel also stands on the old pilgrimage route that took worshippers to the Pantokrator Monastery at the time of its great August feast. Since in pre-Christian days a temple dedicated to Zeus stood on the summit, perhaps this pilgrim's path has been in use for thousands of years.

Not far from the chapel, the Church of the Virgin of the Crossroads occupies an isolated spot near the village of Strinilas. Above the main doorway, two romping dragons face each other. Though the doorway is dated 1855, the stone carvings are not structurally integrated with the lintel, and may be much older. The presence of serpent images on a Christian monument, the 'crossroads' reference in the church's name, and its pointlessly isolated location, may be hidden ley line references. Does the power line also run through here?

We have examined the strong connections the serpent (or dragon) has with the Gorgon Medusa, and how serpents symbolise the healing power of the Earth's Gaian ley line system. But the Gorgon has additional ties with the Michael-Apollo Axis.

In all the popular tales the giant Gargantua appears essentially to be linked with the movements of the Earth's crust, raising up mountains, carving out lakes or the beds of rivers which he also at times causes to disappear. Although with less tumult, his activity is akin to that of the Giants of Greek mythology and we think that, like them, he symbolises the energies of the Earth, his favourite places being the bowels of the earth and the summits. (Lucien Richer, The Michael-Apollo 'Axis')

Though Richer imposes a masculine character on the deity, it is clearly our Gorgon, our Earth Goddess at work again. As we mentioned earlier, the Michael-Apollo Axis is characterized by sites set on high points (the 'summits'), like Angelokastro, and sanctuaries with connections leading down into the earth, like Delphi and the Temple of Artemis ('bowels of the earth'). One of the most dramatic of the alignment sites on the Axis is Monte Sant' Angelo in Italy. Its alternative name is Monte Gargana. In legend, Mont San Michel was created by two stones thrown down by the parents of Gargantua. Our Gorgon's influence is felt everywhere along the line.

So we return to Corfu's Gorgon Medusa. Our culture has demonized her; myths and serpent-phobia make it hard for us to understand that the builders and artists who created her image on the Temple Pediment had no such negative associations. For them, she represented healing and the all-emcompassing power of the Earth. To enter was to accept the Divine, and to be refreshed. She, the Great Goddess, was the ultimate Sacred Feminine, the quintessential promise of pilgrimage.

'The pendulum is swinging. We are starting to sense the dangers of our history... and of our destructive paths. We are beginning to sense the need to restore the sacred feminine.' Just because Dan Brown wrote this (The Da Vinci Code) doesn't mean it's not true.

In Search of Dragons

Has anyone taken note of the weather on winter Saturday mornings, this last couple of years? Rain on Fridays, maybe even all night long and into the early morning; rain on Saturday afternoon; but not between ten and two on Saturday itself? The Sun God Apollo holds off the rain.

On the second-last Saturday in April [2004], one of the many showery days during that month, we set off from Strinilas Square, to the accompaniment of distant rolls of thunder, for a walk that would take us down to Lafki and up a very tough footpath back to our starting point. Hail began to fall, and we made a contingency plan involving a shorter loop should the weather not improve. As soon as we made the decision and took the new route, the hail eased, so, as we reached the top of the little stone-cobbled path which climbs from Petalia, we turned again in the direction of Lafki. Within seconds hail was driving hard into our faces. Unable to proceed, we turned back towards Strinilas and our shorter option, and were rewarded with an immediate cessation of the hail and, the more we shunned Lafki, with the emergence of an increasingly warming sun. The weather was herding us where Apollo wished us to go.

Finally we took an unplanned loop which brought us to the Church of the Virgin of the Crossroads (Panagia ton Dromon). Although we'd passed it many times by car, none of us had entered its walled grassy yard, with the stark church building at the centre.

There be dragons here. Defining the main doorway of the church was a lintel dated 1855, and above that a stone carving depicting two dragons, frolicking nose-to-nose. A strange symbol to find on a Christian building. After all, Saint George and Saint Michael both slew dragons.

Dragons, snakes, the Medusa - all are symbols of the power of Earth currents, connected with the alignment of ancient sites, known also as ley lines. Alfred Watkins, the man who, in the 1920s 'rediscovered' the ley line system, believed that they represented the remains of a system of 'old straight tracks' which led our prehistoric ancestors safely across country (1). Later researchers discovered patterns of magnetic force at ancient locations such as standing stones, churches built on pagan sites and holy wells; and a new theory developed that leys follow invisible lines of power crisscrossing the land, and that the ancients knew how to 'plug in' to these forces to enhance wisdom, healing and fertility. The ancient sites were where this earth force was concentrated, and from where it could be distributed, like an electric socket in the home.

The Greeks knew about the force too, and the oracle sites such as Dodoni were part of the system. In those times 'the most widespread means of communication with the spiritual realms was achieved through dreams... the dream-oracles of antiquity were many, varied and of enormous significance. Caves, cracks or fissures in the living rock, holy wells and other natural features where the Earth energies are strong were all hallowed by thousands of years of use as centres where people could experience direct knowledge of the unseen. They were places where, quite literally, the Earth spoke.' (2)

The most remarkable ley line must be the Saint Michael - Apollo Axis, which begins at Skellig Michael off the west coast of Ireland, and runs across Europe through many sites dedicated to Saint Michael, including Saint Michael's Mount and Mont San Michel. It is at Corfu that the changeover to Apollo (the pagan form of Saint Michael, the Angel of Light) occurs. The line enters the island at Angelokastro, dedicated to Michael and Gabriel, and leaves it after passing through the centre of the Temple of Artemis (significantly, she of the snake hair). The line continues through Dodoni, Delphi, the Acropolis, Delos (Apollo's birthplace), the Temple of Apollo on Rhodes, and ends at Mount Carmel in Israel, where Yahweh supplanted Baal.



The geographical line runs straight across Europe, but dowsers have found that the system incorporates two energy lines which weave and cross the main line, forming 'a corridor of Earth energies that wove around the central axis much like the serpents twining around the Caduceus - a perennial symbol of healing and energy operating in equilibrium. These energies, both male and female, were apparently operating in polarity, and were known and understood in the ancient world. They were the vital force within the Earth, the dynamic, living intelligence of Gaia symbolized since the earliest days as the Dragon or Serpent.' (3)



One place of power where the two energy lines cross the main line is at the very centre of the Temple of Artemis in Kanoni (above), where the Medusa frieze, now in Corfu's Archeological Museum, decorated the main pediment. Significantly, the Caduceus (today the emblem of the medical profession and pharmacies) is represented on Medusa's belt.

Are the dragons on the doorway of the Church of the Virgin of the Roads a similar indicator of the presence of the energy line at this spot? We know that one of the energy lines sweeps across the north of the island, hitting the sea near Barbati, so it is heading in the right direction. There is, too, a possible indicator in the name 'Virgin of the Crossroads.' Alfred Watkins could have hit on a partial truth when he theorized that ley lines were ancient tracks.

'This energy within the Earth is a sentient power that is available to every living creature, and can be sensed by all to a greater or lesser degree. We may be able to detect and define it with dowsing techniques, but there is a more instinctive level on which everyone responds, each in their own way. The traditions of pilgrimage that have been with us from the dawn of time speak of this close association between humanity and the great Being that is the Earth. For countless thousands of years people have trod the paths of the Dragon, merging their own consciousness with that of their ancestral spirits and the mind of the living Earth itself.' (4)

One of the most famous pilgrimage routes in Corfu is the way that leads to Pantokrator, where people still congregate at the great Paneyiri of Christ the Almighty on August 6th (and previously site of a Temple dedicated to Zeus). In the past, pilgrims came from all over the island on foot, through the cool of the night, following the old stone footpath from Pyrgi to Spartillas (now mostly wiped out by the road), up to the Church of Taxiarchis (dedicated to the Archangels Michael and Gabriel), and then on across the Karst Plateau straight for the Pantokrator summit. The section from Spartillas to Pantokrator is mostly intact, and red paint cross waymarks are renewed annually. We have traced at least two footpaths connecting the main Pilgrim's Way with Strinilas and the Church of the Virgin of the Crossroads, though construction of new mountain tracks has interfered with their route. The local people say that the Virgin of the Crossroads is the hub of a network of paths. Could these be the 'paths of the Dragon', the energy lines of the Earth? Could this place, just off the main Pilgrim's Way and connected with it, have been a focus of pilgrimage too? A place where the energy force of the Apollo Line combines with the earth currents of the location to create a place of power? Is that why dragons be there?

And was Apollo, who as Sun God controls Saturday morning weather, directing us there, with forbidding hailstorms and rewards of sunshine?

References

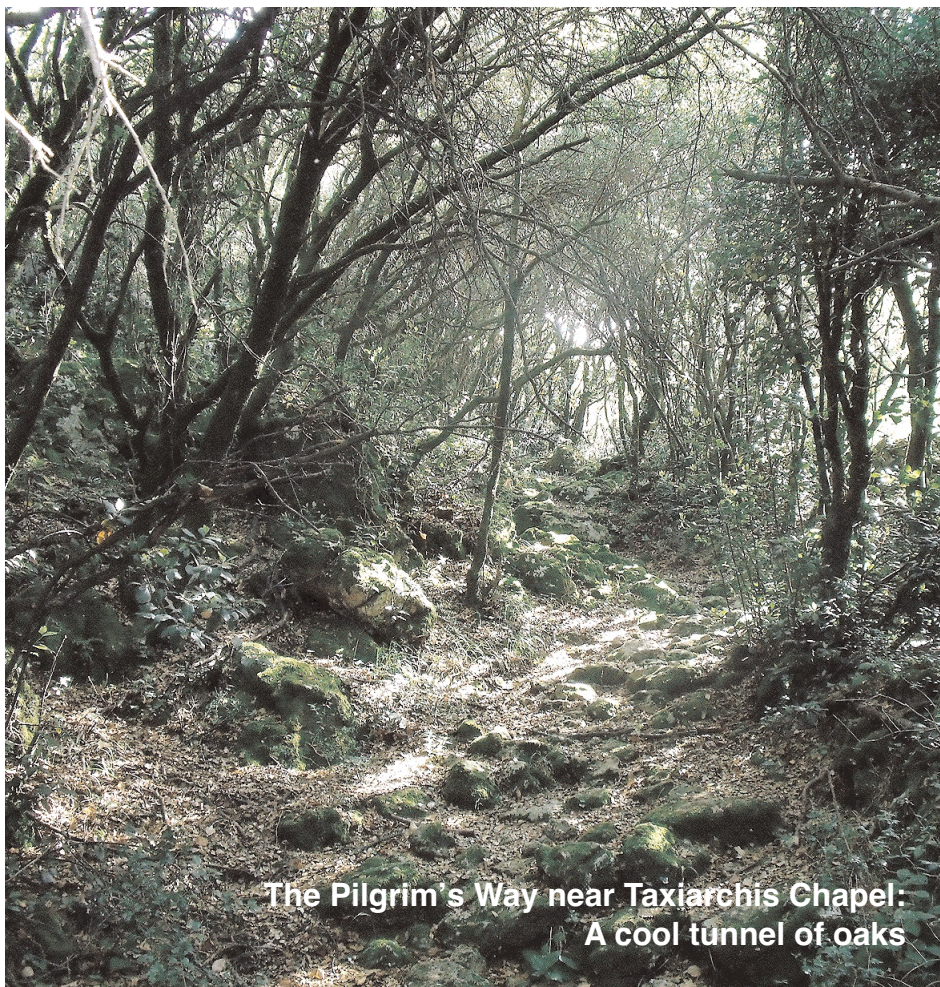
1 'The Old Straight Track' Alfred Watkins

2, 3, 4 'EARTH MYSTERIES - The Dance of the Dragon' Paul Broadhurst and Hamish Miller

Chapel of the Archangels

Looking back the way we'd come, we all agreed that you'd never believe a foot-path came down that cliff face. We'd just descended the reverse course of the Corfu Trail from close to the Pantokrator Summit to Spartillas, taking - with a couple of deviations - some three hours. The walk falls roughly into three sections: the Karst Plateau just under the last cone of Pantokrator, a region of sharp limestone rocks surrounding little 'lakes' of green where small family groups of free-range cattle feed; the descent from the Plateau through a cool tunnel of evergreen oaks to the edge of the cliff; and the scarily vertiginous drop down the precipitous gully to Spartillas, far below.

Despite being the old Pilgrim's Way, the route by which the population of Corfu accessed Pantokrator Monastery for its 6 August fiesta, the path is on few maps (with the exception of the 1:50,000 Freytag and Berndt edition which shows the course of the Trail in full). But even off this almost forgotten path, and hidden by a thicket of trees, is a place that's not on any map - the Chapel of Taxiarchis.



**The Pilgrim's Way near Taxiarchis Chapel:
A cool tunnel of oaks**

The Taxiarchae are the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, to whom the chapel is dedicated. Its name-day falls on 8 November, and it's certain that no-one visits the location to celebrate, even to light a candle. Who's bothered nowadays to climb that path from Spartillas?

When I first visited the chapel many years ago, it served as a place of refuge. Two of us had started out from below in sunny weather, but a storm crept up from behind; we were battered from the south by sleet, which, hitting the cliff, was wind-driven upwards. It was impossible to turn into it and descend, so we continued to climb, and took shelter in the chapel until the storm abated.

From that time, I've watched the chapel fall into ruin. Today, the roof has collapsed, and the mountain's sometimes severe weather is eating into the beautiful ancient frescoes which cover the internal walls. A friend made an attempt to pin down the owner (like many out-of-settlement chapels, it's a private establishment), but learnt that the inheritors were resident in Athens and didn't care. An approach to the Bishopric was met by a shrug, and the comment: 'There are so many of these private chapels, we don't have the resources to fix them.' (Even though the Church is about the richest institution in Greece!)

But surely this is a special case! For one thing, the setting is truly amazing, the chapel being located exactly on the edge of the great wall of the Pantokrator Massif as it drops to the sea. The whole coastline is laid bare below, and on a clear day you think you can see forever.

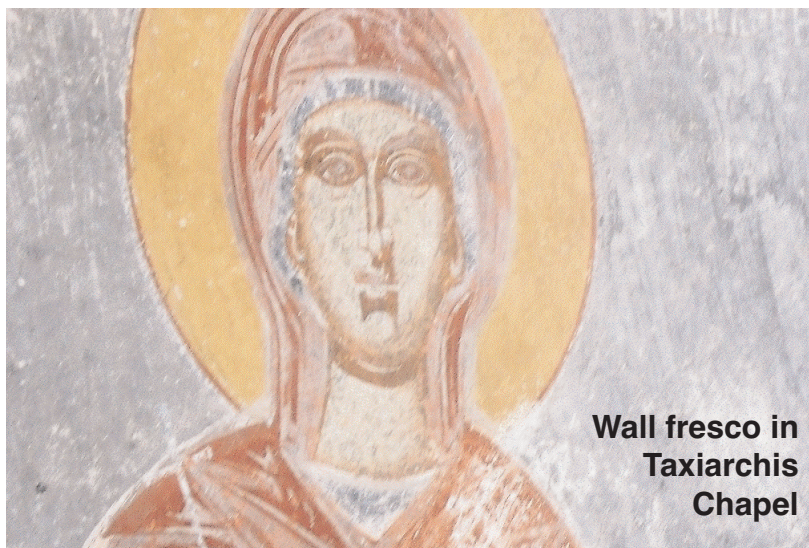
Historically, the chapel must be significant, even only as waymark on the pilgrims' route. Before roads were constructed in the mountain zone, pilgrims came on foot from all over the island, through the cool of the night, to take part in the Monastery's great Paneyiri, following the old stone footpath from Pyrgi to Spartillas (now mostly wiped out by the road). The Taxiarchis chapel marked the end of the steepest climb, and from here on the way was easier. They would have rested here, thanking the Archangels with a candle, in a place where only seasoned hikers now go.

But the Pantokrator Monastery is built on the site of an ancient temple dedicated to Zeus, so who knows how long worshippers have been stopping at this strategic spot?

In Greek Orthodoxy, the Archangels are the great heralds of good news. They reveal prophecies, knowledge and understanding of God's will. Archangels strengthen people in the holy faith, enlightening their minds with the light of knowledge of the holy gospel, and revealing the mysteries of devout faith.

The name Taxiarchis is specifically given to Michael or Gabriel. The word literally means 'commander (archis) of a squadron (taxis)'.

'Michael' means 'like unto God' or 'Who is like unto God?' He first appeared in Joshua's account of the Fall of Jericho and subsequently cropped up in numerous Old Testament tales. During the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, he went before them in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He has been attributed with many miracles, even as late as the 6th century AD. In Greek iconography, he is represented as the Chief Commander of the Heavenly Hosts, holding a sword in one hand; in the other he often carries either a shield, a date-tree branch, a spear, or a white banner (possibly with a scarlet cross).



**Wall fresco in
Taxiarchis
Chapel**

The name Gabriel derives from the Hebrew 'Man of God'. Gabriel played a very minor role in the Old Testament, but he plays a very important part in the New Testament, being the angel who announced the conception of John the Baptist and of Christ. He then appeared to the shepherds near Bethlehem, telling them of the Nativity, becoming the key figure in revealing to humanity the Incarnation. Finally, Gabriel was present during the Passion and Resurrection, being identified as the mysterious 'young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment... following Jesus', who fled naked after he was seized during Christ's arrest in Gethsemane. Most importantly, it was Gabriel who announced Christ's Resurrection outside the tomb. According to tradition, he will proclaim the Second Coming by blowing a trumpet. Gabriel is usually portrayed wearing blue or white garments; he holds either a lily (representing the Mother of God), a trumpet, a shining lantern, a branch from Paradise presented to him by the Mother of God, or a spear in his right hand, and often a mirror - made of jasper and with a X (the first letter of Christ (Χριστός) in Greek) - in his left hand.

Unlike in the islands of the Cyclades and Dodecanese (where many children are named Taxiarchis), dedications to the Archangels are less common than those (for example) to the Virgin (Mother of God) or Saint George. It may be significant that - apart from a Taxiarchis Church in the Kampiello District - the Archangel chapels are located in high places. There's one on the top of Angelokastro (the 'Castle of the Angels' is actually named for them), and another above Sinarades, set on a ridge near Aerostrato and looking out over the countryside in both directions.

Saint Michael is the 'Angel of Light', the Christian incarnation of the Sun God Apollo. Like Saint George (whose churches are also usually in high places), he is associated with dragon-killing. Apollo and Saint Michael are also united in the remarkable cross-Europe ley line, the Saint Michael - Apollo Axis, which begins at Skellig Michael off the west coast of Ireland, and runs across Europe through many sites dedicated to Saint Michael, including Saint Michael's Mount and Mont San Michel. It is at Corfu that the changeover to Apollo occurs. The line enters the island at Angelokastro, dedicated to Michael and Gabriel, and leaves it after passing through the centre of the Temple of Artemis (significantly, she of the snake hair). It continues through Dodoni, Delphi, the Acropolis, Delos (Apollo's birthplace), the Temple of Apollo on Rhodes, and ends at Mount Carmel in Israel, where Yahweh supplanted Baal.

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One of these energy lines has been tracked across the north of the island, hitting the sea near Barbati. Could it be that Taxiarchis Chapel's location on a famed pilgrim route holds clues to an earlier origin? Apart from the main way, we have traced at least two footpaths connecting the Taxiarchis route with Strinilas and the nearby Church of the Virgin of the Roads - which has two frolicking dragons carved on the door lintel! The traditions of pilgrimage are far, far older than organised religion. According to Broadhurst and Miller, the earth's healing energy lines are the 'paths of the Dragon', which 'speak of this close association between humanity and the great Being that is the Earth. For countless thousands of years people have trod [them], merging their own consciousness with that of their ancestral spirits and the mind of the living Earth itself.' (ibid.) The symbolism speaks.

And when we lose the Chapel of Taxiarchis, we will not only lose a connection with our immediate predecessors who made a Christian pilgrimage on this path, but also to a much more ancient heritage which we can now only just discern in echoes.

Corfu: A Place for Pilgrimage?

In the days between the two world wars, the young Ioanna Sourvinou was among the many local folk who would take a break from the toil and tyranny of summer food production (which assured their winter survival) to make a pilgrimage to the Monastery of Pantokrator for its festival on 6 August. Without transport, and in an absence of motor roads between villages, they walked there. Ioanna and her friends would set out from Kinopiastes, south of Town, at sundown. They would climb Corfu's highest mountain by way of the stone-cobbled footpaths from Ipsos to Spartillas and then onwards and upwards to Taxiarchis Church and across the Karst Plateau for the final assault on the summit cone. On arrival, the friends would rest, then join in the worship, followed by traditional dancing; they would hope to have a little cash for a taste of roast lamb. The next day would be spent in much the same way, and on the third night they would walk home, refreshed both physically and spiritually. For Ioanna, like every Corfiot who participated in this great fiesta, it was both a holy-day and a holiday.

The 'Pilgrim Path' they used still exists above Spartillas; below the village, only the odd section still runs, since it now is cut by the switchback road. The way from Spartillas to the foot of the summit cone is in use today as one of the more strenuous parts of the Corfu Trail, the island's long-distance walking route. Across the plateau, where in poor visibility landmarks are few, the path is still marked by red crosses, signifying the religious aspect of its function. Today, pilgrims heading for the Pantokrator festival travel by car, but their place on the foot-path has been taken by the many hundreds of walkers who follow the course of the Trail.



**Pantokrator Summit
as seen from the Pilgrim Path**

Mass Tourism is generally regarded as being 'invented' in North West England towards the end of the industrial revolution, when enlightened bosses sent their factory workers from the 'dark satanic mills' to the seaside: Blackpool and Morecambe. The latter town was created in 1889 when the villages of Bare, Poulton-le-Sands and Torrisholme collectively became known as Morecambe; locals, however, still refer to the areas by their original names. Morecambe's heyday as a resort came in the mid-twentieth century. Whilst Blackpool attracted holiday-makers predominantly from the Lancashire mill towns, Morecambe had more visitors from Scotland and Yorkshire. During 'Bradford Week' - when the workers of that Yorkshire city descended on the resort en masse - not a bed could be found, and visitors would even sleep in the corridors. In this period, top stars performed at Morecambe's Winter Gardens Theatre, and between 1956 and 1989 the resort was the home of the Miss Great Britain beauty contest.

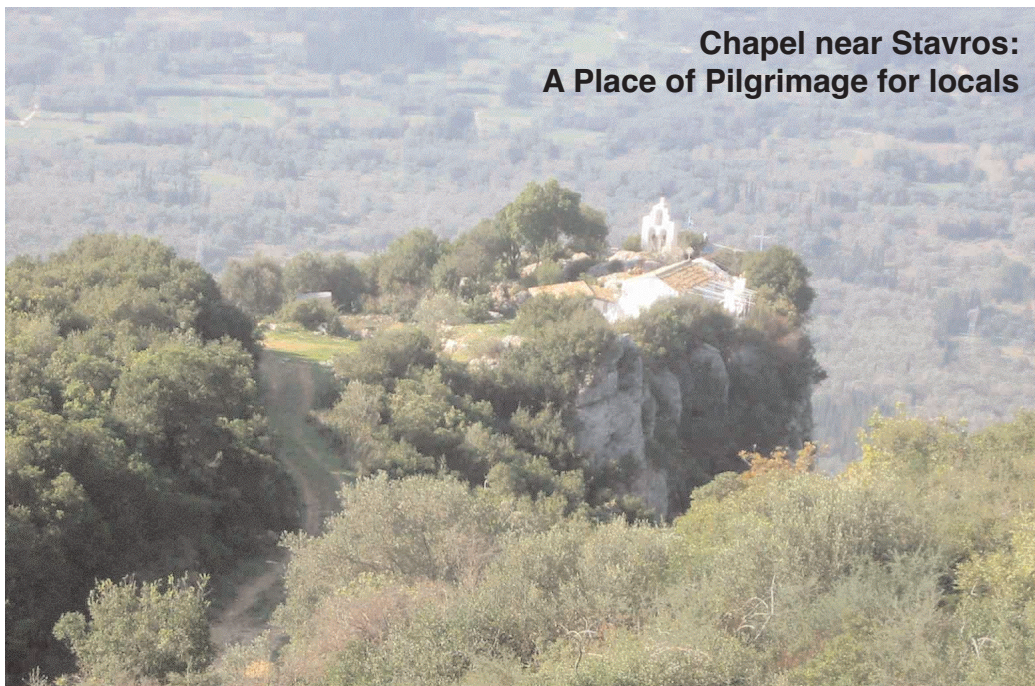
Morecambe's decline began in the 1970s, when cheap package holidays gave its former clientele the chance to take their vacation in locations where the sun was sure to shine - and particularly to those spots which were prepared to compromise their own culture for the trappings desired by the masses, mainly certain destinations in Spain and Greece. This approach to the 'holiday' remains from the Morecambe days: the event is no more than a break from routine and work, to be taken in a place where fellow vacationers, and general provisions and accessories, are reassuringly familiar.

While it's recognised that 'vacation' and 'holiday' are respectively the American and English term for the same activity and thus are synonymous, their etymology is distinct. Holiday is a contraction of holy and day, for holidays originally represented special religious days, when people would be obliged by the Church to take a break from work - and perhaps, like Ioanna Sourvinou and her friends, they would take a trip to a festival. The word evolved in general usage to mean any special day of rest (as opposed to the Sabbath), with or without a religious provenance. But the word 'holiday' still carries connotations of its origin, as a break from work that also has spiritual associations.

In contrast, 'vacation' derives from the French 'Les Vacances', from the fact that, in the past, upper-class families would literally move to a summer home for part of the year, leaving their usual family home vacant. In Britain, it referred specifically to the long summer break taken by the law courts (and later universities).

The word conveys a sense of 'doing nothing'; an empty activity, without meaning. When applied to a person or their expression, 'vacant' suggests 'having or showing no intelligence or interest', as in a 'vacant stare'. Go to Sidari or Kavos in high season, and you'll see plenty of this type of tourist; 'mass tourism' is 'vacation'.

Ioanna Sourvinou's annual August pilgrimage - her 'holiday' in both senses - follows in a long tradition. Pilgrimage is probably as old as Man's first awareness of a higher consciousness. Ancient cult centres, their location decided by the forces of the Earth (Gaia), were the first; Delphi was one, and many others later shed their pagan origins and became places of importance for modern religions, so that today's pilgrims are following a tradition many millennia old. The Pantokrator Monastery is built on the site of an ancient temple dedicated to Zeus; how old is that path from Spartillas across the Karst Plateau?



**Chapel near Stavros:
A Place of Pilgrimage for locals**

We have lost our understanding of ley-lines, hypothetical alignments of a number of places of geographical interest, such as ancient monuments and megaliths. Their existence was suggested in 1921 by the amateur archaeologist Alfred Watkins, whose book *The Old Straight Track* brought the alignments to the attention of the wider public. While Watkins believed the lines were simply paths, later writers such as John Michell have claimed that Neolithic peoples recognised that the harmony of society depended on the harmony of the earth force; ley-lines were the 'wires' which directed the force, and holy sites were spots people could visit on pilgrimage in order to 'plug in' to it for healing. Dowzers have linked the appearance of ley-lines with underground streams and magnetic currents, and believe that crossings of 'negative' water lines and positive aquastats explain why certain sites were chosen as holy.

A major ley-line, the St. Michael - Apollo Axis, runs right through Corfu. The alignment runs from Skellig Michael off the coast of Ireland, through St. Michael's chapel on Carn Brea in Cornwall, St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall, Mont St. Michel in Brittany, Bourges, Sagra di San Michele in Piedmont, San Michele at Castiglione di Garfagnal. Perugia, Monte Sant' Angelo, Monte Gargano, the site of the first recorded appearance of the Archangel Michael, Corfu, Delphi (Apollo's main sanctuary), Athens, Delos (legendary place of Apollo's birth), Kamiros on Rhodes (oldest temple to Apollo on the island), and Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. Notice that many of the sites are located on outcrops or mounts. The Axis enters Corfu at Angelokastro (dedicated to the Archangels Michael and Gabriel), and passes through the central point of the Temple of Artemis in Kanoni (Artemis was Apollo's sister).

But ley-lines are more than just simple alignments. In parallel with the positive and negative magnetic field found at sites on ley-lines, each alignment forms the axis for two energy paths, which weave around the central axis 'much like the serpents twining around the Caduceus - a perennial symbol of healing and energy operating in equilibrium,' write Paul Broadhurst and Hamish Miller, who charted the Axis. 'These energies, both male and female, were apparently operating in polarity, and were known and understood in the ancient world. They were the vital force within the Earth, the dynamic, living intelligence of Gaia symbolised since the earliest days as the Dragon or Serpent.' Both Apollo and St. Michael are associated with serpents; the Serpent Temple of Avebury is located on another St. Michael line, which runs across southern Britain.

In Corfu, Broadhurst and Miller found that the two energy lines cross the Axis right in the centre of the Artemis Temple. On the entrance pediment was set a massive bas-relief sculpture of Medusa, whose hair is formed of snakes and whose belt comprises a pair of entwined serpents. Surely the ancient builders were symbolising the passage of the ley-line and its associated energy lines through the temple. While Ancient Greek legend portrays Medusa as a negative figure, she once represented female wisdom and the forces of Nature - indeed, she IS Gaia, Earth's energy as directed by ley-lines.

One of the energy lines associated with the Axis heads over the central north of the island and sweeps down over the sea to Corfu Town and its rendezvous with the twin line at the Temple. As I wrote in the November 2007 edition: 'Until the lines are dowsed thoroughly, all must remain speculation, but the man-made landscape provides some telling clues. The chapel of Taxiarchis (Archangels) stands high above the village of Spartillas. Like many of the locations associated with the Axis, the chapel introduces a human element to an elevated or isolated feature of the natural landscape. The chapel also stands almost directly on the old pilgrimage route to the Pantokrator Monastery.'

'Not far from the chapel, the Church of the Virgin of the Crossroads occupies an isolated spot near the village of Strinilas. Above the main doorway, two romping dragons face each other. Though the doorway is dated 1855, the stone carvings are not structurally integrated with the lintel, and may be much older. The presence of serpent images on a Christian monument, the 'crossroads' reference in the church's name, and its pointlessly isolated location, may be hidden ley line references. Does the energy line also run through here?'



Its name, the Virgin of the Crossroads, suggests that it is set on a conjunction of walking routes. Only pilgrims arriving from the south would use the Taxiarchis / Karst Plateau path to Pantokrator; those coming from the north west may have found the Crossroads Church a convenient resting point before the last push to the summit, and indeed paths lead from the church onto the Plateau. If - as the dragons suggest - it is a holy 'plug-in' site, pilgrims would at the same time have found spiritual refreshment.

One of the great pilgrim routes is the Way of St. James, the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition has it that the remains of the apostle, Saint James the Great, are buried. It has existed for over a thousand years, and was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages during medieval times, though its origins may derive from a Celtic death route, westwards towards the setting sun, and terminating at the End of the World (Finisterra).

Wikipedia says: 'Today tens of thousands of Christian pilgrims and other travellers set out each year from their front doorstep, or popular starting points across Europe, to make their way to Santiago de Compostela. Most travel by foot, some by bicycle, and a few travel as some of their medieval counterparts did, on horseback or by donkey. In addition to people undertaking a religious pilgrimage, there are many travellers and hikers who walk the route for non-religious reasons: travel, sport, or simply the challenge of weeks of walking in a foreign land. Also, many consider the experience a spiritual adventure to remove themselves from the bustle of modern life. It acts as a retreat for many modern 'pilgrims'.' The Galician government has recognised the Way as an important contributor to the tourism industry of the region, which doesn't boast the climate and beaches of Spain's mass tourism destinations.

For these people, their trip to Northern Spain is a true holi-day, one with direction and purpose, rather than just an empty vacation. Pilgrims, indeed, were the first tourists, and they brought prosperity to successful pilgrimage sites - an economic phenomenon unequalled until the tourist trade - the mass vacations - of the 20th century, pioneered in places like Morecambe, and now focused in resorts like Sidari and Kavos.

Today, mass tourism is in decline. Sun and sand no longer provide motivation, and people seek an experience (holiday) rather than an empty break (vacation). Initiatives like the Corfu Trail demonstrate that the island can provide purposeful activity. Isn't it time now for Corfu to take another step forward and exploit its potential for pilgrimage?