Insula hec que prius ostendetur cerciravel corciraa Rege olim dicta est, que corfu nominatur. et. C. mil. circuit: versus autem meridiem montuosa per totum remanet, quibus montibus arbores valanidarum fructificantur.

This island which is presented first, was once called Kerkyra or Korkyra[[1]](#footnote-1) after a king,[[2]](#footnote-2) and is today called Corfu, and has a perimeter of about 100 miles[[3]](#footnote-3),its southern part[[4]](#footnote-4) is mountainous and on its mountains the oak trees bear fruit[[5]](#footnote-5).

In amphipoli vero promontorio,opidum Sancti Angeli munitissimum erigitur: quod a longe naute prospectant:

On the Amphipolis promontory[[6]](#footnote-6) rises the well-fortified castle of Sant’Angelo[[7]](#footnote-7) which sailors can see from far away.

Ab oriente vero usque corfu et ultra ex parte trionis planicies amena, et multarum habitata gentium ampliatur: et in ea olim cercira urbs deleta cernitur torniamentis columnisque ampliata:

From the east, indeed, as far as Corfu town[[8]](#footnote-8) and beyond, on the north, a beautiful and densely inhabited plain opens,[[9]](#footnote-9) in which one can see the ancient city of Kerkyra, now in ruins, full of ornaments[[10]](#footnote-10) and columns.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Phalarius mons altissimus ab ea videtur, qui dodona silvam in terra conspicit firma.

From here the very high Mount Phalarius[[12]](#footnote-12) can be seen, which looks towards the Dodonean[[13]](#footnote-13) woods[[14]](#footnote-14) on the mainland.

In qua (ut ait Ovidius) templum fuisse dodoneum maximum Iovi sacrum:

here, as Ovid says, there was the great Dodonean shrine sacred to Jupiter.

In quo duas de coelocolumbas descendere solitas et veteribusinsidere quercubus, et ex eis postulantibus responsa dare:

And in here two doves would fly down from the sky and settle in the old oak-trees and from there give oracles to those who asked.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Tandem ex eis (ut aiunt) altera transvolavit in Delphos, Boetię civitatem, et ibi apolinis delphici clarum fecit oraculum.

At length, one of the pair, as they say, flew off to Delphi, a city in Boeotia, and made the oracle of Delphic Apollo famous.

Altera ad ammonis iovis templum in Affrica transmigravit.

The other migrated to the temple of Jupiter Ammon in Africa.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In radicibus autem montis huius, scopulus est quem ad similitudinem Ulixis navem fuisse dixere vetusti.

At the foot of this mountain there is a rock which the ancients said resembled Odysseus’ ship.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Prope vero Leucumam promontorium Cassiopismenibus erectis et iam a pirratis olim desolata videtur:

Near the promontory of Leucinna[[18]](#footnote-18)[[19]](#footnote-19), Kassiopi[[20]](#footnote-20) can be seen with its walls still standing but made uninhabitable by pirates.

Cuius in radicibus planities una cum infecta palude probatur.

And at its feet is a plain with an unhealthy marsh[[21]](#footnote-21).

A latere vero horum nemorum ecclesia matris domini, ab hominibus visitatur multis: qui exauditi repatriantur hilares.

Beside these walls[[22]](#footnote-22) the church of the Mother of God[[23]](#footnote-23) is visited by many people who, once their prayers have been heard, go back to their countries, happy.

Ad trionem vero epirus a rege dicto, altissimis incipit montibus:

on the north begins Epirus,[[24]](#footnote-24) called after a king,[[25]](#footnote-25) with very high mountains.

In quibus heleni propinqua matre, troiaque ab butroto panditur ultro Virgilius.

And in here [of Helenus…], and Buthrotum[[26]](#footnote-26) stretches out further.[[27]](#footnote-27) [[28]](#footnote-28) Virgilius:[[29]](#footnote-29)

Litoraque epiri legimus: Portumque subimus

Caonio et celsum butroti ascendimus arcem.

We skirt the shores of Epirus, enter the Chaonian harbour, and ascend to Buthrotum’s lofty city.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Per hanc igitur insulam: Titus quintus Flaminius ut securius pergeret ad Romanum exercitum bellum cum Philippo Macedonie rege futurus transitum fecit §

On this island Titus Quintus Flamininus[[31]](#footnote-31) made a stop to proceed more safely to the Roman army when he was going to make war against Philip of Macedon.[[32]](#footnote-32)

1. [GEO] Kerkyra <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q121378>;

   <http://www.geonames.org/2463678/corfu.html>;

   <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530835>;

   <https://topostext.org/placde/396199PKer>;

   <https://manto.unh.edu/viewer.p/60/2616/object/6580-9587576>, the northernmost of the Ionian islands. in antiquity identified also with Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians. The name Corfu was first used to refer to the twin-peaked settlement of Coryphe (Greek kορυφώ summit, peak) established from the 7th c. CE on the site of what is called today the Old Fortress. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [ETYM;MYTH] Buondelmonti’s opening remark on the etymology of the name of the island is not entirely correct, as the island was not named after a king but rather after Korkyra or Kerkyra, a naiad (water nymph), following an etymological pattern also evident in the cases of other islands, such as Aegina, Salamis, Euboia and Samos. According to the myth, Kerkyra was the daughter of the river Asopos and was carried off to the island by Poseidon. There she gave birth to Phaiax (Latin Phaeacus), the first king of the island after whom its inhabitants were called Phaeacians (@Corinna, fr. 654; @Bacchyl., fr. 9; @Ap. Rhod., Argon. 4.565–6; @Paus., 5.22.6; @Diod. Sic. 4.72.1–5).

   However, the myth is transmitted only in the Greek tradition and it is unlikely that our traveller, in spite of his good intentions and claims, ever acquired sufficient knowledge of ancient Greek to allow him to read these sources. The source of Buondelmonti’s information was probably local and oral, and this might have generated some confusion between the nymph Kerkyra and her son, Phaiakos.

   For a discussion of Buondelmonti’s name etymologies, cfr. the introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a discussion of the unit of measure used by Buondelmonti, cfr. the introduction. The actual coastline of the island measures 217 km (135 miles). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [GEO] The maps of Corfu as well as of the other Ionian islands, not only invert south and north (as was common in ancient and medieval cartography), but also show an erroneous tendency, typical of the ancient and pre-modern cartographic and geographical tradition, to re-interpret the actual NW–SE alignment of this group of islands in a straighter E–W orientation (@Ptol., Geog. 3.4.11; @Strabo, 7.7.5; @PARTSCH 1887, 70 and 73; @PARTSCH 1890, 56) because of this, the “southern part” corresponds to the western side of the island which is indeed mountainous, with steep cliffs. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [BOT] Valonia oak (Quercus macrolepis previously called Q. aegilops), a majestic deciduous tree, now threatened with extinction on the island, was still abundant, forming dense forests, in Venetian times, when the trade of acorns, valuable for their tanning substances, was economically relevant and subject to heavy taxation (@PARTSCH 1887, 83, with references to Venetian archive documents). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [GEO] Since Amphipolis is not recorded by others on Corfu, Buondelmonti is possibly thinking of Amphipyrgos <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/536055>, a promontory mentioned by Ptolemy, whose location, however, remains a matter of debate among modern scholars and geographers (@Ptol., Geog. 3.13.9; @BÜRCHNER 1922, 1407). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [MON, castle] The castle is the Byzantine fortress of Angelokastro <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q536865>;

   <https://www.kastra.eu/castleen.php?kastro=angelokastro>, built by the Despot of Epirus Michael Komnenos Doukas as part of his defensive strategy after he had seized control of the island in 1214. At a height of 330 m Angelokastro stood out as a clearly visible landmark on the steep northwestern coast of the island (@PARADEISES 1983, 50–52; @LEONTSINI 2014, 46-47). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [SETT] Corfu <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q205832k>

   <http://www.geonames.org/2463679/corfu.html>;

   <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530834>;

   <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/978/gallery/> is the name used for the medieval settlement whose foundation dates back to the Byzantine time (around 7th c.) and which developed as a fortified port settlement (today Old Fortress) replacing the ancient city of Corcyra/Kerkyra. The name derives from Koriphe (Greek kορυφώ, summit, peak) after the twin peaks which characterized the morphology of the site. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [GEO] Buondelmonti, whose cardinal points again reflect the erroneous orientation of his map, here refers to the plain which occupies the southern and the eastern side (Buondelmonti’s east and north, respectively). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [TEXT]In the ms *torniamentis*, either neologism for something worked by the *tornium*, i.e. decorated, or corrupted form for *ornamentis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [ARCH] Here he also locates the site once occupied by the ancient city of Corcyra <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q3693378>;

    <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530834>;

    https://topostext.org/place/396199PKer;

    or Paleopolis <http://paleopolis.ba.iac.cnr.it/?page_id=5&lang=en>,

    a term often applied to an ancient city whose life continued, though on a restricted scale, in the Roman and Early Byzantine periods. In this case, the ancient town was gradually abandoned after the 6 c. while from the 7th c. the settlement shifted to the twin-peaked site of Coryphe, currently occupied by the Old Fortress (@LEONTSINI 2014, esp. 32-35). Buondelmonti’s attention to the presence of ruined monuments and columns as an indication of the location of the ancient site offers a clear example of his sensitivity as regards antiquities and ancient topography. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [GEO] Mount Phalarius is to be identified with the promontory Phalacrum (from Greek Phalakron), correctly so spelled by Pliny but distorted into Phalarius by later Latin authors, (@Strabo, 7.7.5; @Plin., HN 4.12.53; @Solinus, 11). Whereas this promontory is traditionally identified with Cape Kephali or Taxiarchis Akri <http://www.geonames.org/2463790/akra-taxiarchis.html> on the northwest coast of the island, both Buondelmonti’s own text which makes a connection with Epirus and the related map where it is indicated on the coast facing the mainland, demonstrate that for Buondelmonti the mountain in question is located on the opposite side of the island in the northeastern corner and should therefore be identified with Mount Pantokrator <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q333229>, the highest point of the island (906 m) for which Buondelmonti’s superlative *altissimus* is therefore, particularly fitting. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. [TEXT] In the ms. *Dodonam* emended in *dodoniam* based on @DE SINNER 1824, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. [ARCH] While Dodona <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q382317>;

    <http://www.geonames.org/11395564/dodona.html>;

    [https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530843/?searchterm=dodona\*](https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530843/?searchterm=dodona*);

    <https://topostext.org/place/395208SDod>;

    http://eng.travelogues.gr/tag.php?view=14449, located in inland Epirus, is not visible from any point on Corfu, the two localities have always been historically connected.

    Buondelmonti’s awareness of the geographical location of this sanctuary, which despite its great fame in antiquity, remained marginal even in the itineraries of later travellers and was identified only in the late 19th century by the Greek archaeologist Karapanos (@CARAPANOS 1878), is remarkable. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. [MYTH] Dodona and its sanctuary of Zeus were renowned in antiquity for the oracle where the priestesses, known as peliades or “doves”, interpreted, among other signs, the cooing of doves (@PARKE 1967). Ovid <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q7198> mentions Dodona twice (@Ov., Met. 7. 622; @Ov., Met. 13.717) but in none of the passages does he speak of doves. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. [MYTH] This passage appears rather to be a confused rephrasing of an ancient tradition first found in Herodotus (@Her., 2.54–7). According to Herodotus, two doves flew from Thebes in Egypt; one of them landed in Libya, where the temple of Ammon Zeus was subsequently built; the other one reached Dodona and indicated the spot where the god's oracle was to be established. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. [MYTH] This is an ancient tradition, found in Pliny and Solinus (@Plin., HN 4.12.53; @Sol., 11). It was eventually revived by Giovanni Boccaccio and later by Domenico Silvestri, who refers to Boccaccio and paraphrases his text (@G. Boccaccio, De montibus, under “Phalarium”; see also @D. Silvestri, De Insulis, under “Phalarium”). It originates from the famous episode in Homer’s Odyssey, in which Poseidon, in a rage, turned the Phaeacians’ ship into a rock to punish them for bringing Odysseus home to Ithaca successfully (@Hom., Od. 13.152–64). In local folklore there were at least three different possibilities for this identification:

    Pontikonisi <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q7228287>, the famous little island at the entrance to the lagoon opposite the Kanoni peninsula.

    A rock once called Barchetta (“little boat” in Italian), now known as Vrachos Psyllos <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q21555074> , in the northern channel separating the island from the Albanian mainland.

    And a tiny island called Karavi (“boat” in Greek) <https://www.google.com/maps/place/%CE%9C%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%81%CF%89%CE%BC%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%BF+%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%AC%CE%B2%CE%B9+%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85+%CE%9F%CE%B4%CF%85%CF%83%CF%83%CE%AD%CE%B1/@39.7665451,19.5324218,14z/data=!4m13!1m7!3m6!1s0x1344b28750072307:0x11f82e3e19dcf826!2sMathraki!3b1!8m2!3d39.7674477!4d19.5240814!3m4!1s0x135b4d504a58cea9:0x3e62c63b952e28d8!8m2!3d39.7608466!4d19.5689819>, near Mathraki off the Western coast of Corfu. (for a survey of the various identification proposals, see @PARTSCH 1887, 73).

    If we follow the correct and now established identification of ancient Phalacrum with modern Cape Kephali (or Taxiarchis Akri) <http://www.geonames.org/2463790/akra-taxiarchis.html>

    a promontory on the northwest of the island, it is obvious that the ancient tradition reflected by Pliny and Solinus, identified the petrified ship of Odysseus with Karavi, off the western coast of Corfu.

    However, bearing in mind what has been said above on Buondelmonti’s identification of Phalarius as Mount Pantokrator <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q333229>

    <https://www.geonames.org/2463612/oros-pantokratoros.html>, it is clear that he was in fact thinking of “Barchetta”. This is further confirmed by the cartographic tradition of Buondelmonti’s work where, as in this ms, the island, tagged as “Ulixis scopulum [rock]”, is located in the narrow strait separating the island from the mainland. this proposed location for Odysseus’ ship on the eastern channel was also rooted in ancient tradition, as it is reflected in a hitherto-ignored passage by Procopius where he describes an ancient monument representing the petrified boat of the Phaeacians and bearing an ancient inscription commemorating its erection by a merchant as an offering to Zeus Kasios, venerated in Kassiope (@Procop., Goth. 8.12.23–7) <https://topostext.org/work/666#8.22.23>. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. [TEXT] In the ms. *Leucumam* but I am reading *Leucinnam* based on @DE SINNER 1824, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. [GEO] Even keeping in mind Buondelmonti’s own orientation of Corfu as discussed above, we have here a major confusion: Leucinna corresponds in fact to ancient Leukimma <http://www.geonames.org/258426/akra-lefkimmis.html>

    <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530977>, a promontory located on the southeastern part of the island, and which cannot therefore be near Kassiopi <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q25159979>

    <http://www.geonames.org/2463700/akra-kassiopi.html>, another long promontory at the northeastern tip of the island. given the reference to marshland at its foot, Buondelmonti may in reality have been thinking of Cape Agia Ekaterini <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q25159935>, the northernmost point of the island, beside which is Lake Antinioti or Antiniotissa <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q24915572>, a brackish lagoon which offers a perfect match to the description of the unhealthy marshland mentioned below. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. [SETT] Kassiopi <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q1735279>

    <http://www.geonames.org/2463701/kassiopi.html>;

    <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530920>;

    <https://topostext.org/place/398199UKasàà>;

    was an ancient Graeco-Roman settlement. <https://topostext.org/place/398199UKasàà>

    In the Byzantine period (12th–13th centuries) a fortress <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q15297479>

    <https://www.kastra.eu/castleen.php?kastro=kassiopi> was built, only to be almost entirely destroyed, not by pirates as Buondelmonti suggests, but by the Venetians, who blew it up in 1368 after a long siege while trying to recapture the island (@PARADEISES 1983, vol. 3, 46–9; @VOGIATZES AND RAPTAKE 2005; @PYLARINOS 2007, fig. 45 with captions on p. 423; @LEONTSINI 2014, 47-48). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. [GEO] Possibly Lake Antiniotissa or Antinioti <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q24915572> , still today an important wetland and once a malarial swamp. l [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. [TEXT] In the ms. *nemorum*, I am reading *moeniorum* based on @DE SINNER 1824, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. [MON, church] The church mentioned by Buondelmonti is the Panagia Kassiopitissa (or Kassopitra) <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q68826172>, an early church built on the site of the ancient temple of Zeus Kasios, destroyed by the Turks in 1537 and rebuilt several times during the later periods (@LEONTSINI 2014, 48 with previous bibliography). Throughout its history this church was an object of devotion for seafarers and was a famous centre of pilgrimage (MARMORA 1672, vol. 1, 8). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. [GEO] Because of the odd orientation of the Ionian islands in ancient and medieval cartography discussed above, the mainland region of Epirus <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q565751>;

    <https://www.geonames.org/6697804/epirus.html>;

    <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530871>;

    <https://topostext.org/place/395205REpe>;

    is described as lying to the North instead of the East. Buondelmonti must have been familiar with the region since members of his family were at the time masters of the Despotate of Epirus (see introduction). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. [MYTH] The mythological origins of Epiros are not well established and while in one version Peleus is considered the ancestors of the local dynasty of kings (@Paus., 2.29.4) <https://manto.unh.edu/viewer.p/60/2616/object/6580-9358745>, in another version Epeiros, the granddaughter of Cadmus and Harmonia, became the eponymous heroine after she died in that region (@Parth., Amat. narr. 32). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. [TEXT] In the ms *ab utroto.* I am reading *Butroto* based on @DE SINNER 1824, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. [TEXT] As signaled also by @DE SINNER 1824, 145, this passage appears corrupted and its sense is incomplete. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. [MYTH] This passage presents a textual difficulty but its general sense refers to the mythological foundation of Butrint

    <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q22002796>;

    <http://www.geonames.org/363394/butrint.html>;

    <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/530824>;

    <https://topostext.org/place/397200PBou>;

    <http://eng.travelogues.gr/tag.php?view=11500>;

    by Helenus <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q729332>;

    <https://manto.unh.edu/viewer.p/60/2616/object/6580-8188467>, the Trojan seer, son of Priamus, who after fleeing his country, married Andromaca, the widower of Hector and founded a new city on the shore of Epirus. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. [TEXT] This is a quote from Virgil <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q1398>

    to be noticed *portum* for porto, *celsum* for celsam (@Virgil, Aen. 3.292-293) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This quote from the Aeneid (@Virgil, Aen. 3.292–3).is linked to the preceding passage by the references to Helenus and Butrint. It refers to an important episode in Aeneas’ journey when Helenus foretells his journey‘s final destination. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. [TEXT] In the ms. *Flaminius*. I am reading *Flamininus* based on the correct name of the historical character in question. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. [HIST] This second quotation is unrelated to any preceding observation; it refers to the stop which the Roman consul Titus Quincius Flamininus <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q349222>

    made on the island of Corfu during the Second Macedonian War (200–196 BC) against Philip V of Macedon <https://viaf.org/viaf/88734482/> as told by Livy (@Livy, 32. 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)