KEFALLINIA: THE IMPERIAL LEGACY OF BRITAIN'S GREEK EMPIRE

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Abstract

Kefallinía is the largest of the seven Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece. These Islands were for over five decades in the first half of the nineteenth century an independent state under British protection and known as the United States of the Ionian Islands. British imperial legacy in Kefallinía included an island road network that forms the basis of transport today, lighthouses, bridges, a quay, a customs house, courts of justice, a prison, a hospital, and public squares. Three men were responsible for the remarkable physical transformation of Kefallinía in the form of major civic projects and public buildings during the British period. Their individual contributions were concentrated in Argostóli, the capital of the island, and the next largest town, Lixoûri. Photographs and drawings illustrate the austere British neoclassical style of civic architecture that identified the British period of the island's history. The legacy of their public works was lost in the devastating earthquake of August 1953 when virtually every in building and structure in Argostóli and Lixoûri were demolished.

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Context

For five decades in the first half of the nineteenth century the seven Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece constituted Britain's Greek Empire, as Michael Pratt (1978) characterized them. Under provisions of the Treaty of Paris, signed on 5 November 1815, the great powers agreed to create the United States of the Ionian Islands as an independent state under British protection. A British Lord High Commissioner was to govern the Islands and be based in Corfu (Kérkyra). The British imperial legacy in Kefallinía, the largest of the Islands, included major civic projects and public buildings. These projects and buildings were concentrated in Argostóli, the capital of the island, and the next largest town, Lixoûri. British influence on the public realm complemented Venetian impact on the residential architecture of the island. Venice had occupied Kefallinía and the other Ionian Islands from the beginning of the sixteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century. During this time the only major public building the Venetians constructed in Kefallinía was the lazzareto or quarantine building. Thus the architectural identity of Kefallinian towns was the result of imperial legacies - public buildings in British neoclassical style, mansions of the nobility and upper middle classes in Venetian Baroque and Renaissance styles - both overlaying the vernacular form of the remaining buildings. Of all the Ionian Islands Kefallinía exhibited most extensively British urban and architectural influences.

The Three Achievers

The remarkable physical transformation of Kefallinía during the British period was the result of the efforts of three men. Between them they developed an extensive road network over the whole island, devised a plan for Argostóli, and built important public buildings in both Argostóli and Lixoûri. These men were Charles-Philippe de Bosset, Charles James Napier, and John Pitt Kennedy. Their achievements were remarkable as they managed to undertake the many public projects in Kefallinía despite the preferential treatment given to Kérkyra by the governing British Lord High Commissioners.

The first achiever, Major Charles-Phillipe de Bosset, was Swiss having joined the British Army in 1796. In 1810 he led two companies in the successful siege of the Ionian Island of Santa Mavra (Lefkáda). Soon after he was sent to Kefallinía to command the island and head its government. He held the post of Commandant until 1814. Robert Travers who followed and served as Resident under the new constitution instituted in 1815 did not leave any legacy. The second achiever, Charles James Napier, succeeded him and served as Resident of Kefallinía from 1822 until 1830. His outspokenness during these years made him an enemy of the then Lord High Commissioner, Sir Frederick Adam. When Napier left for England in 1830 on account of his wife's illness, Adam avenged himself during Napier's absence by annulling his appointment in Kefallinía. Captain John Pitt Kennedy, the third achiever, had entered the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich in 1811. After he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of the Royal Engineers he was sent to Malta in 1819 and then to Kérkyra. In 1820 the army appointed him Director of Public Works in Lefkáda. At Napier's request the army transferred him to Kefallinía as Director of Public Works and Military Secretary. Kennedy took up his appointment in Kefallinía in 1822 and left it in 1831.

Fig. 1. The new roads of Kefallinía built by the British.

Charles-Phillipe de Bosset

Before the arrival of the British there were no significant roads for wheeled traffic in Kefallinía. Charles-Phillipe de Bosset's major contribution to the imperial legacy was roads and bridges (Cosmetatos, 1995, 13-42). He established the basic road network with Charles Napier making significant additions while later British Residents made further improvements. De Bosset wanted arterial roads to link the capital Argostóli with other towns and rural centers. In addition he envisaged roads for the large villages. In Livathó, the richest and most densely populated district, wheeled traffic soon became commonplace changing social life and commerce forever. The inhabitants of Livathó presented de Bosset with a ceremonial sword in gratitude for the benefits that the new roads brought. Besides improved connections between districts the new road network linked the ports to the interior. These roads allowed the commencement of wheeled traffic and improved the safety of mountain passes for loaded mules. Wheat could now be transported to out-lying areas. A period of prosperity set in on the island. Better contacts between districts led to profound changes. The social structure broadened, feudalism declined, and democratic processes replaced the politics between the warring factions.

Soon after de Bosset arrived in Kefallinía in April 1810 he set about building a bridge, to be known as the Drápano bridge, to span the bay of Argostóli. Up to that time inhabitants from the large region to the east had to make a long journey around the bay to reach the capital of Argostóli. As local inhabitants were opposed to the idea of a bridge he decided to construct it speedily in wood. The local inhabitants soon accepted the bridge. De Bosset then proceeded over the next three to four years to reconstruct the bridge in stone. In 1812 the Administrative Body of Kefallinía awarded a gold medal to de Bosset for his building the bridge of Drápano.

Fig. 2. Drápano bridge, Argostóli from the south.
Fig. 3. De Bosset's bridge, Lixoûri. Emblem of St. Francis just visible in the center.

De Bosset also undertook many public works in Lixoûri, including the design of the bridge over the storm water canal, called the Seine by the local population. Lixourians erected many memorial tablets to de Bosset in recognition of his services to the town. In recording his own achievements over a three year period, 1810-1812, de Bosset wrote: "A public square has been formed in Lixuri [*sic*], notwithstanding the numerous difficulties which were in the way of such an undertaking, a square which combines with the embellishments of that city the advantage of a secure and commodious landing place for boats" (de Bosset, 1821, 141). He also undertook the construction of the bell tower for the church of the Pantokrátora. Above the window of this tower residents placed a plaque that acknowledged de Bosset's contribution.

Charles James Napier

Napier carried out an extensive array of projects (Cosmetatos, 1995, 45-51). He extended the island's road network begun by de Bosset and opened all the ports in Kefallinía. Today this network still forms the bulk of the modern system. In Argostóli he improved the street pattern, created new urban squares, built a new Law Court building, erected many other public buildings, and constructed a waterfront road and quay. He also built a large Law Court building in Lixoûri.

After de Bosset had left in 1814 the roads he built were neglected. One of the first tasks Charles Napier set out to accomplish soon after his arrival in 1822 was to improve on the roads built by de Bosset. He intended to connect all the important harbors and anchoring places in Kefallinía to Argostóli by means of roads passable by wheeled traffic. Napier, with the engineering help of John Pitt Kennedy, carried out extensive road construction work. A British visitor in 1885, William Napier Bruce, described the work as

"134 miles of road over a rugged mountain range more than 5,000 feet high, only 21 miles incomplete when control was taken from his [Napier's] hands; 113 miles of road fit for carriages, 96 miles having been cut or blasted through solid rock, as well as Bridges, Conduits, Mile-Stones and Guarding parapets. This vast work was executed by labour on the corvee system and at the marvelously low cost" (Cosmetatos, 1990, 24).

When Napier took office in 1822 he found only the port of Argostóli open. Seven other ports had been closed by the previous administration for economic reasons. In a letter to Sir Frederick Hankey, Private Secretary to the Lord High Commissioner in Kérkyra, dated 14 December 1826, Napier described his proposed policy as "The Dispersion of Trade and against its Concentration." His first objective was to connect five ports with "magistral" roads to the agricultural areas in the northern part of the island (Napier, C.J., 1825, 4-6). He reasoned that "all these districts, hitherto isolated among the mountains, are wholly dependent on their respective ports for supplies, which are uncertain ... " and that a new road

"is very necessary, as by the present path, corn is sent with difficulty from most parts of the island to be ground by water-mills in that district; ... (another road) would be a coastal road around the island; a reason for making which (besides its usefulness in point of defence and against smuggling) is, that it would draw cultivation along the coast, and thereby prevent the soil of the island being carried into the sea by heavy rains "(Cosmetatos, 1990, 44).

Another problem Napier discovered on his arrival was, as he wrote afterwards, that

"the town of Argostoli, which stretches along the shore, had a ragged, filthy edge, and generally shallow water. In strong winds, the waves dashed into the town, so as to render the street next the sea impassable; I, therefore, resolved to build a quay ... and filled up the sea to a certain depth, forming a quay of a mile and a half in length, ... This quay ought to have been constructed with cut stone, much broader, and in nearly a straight line, with some enclosed places for small boats. All this I hoped to have done, gradually, had I remained; and I only considered the quay, in its present form, as a portion of a greater work. Nevertheless it has improved the health, the cleanliness, and the comfort of the town; for having been made expressly without any projections to harbour filth, the water has a clean sweep, keeping always clean; and, as the foundations were made with large rocks cast into the water, and afterwards filled up; so, in wet weather, the rain sinks through the crust of gravel which forms the surface, and in ten minutes, after the heaviest shower, there is a perfectly dry walk of a mile and a half, adding greatly to the beauty and cheerful appearance of the town, and forming the favourite promenade of the inhabitants; ..." (Napier, C.J., 1833, 332).

Fig. 4. Landing place on the quay, Argostóli.

John Pitt Kennedy referred to the quay as the "Mole," known locally as "*O Mólos*" [from the Italian]. Napier began construction of the quay in 1822. Not only did the government in Kérkyra fail to help him but the shoreline landowners continually harassed him. He still managed to complete the project under these difficult circumstances. Reverend Richard Burgess criticized Napier for using stones from the ancient agora at Kráni in the construction of the quay. Yet another British visitor, David Ansted, who visited in 1863 wrote about the "excellent quay constructed by Napier." (Ansted, 1863, 329). He went on to describe Argostóli as a

"long town, consisting of several pretty good streets, parallel to the quay, and a multitude of others of all kinds crossing them at right angles. The chief street is the *Strada Marina* which extends from the commencement of the town at the bridge and is nearly a mile long, facing the harbour for the whole distance, and terminating with the parade ground."

Fig. 5. Plan of Argostóli.

In Argostóli Napier's vision for the undeveloped northern district was for an esplanade on the waterfront and a square to form the core of the new area. He envisioned "a fine Esplanade the greater portion of which is levelled out of the solid rock, and in the centre a pyramidical base pedestal surmounted by a statue of Sir Thomas Maitland by Prosalendi of Corfu." (Napier, H., 1829, 135). The Greeks pronounced Maitland as Métlan and the name of the square as Métela. Letters written by Napier in 1822 and 1823 provide details on the preparations for building the Esplanade and Maitland Square. Land belonging to the Regent (a prominent local person who headed the island's Council) needed to be purchased for the urban open space. Then there was the question where to site the statue of Sir Thomas Maitland by the renowned sculptor Pávlos Prosaléndis.(Corgialenios Museum Card D35c12/32). In a letter from Napier to Sir Frederick Adam, dated 26 December 1822, he explained that

"the Regent proposes to sell the ground around the statue, unless the Government choose to purchase it, I know several who are ready to buy it: Houses will be built touching the Pedestal between it and the sea; and thus Prosalendi's fine work will be wholly lost and from the windows of high houses, built around it ... will be emptied upon the Head of the Statue ... We must have ground for the prison & tribunals; We must have ground for a parade for the troops and the expense is trifling: ... I would instantly lay out the ground and soon sell the part allotted for private houses to be built on a plan given by Government." (Corgialenios Museum Card D44a15).

Fig. 6. Prison complex, Argostóli. Ground and first floor plans.

On the landward side of Maitland Square Napier located three major buildings, a prison complex, the tribunals, and the barracks. The prison was built of stone quarried from leveling the area for the Square. His report and plan for the new prison was drawn up in 1822. It approved the following year and construction was completed by the end of 1828. Napier's own words best

describe the efforts it took to build the prison. "I finally succeeded in getting leave to build a new prison, upon the principle of classification, and the separation of persons at night, so that every prisoner should have a separate cell, while those of every class worked together, each in the yard appropriated to his class of crime. The prison is so constructed that it may also serve as a fortress, in case of any danger to the garrison." (Napier, C.J., 1833, 327). He added further that

"[t]he two circular towers are for the guards. They do not communicate with the internal part of the prison and the guards mount to the top of the prison wall by a staircase within the towers, which latter are loop-holed. There are arched door-ways prepared inside of the towers in the prison wall, which may, on an emergency, be opened, and the whole turned into a castle strong enough for the garrison to resist attack if not made with artillery. The cells are not placed back to back as in English prisons: It would not do well in so hot a climate, which requires a clear passage of air through. The guards may be formed on the top of the walls, as the sentry's walk goes all round, and commands every part of the interior of the prison" (Napier, C.J., 1833, 605).

The prison complex also included a Chapel, a Hospital, and Work Houses. Henry, Charles' brother, depicted "[t]he new Prison, now half finished, [as] already a fine specimen of strength and massiveness combined with space, security and convenience and well adapted to the supervision of prisoners. [There are] 120 cells with grated windows and the doors so fixed to allow of a free circulation of air without endangering the prisoners' security" (Napier, H., 1829, 139-40).

"Close in front and almost touching the prison are to be placed the Tribunals, where also the whole of the public offices will be concentrate [*sic*] so as to make it the real centre of public administration in every department a great convenience and economy of time." (Napier, H., 1829, 139-40). Charles Napier recounted how "I sent a plan to Corfu, for adding these courts [of justice] to the prison; which is purposely built in a way to admit of this addition." (Napier, C.J., 1833, 329). In a letter he sent to Maitland on 12 March 1823, he added that "[t]he Tribunals you know will be quite separate so the consideration of them will be quite unconnected with the Prison, except that we have the ground for them. The Private Houses may be built after the plan of those on the Esplanade at Corfu. The stone here is on the spot, so that the expense of the Arcades will be pilfering." (Corgialenios Museum Card D44a15). The tribunals were never built.

Charles Napier envisioned

"the third side of the Esplanade a Barrack [that] has long been in contemplation, which it is calculated will redeem its own cost in a few years by saving the expense of officer's quarters which in Argostoli are extravagantly dear; If ever this fine square is completed it will be one of the most splendid places in Europe of its size, and art, nature, and good taste will all be employed and aid each other in its accomplishment" (Napier, H., 1829, 142).

Barracks for the soldiers were eventually built.

For central Argostóli Charles Napier's idea was for an avenue to link Maitland Square with a new central square. He described his idea as

"a new and spacious street, just opened out and planted with a row of trees on each side, but not yet built. It will be a half mile long and fifty feet across, but cut through the centre by another of equal breadth: the point of intersection will form a fine square in the centre of which it is intended to erect an Exchange, Theatre and Casino, all comprised under one roof the drawing and plan of which are already executed and will add greatly to the magnificence of Argostoli." (Napier, H., 1829, 140).

In Lixoûri Napier added a large building to the new public square to house varied activities.

"The reason for building a market place on a larger scale at Lixuri than Argostoli was that the Court of Justice was hitherto held in a small hired room quite insufficient for the purpose of administering justice ... I therefore built over the Market Place an ample room capable of containing at least 600 people opening onto a balcony which passed all round it ... Under the same roof were concentrated the Public Offices and a Lancastrian school ... Under the colonnade of the Market Place, the people find shelter from the noonday sun and if late they may sleep there sheltered from the heavy dews. The labouring class find the full use and profit of great public edifices in these hot climates which is the reason I preferred the colonnade" (Cosmetatos, 1990, 74).

Napier gave another reason for the larger size of the Lixoûri building. It was the need to house troops in case of insurrections, which had recently occurred in the Ionian Island towns of Zante and Santa Mavra.

Fig. 7. Public building (the Markáto), Lixoûri: Courts of justice, market shops, public offices, Lancastrian school.

John Pitt Kennedy

Kennedy's role was essentially to make concrete Napier's visions (Cosmetatos, 1995, 52-55). This began with the design of two lighthouses. About the first lighthouse on "Guardian" (Vardiánoi) Island, Napier wrote that Kennedy "designed, and executed, the magnificent Doric column, which at present exists. My wish was to have formed this column, of a single stone; or at most of three, which might have been done; but the means I possessed were not adequate to the transport of such masses across the water; a distance of seven miles." (Napier, C.J.,1833, 216). The column was left unfluted but Napier's hope was to obtain approval later for fluting the column. He also lauded the second lighthouse at Point Theodore which "Captain Kennedy, again, excited the public admiration of his taste in architecture, by erecting a beautiful Grecian temple, on the top of which stands the lantern, and completes the illumination at the entrance to the harbour of Argostóli." (Napier, C.J., 1833, 216). The building is circular with "columns (that) are 24 in number, about 8 feet high, and the height to top of lantern is 30 feet." (Napier, C.J., 1833, Plate 12). Henry Napier recorded that "(t)here is a lighthouse just erected on Point Theodore at the entrance of Argostóli Harbour ... the foundation stone of this little 'Bijou' in architecture was laid by Captain Kennedy on the 12th or 13th of March 1829. In the beginning of May it is nearly completed." (Napier, H., 1829, 140).

Fig. 8. "Guardian" (Vardiánoi) Island lighthouse.
Fig. 9. Point Theodore lighthouse.

Kennedy translated Napier's idea for the focal point of central Argostóli into a design that consisted of two buildings not one. In the first building were to be the Law Courts which was eventually built. Its site was originally a pond or swamp where women washed clothes. Kennedy filled the marshy area before beginning construction of the building in 1825. A British traveler at the time severely criticized Kennedy for transporting and using masonry from the walls of the ancient citadel of Krani for building material. The second building did not receive funds from Kérkyra and was not built. Authorities there decided to fund the Nausicaan Palace on that island instead. In this second building was to be a Public School (on the Lancastrian System), the Assembly Rooms, the Exchange, a small theater and the "Monte di Pieta."

Fig. 10. Public building, Argostóli: Public school, Assembly rooms, the Exchange, and the "Monte di Pieta."

Kennedy also designed the Court of Justice, or Markáto building as it came to be called, in Lixoûri. In a letter to Napier on 15 May 1824, he wrote that he hoped "to have the Lixuri market habitable in two months." (Cosmetatos, 1990, 69). Napier mentioned in his book that each of the twelve columns was cut in one piece at the quarry. The beautifully white stone, also used in fine houses in Argostóli, was from the quarry at Fallarís although Napier mistakenly referred to its location as the Black Mountain. About 1930, the authorities replaced many of the columns in the Markáto building with reinforced concrete after an earthquake had damaged them.

Conclusion

During the first half of the nineteenth century era Venetian architectural styles were replaced by the more austere British Neoclassical style. The latter was introduced into Kérkyra and Greece in 1821 by George Whitmore who designed and built the Palace of St. Michael and St. George in Kérkyra (Dimacopoulos, 1979). It is likely he was influenced by the work of Robert Adam who in turn was inspired by Andrea Palladio. In Kefallinía the British neoclassical style is most evident in the designs by John Pitt Kennedy for the Court of Law Building in Argostóli and another in Lixoûri. There does not appear to be any connection between Kennedy and Whitmore. After the departure of the British from the Ionian Islands in 1864 the influence of Athenian Neoclassical style spread to Kefallinía and the other islands. In the devastating earthquake that struck Kefallinía in August 1953 all the buildings were demolished. Fortunately photographs taken in earlier years provide us with visual evidence of the public buildings described in this paper and Britain's imperial legacy.

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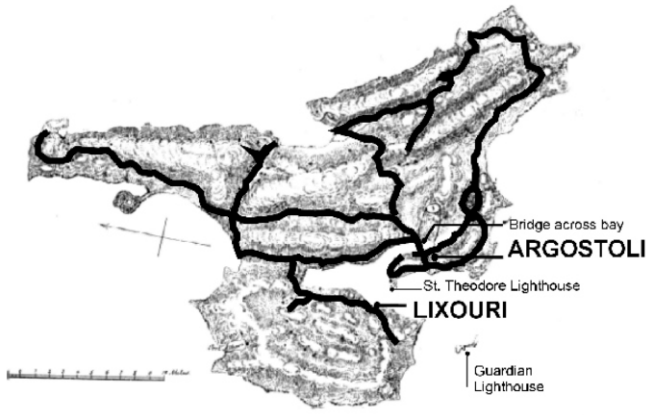

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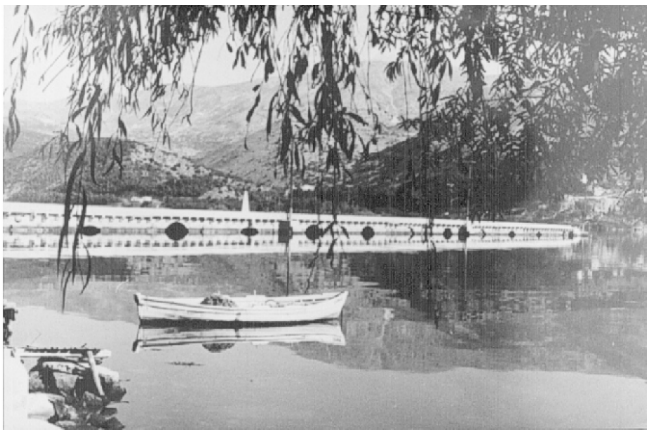

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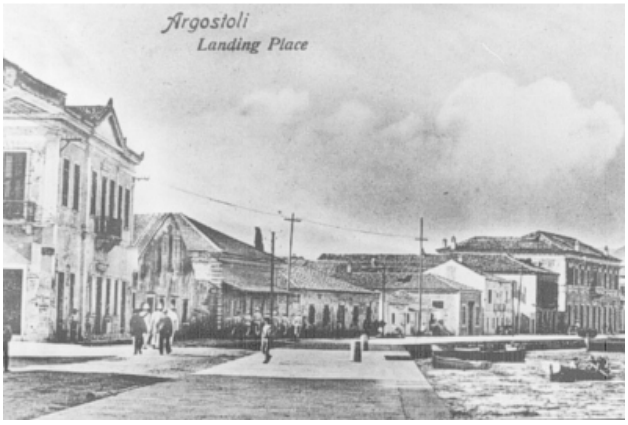

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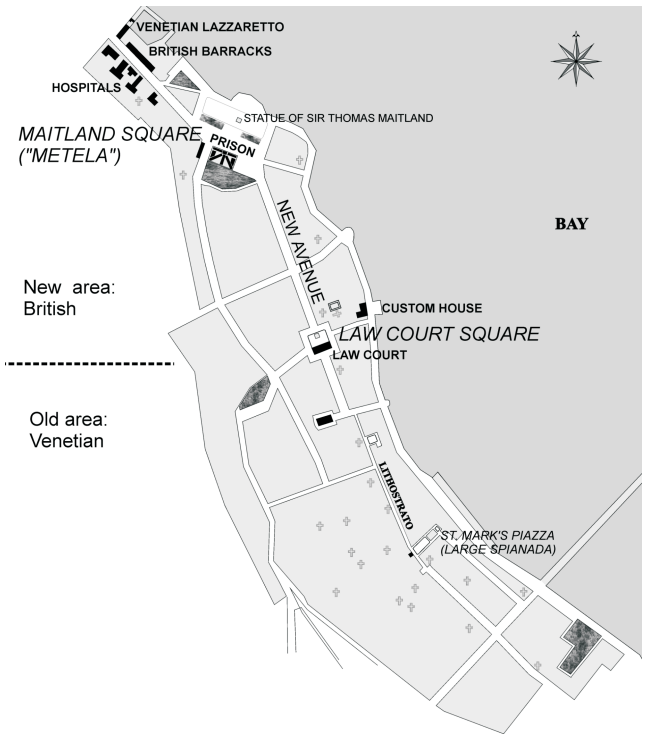

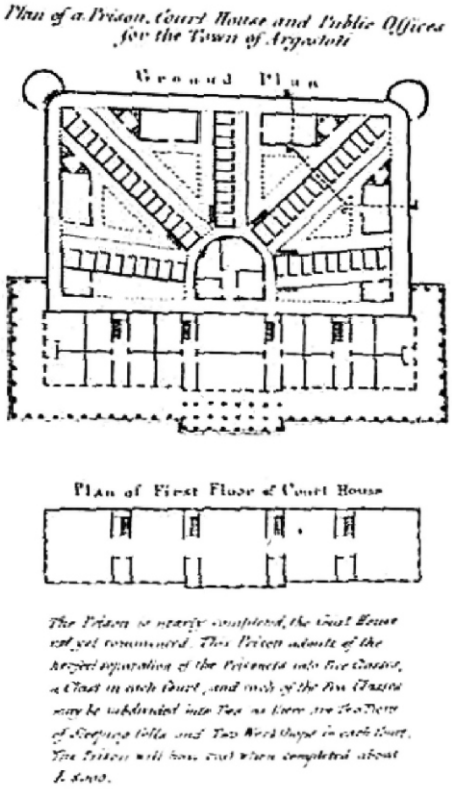

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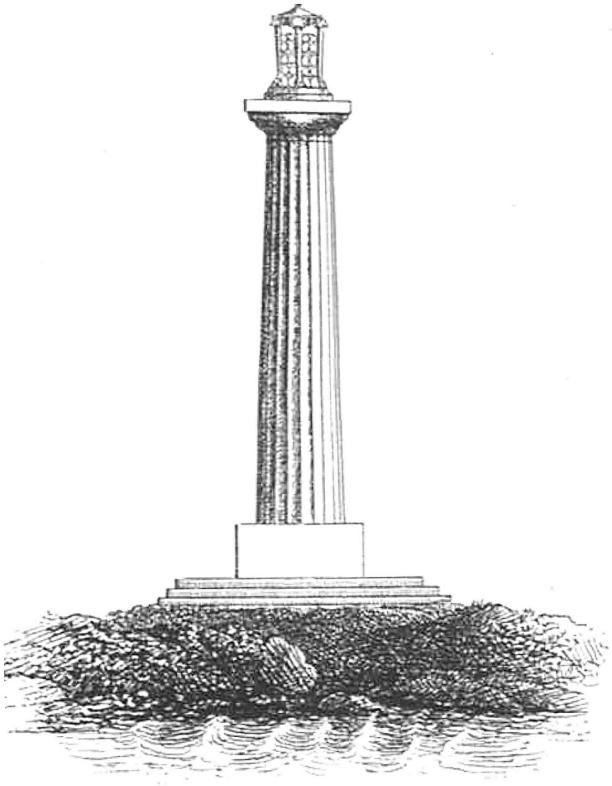

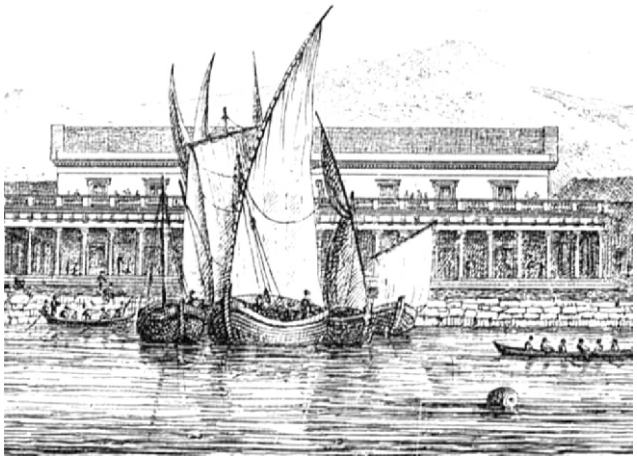

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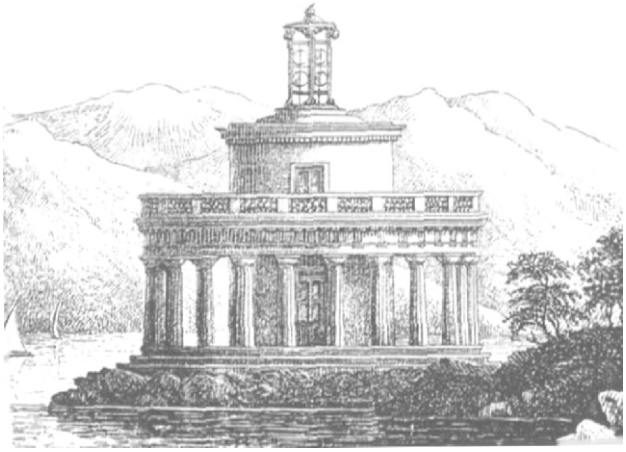

FIGURE 10