

At last, after much trouble, we reached the gate of the palace and took a few moments' rest. This singular edifice may be described as consisting of four separate blocks, some higher than the others. Let me call the first the guardrooms, the second the storerooms, the third the court or state apartment, and the fourth the sleeping quarters of the owners on the very highest point of the mountain. This last block was perhaps intended to serve also as a chapel or oratory. There are vaults below. The building I should ascribe to præ-historic times. I am told that no mention of it exists in any history worthy of credit, and on no part of it did I find any trace of an inscription or hieroglyphics.

The walls are built of stone quarried on the spot, cemented with lime. Several of the corners are of bricks, still red, and well burnt. Some which I measured were two feet long, one foot broad, and two fingers thick. The jambs of the doors and windows are of marble composed entirely of fossil shells of a thousand different kinds, quite well preserved. Some rooms still preserve their roof. When one thinks of the labour and cost involved in the building of such a palace, on such a site: when one reflects on its antiquity, one is astonished indeed. It was decorated with all the luxury known at the epoch of its construction. The window openings are well proportioned: the marble was certainly brought from a great distance, as well as the lime and the bricks which could not have been made on the spot. The beauty, I might even say the magnificence, of the apartment probably used by the court, even the provision of water for a building so vast and situated on such a height, make one believe that the founder of the palace was a sovereign endowed at once with great talents, no ordinary spirit, and immense wealth.

If we care to suppose that the building was a simple fortress one might fix very nearly the date of its erection, without regard to the silence of history, for it may have been connected with no memorable event, nor attracted particular attention. On looking at it simply as the dwelling of some great personage—I have seen such among the African mountains, the abodes of Arab sheikhs—I should say that it had been built just as those were, when there were no houses in the country. But when I consider the magnificence and luxury of this palace, a monument of the art of its age, and its remarkable and impregnable position, I recognise the abode of a mighty sovereign. It follows then that the *Palace of the Queen* was certainly built and inhabited in a præ-historic age: that it was erected by a king of the island, a rich and powerful sovereign: and that it was at the same time a fortress which defied attack, and a luxurious home, in which the charms of society tempered the display of warlike power. But who was the prince who created it?

The name *Palace of the Queen* has been handed down from father to son by an unbroken tradition, for there is not a man now in the island who does not know it by this title.

Every faith must have its mysteries, and in the convent of S. John Chrysostom I was shown an old picture, painted on wood, about two feet square, which represents *the Queen*, the foundress, according to the monks, of both the palace and the monastery. She is depicted at her prayers before an image of the Virgin Mary. The artist has made *the Queen* as beautiful as he could, but he has dressed her in modern Greek costume. At the foot of the picture is an inscription, half effaced, in Greek, in which one may still read her supposed name Maria, daughter of Philip Molinos, etc. The monks pretend that in their convent was preserved an ancient manuscript which affirmed that this princess was their protectress. But no one has seen it, and a comparison of the two buildings exposes the anachronism. It is quite certain that when the *Palace of the Queen* was built nothing was yet known of Marias or Philips or Molinos, still less of a monastery of S. John Chrysostom.