

**RUPERT BROOKE
AND SKYROS**

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Rupert Brooke and Skyros by Stanley Casson

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STANLEY CASSON

**RUPERT BROOKE
AND SKYROS**

RUPERT BROOKE
AND
SKYROS

BY
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WITH WOODCUT ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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LONDON
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MCMXXI

*The woodcut Illustrations are done
from Photographs which I took in
Skyros in April 1920.*

S. C.





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RUPERT BROOKE AND SKYROS



the northern part of the Ægean Sea, almost mid-way between the islands of Eubœa and Chios, lie the twin peaks of Skyros. The storms of history have broken round and near the island, but only spent waves have reached its shores. A few legends, a few of the minor events of Mediterranean history and the records of a few travellers are all that it has to show. And now England, who has never yet figured in its history, must claim a place in its soil and tradition, for in Skyros is the grave and memorial of Rupert Brooke.

A wild and lawless island, inhabited even down to the days when Athens was at the height of its power by half-barbarous peoples, Skyros early became the home of the heroes of legend.

Achilles spent his boyhood on its sands
and cliffs before Troy called him :

He scoured the lonely cliffs and valleys wild,
Hearing the seagulls call to one another,
While far below the great Ægean smiled
(There dwelt the lady of the seas, his mother,



In the old tale). He thought he could descry
Far off amid the clouds those mountains high
The cradle of his race : far other
The isle of Skyros where he lay beneath the sky.*

Theseus was killed by the king of the
island when he fled there from Athens,

* From *Achilles*, by the late R. M. Heath. 1911.

and centuries later his mighty bones, revered as were the bones of Becket, were carried by the Athenian general Cimon to the Athens that had disowned him.

Of these two the name of Achilles still survives in the name of Akhili, which is given to a landlocked bay on the eastern shore, far the loveliest place in the island, whence on the clearest of summer days one can just discern the distant shores of the Troad.

A memorial of Theseus is perhaps found in a small temple site near the old castle high up on the cliffs. It was a small sanctuary, dedicated in all probability to Theseus as a hero, and it was right on the edge of the sea, almost hanging over the water on an escarpment of the main ridge of rock on which the town is built. Other traces of old Hellenism linger on the island. The spring of Niphi, on the western side, preserves the name of the Nymphs, the hill-top Areion that of Ares, and Artemi that of Artemis. None of these names is a revival, as is so often the case in modern Greece. The fact that

all the places bearing these names are far out in the wilder parts of the island, and so removed from the archaistic zeal of the village schoolmasters and antiquaries, makes it all the more probable that the names come down to us in true and authentic descent from antiquity. Niphi is a spring that breaks abruptly from the cliff-side and falls into the sea through a luxuriant grove of fig-trees amongst which cluster a few houses, all in ruins but one. Areion is a bleak summit that rises at the southern end of the island above a valley of olive-trees. Shepherds told me that there were "old ruins" on it, but I was not able to get there. Artemi is just such another peak, rugged and without even the wild thyme and shrubs that one finds elsewhere. In few places on the mainland can one find so many traces of antiquity as here, for Turk, Venetian, and Slav have swept away most of the old place-names in the Peloponnese and in the central provinces.

In antiquity the island was famed mostly for its marble and its flocks. To-