

# STRABO ON ACROCORINTH

(PLATE 124)

W. Aly's<sup>1</sup> publication of the Vatican palimpsest of Strabo has added some important readings to the text. This palimpsest, dated to about A.D. 500 by Aly,<sup>2</sup> preserves in Books VIII and IX some of the lines which were destroyed in Parisinus 1397 (A) and which were omitted in the excerpted manuscripts of the Byzantine family.<sup>3</sup> One of these readings is of considerable interest for Greek topography, because it clarifies the account of the Corinthia, the only region in mainland Greece for which Strabo claims autopsy. At the end of VIII, 6, 21, immediately after *πρὸς ἐσπέραν δέ*, Aly reads the following letters:<sup>4</sup>

Η Μ Ε Τ Α Ξ Υ Κ Ο Ρ Ι Ν Θ Ο Υ Κ Α Ι Τ Η Σ Α Κ Ω Π Ι Α Σ Χ Ω Ρ Α  
Κ Α Λ Λ Ι Σ Τ Η Τ Ω Ν Ε Ν Τ Ο Σ Ι Σ Θ Μ Ο Υ Π Ρ Ο Σ Ν Ο Τ Ο Ν Τ Ε  
Η Τ Ε Ν Ε Α Τ Ι Σ Τ Η Σ Κ Ο Ρ Ι Ν Θ Ι Α Σ Ο Υ Σ Α Γ Η Κ Α Ι Α Ι  
Κ Λ Ε Ω Ν Α Ι Κ Α Ι Τ Ι Ν Α [Ο] Ρ Η Τ Η Σ Α Ρ Κ [Α Δ] Ι Α Σ Κ Α  
Ι Τ Η Σ Φ Λ Ι Α Σ Ι Α Σ Π Ρ Ο Σ Ε Ω Ι Δ Ε Ο Τ Ε Ι Σ Θ Μ Ο Σ Κ Α  
Ι Η Ε Κ Α Τ Ε Ρ Ω Θ Ε Ν Ο Υ Σ Α Τ Ο Υ Ι Σ Θ Μ Ο Υ Κ Α Ι Π [ 10-11  
litt. ] Π Α Ρ Α Λ Ι Α Κ Α Ι Τ Ο Μ Ε Τ Α Ξ Υ Χ Ω Μ Α Μ Ε Χ Ρ Ι Τ Η Σ  
Μ Ε Γ Α Ρ Ι Κ Η Σ Δ Ι Α Τ Ε Ι Ν Ο Υ Σ Η Σ Α Π Ο Θ Α Λ Α Τ [ Τ Η Σ Ε Ι Σ Θ Α Λ Α Τ Τ Α Ν ]

This passage, with a few preceding words for context and a suggestion for the lacuna<sup>5</sup> of ten or eleven letters, is rendered in normal printed text as follows:

*ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς κορυφῆς πρὸς ἄρκτον μὲν ἀφορᾶται ὃ τε Παρνασσὸς καὶ ὁ Ἑλικὼν, ὄρη ὑψηλὰ καὶ νιφόβολα, καὶ ὁ Κρισαῖος κόλπος ὑποπεπτωκὼς ἀμφοτέροις, περιεχόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς Φωκίδος καὶ τῆς Βοιωτίας καὶ τῆς Μεγαρίδος καὶ τῆς ἀντιπόρθμου τῇ Φωκίδι*

<sup>1</sup> *De Strabonis codice rescripto, cuius reliquiae in codicibus Vaticanis Vat. gr. 2306 et 2061A servatae sunt*, Vatican, 1956, with Corollarium by F. Sbordone.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. XII, XIII.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 274, 275.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212, folio 211 v III, 20/38.

<sup>5</sup> Aly apparently thought he could see a few letters in this lacuna when he earlier published the passage in "Der Strabon-Palimpsest Vat. Gr. 2061A," *Sitz. Heidelb. Akad. Wis.* 1928/9, No. 1, pp. 22, 23, Tab. 3. After *Ἰσθμοῦ καί*, Sbordone (*ibid.*, p. 282) reads [πε]ρὶ [τ]ὰ .Α. .Α.ΙΑ. The restoration here offered is merely a suggestion since I have not seen the manuscript; problems still remain.

Κορινθίας καὶ Σικωνίας· πρὸς ἑσπέραν δὲ <ἡ μεταξὺ Κορίνθου καὶ τῆς Ἀσωπίας χώρα καλλίστη τῶν ἐντὸς Ἴσθμοῦ, πρὸς νότον τε ἡ Τενατις τῆς Κορινθίας οὔσα γῆ καὶ αἱ Κλεωναὶ καὶ τινα [ὄ]ρη τῆς Ἀρκ[αδ]ίας καὶ τῆς Φλιασίας, πρὸς ἑω[ι] δὲ ὁ τε Ἴσθμὸς καὶ ἡ ἐκατέρωθεν οὔσα τοῦ Ἴσθμοῦ καὶ Π[ελοποννήμου] παραλία καὶ τὸ μεταξὺ χῶμα μέχρι τῆς Μεγαρικῆς διατεινούσης ἀπὸ θαλάτ[της εἰς θάλατταν]>.

The importance of the passage lies in the fact that the views Strabo had from Acrocorinth form the basis for his description of the Corinthia. In VIII, 6, 20 Strabo begins his discussion of the Corinthia with an introduction, emphasizing the remarkable commercial advantages of the city's situation; he postpones his discussion of the city itself until VIII, 6, 23. From the historical sketch of Corinth Strabo moves directly to Acrocorinth in VIII, 6, 21, and we may consider the remainder of his discussion of the Corinthia from the standpoint of the views he had from that mountain (Fig. 1).

Strabo begins at the north, then describes the views to the west, south, and east. To the north he sees Parnassos, Helikon, and the Krisaian Gulf (Pl. 124, a).<sup>6</sup> Since the mountains to the north do not belong to the Corinthia, Strabo says no more about them.<sup>7</sup> He now begins to elaborate on the regions he has just mentioned, taking them in reverse order.

To the east Strabo sees "the Isthmos, and the seacoast on both sides of the Isthmos and the Peloponnesos, and the land between up to the Megarid, which extends from sea to sea" (Pl. 124, b). On the *μεταξὺ χῶμα* are the Oneian Mountains<sup>8</sup> and the Skeironian Rocks (VIII, 6, 21 *fin.*). Strabo continues his discussion of the view to the east in VIII, 6, 22 with a description of the *παραλία*. Though he refers to cities on both sides of the Isthmos, Strabo first describes the coast on the Corinthian Gulf: Lechaion, the oracle of Hera Akraia, Oinoe and Pagai. On the Saronic Gulf he notes Kenchreai, the temple of Isthmian Poseidon, Schoinous near the diolkos, and Krommyon.

To the south Strabo sees "the territory of Tenea, being land of the Corinthia, Kleonai and some mountains of Arkadia and Phliasia" (Pl. 124, c). The remainder of VIII, 6, 22 constitutes his discussion of Tenea. The geographer has nothing more to say of Kleonai, for he had already described that city in VIII, 6, 19, where he quotes the Catalogue (Homer, *Iliad*, II, 569 ff.) to show what cities were subject to Mycenae.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Daniel J. Geagan for lending me his pictures of the views from Acrocorinth.

<sup>7</sup> Strabo briefly describes Helikon in IX, 2, 25 and Parnassos in IX, 3, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Strabo's identification (cf. also IX, 1, 8) of the Megarian mountains as the Oneian Mountains is usually regarded as a mistake, but as E. Meyer (*R.E.*, XVIII, 1942, col. 440 and *R.E.*, XV, 1931, col. 164) points out, Geraneia must have been known by the name Oneia also, otherwise certain extant proverbs would have been meaningless. See Suidas, s.v. ῥᾶον, Apostol., XV, 18 with Appendix IV, 64 in *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum*, edd., E. L. Leutsch and F. G. Schneidewin.

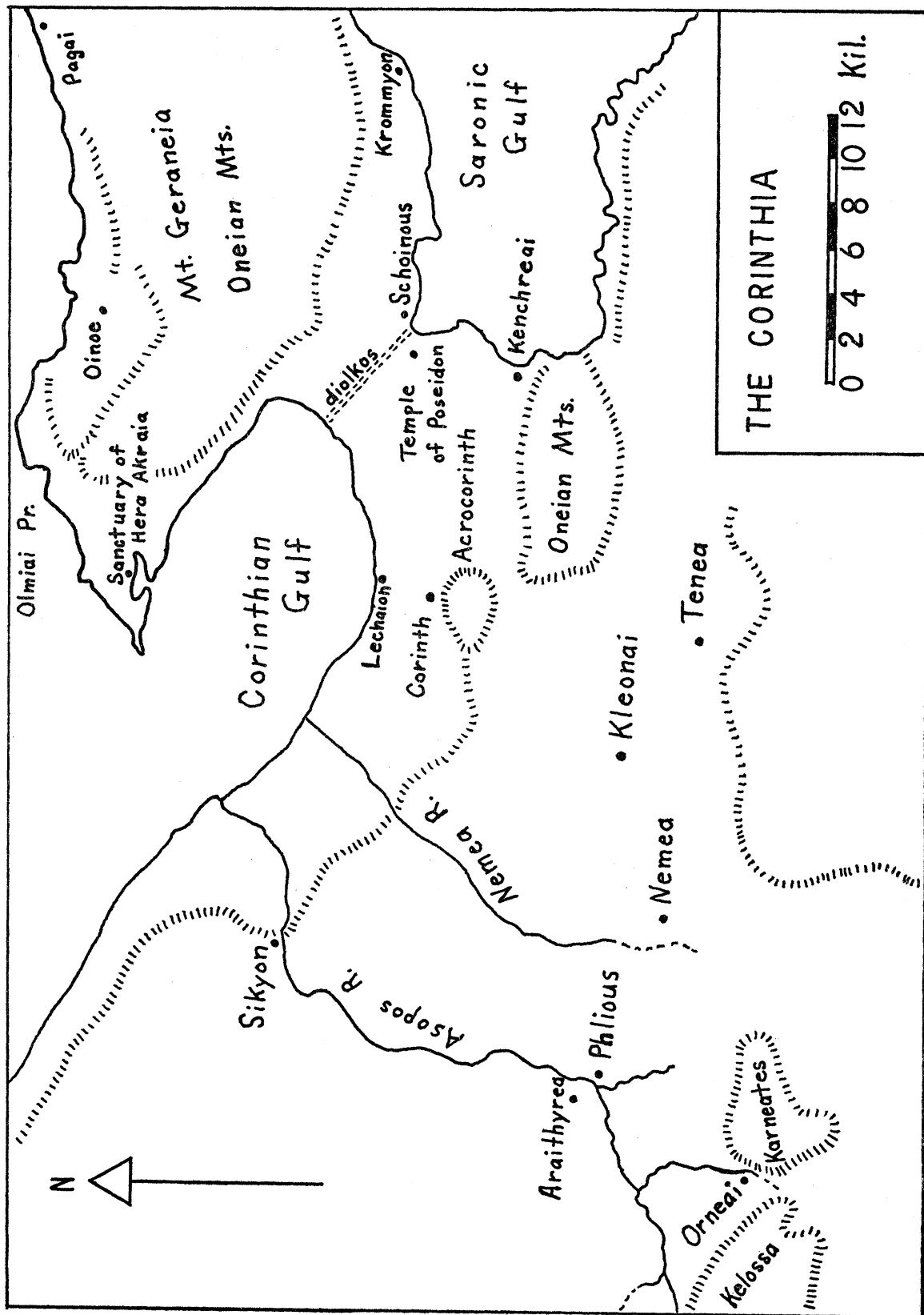


FIG. 1. The Corinthia.

To the west (Pl. 124, d) Strabo sees "the territory between Corinth and the Asopia," which he calls the "finest within the Isthmos" (i.e. in the Peloponnesos). This statement, that the territory between Corinth and the Asopia was *καλλίστη τῶν ἐντὸς Ἰσθμοῦ*, seems to contradict the last sentence in VIII, 6, 23, *viz.* that Corinth *χώραν δ' ἔσχεν οὐκ εὐγεων σφόδρα, ἀλλὰ σκολιάν τε καὶ τραχείαν*. The alluvial strip to the west of Corinth, though fine fertile land, is not however very extensive, being only about 15 km. east to west and 6 km. north to south. At the end of VIII, 6, 23 Strabo had just mentioned that Corinth was a large and wealthy city. In this context, Strabo's remark on the roughness of the Corinthian land must mean simply that the Corinthian land was neither extensive enough nor fertile enough to account for any part of Corinth's wealth. *καλλίστη* refers only to the strip between Corinth and the Asopia; much of the remainder of the Corinthia is quite fairly described by the adjectives *σκολιά* and *τραχεία*.

Strabo devotes the remainder of this chapter (VIII, 6, 23-25) to the view he had to the west of Acrocorinth. Corinth, associated with the cities to the west in the Homeric Catalogue, is described by Strabo as part of the view to the west. After a long discussion of the destruction and refounding of Corinth by the Romans (VIII, 6, 23), Strabo digresses to comment on Orneai and Araithyrea (VIII, 6, 24). His mention of Mt. Karneates, however, brings the geographer back to the Asopos, the Asopia, and the Sikyonia, the territory visible from Acrocorinth. Strabo's discussion of Orneai and Araithyrea has nothing to do with what he could see to the west; this section is merely a commentary on Homer, *Iliad*, II, 571.

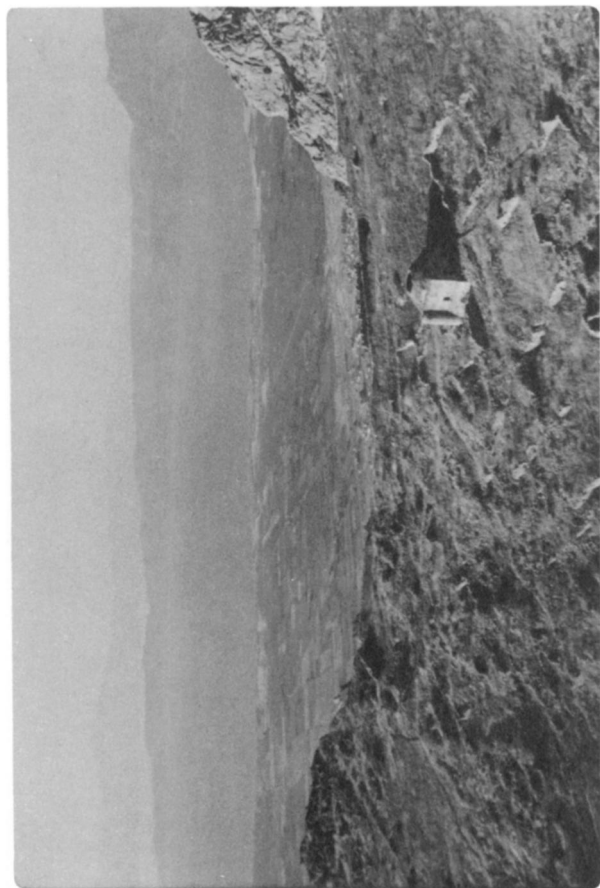
Strabo always relies heavily on the Catalogue of Ships; his respect for the geographical value of Homer is so great that he considers no problem solved until it is reconciled with the text of Homer (VIII, 3, 3). Strabo's dependence on the Catalogue has long been known and deplored, but his other fine geographical methods often do not receive the credit they deserve. The unusually long coastline of Greece constitutes the clearest point of reference for the geographer. Strabo (following Ephoros, VIII, 1, 3) realized this advantage and, whenever he could, used the sea to locate cities. It is noteworthy that Arkadia (VIII, 8), which has no coast, receives the shortest treatment of all the Peloponnesian territories. Attica (IX, 1) is described almost solely from its coast. Strabo is at his best when he uses precise geographical points of reference, such as the seacoast, lakes, or sharply defined mountains; on the other hand he is at his worst when he ignores these points of reference to follow Homer. For example, in his description of Boiotia, Strabo at first uses the coast of the North and South Euboian Gulfs (IX, 2, 6-14), and the description is clear and straightforward; but when he comes to discuss the cities of the interior (IX, 2, 21-41), rather than following the Kopaic Lake, Lake Hylike and Lake Trepheia (Paralimne) as his guides, he follows the haphazard Homeric Catalogue line for line and considers together cities as distant from one another as Thisbe, Koroneia, Haliartos, Plataia,

and Glissas (IX, 2, 28-31). When there is a seacoast, however, Strabo usually prefers to follow it rather than the Catalogue.

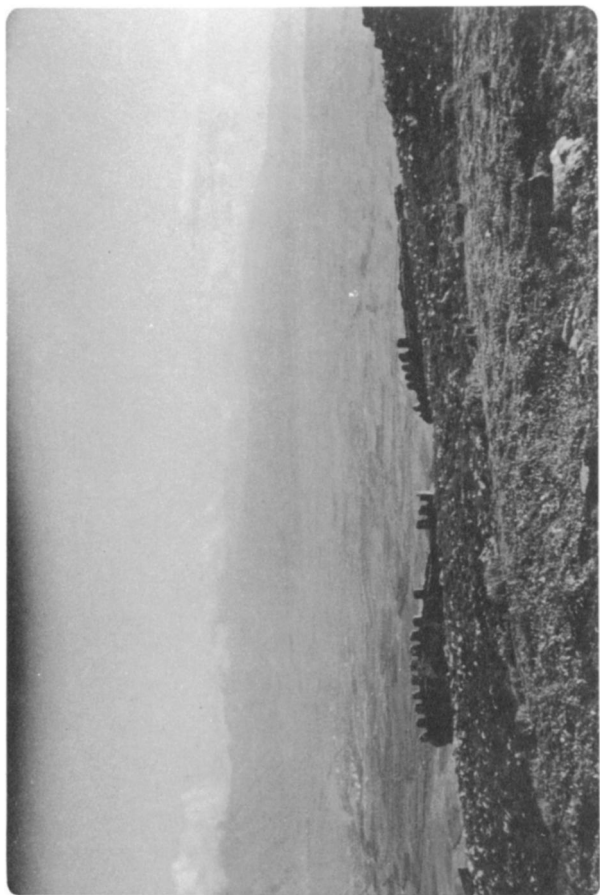
In his description of Greece, Strabo mentions so many cities, and in such rapid order, that the reader is often confused and unable to discover any system in the description. Before the addition to the text of the views from Acrocorinth, Strabo's description of the Corinthia seemed to lack method, but now we know that the areas of the Isthmos, Tenea, Corinth itself, and Sikyon are all tied together by the personal observation of the geographer from Acrocorinth. This great citadel, because of its fame and height, and especially because Strabo himself had climbed it, is the geographical point of reference for the Corinthia, just as the seacoast is for most of the rest of Greece. The reading from the palimpsest has revealed Strabo's geographical method for the Corinthia; further study will surely do the same for other regions.

PAUL W. WALLACE.

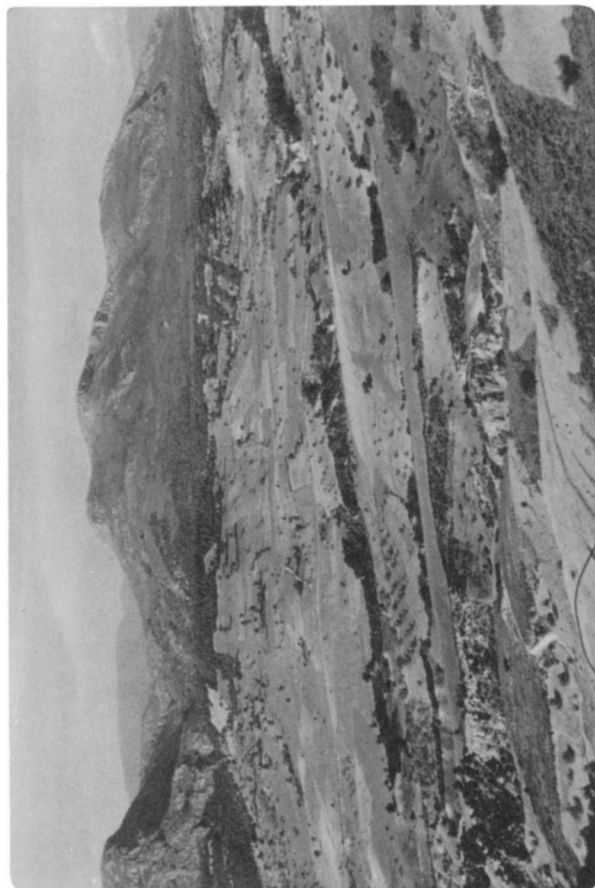
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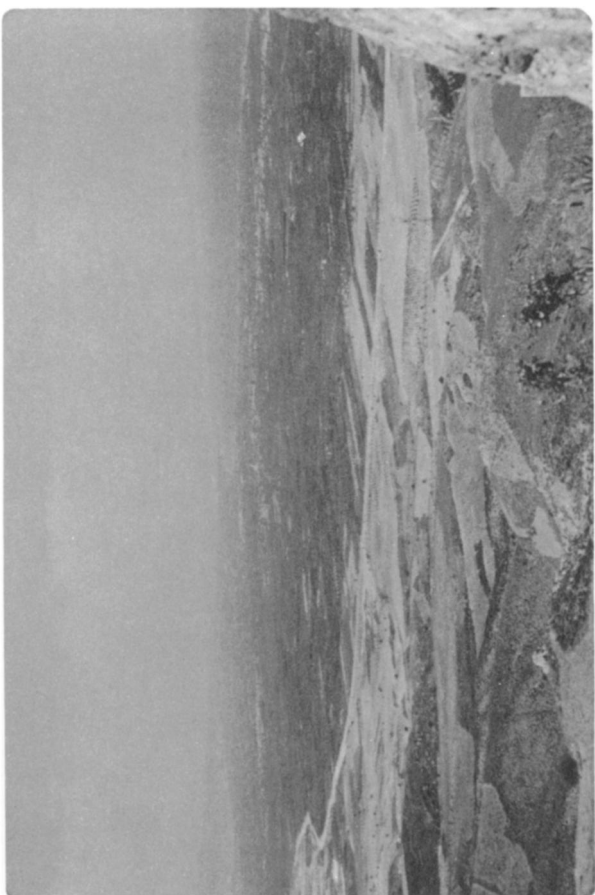
a. View to the north from Acrocorinth



b. View to the east from Acrocorinth



c. View to the south from Acrocorinth



d. View to the west from Acrocorinth

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