

Year 5, Number 19

Price 5 euro

In-On

Special Term Crete Business Issue

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**Preview
of thematic
tourism
in Greece**

The Metropolitan of Proikonnisos
Joseph Harkiolakis

ISSN 1791-4019



**Historical Religious Tourism
Prefecture of Lassithi**

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Virgin Mary of Keras (Kritsa)

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St. Ioannis in Lassithi Plateau

HISTORICAL RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism

Under the auspices of the Region of Crete

With the support of the municipalities

Creta 2012 - 2013

An initiative by "In-On"

In-On

The contribution of the Society of Hellenes Abroad to religious tourism

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QUESTION: Tell us about the role of the Greeks abroad in the development of the historical religious tourism in Greece. ANSWER: The Greeks abroad contribute a great deal to the development of tourism in general by projecting emphatically either deliberately or by chance all the elements of our country that raise a special interest for the countries where Greeks live (sun, sea, islands, mountains, sports, history, antiquities, byzantine monuments, Fine Arts, traditional food, etc). More particularly, religious tourism is limited to Greeks abroad as well as those foreigners (Orthodox or not) who show a relative interest. They are pilgrims and they also encourage the foreigners who are interested. The focal points of interest especially for the foreigners is Agio Oros (the Holy Mountain) and Meteora. Additionally, the Greeks visit the religious monuments of their special place of origin like Monasteries, shrines etc", underlined in an interview to "In-On" magazine the Metropolitan of Proikonnisos Joseph Harkiolakis (secular name: Emmanuel Ant. Harkiolakis).



The contribution of the Society of Hellenes Abroad to religious tourism

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QUESTION: Tell us about the significance of the old flag of Grete: what it depicts and what the Cretans of today should know now that the celebration of the 100 years of the Union with Greece is held.

ANSWER: The so called “old flag of Crete” is a distorted Greek flag that was used in Crete during the “Autonomy” years from 1898 till 1913, at a time when Crete used to be a protectorate of the Great Powers of that era (Russia, France, England and Italy) under the suzerainty of the Sultan called “Cretan State”. It is about the well-known Greek flag of the

mainland, in which, however, one of the four squares (the upper left) was red instead of blue with a white star in the middle. This pattern shows Ottoman suzerainty (even high dominance) upon Crete. It was a flag that the Cretans hated from the first time and never accepted. For the Greek people the Flag was only one, unique and irreplaceable: the blue and white flag of all Greeks. This sudden (!) appearance of this monstrosity flag that the foreigners had imposed on Crete, therefore, more than a hundred years later, is actually very suspicious and undoubtedly serves dark pursuits (let’s remember Kosovo, which is the matrix of the Serbian people; what really happened to it and where it stands now!). Our suspicions are reinforced by its presentation two years ago on a TV commercial held by a well-known international mobile phone company, which after strong reactions, rushed to withhold it. If all the above is combined with some insidious whispers related to a “Referendum” (!!!) whether Crete should continue to be part of the Greek government or whether its people prefer to see the island “Independent” (!!!), then the whole thing becomes blatantly dangerous! I am really sorry that there are naïve people (or probably traitors?), who insist on sticking this “flag” on their cars so as to supposedly cry out their Cretan pride. Every true patriot must be cautious and react wisely. Crete is Greece as the Acropolis and the Parthenon are as well. Nothing less, nothing more! Crete has no nostalgia for foreign suzerainty nor to be extracted from the national body to which finally managed to incorporate a century ago after so much torment, such anguish efforts and so much blood.

QUESTION: Tell us about what the Patriarchate did in 2013 a year that has been characterized as a year of religious freedom
ANSWER: 2013 has indeed been declared by the Patriarchate as a “YEAR OF HUMAN SOLIDARITY”. As you know the Patriarchate neither has any secular authority and power nor financial recourses. It is a purely spiritual foundation and its power is only spiritual and moral. Thus, its main weapon is the power of spiritual words based on the eternal evan-

The Metropolitan of Proikonnisos Joseph Harkiolakis

gelical truth and the orthodox ethos. And these words are always convincing because they correspond to the history of our Church and the Patriarchate itself, a history that has not always been cruciform, humble and sacrificial for the sake of Man, but also full of light and hope of the Resurrection. Our Ecumenical Patriarch, therefore, as a medium who expresses the voice of the whole body of the Holy Church of Christ (Synod, clergy and faithful people), addresses appeals at times regarding the major problems that afflict humanity. His voice reaches even the great fora namely the United Nations Organization, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe etc., as well as inter-church, interdenominational and inter-religious meetings and dialogue everywhere. Of course the issue of religious freedom is always top priority for the Patriarch, which is vital not only for the survival of the Patriarchate itself but also for other Churches as well (in the Middle East etc). The continuous agonizing appeals of our first Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Mr. Bartholomew who conveys interfaith conferences for this reason along with official declarations as well as the relative steps and the actions of the first in charge Orthodox Church are widely-known.

Curriculum Vitae

His Eminence Metropolitan of Proikonnisos Joseph Harkio-

lakis (secular name: Emmanuel Ant. Harkiolakis) was born in 1955, in Sitia in Lassithi-Crete.

He has attended the School of Catechists of the Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece in Athens 1973-1974. He graduated from the School of Theology in the University of Athens in 1978, with honors and also holds a PhD from the University of Flinders, Adelaide, South Australia, since 2002. His thesis was: “Religious and Folk Tradition in Photis Kontoglou”.

He worked as a teacher of Ancient and Modern Greek as well as in a course of Liturgy in the School of Theology of Apostle Andrew in Sydney, Australia, 1987, 1988 and 1989 (three academic years).

Also, he was consecrated Bishop of Arianzos on 3-12-1989 in Sydney, Australia. Moreover, he served as an auxiliary Bishop of the South and North Australia (1989-2000) and Melbourne – Victoria and Tasmania (2001-2003).

He was elected as Metropolitan of New Zealand on 21st July, 2003. He resigned in August, 2005.

Since September 2005 he lives in Piraeus.

He was elected Metropolitan of Proikonnisos and Exarches of all Propontis on 24th June, 2008.

He is also a member of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (2009-2010).

Special Report

Historical Religious Tourism Prefecture of Lassithi





George Panayiotakis
writer and historic researcher

The Heroic Resistance of the Abbots against the Invaders

“Vidiani monastery is situated on the northwest side of Lassithi plateau and it owes its name to Vidos, its founder. It is dedicated to the Life-giving Fountain. The building of the monastery started in 1854. On the 30th of May 1867, the newly-built monastery was burnt down by Pasha Omar’s troops that conquered Lassithi. The monks tried with zeal to rebuild the new church soon on the ruins of the old. During the German Occupation, the conquerors arrested Dorotheos Tsakarakis, the abbot of the monastery because he cooperated with the National Resistance. He was executed in Agia in the prefecture of Chania in 1943 after imprisonment and tortures”, refers in a continuation of his prior work about the historical and religious monuments, the author and historical researcher Georgos Panayiotakis in his book “CRETE WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW”. It has to be mentioned that “In-On” magazine has commenced a historical review of the ancient religious monuments of Crete from the prefecture of Herakleion and continues with the prefecture of Lassithi.

The magazine also likes to thank the author for his kind concession.

St. NIKOLAOS

St. Nikolaos is the capital city of the Prefecture of Lassithi. Its name derives from the very old small chapel with the same name that is located in a small peninsula in Ammoudi. The city is built on the location of the ancient city of Lato towards Kamara. In fact, it was created after 1866 by families from the regions of Sfakia and Kritsa.

CHURCHES

- VIRGIN MARY KERA (St. Nikolaos)

Virgin Mary Kera is located in St. Nikolaos and it is considered the most significant and the oldest church in Crete. It is located about 10 kilometers south west St. Nikolaos. Regarding architecture and frescos it is considered as one of the most important old chapels of Crete. The church is full of frescos of exceptional art which date back the 14th and the 15th cen-

turies.

- St. GEORGIOS -SITIA

The deserted medieval village of Voila is situated in a distance of about 3 kilometers from Etia past the village of Chandras. The two-aisle 15th century chapel of St. George with the coat of arms of the House of Solomon constitutes a remarkable monument of Voila. Inside the church, there is the tomb of Georgios Salamos. The surname Salamos or Solomos, confirms the existence of a Jewish family, which embraced Christianity and settled in Sitia before 1582. After the conquest of Crete by the Turks, the descendants of the noble Venetian followed different directions. Some remained in Voila, preserving their feuds while others resorted to the islands of the Ionian Sea that were ruled by the Venetians. Some special researchers, among them some from the island of Zakynthos as well, support the view that our national poet Dionysios Solomos came from this family.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

- LATO (St. NIKOLAOS)

The ancient city of Lato is located northeast of Kritsa. Although the exact time of its establishment cannot be identified precisely, it is estimated that it was built between the 7th and the 3rd century B.C. There were two citadels that provided safety to the city.

The city was excavated by the French School of Archaeology. The city center was a pentagonal site, the Agora, situated between two hills. On the southern higher hill there were public buildings. Till now, one can see the theater tiers that the citizens used to sit on in order to watch performances and religious ceremonies or have political debates. The Prytaneion is also an interesting building. The altar or the table, the place where the symposia were realized and the guests were welcomed and ate are still in a good condition. A probably outdoor sanctuary was revealed there, however, the identity of the deity that was worshipped is still unknown. According to tradition,



Photo from the writer's files

Toplou Monastery

this was the birthplace of Nearhos, the illustrious admiral of Alexander the Great, who in 326 B.C. was head of his fleet.

- OLOUS -St. NIKOLAOS

A significant ancient town in Crete that was located in the present region of Poros, the former community of Olounda. According to the inscriptions, we are informed about the existence of a peace treaty with the neighboring town Lato. In another inscription in 134 B.C. between Lato, Olounda and Knossos, the role of the arbitrator becomes clear in case there is a difference between the towns. In another piece of the inscription an alliance treaty is included between Olounda and Lyktos. Finally, another inscription shows alliance with the Rhodians, which in fact included humiliated conditions for the Oloundians. As an independent and autonomous city, it minted its own coins. On most of these coins Artemis Vritomartis is depicted on one side while on the other Zeus is depicted holding either an eagle or a dolphin or there is a star with eight rays and the word OLONDION on it. In Olounda Zeus Talleos, Mars and Artemis were worshipped.

Roman Olounda was built after ancient Olounda was covered by sea water. The excavations brought to light significant findings and mainly grave gifts. The city was embellished with the statue of Artemis Vritomartis, which according to traditions was the work of Daedalus.

- BASILICA -St. NIKOLAOS

It is situated on the 24th kilometer from St. Nikolaos to Ierapetra. From the excavations that were realized by the American archaeologist Rich Seager (1904-1906), a small palace was revealed that probably constitutes a miniature of the great palaces of Knossos, Malia, Festos and Zakros. Some unique, yet peculiar vessels regarding their architecture and shape made the archaeologists characterize them as “Basilica type”. They are estimated as the earliest and most interesting findings of Minoan pottery.

- DRIROS -St. NIKOLAOS

Northeast the city of St. Nikolaos and close to Neapolis, Driros was situated in a region where today there are only ruins. A quadrangular stone engraved with letters on each side helped

in finding the exact location of Driros. This inscribed column included the oath that the teenagers of the city had given in order to manifest their faith to Driros along with their ally Knossos. However, their implacable hatred was also declared towards their neighbors Militians and Lyktians. This oath was written between 346 and 343 B.C. in Doric dialect. The teenagers used to swear to the gods of the Greek pantheon to be eternal enemies towards Militos and Lyktos.

This very significant inscription was transferred on the same year that was revealed, namely in 1855, in Herakleion. The Turkish authorities transferred it to Constantinople. Today it belongs to the epigraphic museum of the city.

During the excavations that S. Xanthoudidis realized in 1917, a great temple of the 7th century B.C. was revealed that was believed to have been dedicated to Delfinios Apollo. Further excavations revealed three hammered bronze statues of significant archaeological value. They depict two goddesses and one god. The female statues must depict Artemis and Leto. The male statue depicts Delfinios Apollo, in honor of whom the temple was built. After the war of 220 B.C. a political crisis burst out in Driros and two opposing groups were created that unfortunately cost the city’s destruction.

- SPINALOGA -St. NIKOLAOS

In a distance of about 6 miles northeast St. Nikolaos, there is the rocky fortress of Spinaloga. The Venetians built a powerful fortress in 1579, which was considered one of the best and most important in Crete. After the complete conquest of Crete by the Turks in 1669, the fortress of Spinaloga remained under the domination of Venice until 1715. At that time the fortress was besieged by the Turks along with the fortresses of Souda and Gramvousa that were under the same status and were occupied by capitulation. The Turks remained there till 1903. The gates of the fort closed for the Turks and opened again by decision of the Cretan State so as to accept this time not the conquerors but the lepers of Crete. The lepers remained on the island till 1957.

- “KENOURGIO CHORIO” -NEAPOLIS

During the Venetian era, two settlements were called “Ken-

ourgio Chorio”. This name remained till 1868, when the commander Pasha Kostis Adosidis settled there and transferred the capital of the prefecture from Kastelli Fournis to Kenourgio Chorio and gave it its new name Neapolis. As the capital city of Lassithi it remained until 1904, when St. Nikolaos became the new capital. In the settlement of Kares that the Venetians destroyed in 1347, Petros Filargos or Filaretos that turned to monasticism was born in 1329. He was distinguished for his scientific training, his rhetoric abilities and his wide theological education. He became the Pope of Rome in 1409-1410.

- IERAPETRA

Ierapetra is called “Nymph of the Libyan Sea”. It is an ancient Cretan town and in the course of History it appears with the names Kyrva, Pytna, Kamiros, Ierapydna, Ierapytna and Ierapetra. During the Minoan era it must have been a small town. However, during historic times, it was developed into a great and independent economic power.

44 types of coins were minted in Ierapytna, a fact that demonstrates its financial autonomy and leadership. The city also had its own mint during Roman times. Apart from the travelers that visited the town at times during medieval era and the years that followed, according to tradition another significant visitor was the French general Napoleon Bonaparte.

Another monument that serves as a reminiscent of the Turkish conqueror is a spacious mosque with its minaret that is located in the old city.

- AGIA FOTIA -SITIA

Agia Fotia is a settlement in the municipality of Sitia, where an extensive cemetery of the early Minoan era was discovered. 252 tombs were excavated while 50 more tombs were found destroyed due to cultivation. It is considered to be the biggest cemetery of Minoan Crete. Besides skulls and bones, 1800 vessels of different types were found in an excellent condition such as cairns, compasses, jugs, tools, blades, fishing hooks, spikes from spears etc. Actually, two animal-like amulets from lead that were found are considered of great importance.

- PALEOKASTRO -SITIA

In Palekastro or Paleokastro an important Minoan and post Minoan settlement was discovered by the English School of Archaeology revealing a great number of exceptional findings. There is also a main road crossing the city. On the left or on the right smaller roads divided the city into neighborhoods and it was believed that in every neighborhood an extended family used to live.

The houses of the settlements were oriented towards the main road and had beautiful facades. They also had a complete sewer system. A large number of human bones were gathered in a good condition from the tombs that helped the anthropologists to proceed to important scientific observations and announcements regarding the Minoans’ physique. Additionally, this is the town that the famous shrine of “Dikteos Zeus” was established. An inscription that probably received the rage of the followers of the new religion, who broke it, contained the hymn towards Dikteos Zeus. This hymn was sung by naked young people carrying shields that imitated the Kourites who according to tradition were responsible for the safety of Zeus during his birth. This hymn is in the form of a poet of the 3rd or

4th century B.C and constitutes an invocation to Zeus to bring happiness to humans, plethora of food from the Earth, protection to those that sailed at sea etc.

- ITANOS -SITIA

Northeast Tomblou monastery and close to Vai, the woods with the palm trees, one can see the ruins of the ancient city of Itanos, which is known by the name Erimoupolis or Ermoupolis. The establishment of the city dates back prehistoric times. Homer provides the first historical testimony about the existence of the city. It used to be a great transshipment station and it had developed commercial relations with Near and Middle East, where murex, sponges, glass and fisheries were exported. The Itanians dominated the eastern coasts of Sitia and the borders of the city stretched from cave Samonio (Kavo Sidero) till cave Erythreo (Goudouras). Due to the export activity within the periphery that Itanos dominated along with the significant revenues that the sanctuary of Dikteos Zeus offered to Paleokastro, made the city rich, as it is indicated by the number of temples and its luxurious marble buildings. Another important historical monument is a plate on the wall on the left of the catholic of Toplou monastery, known as “the inscription of the Magnites”. We get informed from this inscription that due to the fact that the Itanians were in constant fights with the habitants of Presos, they asked help from Ptolemy Philometor, the king of Egypt in 146 B.C, who sent army to the Itanians and even garrisons in its territory. The Egyptian king’s help and the involvement of the Presians in a war with the Ierapytnious, ceased fighting. However, the Itanians did not find peace. The new neighbor, who conquers Presos and its possessions, meaning Ierapytna, arouses territorial claims from Itanos. Their conflicts and frictions remained till 67 B.C. that Roman occupation was realized. During that time Itanos continued to hold a leading position. The Romans allowed it to mint its own coins and participate in the “public of Cretans”.

- ZAKROS-SITIA

It is a coastal settlement with a beautiful beach that belongs to the township of Epáno Zakros and it is 8 kilometers far from it and 46 from Sitia.

The observant traveler and English admiral T. Spratt was the first who in the middle of the last century detects traces of ruins that convince him for the existence of a coastal Cretan city. At the end of the century, the Italian archaeologists Halbherr and Mariani and the Englishman A. Evans realized test excavations which became more systematic by P. Hogarth, the Director of the English School of Archaeology in Athens. Hogarth discovered a part of the ancient settlement, 12 houses of the late Minoan period that hid remarkable treasures such as Minoan vessels, bronze weapons and tools, double axes, knives, chisels as well as about 500 clay seals which probably were a part of a commercial correspondent file. Sixty years passed and there was an agitation in the district that was in seclusion and silence till then.

The accidental discovery of various gold coins of fine art and a sword later, give rise to the archaeologists to start their work again.

Nik. Platon the curator who is deeply knowledgeable and also researcher of the Minoan civilization started his excavations



Photo from the writer's files

Νικόλαο The small old church of St. Nicolas in St. Nicolaos



Faneromeni Monastery

Photo from the writer's files

that receive brilliant success. The district reveals its secrets and a new Minoan palace is discovered, the fourth in Crete, following the palaces in Knossos, in Festos and in Malia. In fact, even it is smaller than the former ones, more than 10.000 items of exquisite art were found, many of which can be characterized as “royal”.

Therefore, we are convinced that Zakros used to be one of the major transshipment centers in Crete and station for the ships that sailed towards Africa. Wood from cedar, olive oil and wine were the basic export products of Crete to Egypt and other countries. The products imported from these countries were ivory, gold, precious and semi-precious stones that were processed by the craftsmen of the palaces. Crafts were in great development here as well because the poor and mountainous inland of the palatial center did not allow the development of agriculture as it happened in other areas that were fertile. Life in the palace lasted 100-150 years. More particularly, it was built around 1600 and destroyed in 1450 B.C. It seems that the palace of Zakros for even more natural reasons did not avoid the rage of the volcano of Santorini judging by the volcanic material that was found in the palace, the shifted walls, and the collapse of the upper floors as well as traces of fire. After the sudden and complete destruction of the palace not another one was rebuilt on this location.

Covered with lava and pumice it preserved almost intact its rich treasures, which were discovered by the archaeologists. Finally, it has to be noted that in the surrounding hills of Traostalos and Faragi of the dead, many tombs of pre-historic era were discovered.

MONASTERIES

- ARETIOU MONASTERY -St. NIKOLAOS

Aretiou monastery is located 20 kilometers from St. Nikolaos and was established around 1600 by “Master” Marcus Papadopoulos resident of Apano Fourni. He donated 40 estates that each one produces about 15 kilos of wheat barley and was enough to sustain 12 monks. A new donation by Marcus Papadopoulos nephew of the first donor allowed the monastery to possess a lot of estates and was enriched with new buildings (cells-guestrooms). There, the Turks killed Bishop Joachim. It used to be the seat of the Bishop of Petra till 1868, a year when Pasha Kostis Adosidis transferred it to Neapolis. The current industrious Bishop of Petra Mr. Nektarios implemented a restoration program and the building complex regains its old form, following an architecture that is in close harmony with its surroundings.

- KREMASTA MONASTERY -St. NIKOLAOS

Kremasta monastery is dedicated to Archangel Michael and it is built in the end of the 16th or in the beginning of the 17th century.

In the monastery a well organized secret school functioned, which in the course of time was run by the community. In fact, the teachers were educated clergymen. The contribution of the monastery was significant to the education of that time. In 1868, Pasha Kostis Adosidis, the commander of Lassithi at that time established for a while the administration in the monastery, where his family used to live as well.

- KROUSTALLENA MONASTERY -LASSITHI PLATEAU



St. Georgios Vrahaviotis

Photo from the writer's files

In the eastern part of the plateau, Kroustallena monastery is situated. It is dedicated to the Assumption of Virgin Mary. Probably it was built in 1241, as a relief that is kept today in the monastery shows. When in 1543, after a period of two hundred years that Lassithi was devastated by the Venetians, it was decided by themselves to be inhabited again and they transferred refugees from Nafplio and Malvasia and also allocated fields from the district of Lassithi. The obligation that the new settlers used to have was to give half crop to the Venetian authorities of Chandax.

Among the refugees that settled in Lassithi was Palantia, abbess of Spileo nunnery, who established or reestablished the monastery and also took care of its maintenance. In January 1823, when Pasha Hasan after many efforts conquers Lassithi, a cruel slaughter and a merciless extermination of the inhabitants starts. This is the time when the monastery was destroyed. During the revolution of 1866-69, the revolutionary committee, part of the munitions as well as a rough factory of car-

tridges, were located in Kroustallenia. The monastery had the flag of the rebels on the flagpole.

Naturally, the monastery did not survive the rage of Pasha Omer. On May 29th 1867, the monastery was burnt by his troops. During the German-Italian Occupation, the monastery was turned into an assembly station for the prisoners and the monks were evicted. Finally, the monastery played an important role in the educational issues of Crete. In the end of the Turkish Occupation and the beginning of the last century a primary school operated which the children from the neighboring villages attended.

- VIDIANI MONASTERY -LASSITHI PLATEAU

Vidiani monastery is situated on the northwest side of Lassithi plateau and it owes its name to Vidos, its founder. It is dedicated to the Life-giving Fountain. The building of the monastery started in 1854. On the 30th of May 1867 the newly-built monastery was burnt down by Pasha Omar's troops that conquered Lassithi. The monks tried soon with zeal to rebuild the new

church on the ruins of the old. During the German Occupation, the conquerors arrested Dorotheos Tsakarakis, the abbot of the monastery because he cooperated with the National Resistance. He was executed in Agia in the prefecture of in Chania in 1943 after imprisonment and tortures.

Significant restoration works have been realized by the bishop of the district and the relative abbots.

- FANEROMENI MONASTERY -IERAPETRA

Faneromeni monastery is located on the ruins of the Minoan city Gournia, in a prominent position with a stunning sea view. In Gournia it is also called as Panagia. The cave temple of Faneromeni is dedicated to Virgin Mary’s Assumption and Life-giving Fountain. The monastery is old and it is estimated that it existed since the second byzantine era.

This is proved by the fact that, as it is referred, on the Sunday before Easter in 1293, the leaders of the revolution against the Venetians Al. Kallergis, Kavasilas, Melissinos and Chamoleos gathered in the monastery in order to take their decisions for the future of the revolution. The fortress-like form of the monastery allows it to facilitate not only as a pilgrimage location but also as a place where the persecuted Christians and the local chieftains and warriors found shelter. The monastery’s large real estate gave rise to frequent frictions with the Turkish authorities of Ierapetra that their fields shared borders with the ones that the monastery had. The secret school which functioned in the monastery during the Turkish Occupation played a great role regarding the education of the young people of the entire county. According to tradition this is the school where in 1821 Rodanthi Kripsotopoula who is known for her efforts and her general contribution to throw off the Turks, learnt her first letters.

SITIA

The word Sitia derives from the ancient town of Itida or Iteia, which according to the most likely scenario was located on the neighboring hill of Petras. The city existed since antiquity till 1651. It received three catastrophic strokes which finally destroyed it. The first was the earthquake of 1508 and the second was Chairentin Barbarossa who is responsible for the devastation of the city, since only 10 out of 400 houses remained. After the destruction of the Venetian fort by the Venetians themselves so as not to fall into the hands of the Turks, the city ceased to exist and it was rebuilt two centuries later namely around 1870 using the design of the Turkish commander Pasha Avni Housin. It was the hometown of Myson, one of the seven wise men of ancient Greece. This is also the region that Vintsenzos Kornaros used to live who with his masterpiece “Erotokritos” became the leader of Cretan poetry at his time. Sitia has a small airport that connects it with Athens and Karpathos.

- KIRIA AKROTIRIANI MONASTERY TOPLOU -SITIA

It constitutes one of the most important and historic monasteries of Crete. It is located in a distance of 20 kilometers east of Sitia. Virgin Mary and St. Ioannis the Theologist are worshipped and it is considered to be “the Great Monastery” as our people use to call it even today. The name Akrotiriani is known from the 15th or 16th century, as a circular brass seal of that time shows. For the first time in 1673 it is referred as Toplou monastery in a relative Turkish document. This name accord-

ing to the opinion of many historians comes from one small cannon that the monastery had in order to be protected from the pirates. The Turkish word for cannon is “top”. There is another well-established view that the name of the monastery comes from an abbreviation of the word “plou (sio)” “rich” because it had a huge fortune. The year when it was built is not certain. According to the frescoes that were lately revealed, the experts are led to believe that the small temple of the Assumption that was the core of the monastery was built in the 14th century. The monastery was marked by various incidents in the course of time. It played a significant role in the History of Eastern Crete and became the trustee of our religious and national traditions. From 1460 to1471, the monastery was destroyed by Turks probably pirates. It was rebuilt according to the fortification system of that era so at to be protected by the pirates who were especially dangerous at that time. Moreover, according to another tradition, the monastery was built by the big Kormnari family. In 1530, the monastery was looted by the knights of Malta. In 1612, there was a great destruction due to an earthquake but it was soon renovated by the active abbot of Pantogalo monastery. In 1646, it was conquered by the Turks who looted the monastery and forced the monks to desert it. In 1704, the monastery was declared follower of Stavropigi monastery. Due to the fact that it was the center of rebels and the refuge for the persecuted, it endured a lot of hardship during the Turkish Occupation. In 1821, after the declaration of the Greek revolution, the Turks slaughtered 12 monks at the entrance of the monastery.

During the revolution of 1866 the monastery reinforced the national affairs in many ways.

Additionally, during the German Occupation it also played its national role. For that reason, the Germans killed abbot Ignatios Syliognakis while other monks were imprisoned and tortured. However, regarding the field of education the monastery also played its role. There is evidence that during the Turkish Occupation, a secret school was in operation. Since 1870, a mutual learning school was established and functioned there.

SAMPLE CAVES IN LASSITHI PERFECTURE

- MILATOU - St. NIKOLAOS

It is known as the cave of Rapas and it is located 2,5 kilometers east the seaside village Milatos.

The cave is not only a natural but also a historical monument and as such is mostly known. The notorious Pasha Hasan, after the destruction and the devastation of Lassithi in January 1823, turned against Merambello. Very few defenders and 2000 women, children and old people sought refuge in the cave. The Turks got informed, surrounded the cave and a tragedy started for the besieged that lasted from the 3rd till the 15th February 1823. The besieged who could not endure any longer, dared a heroic way out, resembling the Messologians but had a tragic ending.

Some were trampled by the cavalry of the enemy, others were slaughtered in the cruelest way and the women and children ended up in the slave markets of the East. Almost 60 years ago, a small church was built inside the cave that is dedicated to Thomas the Apostle. On that day namely on Easter Sunday,

the official memorial is celebrated with the participation of the authorities to commemorate the victims.

- DIKTEON ANTRON -LASSITHI PLATEAU

Dikteon Andron is the cave where according to mythology Zeus was born and in another version became the father of gods and people. It is situated above village Psychro at an altitude of 1025 meters. Rhea in an attempt to save her children from the altar which was Crones’ jaws resorted to Crete one night, where with the help of Mother Earth the “holy infant” came to this world.

Therefore, the cave that provided hospitality to the persecuted “divine visitor” according to the opinion of the first archaeologists was Dikteon Andron or Psychros cave. The cave’s worship period covers two and more millennia (2000 B.C.-100 A.D). In the cave according to the view of the great archaeologist A. Evans, two deities were worshipped: Zeus and a female goddess that were the personification of fertility and vegetation. It was Mother Earth that took over to hide him with safety and warmth in her depths. Along with these deities, the imposing and majestic stalactites were also worshipped. Those huge stalactites seem as if they are holding the roof of the cave on their arms and divide the area in different parts.

-TRAPEZA -KRONIO (LASSITHI PLATEAU)

The Trapeza cave in Kronio is located close and above Tzermiado village. It is mostly known as “Kronion”. The cave served as it happened with most caves as a human dwelling. Later it served burial needs as it is evident by the offerings found. The discovery of the scarabs of the 11th pharaoh dynasty shows that there was a relationship with the countries of Near East and especially Egypt. Moreover, in the cave gold leaves, a faience figurine and an ivory figurine etc. were also found. Finally, the cave also presented a brilliant religious development till it was abandoned and the worship was transferred to Dikteon Andron.

- KARFI -LASSITHI PLATEAU

It is located near the border between Lassithi and Herakleion

above Kera Karditsiotisa monastery. It is a tower-like crag that resembles a nail and gives its name to an unknown sub Minoan settlement that is located near its feet. The Minoans who were victimized by the Dorians around 1100 B.C. resorted to this place, where there was a sanctuary on the top. The Minoans preferred this windswept, yet safe spot so as live under the most difficult conditions, however, breathing the air of freedom. The settlement was built on the east side of the rock, in a part of a flat area that stretches next to it. A. Evans was the first who signposted the archeological value of the district when in 1896 he excavated a tomb in a cemetery location. The town was finally discovered by an English archaeologist during the excavations that were realized in 1937-39.

The idol of a goddess with her raised hands in a form of a prayer or blessing, the tubular-like body trunk, the movable legs and the birds on the head are of particular importance and interest.

The types of houses that were discovered and the paved roads that divided them, show striking resemblance with the old houses and the paved lanes that we encounter even today in many Cretan villages and mainly in Lassithi plateau.

- MEGALO KATOFIGI -SITEIA

The cave is located in the village of St. Georgios which was formerly called Tourtouli on an uphill path of 45’. The village is 14 kilometers from Sitia on the way to Maronia, Epano Episkopi and Tourtouli. It is a cave with a rich natural interior. Its entrance is totally 3.20 meters wide. It consists of two rooms. The first is 24 meters long and 12 meters wide. The second is 42 meters long and 11 meters wide and it is divided into 4 chambers.

A narrow descent path on the right side of the chamber leads to big lake. The total route inside the cave is 100 meters. Nearby, there is also “Mikro Katofigi”, which is a cave with great scientific interest. It has to be noted that Tourtouli village is known from the great massacre of the Christians that the bloodthirsty janissary Ibrahim Afentakis or Afentakakis ordered in 1821.



St. Ioannis in Lassithi Plateau

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