

Historic Crete

When we recently set off on a walking holiday to Crete, I did not expect to return with a report for our website, but here goes!

The Necropolis of Armenoi

One of our walks took us to an amazing site about 6 miles south of Rethymnon, which is situated on the Cretan north coast. It is believed to be the greatest Late Minoan cemetery (c1400-1200BC) and is on the side of a hill called Prinokephalo, which means “hill of the wild oaks”. The site is still covered with wild oaks and in spring is said to be covered in wild flowers.



Excavations started on this site in 1969 and 231 tombs have been found and one tholos (circular temple). Below is a view of a cross section of the tholos wall.



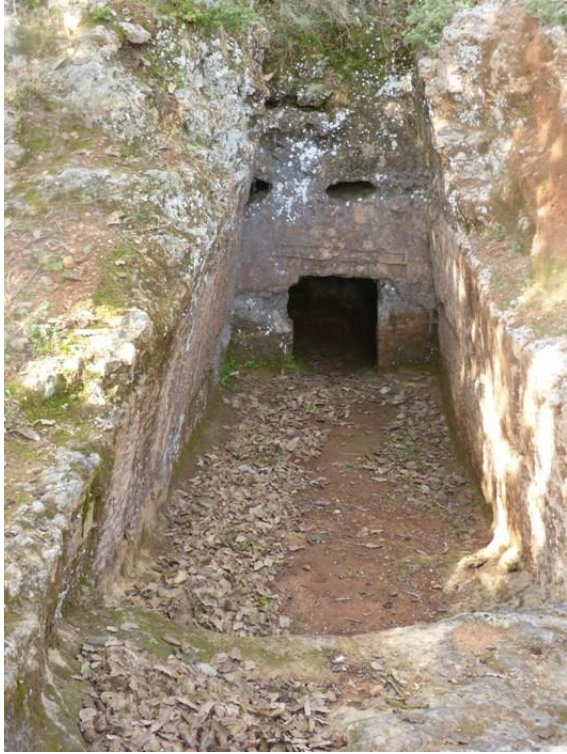
Initially there appears to have been a plan for the cemetery which included special areas for the wealthy. This plan was later abandoned resulting in a mixture of large and small tombs.



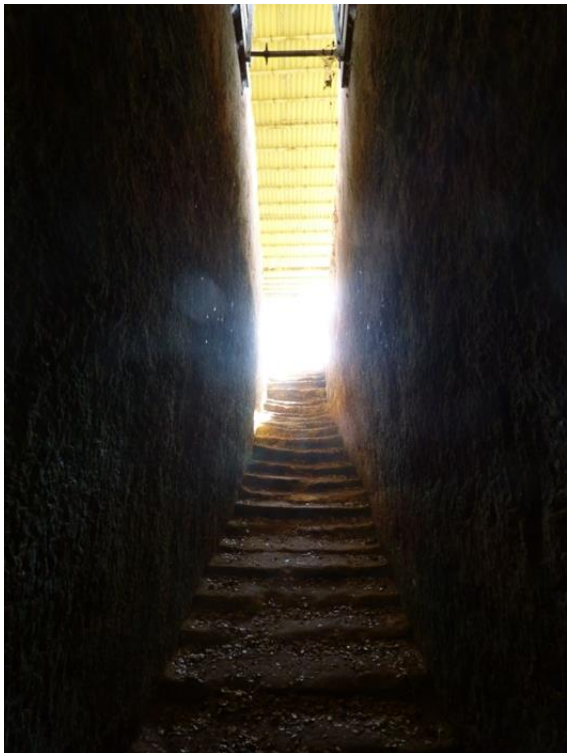
Each tomb was dug deeply into the rock and consists of a corridor and a chamber. The chamber below was particularly large and presumably for an important family.



The corridor consisted of either stairs or a ramp, with the entrance to the burial chamber covered by a large stone. (Stone above by my feet)



The depth of the tombs and wedge-shaped entrances is quite remarkable and each must have taken thousands of man hours to create.





Entrance to the site was 1 euro which was ridiculously cheap. The finds from the excavations are kept elsewhere, but include clay larnakes, vases, bronze weapons, necklaces, seal stones, a boar's tusk helmet and a stirrup jar.

Medieval Church Frescoes

There is no shortage of churches/chapels in Crete. They are small and of a standard design, but everywhere.



The nearest village to where we stayed at Footscapes had 8, and a current population of less than 100 residents! On one of the walks we did we passed 7 of these small remote chapels. Most had medieval frescoes which in great detail told bible stories or stories of saints.



Most were in poor condition, damaged by damp and fungus.



Two of the chapels had been colonised by dozens of bats who flew out and around us as we entered.



World War 2 Memorials

A different walk took us down the river Megalopotamus and its gorge to the Libyan Sea. Above the cliffs and on the road to the Preveli Monastery we came across one of the most important war memorials on Crete. The plaques tell their own story of the bravery of the Cretan people, priests and monks in helping allied troops escape from the invading Germans. As a consequence they suffered horrific reprisals.



HOLY STAVROPEGIC MONASTERY
OF ST IOANNIS THE THEOLOGIAN
PREVELI 1941

"AT THIS HOLY CASTLE OF THE NATION AND THE
ORTHODOXY. OVER FIVE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE
HAVE PASSED. HAVE EATEN. HAVE SLEPT. HAVE
BEEN HELPED. MANY OF THEM ESCAPED TO THE
MIDDLE EAST. AFTER TWO SENDINGS OF
SUBMARINES. WITH THE GREAT COOPERATION OF
THE BRAVE ABBOT AGATHAGGELOS LAGGOUVARDOS."

MICHAEL M. PAPADAKIS
LAWYER

"FRIENDSHIP AMONG THE COUNTRIES CANNOT BE
FOR EVER. HOWEVER. THE GRATITUDE OF PEOPLE
C ENGLISH. AUSTRALIAN. NEW ZELANDERS WHO
HAVE BEEN HELPED BY THE SUPERIORITY AND
THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT OF THEIR CO-PEOPLE
C ABBOT AGATHAGGELOS LAGGOUVARDOS - THE
MONKS OF THE HOLY MONASTERY OF PREVELI AS
WELL AS THE CITIZENS OF THE AREA AND HAVE
BEEN SAVED FROM THE CATASTROPHE MUST BE
FOR EVER."

PHILLIP G. POOL
ENGLISH CAPTAIN OF THE
ROYAL NAVY

MONASTERY OF PREVELI
1941

THIS REGION AFTER THE BATTLE OF
CRETE BECAME ALLYING POINT FOR
HUNDREDS OF BRITISH AUSTRALIAN
AND NEW ZEALAND SOLDIERS
IN DEFIANCE OF FEROCIOUS GERMAN
REPRISALS SUFFERED BY THE MONKS
AND THE NATIVE POPULATION THEY
FED PROTECTED AND HELPED THESE
SOLDIERS TO AVOID CAPTURE AND
GUIDED THEM TO THE BEACHHEAD
LIMNI WHERE THEY ESCAPED TO THE
FREE WORLD BY BRITISH SUBMARINES
WITH THE HELP OF THE BRAVE
REVEREND FATHER AGATHAGGELOU
LAGGOUBARDOU.

Christine and John Harrison

October 2015