

The church of Aghia Aikaterini Sinaïtes used to be the theological museum, but at the time of writing it was closed due to restoration work. It has an important collection of works by leading Cretan icon-painter Mikhail Damaskinos (*see box below*).

Mikhail Damaskinos (active 1555–91)



The *Divine Liturgy*, by Damaskinos, in the church of Aghia Aikaterini.

Damaskinos first studied at Aghia Aikaterini and then, like many of his contemporaries, looked for employment abroad. He was in Venice from 1577 to 1582 and worked on the decoration of San Giorgio dei Greci. He painted the fresco in the apse and the individual panels on the tier of the iconostasis, with icons representing the 12 great festivals of the church. His production is now widely dispersed, but six major works belonging to his mature period, after his return from Venice, are to be seen here. They were originally in the Vrondisi monastery on the south slopes of Mt Ida but were housed for safety at Aghios Minas in 1800 and from there they were moved to Aghia Aikaterini. The works include the *First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea*, the *Divine Liturgy*, the *Virgin and the Burning Bush*, *Noli me Tangere*, the *Last Supper* and the *Adoration of the Magi* with camels, horses and Turkish-looking soldiers, said to show more clearly the influence of Western art.

In the church of **Aghios Matthaios Sinaïtes** are two more icons now attributed to Damaskinos. The church is situated in Taxiarchou Markopoulou, a few minutes' walk from Aghia Aikaterini (*it looked firmly closed at the time of writing and had no timetable for visitors; this may change when the museum in Aghia Aikaterini Sinaïtes reopens*). The two panels by Damaskinos are *Aghios Symeos Theodochos* (Receiver of God) illustrating the message of the Presentation in the Temple, and *Aghios Ioannis Prodromos* (St John the Baptist). The scene shows adherence to the iconographical tradition of the Palaeologan style with the saint wearing a sheepskin garment with one hand raised in blessing and the other holding an open scroll. The traditional severed head at his feet has been omitted, however, while the addition of wings is certainly a departure from the standard representation.

Retrace your steps to the Morosini Fountain, from where **Odos 25 Avgoustou** heads north and leads to the harbour. This is a pedestrian area with banks and tourist agencies.

THE MARTYRS OF 25TH AUGUST

Many streets in Greece are named after dates commemorating important events in history. The street connecting the harbour to the old city centre of Herakleion, anciently the Venetian *Ruga Magistra*, is no exception: it is named after a day in 1898, when the struggle for independence from Turkey was nearly over. *Enosis*, the union with Greece, had been temporarily ruled out, but autonomy had been granted. On that day a detachment of British soldiers was escorting officials of the new Executive Council along the street to harbour. They were attacked by a mob of Turkish Cretan rioters. In the subsequent disturbances many civilians were killed as well as 17 British soldiers and the British honorary consul. The British navy moved in, and the Turkish Cretan ringleaders were apprehended and hanged. Eventually the city was cleared of Turkish forces and on 2nd November of the same year the last Turkish soldier left Crete.

The waterfront

The harbour is guarded by the 16th-century **Venetian castle** (*Rocca al Mare*; *open low season Mon–Sun 8–3, high season 8–7*). Sited at the end of a long pier, it still has the symbol of the Serenissima, the Winged Lion of St Mark, stamped upon it. The original castle on



this site was a *castellum comunis*, intended to shelter the inhabitants in case of attack. It was destroyed in an earthquake in 1303. The building that replaced it was ambitious but ill-fated. It developed immediate problems because of exposure to the waves and to the north winds. Alterations to the configuration of the harbour to improve the castle's situation only exacerbated the harbour's tendency to silt up and, according to documents, the sea was still getting into the fortress in 1638.

The entrance is on the ground floor, where 26 vaulted rooms were used as stores and to house the garrison. The upper platform is accessible via an inclined ramp designed to move guns while pack animals would have been able to negotiate the shallow steps. There is a fine view from the top.

Winged Lion of St Mark on the wall of the Venetian Rocca al Mare, Herakleion's castle.

The peak sanctuary

Mt Juktas was first investigated by Evans, who found substantial structures and a temenos wall of cyclopean masonry built with irregular but close-fitting stones. He also established a communication link from Knossos and identified traces of a paved road both at Anemospilia and on top of the mountain. Later, in 1977, the sanctuary was investigated by the Greek Archaeological Service. Its time of activity was dated from the Prepalatial period through to LM IIIB, well into Mycenaean times. The excavation is fenced but can be viewed from a vantage point on the hillside above it. At the south end of the temenos is the key feature of any peak sanctuary i.e. the crevice into which offerings were made. This one is 10m deep and is surrounded by a building intended for cult practices. The visible features date from the New Palace period. On the west side of the cleft was a stepped altar. Cult objects including a kernos with 100 or so depressions, presumably for offerings, a hoard of bronze double axes, libation vessels and remains of sacrifices were excavated in the vicinity. A large number of offerings were retrieved from the cleft itself. They were mainly linked to the day-to-day troubles of life: terracottas of women in labour, heads, hands, torsos and phalli. Objects in precious material (faience, rock crystal, gold leaf and bronze) and fragmentary stone offering-tables with Linear A inscriptions, show that not only the poor walked all the way up to seek solace and divine assistance. Artefacts are mainly dated to the Old Palace period, but not exclusively: a headless sphinx establishes the continuity of the shrine into Mycenaean times. To the north of the temenos, by its northern entrance, remains of a potter's kiln testify to industrial activity in the New Palace period. From the summit on a clear day you can see Mt Dikte in the east, the White Mountains in the west and look south across the island to the Asterousia range and the Libyan Sea beyond.

View from the ruins of Vathypetro.

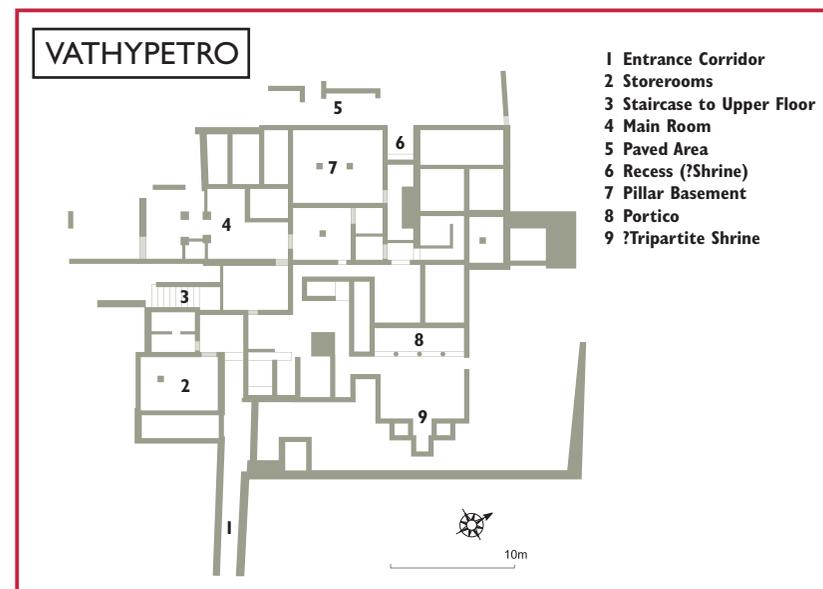


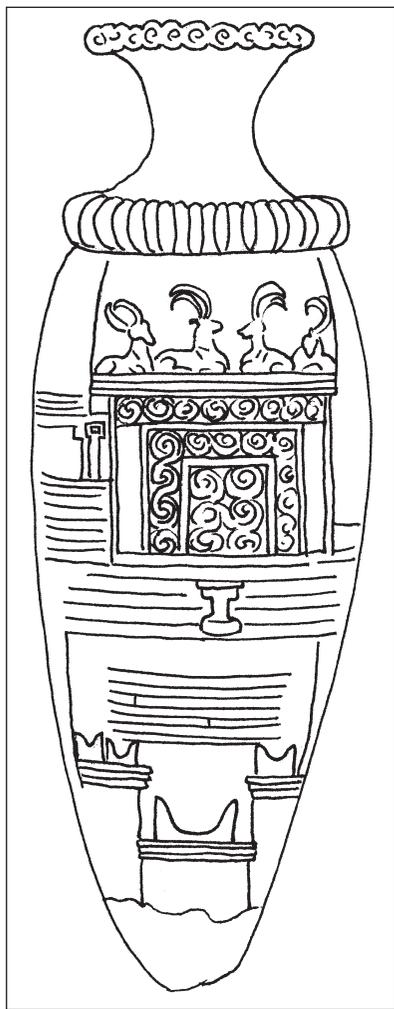
VATHYPETRO

The road south of Archanes continues to Vathypetro (Βαθύπετρο; map p. 430, C2). The Minoan Farm is signposted to the right, just before the village. The site (*open Tues–Sun 8.30–2.30*) is beautifully positioned on a bluff overlooking a wide vista of mountain, fields and olive groves. The ruins were excavated in the 1950s by Spyridon Marinatos. Further investigations were carried out by Driessen and Sakellarakis.

The settlement

The complex, not just a single house but a small settlement, was built in LM IA and was badly damaged about 30 years later. This first structure had some high-status palatial features such as light-wells, ashlar masonry, halls, a west façade and a north–south orientation; it may indeed originally have been planned as a palace. The tripartite shrine may belong to this phase, but not everyone agrees that there was such a feature at all. The reconstruction work, which took place in LM IB, may have included a smaller building to the east mainly devoted to food processing and industrial activities. This new phase changed the character of the complex from its original administrative, ritual and residential purpose to an agricultural and industrial one. Olive and wine presses were installed and storage areas developed. The site also had a pottery kiln and weaving facilities, judging by the numerous loom weights. The final destruction is dated around 1470 bc. It is quite likely that this was the most important building of a settlement extending over three hills, since ashlar masonry has only been found here.





The Late Minoan 'Sanctuary Rhyton' from Zakros palace, now in Herakleion museum's temporary exhibition. Made of soft stone, much darkened by fire damage, it is decorated with an elaborate scene in relief which seems to depict a Minoan peak sanctuary in a mountainous landscape. At the bottom is what appears to be the approach to a tripartite shrine decorated with horns of consecration. Above is the elaborate shrine door on top of which are seated four *agrimia* with splendid horns. Further round the rhyton (not shown here) are *agrimia* leaping, and more horns of consecration, this time with birds perched on their tips.

Returning to the Central Court the visitor will pass the **Hall of Ceremonies (12)**, lit by a colonnaded light-well and supplied with polythyra (pier-and-door partitions) characteristic of high-status Minoan architecture. It had relief frescoes and decorative panelling on the floor framed by narrow strips of stucco painted red (some still in place). It was probably used for banquets judging by the large number of drinking vessels found in it. Immediately to the north is the **kitchen (13)**, the only one ever identified in a palace, conveniently located close to the storerooms (8). The six rugged column bases are taken to indicate structural support for a dining room above. The staircase is on the eastern side.

Northeast Court and Harbour Road: In the **Northeast Court (14)** are remains of the ancient Minoan Harbour Road, which was paved with a contrasting pattern of blue and white stone slabs. It can be traced from the north

Room (11) held Linear A tablets. Unfortunately only 13 of these have survived. Many were crushed when the boxes they were in fell off the shelves; as they had not been fired, they were reduced later to a clay mass by the encroaching water. Under the covered area to the west are remains of internal stairs.

end of the central court to the northeast court, up the heavily reconstructed stepped entrance (but the huge threshold at the top is probably original) and

on into the town. In the Northeast Court under a protective roof are the remains of an industrial installation belonging to the first palace.

The town

The town, as yet partly unexplored, extended to the northeast of the palace well beyond the fenced area. A walk through the maze of narrow alleys and steps, minding the odd snake, is a perfect way to end the visit. From the restored clay bench (cordoned off) there is an excellent view of the palace layout.

PALAIKASTRO & PETSOPHAS

The coastal plain of Roussolakkos (the 'Red Pit') is north of Zakros on the way to Itanos past Chochlakies. In Palaikastro (Παλαίκαστρο; map p. 431, D2), aim for the bay of Kouremenos for excellent swimming and the best windsurfing in Crete. This is a place where the meltemi, the north wind, is positively welcomed.

To find the site, follow the signs for the Hotel Marina Village near Angathia. The road leads in 2km to the excavations, just in from the beach. The flat-topped promontory of Kastri is to the north. From the top on a clear day it is possible to make out the islands of Kasos and Karpathos in the distance, past Grandes in the middle of the harbour. This was the notorious Kasos Strait, a gateway to the Aegean Sea used by the Allied forces from their bases in North Africa in the Second World War. The Germans had an air base on Karpathos and used stukas to harass the British Mediterranean fleet. In the process, the site of Roussolakkos received a hit.

Palaikastro is fully accessible in a very pleasant setting and with good explanatory panels that make up for the discontinuous presentation due to the complex excavation history of the site and the frequent backfills.

The excavations at Palaikastro

Excavations on the headland of Kastri have revealed occupation at the beginning and at the very end of the Bronze Age. These were times of troubles, and the hill offered a defensive position. Later, in the Middle Ages, the Venetians established a fortress here, which is how the location acquired its name (Palaikastro = 'Old Castle'). The new castle (Kastri) was on the hill, and the old one, Palaikastro, a reference to the prominent building remains of the Bronze Age town, was below. The Minoan settlement was first investigated in the early 20th century by British archaeologists and again in the 1960s. The current programme began in 1983. It was during this phase of the excavations that a most spectacular find came to light. The Palaikastro Kouros, a chryselephantine statuette of a young man, recovered in innumerable fragments over three seasons of digging, is now in Siteia museum (see p. 237).

There was evidence of occupation in the fertile plain from the Neolithic to the end of the Minoan period while the cult of Diktaian Zeus is attested from Geometric up

