

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**

Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Excursion to the Eileithyia-Cave at Amnissos / Prefecture Iraklion
Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*)

The *Eileithyia Cave* (also the Cave of *Eileithyia* [Εἰλειθυία]) is located about 1 mile south of *Amnissos* towards *Elia*. *Amnissos* is located at the “Old Road” around 4.3 miles east of *Iraklion*. The grotto is also named *Neredaspilia* (Nymph grotto) and was dedicated to the Goddess of childbirth *Eileithyia*. She served from the Neolithic (3000 BC) until the 5th Pre-Christian century as a Temple. From the Neolithic (3000 BC) until the 5th pre-Christian century the cave served as Temple. *Eileithyia* was a daughter of *Zeus* and *Hera* and was regarded as protector of parturient women and maternity.

First archaeological excavations (1884 by J. Chatzidákis) brought, beside Neolithic pieces and tools, figured representations of female idols in birthing position, during suckle etc up. Today they are kept in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklion. The Grotto was not scientifically explored until 1964 by E. Platákis, indicating an area of approx. 1200 square meter for the cave. Yet it seems the cave calls for further archaeological research (with today's know-how and technology); everywhere yet broken fragments are around in the cave and at various points, more cave rooms also containing pieces under the sole. Smaller creep mine include much more shards and seem to be insufficient examined so far. The "grown" ground of this cave certainly hides much information about the temple and the era as goddess of the labour and birth was worshipped here.

The entrance to the cave is "well hidden by a fig tree" and despite good signs not easy to find; apart from that the cave is not freely accessible and almost closed. However it is possible to retrieve the key at the "head" of the municipal in the 3 mile away *Nirou Chani* or request a guided tour.



The picture left shows the entrance to the cave under a fig tree only a few metres below the paved road to Elia. Middle: Access to the cave is secured by a grid and usually closed. The right illustration shows the 2.5 m wide cave entrance from inside. From here the way into the inner cave is relative steep. To be seen first is a barrow shaped stalagmite called “the navel” because it looks like the belly of a pregnant woman with a small notch in the middle.

Photos: H. Eikamp (2003)



Figure on the left shows travertine formations on the walls in the middle section of the cave. Middle picture: Sintering pillars and stalagmites act here and now on the imagination of the Viewer, as even in the era as here the birth goddess was worshipped. The picture right shows a view in an approximately 60 cm wide (and 3 m long) creeping tunnel; jutting bones remains at whose end depth (from a sinter basin).

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) (previously also known as *Pyrameis atalanta*)

The Admiral is a hiking butterfly and occurs everywhere in Crete up to 1,500 m height. This large butterfly is identified by its striking dark brown, red and black wing pattern. The caterpillar feeds on nettles, and the adult drinks from flowering plants like the *Buddleia* and overripe fruit. The eggs of admirals are stored separately. The color of the Caterpillar is variable and ranges from yellowish grey to blackish. A yellow broken side line exists. Thorns on the segments are short and forked. The “fall doll” is grey or brown and show beautiful shiny metallic stains. The pupation mostly takes place in a loosely together spun sheet casing from multiple sheets.



Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling

[Art.-Nr. 2.815, Zitat-Nr. 5.915] – impr. eik.amp 2004

