

**Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:****Numerous byzantine churches are the “landmarks” of Axos
- a old mountain village at the foot of Mount Psiloritis, Prefecture Rethymno**

[An article from our NLUK members *Diana P. Bailey* & *Maria Eleftheria*, Crete]



The old mountain village Axos (Αξός) is believed to be founded by Oaxos, a grandchild of the Minos. King Minos (Μίνως) was, based on Greek mythology, a son of Zeus and Europe. During ancient times Axos was one of the most important cities of Crete.

The history-charged place, located on the northern foothills of the Psiloritis Mountains is well-known for its numerous Byzantine churches and the handiworks manufactured in the place. The outside of the season rather the contemplative village is during the main vacation period a destination of many touring buses, Jeep safaris and individual tourists.

Coming from Anogia, a briefly restored chapel is shortly before the village on the right side, which is however locked outside the times of the services. On the left side of the street is the entrance to the cemetery of the village. The God's acre offers a beautiful prospect due to its situation at the slope; however it is arduous to walk on. Steep stairs drove up the hill; at the upper end you reach the church of Agio Ioannis. This renovated, single-nave church is painted with remarkable frescoes (see fig. next page left), which are dated back to the 14th Century; among them the icon of the Holy Mamas, who holds an animal in his hands as well as impressing scenes of punishments of the damned in hell. The church has besides a quite beautiful mosaic pavement. Beside the cemetery church of Agio Ioannis a signed path leads up to the ruins of the Acropolis (see fig. next page right).





An enormous temple platform was exposed at the excavation place; in advance remains of the town wall and layouts of individual buildings can be seen. Most of the here found treasures are situated in the Archaeological Museum in Iraklion.

The area, on which numerous signs with arrows are set up, unfortunately makes a quite unkempt impression to me: railings lay around, explanatory remarks are missing and what is looking interesting from far, not least because of the roofing and barrier, appears upon closer examination as a heap of stacked rock plates. Nevertheless the derelict acropolis is worth to see, even for less archaeologically interested the wide view into the environment is worth to see. Just a hint: In the high summer a committing in the early morning hours is recommended, because there is no shade.

At the continuation of the journey there is the beautiful but new build Church of the Apostles at the entrance of the village. The picture below right shows a griffon vulture, who made himself cozy on the roof of the well-kept house of god. A colony of these impressive birds lives close by; for more information about the griffon vulture at Crete see our info-leaflet No. 259-08/E at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/259-08E.pdf].



In the further course of the road turns right a path to the remains of the formerly three-aisled basilica Agia Paraskevi (see fig next page left). Here is a good possibility to park the car. About 100 meter further on the main road is left the byzantine church Agia Irini (see centre fig next page). The cross-shaped built dome church appears petite and frisky by the blind arch at the gable. From here another signed path leads to the acropolis.

If you follow the right branching road you will reach the central village church after approx 100 meters (see fig right on next page). Besides is the single-nave church of Agio Georgios. The praying house was extended in the course of the time by an annex. The wall paintings from that 14th Century are to a large extent strongly damaged, but the richly ornamented iconostasis is in good condition (see fig. 2nd picture row on page 3)



Following the main street further on you will get to the village centre. The village square with its fountain is shaded by a big plane tree and lined by taverns, kafenions and small shops.

If you should find the churches of the village locked, which can be the case outside the main travel time, you are correct here in the village square to enquire about the priest. He gladly will open the churches for you and perhaps you even come into the benefit of a private guidance.

Above the fountain the ruin of the Church of Michael Archangelos is located. The two-bay praying house of the archangel Michael, whose one bay is slightly narrower and roofed with a halfcylindric dome, was built obviously on the remainders of a substantially older building.

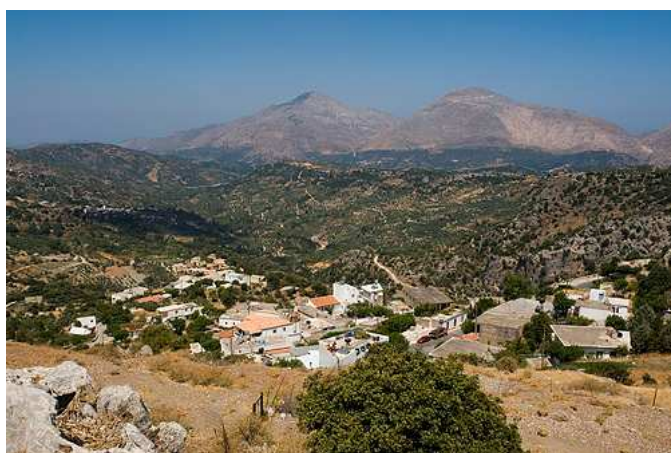
Remainders of frescos are recognizable on the interior walls of the ruinous church. The external wall of the still intact apsidal is decorated with a pattern from red clay tiles (see fig. page 4)





There are further points of interest for the Crete traveler within the closer environment of Axos, e.g. the mountain village Zoniana (therefore see our leaflet No. 357-11/E at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/357-11E.pdf]), the Zoniana-Cave (therefore see at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/010-04E.pdf]) or Monastery Diskouri (see our Info-leaflet 248-08/E: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/248-08E.pdf]).

Completing some further impressions from close environment of Axos.



Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling