

Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Monastery Vrondisi (near Zaros) Famous by the achievements of its monks



Monastery *Vrondisi* can be reached from *Zaros* towards *Kamares*. After about 2 miles a signed branch to the monastery takes place at the right. Its then still 950 meter to the parking lot in front of the monastery (Google maps coordinates: 35° 14.3854 N; 24° 88.1195 E).

The monastery is sanctified to the patron of the monks Antonius (17th of January). Still today the monastery is very impressive even if it is certainly not as illustrious as formerly; the old fortification like complex has been taken down (see fig. left) and new buildings have been build.

Two enormous old plant trees are in front of the main entrance (see middle fig.) and on the left is a source basin decorated with reliefs (see fig right), a remnant from the heydays of the monastery. The water runs from the muzzles of two relief lions. The entrance of the monastery is relatively new. On the inside however you still can see remnants of the old main entrance.



The Catholicon of the monastery retained its old gloss. It is a double-span church (see fig. left), whereby the second ship is sanctified to the Apostle Thomas. The bell tower is remarkable (see fig. in the middle); it reminds of a catholic church. It was established in the time of the Venetian reign, when one Christian dogma affected the other and orthodox and catholic lived on Crete. In the south ship parts of the beautiful mural art (see fig. right) have receive. The shape of the holy Symeon Theodochos, who holds the divine child in the arms, is remarkable.





In the last centuries of the Venetian reign, the monastery was famous for the achievements of its monks in science and art. Scribes, scrivener, painters and teacher, which admit also beyond Crete, lived here. Michail Damaskinos*, one of the most important painters of the Cretan Renaissance, created six of his most well-known icons here. The icons were kept in Vrondisi, until the year 1800 when they were transferred by the Metropolitan from Crete, Gerasimos, to Iraklion and hung up in the church of Agio Minas.

Today they are located within the icons hall of the Saint Catherine's church in Iraklion.

The Turk rule was the reason that the most important forms of the Cretan culture have come to an end.

The fall of the monastery began after 1669, when all hopes for removal of the heretic intruder were lost. The mural art, the carrying icons, the old handwriting and the beautiful buildings attest certification off the cultural heydays and the past gloss of the monastery. The suppression in the Turk reign led in the long run to the depopulation of the monastery.

Like many other monasteries on Crete, also *Vrondisi* played an important role within the different rebellions of the Cretan population and was refuge of the resistance

and freedom fighters, such as Captain *Michalis Korakas* and the crypto-Christ *Michalis Kourmoulis*. In the 19th Century the monastery was often destroyed during hard retaliatory measures and finally abandoned. Today only two monks still live in *Vrondisi*.

* *Michail Damaskinos* or *Michael Damaskenos* (Greek Μιχαήλ Δαμασκηνός; 1530; † 1593) was an important Greek icon painter. Damaskinos was born in 1530 in the Cretan town Chania. He learned the icon painting on Crete. Later on he went to Italia where he first studied and copied the works of Italian painters. Starting from 1574 he then lived as a member of the Greek municipality in Venice. In this time he received the order to paint the ikons of the Church San Giorgio dei Greci. He returned back to Iraklion briefly before his death. Approximately 90 of his works from the years 1555 – 1591 are received.