



Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

The monastery complex Asomaton in the Amari valley (once spiritual and cultural centre of the region)



The three archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael

Moni Asomaton (Greek Μονή Ασωμάτων “monastery of the angels”), also Iera Moni Asomaton (Ιέρα Μονή Ασωμάτων), is a monastery complex in the Amari valley. The monastery is currently not inhabited; the buildings show a partial strong state of decomposition. On the other hand the monastic church (Καθολικό Catholico) has been restored in the last years and one begun to repair a further building for a future museum. In the year 1927 parts of Moni Asomaton were used for the establishment of an agricultural college. By the metropolitanate of Lambi, Syvritos and Sfakia with seat in Spili (see in addition our leaflet at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/379-12E.pdf]) in the meantime the complex has been reformed again to a nun monastery. The 28th Ephorat (supervisory authority) for Byzantine relics of the Greek culture Ministry in Rethymno endeavours at the gradual restoration of the monastery buildings.

About 14 miles southeast of Rethymno, in the centre of the Amari valley, Moni Asomaton once formed the mental and cultural centre of the region. The monastery complex is at the road of Agia Fotini (Αγία Φωτεινή), the principal place of the municipality Syvritos, where also the monastery is located. The distance of Moni Asomaton to Agia Fotini amounts about 2 miles.

The exact founding date of the monastery is not well-known. Moni Asomaton was probably built at the end of the second Byzantine epoch of Crete (961 to 1204). A noble one from Chandakas (Χάνδακας), the today's Iraklion, is considered as a founder, who selected, at the suggestion of a monk of the convenient monastery Kaloidena (Καλόειδαινα) at Ano Meros (Άνο Μέρος), the location in the Amari valley for the new monastery and blessed it to the archangel Michael. Towards the end of the affiliation of Crete to the Republic of Venice the monastery buildings were renewed. As seat of the Diocese of Lambi, Moni Asomaton played an important role in religious, national and cultural respect during the Ottoman time with the resistance against the foreign rule. The support of rebellions against the Ottomans in the 18th Century led to destruction of the monastery. Beginning of the 20th Century it was derelict.

The centre of the monastery complex of Moni Asomaton forms the in the last years repaired cross-in-square church, which is sainted to the taxiarch (leaders of the angelic hosts) the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Tradition has it that the monastic church could be established after the Byzantine recapture of Crete from the Arabs at 961 under Nikephoros Phokas, as Nikephoros II. from 963 to 969 Byzantine emperor. Archaeological remnants and pieces of find support this assumption. In the 13th Century the church was rebuilt in Venetian- Byzantine style and provided with a timber roof, before it received a curved roof in the 17th Century. Beginning the 20th Century parts of the side panels and the church dome were destroyed.

Four two-story buildings are located around the monastic church, which are uninhabited and in a ruinous state. These are partly restored. The eastern delimitation of the monastic yard forms the abbey, the house of the abbot, with interesting front decorations. At the other sides of the yard are the buildings with the refectory, the chambers of the monks, work spaces and storage halls as well as the stables. Something away from the head yard of the complex, in the southeast, the cemetery of the monastery is located, surrounded by palms and orchards.

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Beside a library with a collection of theological books Moni Asomaton possessed important hereditary pieces at holy garbs, gospels, liturgical objects and valuable articles. Among them are the bishop throne, wood carvings of the iconostasis and many icons. Some is accommodated in the restored monastic church, other parts are currently stored in the entrance building, in order to issue them in one in the future in the monastery buildings furnished museum. After the fall of the monastery, valuable objects from the inventory of the former monastery property, such as gold embroidered, qualitatively high-quality church garbs or the silver benediction cross often came to other places, in order to store or display there. They are today in the buildings of the seat of the metropolitan in Spili, in the monastery Preveli (see in addition our leaflet at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/055-04E.pdf]) and in the historical museum of Crete in Iraklion.