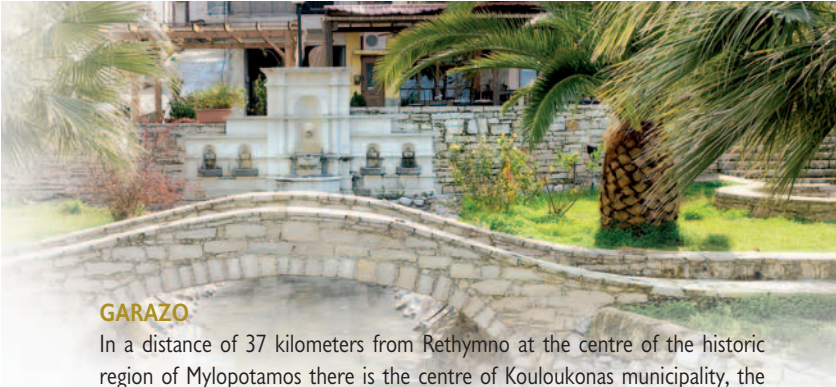


PEREGRINATION
WITH GARAZO AS
THE POINT
OF DEPARTURE





GARAZO

In a distance of 37 kilometers from Rethymno at the centre of the historic region of Mylopotamos there is the centre of Kouloukonas municipality, the village of Garazo. The first references for the particular settlement can be found in the Venetian censuses of the 16th century. During the Turkish invasion it was the centre of the homonymous municipality that was consisted of 16 settlements.

The residents are occupied with agriculture, stock breeding and trade. The citrus cultivation is among their most popular occupations.

In the beautiful narrow lanes of the village we can admire the characteristic samples of traditional architecture and visit the local folk museum. The settlement is designated as traditional of high cultural value. The church of Panagia



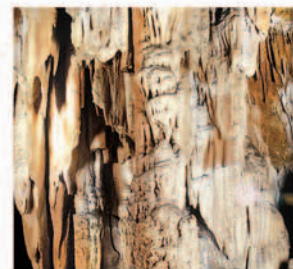
with the bell tower of the 19th century has intense baroque elements resembling the Monastery of Arkadi. At the borders of Garazo there are the picturesque glebes called Omala and Faratsi and the abandoned villages of Nisi and Anemomilos.

A TOUR OF IMPORTANT SETTLEMENTS - ROUTES

Veni - Aksos- Zoniana- Krana- Livadia- Diskourios monastery

Garazo village as the starting point is ideal for excursion and exploration not only in the mountainous areas of Psiloritis but also in the valleys south of Mylopotamos. Ascending we come across the village of cherries, Veni and Aksos, the home of King Eterachos (7th century B.C.) and the land that gave birth to the ecumenical patriarch Athanasios Patelaros. The village preserves immense byzantine memories and folk art. At the end of the route we have two choices: left towards Anogia or right towards Zoniana, a lively settlement that is especially demographically developed. Just before entering the village of Zoniana we come across the cave of Sfendoni to the right, one of the largest and most beautiful caves in Crete. In the village we can visit the wax museum

of Potamianos familiarizing with the local history and enjoying a raki in one of the taverns of the village. Following the road to the east we come across the village of Krana, the settlement that brought out the priest Kraniotis – the protagonist of the revolution in 1866. In the old church of the village there are ecclesiastic books and heirlooms of the 19th century. In the eastern side there is the village of Livadia one of the largest villages in Crete. Access to the village of Gournolakos from that point is easy, an area in which many residents of Mylopotamos were executed during the German invasion. From Livadia village there is an accessible route towards the top of Psiloritis. The hospitable residents of the village of Livadia are mainly occupied with stockbreeding. South of Livadia village there is the small monastery of Agios Georgios at Diskouri village, which is a sacred place, respected by all the stockbreeders of the north glaci of Psiloritis. From that point we head to the left descending towards the village of Garazo.



Mourtzana - Episkopi - Agia - Dafnedes - Agios Silas - Damavolou - Agios Agios Ioannis - Kalivos

North of the village of Garazo the road leads to the old national road of Rethymno-Heraklio. At the left, towards Rethymno the first settlement that we come across is called Mourtzana with the cobbled roads and the picturesque settlement of Moussai. Here is the Jerusalem glebe of Despotis Christos. We ascend towards Episkopi, to find the village with the important church of Agios Ioannis and the Venetian and Ottoman architectural elements. Agia towards





Melidoni is a settlement known since the Venetian occupation. Here one can experience the traditional way of charcoal production. We return and continue left towards Dafnedes and towards the small settlement of Agios Silas from which we head towards Domovoulou, a settlement known from the Venetian occupation. From that point we can visit the traditional settlement of Avdanites with the clear waters. At the end of the road to the left, there is the village of Agios Ioannis that took its name from the church of Agios Ioannis Chrysostomos. The church of Panagia of the 13th century is a remarkable monument



of the village. Our last stop is Kalivos with the church of Taksiarches and Agios Charalampos. Its temple was built in 1816.

Apladania - Cheliana - Doksaro - Vossakos monastery - Makriyannis - Theodora - Drosia - Sisses - Chalepa monastery

Following the old national road towards Heraklio we come across many small villages that used to be very lively due to their position on the road network. Essentially the settlements that we come across in this route are nothing but old caravanserais that used to be in the down county of the centre of Mylopotamos. We come across Apladania and Cheliana. At Cheliana there is the church of Agios Georgios. Continuing the route from the old national road from Doksaros to the left we cross a landscape with impressive geological formulations. The road leads us

to a small table-land. Here is the Monastery of Vossakos, the historic monastery with a fortress-like architecture that resembles an oasis in the wild landscape of Talea Mountains. We follow the same road on the opposite direction on the left where we come across the two beautiful villages of Makriyanni and Theodora and end up to Drosia and Geni Gave villages with the Turkish fountain next to a perennial plane. The village is famous for its unique roast pork that is served in most of its taverns. From Drosia we can continue through the village of Aloidess where the hospitable residents are mainly occupied with table grape, agriculture and olive trees cultivation. We end up at Sisses, a village that is especially developed and is located between the geographical border of the Prefectures of Rethymno and Heraklio. The warm days of the summer the residents of Sisses collect an essential oil called labdanum from the homonymous plant (main substance of incense). The village is famous for the citrus trees and the honey products. Very close is the coast of Almirides in Sisses village, heaven of ancient Aksos. Another possibility is to ascent from Drosia village towards the picturesque villages of Chonos, Aimonas, Tsachania, Krioneri, Agridia and visit the Monastery of Chalepa. The monastery was built during the Venetian occupation and was destroyed during the Turkish invasion in 1645. It participated in many fights during the 19th century. Today, it is considered an important religious centre of the area and it is being reconstructed.

WORTH VISITING (A journey in nature)

The road from Sisses to Aloidess is a route of unique geological interest, since the great variety of limestone rocks reveals a history of 250 million years. The landscape from Doxaro to Vossakos monastery is also one of exceptional beauty. Water has curved into the malleable limestone rock and has formed important gorges, caves and gulches. Sfedoni's cave, with its rich stalactitic and stalagmitic interior, stands out in the region of Zoniana. The cave has a surface of 300 square meters and a big part of it is amended in order to receive visitors. Other important caves, which are not, however, accessible without proper training and the required speleological equipment, include Mougri,





near Vossakos monastery, Tsoupas at Kalivos, Axos etc. Geropotamos River starts from the north glaciis of Psiloritis and crosses the whole basin of Mylopotamos ending up to the sea. Many of its tributary rivers flow through the small plains of the area, while in earlier times they were used to move small watermills, an impressive cluster of which can be found in the area of Avdanites - Damavolos - St. Sillas - Kounalo - Veni - Drosia.

There is a great variety of flora including genista, evergreen bushes, makia vegetation, locust trees, wild olives, mustics, junipers, kalmias and arbutuses which resist the dry spell of the Cretan summer having by rule hard coriaceous leaves and deep roots. Ericas and arbutuses abound at the north glaciis of Kouloukonas. The cultivation of oranges at Sisses, citron in the wider area of Garazos, table grapes at Aloides and cherries at Veni are well known. The production of honey is quite prevalent.



A JOURNEY TO THE MYTH AND HISTORY

Traces of prehistoric residences have been found in Makrigiannis area, as well as archaic residences at Aimonas. In ancient times, the wider area of Pano Mylopotamos was under the influence of Axos, which flourished since the Geometrical era to the late Roman era. A temple of goddess Aphrodite (Venus) was dug up in the ancient acropolis of this region.

During byzantine years, castles and churches were built in the whole area. Under the Venetian occupation, the seat of the Latin episcopate was at Episkopi village. During the Turkish occupation, mountainous Mylopotamos was a centre of resistance for Christians against the Ottomans. Finally, during the years of the Nazi occupation the residents fought back the invaders.

The sacrifice of 32 Mylopotamos residents at Gournolakos site near Livadia is an event of great importance.

SIGHTS

The acropolis of the ancient town of Oaxos lies on a barrow above the modern village of Axos. The ceramic and stone findings discovered in the ruins of this area show that it has been inhabited since the Neolithic era. At Axos a temple of goddess Aphrodite has been found with dedicatory statuettes picturing a female god figure, as well as weapons that are kept in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklio. The father of history, Herodotus, brings through the name of Etearchos, king of Axos, and his daughter, Fronimi. Life in this town continued until the byzantine years. The great number of byzantine and post-byzantine churches suggests the existence of intense religious life in Axos in later years. The church of Agia Irini stands out with its free-cross shape and its dome with a drum of impressive blind arches. Agios Georgios and Agios Ioannis are single-naved churches with 14th century wall paintings. The



ruined church of Archangelos Michael rises above the village fountain.

The byzantine church of Koimisis Theotokou at Agios Ioannis village is distinguished for the epigrams on its wall paintings. Agios Ioannis, a Catholic church at Episkopi, is a cross-in-square church. Traces of 14th century wall paintings are rescued suggesting that here the seat of the Latin episcopate of Mylopotamos might have been during the Venetian occupation. Near Agios Ioannis lies





the church of Agios Georgios with its Latin epigraphs. The church of Agios Georgios at Cheliana has 14th century wall paintings of exceptional artistic quality as well as a dedicatory inscription dating back to 1319.

The Timios Stavros monastery at Vossakos is hidden in a plateau on Talea Mountains and is now being reconstructed in an exemplary way. Outside the monastery we see stone-built troughs for the animals that are kept in the monastery ("mantzadoures"). The central gate is in the east and has the year 1669 incised on it. The katholikon is a single-naved church which was



reconstructed in the early 20th century. The ornate spring was constructed in 1675 according to the epigraph.

Legend has it that the monastery at Diskouri near Livadia is associated with the mythic Dioscuri. The katholikon honors the memory of St. George. On St. George's icon the shepherds take a vow in case of cattle-stealing: "I swear to Zeus, you should know that I am not responsible for what you lost neither by any deed nor by my will". There is a small library with post-byzantine manuscripts and incunabula and a collection of ecclesiastic heirlooms and folkloric items. The old olive press with its burrstones is still used. Near the monastery and on the way to Livadia lies the byzantine church of Agios Ioannis with its wall paintings. The representation of its founders on the south wall is very interesting.

The monastery of Chalepa looms in the northwest. Because of its wonderful view on the low land of Mylopotamos, this part has been characterized as Mylopotamos balcony. The monastery was built during the years of the Venetian occupation. The entrance can be found on the southwest side of the complex and it is a typical sample of a monastery gate. It is a barrel-vaulted corridor (chiostro) with stone-built benches. The corridor leads to the monastery

precinct. On the eastern side of the precinct is the two-aisle katholikon, which honors the Transfiguration of the Savior and the Birth of Christ. Near the monastery of Chalepa there is also the single-naved church of Agia Marina. This might be a katholikon of an old monastery. At the entrance we can see the escutcheon of the Kallergis family and we are impressed by the paintings in the interior.

Venetian and earlier mansions are scattered through the villages of Mylopotamos, especially in Garazos, Avdanites, Agios Ioannis, Episkopi, Dafnedes etc. At the Damavolos and Agios Sillas villages as far as the monastery of Diskouri, as well as at Veni, Moussai, Drosia and Episkopi, we come across a plethora of watermills. The stone-built bridge at Kampos Garazou is one of the most beautiful bridges ever built in Crete.

The wax museum at Zoniana offers visitors an imaginable tour through the history of Crete from the Cretan renaissance and El Greco to the fight for freedom and Eleftherios Venizelos.

For those who love walking in the mountain we recommend climbing to the peak of Psiloritis. A mountaineering shelter is under construction above the village of Livadia, where visitors can go by car and then reach the peak of the



mountain, following the path which has been recently originated by the municipality of Kouloukonas. As far as walking excursions are concerned, it is worth visiting the gorge of Moussai and the one whose boundaries are determined by the villages of Avdanites, Damavolos and Agios Sillas.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS ALL YEAR THROUGH

The area of Pano Mylopotamos with its numerous villages is a living core of the Cretan tradition. The residents have learnt to live in this wild landscape, cultivate the land with its astonishing alterations ranging from the peace of Geropotamos watermills flowing in the plain to the wildness of gorges and the bare landscape of Psiloritis.

The residents of mountainous Mylopotamos know how to enjoy life as a gift of God and sing and create "mantinades" on every chance they are given. Life's grace is deeply rooted in their marrow when they milk their flocks, drink another shot of tsikoudia at the coffee shop or dance at an improvised



fete to the sound of the lyre and lute. Dance and music play a central role in the social life of people, especially in the villages of the mountainous zone (Livadia, Zoniana, Kalyvos, Axos, Garazo, Apladiana etc). Fetes and dances are always very promising and they preserve tradition. Summer weddings, taking place at the village square with the participation of all the residents and the perseverance of old customs, have a unique character, especially at Livadia, Zoniana, Apladiana, Agia.

The upper and middle area of Mylopotamos administratively belongs to the



municipality of Kouloukonas and the community of Zoniana. During the summer, many fetes and theatrical performances are organized for the "Talea" festival in the municipality of Kouloukonas. The community of Zoniana also organizes remarkable cultural activities. Undoubtedly, the "Citrus Fete at Garazo" has become an essential event of this area in recent years. On 15 August every

year, this fete includes many events, exhibitions, speeches etc. The cherry fete at Veni in June and the Sissanos in August are also well-known fetes.

Faithful to the historical memories, the people of two municipalities of the area, the ones of Kouloukonas and Geropotamos hold memorial events on 5 September every year at the Gournolakos site near Livadia, where 32 residents of Mylopotamos, members of the national resistance movement, were executed.

Religious fairs are observed with devoutness the whole year through and offer unique experiences to visitors. We suggestively mention some of them that are really worth a visit, such as the ones at Agia Kiriaki on 7 July, Agios Athanasios Patelaros at Axos on 21 August, Agia Theodora at Episkopi on 11 September, Evangelismos Theotokou at Faratsi on 25 March, Agia Marina at Livadia on 17 July etc. A great number of visitors go up to the peak of Psiloritis on 14 September (Timios Stavros fete) keeping to an annual sacred agreement of prayer.

A climbing also takes places in Kouloukonas Mountain on the same day. Believers attend mass at the little stone-built church at the peak of the mountain, which is a meeting place for the hundreds of residents of this area who go

there on the previous day and spend the night there. Those who take part in the mass experience the unity with God and nature, at the peak of the mountain, with a view on Psiloritis and the whole plain of Mylopotamos.

A big fair has been taking place on 14 September for some years now at the monastery of Vossakos, as well.

In the neighborhoods of mountainous Mylopotamos villages on the Holy Saturday night they burn Judas. At Garazo, custom is combined with the roasting of lamb in a particular way called "antikristo". Residents put big pieces of lamb on the spit and place them circularly with a fire burning in the middle. A plethora of people flock to the area on this occasion.

St. George's fair at the monastery of Diskouri is the Easter fete of stock-breeders. Dozens of them bring their stock as an offer to the monastery's altar, with respect to the saint's icon and the sacred vow of honor, according to tradition, to support their innocence in case of cattle-stealing.



TOURISTIC INFRASTRUCTURES

In the inner and upper area of Mylopotamos tourist facilities can host many visitors. There are many agrotourist units, guest houses and rented apartments which accept visitors the whole year through. There are many options to choose from for a quick escape or a delicious meal. At Drosia village, beneath the sycamore trees of dozens taverns, there is pork traditionally roast on the spit for those who love this kind of food. In many villages you will find taverns serving delicious meals, cooked according to local recipes. For a cup of coffee, a little chattering with the locals and a shot of tsikoudia leave everything to luck. You will find more than you need in all village coffee shops and the frequenters you will meet there will have their way to welcome you and make you feel at home wherever you are.

WHAT TO BUY BEFORE LEAVING

All kinds of cheese in this area are of exceptional quality (fresh or dry cheese called “mizithra” or “kefalograviera”) and you can find them in stockbreeding units, cheese dairies and butcher’s shops. Also, visitors can find cherries at Veni or grapes at Aloides, when these kinds of fruit grow, as well as barley rusks, broidered rusks and desserts at the village bakeries. At Axos, where the art of weaving still blossoms, you can choose among beautiful weavings. In bigger villages, there are also small shops selling folk art items, in which you will find many options for gifts from Mylopotamos. In local convenience stores you can buy olive oil, honey, wine and tsikoudia.

Useful telephone numbers	
Municipality of Kouloukonas	28340 40102
“Land of Psiloritis” Network	28340 31008
Citizen Service Centre (KEP) of Kouloukonas	28340 20305
Anogia Health Centre	28340 31208
Perama Health Centre	28340 23074
Garazos Community Clinic	28340 41216
Livadia Community Clinic	28340 61398
Drosia Community Clinic	28340 71203
Garazos Post Office	28340 41220
Anogia Pharmacy	28340 31232
Perama Pharmacies	28340 22701 28340 22990 28340 22550
Mountaineering Association of Rethymno	28310 57766
Psiloritis National Park	28340 31606

NEAR THE AREA

The region of Kouloukonas spreads between the mountain and the sea, which makes it ideal for great escapes both to Anogia, a place of culture and tradition, and to the plain of Mylopotamos and the north coast of the island.







MARGARITES

On the northwest side of Psiloritis, 25 km far from Rethymno, you can find historical Margarites, built between two glens with wild vegetation, where olives, locust trees and cypresses prevail. Their geographical position is an advantage, with a view of the Cretan Sea, near the north coast of Crete (15 km) and with easy access to the national road and urban centers.

The first attested residence goes back to the late Minoan era of 1450 BC. In



ancient years this region was in the sphere of influence of Eleftherna. Even during the early years of the Venetian occupation this region bustled with life. In 1332 it was the revolutionary centre of Kallergis and Prikosiridis against the Venetians. Immediately after the suppression of the revolutionary movement, the village was utterly destroyed and reconstructed from the beginning. At that time, marvelous churches, towers and mansions were built. After the Turkish invasion, villagers were compelled to pay taxes to Ahmet Pasha Kioprouli, conqueror of Handakas. In the seventeenth century, the village was the patriarchal exarchate of the people of Margarites, which means that its

church belonged directly to the Patriarch of Constantinople. At the end of the Greek Revolution in 1829-30, here was the seat of the Council of the Revolution. It was from here that the anguished letters of the revolutionaries were sent to the Great Powers, calling them to see to the Cretan issue in a favorable way. Gavriil Marinakis, abbot of the monastery of Arkadi, was born here during the 1866 great rebellion and holocaust. However, Margarites is internationally known for their pottery which has been practiced unflinching since ancient times to recent years. Today pottery blossoms in the village workshops, where younger potters create both practical and decorative objects. The village is a centre of attraction for hundreds of visitors thanks both to pottery and the wall-painted churches, stone-built dwellings, picturesque narrow streets and the wonderful nature surrounding them. The monastery of Sotiras Christos, built on a hill where the village starts, looms with its gardens and its wonderful view of the village. Dozens of fetes take place at Margarites every year, the most important of which are the “Magarika”, an international pottery festival and “BOUDALIA”, a play attended by a great number of young people. Many taverns and guest houses have been made available in recent years to welcome visitors.



A TOUR OF IMPORTANT SETTLEMENTS - ROUTES

At lower Mylopotamos, at the foot of Psiloritis, hundreds of villages bustle with life and give a dynamic sense to the present. People are occupied with farming, stockbreeding, handicraft and tourism. Setting off from Margarites, we recommend you some routes to get to know the rich environment, local history, important monuments and unique architecture of the villages of the wider area.

Eleftherna - Monastery of Arkadi - Viran Episkopi - Skordilo - Lagka

A short excursion to the stone-built villages surrounding Margarites among the virgin gorges and cultivable land recompenses the visitor. In the south of Margarites the road passes near the ancient town of Eleftherna and ends up to the historical monastery of Arkadi. From here we can head either to the road which goes south to the villages of Amari and Pano Riza or take the same road back to the left through the picturesque villages of Roupes, Skaloufia, Erfoi and arrive to Viran Episkopi with the early Christian basilica and the church of Agios Dimitrios. Taking the national road to Heraklio we go to “Chani tou





Alexandrou". If we take the direction on the right we head to Alfa, a village with a long tradition in the handling of the alfopetra stone. The great lyrist Kostas Mantakis was born here. The tradition he left behind still remains alive. At nearby Skordilo, visitors can see the 19th century Mutual Teaching School. The road continues to Lagka, a well-retained traditional village with friendly people, the church of Panagia Lagkani and the small folklore collection exhibited in the old school of the village. We take the road back through the little villages of Ano Tripodo and Kinigiana.



Aggeliana - Perama - Melidoni - Melidoni Cave - Panormo - Bali

Taking the local road which leads to Perama, at the 5th km we head to Aggeliana, one of the biggest villages of the area whose residents are intensively occupied with growing fruits and vegetables. Following the same road we go back to the national road and head left to Perama. Because of its position on the old road to Perama, this village has developed into a little town. Today, this is the capital of the municipality of Geropotamos and has considerable infrastructure, commercial centers, banks, a health centre, pharmacies and many public services. The old iron bridge, constructed in the early 20th century is quite interesting. From the old bridge of Perama we go on to Melidoni, a big village hidden in a basin which is also the historical capital of the municipality of Geropotamos. Stone-built mansions, the old school and the church of Agios Georgios add to the beauty of this village. Passing the picturesque square we take the snakelike road up to Gerontospilios Cave, which lies at a panoramic spot and has a view of lower Mylopotamos and the peak of Psiloritis. This cave is 300 square meters big and is one of the most beautiful caves in Crete. In ancient years it was used as a place of worship for Taleos Ermis. The archaeological authority organizes excavations that constantly bring important findings

to light. Numerous pilgrims in ancient years and modern travelers have left their handprints on its walls, covered with epigraphs and inscriptions that make up the cave's guestbook. The sacrifice of 400 revolutionaries, women and children took place here in 1822. The cave is open to visitors.

Panormo or Kasteli of Mylopotamos used to be the capital of this province from the years of the Venetian occupation until the years of the Cretan autonomy. It is built at a moorage and its mansions are a sample of life in the past. Agios Agathopoulos, one of the Ten Martyrs, descends from this place. The early Christian basilica of Agia Sophia is an important monument. Panormo has many hotels and tourist facilities and in the summer welcomes thousands of visitors enjoying its beautiful beaches, a stroll along the picturesque harbor and the delicious cuisine of its taverns. Taking the national road to Heraklio we find Bali at a 10 km distance. Bali -the ancient Astali- is a fishing village built between scenic moorages and sandy beaches, which has developed into a resort, well known to Greek and foreign visitors. Above the village there is the monastery of Al-Giannis Vaptistis, the famous monastery of atali with the RENAISSANCE spring, the katholikon and the wall painted altar. On the national road to Heraklio there is a church where believers worship Panagia Harakiani.



Orthes - Kalamas - Melissourgaki - Houmeri - Agios Mamas

In the south of Margarites, after passing the old pottery workshops and the village of Pigounania, we head to Orthes, dominated by the Agios Fanourios campanile. On the same road we come across the picturesque villages of Kalantare, Melissourgaki, Kalamas and Passalites with their interesting architecture and beautiful churches. On the left side of the road we can admire the lush green gorge of Kalantare. At the end of the road we head to Houmeri, the site of a Minoan dorp where important burial monuments and byzantine



churches are saved. Going on in the direction of Krasouna, Avdela and Agios Mamas, the landscape changes to the typical wilderness of mountainous Psiloritis. Agios Mamas is the protector of stockbreeders, too. We go down to the traditional village of Kastri and arrive at Agios Silas. Taking the old national road we can go left to go back to Perama or follow the road in the direction of Heraklio, drive through all the mountainous villages of Mylopotamos and arrive at Anogia.

WORTH VISITING (A journey in nature)

The mountaintops of Psiloritis, both at the plains and at the mountainous regions, are a geological treasure. The intense forces that have formed the mountains are revealed through the impressive corrugations in the layers of limestone rocks. At the plains the yellowish marly limestone rock, often full of spectacular sea fossils, is a constructive material used in traditional villages. We suggestively recommend you a short trip to the gorges among Eleftherna, Margarites and Orthes villages, in which you can see a great variety of plants



of the Cretan flora, such as the cypresses with horizontal branches that dominate the scene. We follow the E4 international path from Margarites and cross the gorge to the village of Kato Tripodo on the other side and then to the Hellenistic bridge of Eleftherna. On the way we see roman tombs curved on the rock, many of which have been turned into country churches. Gerontospilios at Melidoni has three levels. The big area with the stalagmitic interior and the war memorial is open to visitors. For speleology lovers, there are still some wonderful caves, such as Mougkri near the monastery of Vossakos or Fantakospiliara at Prinos, which, however, are not easily accessible and an experi-



enced driver, special training and speleological equipment are required to visit these places.

The routes from the plains to the sea are impressive during the summer because of their vegetation, with their bloomy oleanders which are self-sown in coombs or planted on the side of the road. As we go close to Arkadi, clusters of oak and sycamore trees appear.

In September, sea daffodils bloom in the river mouth of Geropotamos and the beaches of Skaleta and Stavromenos, while an important number of Caretta-Caretta turtles come to these sandy beaches and leave their eggs. As far as fauna is concerned, the north glacis of Psiloritis fade away slowly towards the



Cretan Sea and are used as feeding grounds, where eagles and vultures often appear. These raptors live in the more mountainous regions of the area but come here in search of prey (usually dead sheep). The fauna of the rest of the vertebrates is also extremely interesting. In this region we will come across all three species of Cretan amphibians: the pseudepidalea viridis, the hyla arborea and the rana cretensis, all species of Cretan reptiles, slowworms, lizards and the four species of snakes that live on this island (all of which are harmless to people), as well as most of Crete's mammals.

A JOURNEY TO THE MYTH AND HISTORY

Archeology

During ancient years, between the villages of Eleftherna and Ancient Eleftherna, the town of Eleftherna was developed and has been continually inhabited since the prehistoric years. It is considered to be the birthplace of Amitoras, the famous guitarist of ancient years. Beneath the acropolis, the gigantic reservoirs, carved in the rock, inspire awe to visitors. For many years, the University of Crete, Department of Archaeology has been carrying out systematic excava-



tions in the ancient town. A cemetery dating back to the archaic and geometrical eras has come to light. Archaeological findings have richened our knowledge about burial customs during the early years of Greek history. At Katsivelos site, a Hellenistic sanctuary has been discovered, as well as a building block of public buildings, baths and a three-aisle early Christian basilica with marvellous mosaics dating back to the 5th century.

Archaeological sites have been unified thus forming the archaeological park of Eleftherna and enable visitors to witness the historical evolution of this area from archaic years to late antiquity. In the region of Grivila, between Perama and Ahlades, there is a Minoan dorp. Near Perama Health Centre, the late Minoan tomb of the Margarites residents is saved. A road downhill leads to the round compartment of the tomb. Archaeological findings of this area (Eleftherna, Aggeliana, Houmeri, Melidoni, etc) are kept and exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Rethymno.



Monasteries

The monastery of Atali at Bali was built in the 7th century and is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The embossed entrance of the katholikon is very impressive. Important wall paintings were found at the katholikon and the altar. The monastery played an important role in the Cretans' fights for freedom.

The 17th century monastery of Metamorfofi Sotiros - Agios Gedeon also lies on a hill opposite Margarites. It is a glebe of the monastery of Karakallos, with a small katholikon and stone-built dwellings around, some of which have been recently erected or built, with gardens and songbirds adding to the beauty of this area.

Churches

At Margarites you can find byzantine and post-byzantine churches. The wall painted church of Agios Ioannis Theologos with its stone-made temple, prayer representation and dedicatory inscription dating back to 1383, stands out. The church of Agios Ioannis Vaptistis is also saved. At Ancient Eleftherna and the road leading to the archaeological site, visitors can admire the church of



Sotiras Christos (12th cen.) with its free-cross style and dome. The early Christian basilica and church of Agios Dimitrios at Viran Episkopi and the church of Agios Ioannis and Zoodohos Pigi at Erfoi and Prinios respectively, are also very interesting. At Kalamas, you can find the cross-in-square church of Agios Georgios with its dome (12th cen.). The church of Panagia at Houmeri is remarkable for its architecture. At Ahlades, the post-byzantine two-aisled church of Agia Paraskevi looms on the hill above the plain of Ahlades. At Agios Mamas, there is the wall painted church of Agia Irini with its cemetery. At Kastri, the wall painted church of Agios Stefanos (14th cen.) is still saved.





CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS ALL YEAR THROUGH

The lively hinterland of lower Mylopotamos preserves all Cretan morals and customs. Religious fairs and all kinds of popular gatherings is where residents meet with visitors who pleasurably accept the Cretan hospitality. Every summer, the municipality of Geropotamos along with cultural authorities organize the “Cultural Gathering”, while in the municipality of Arkadi the “In squares and yards” festival offers a variety of celebrations in each village. The “Municipality of Geropotamos Theatre Workshop” and its young members have been



giving wonderful performances for the last 5 years. At Margarites the theatrical festival BOUDALIA is held every late August for 12 years with the participation of young people living in the wider area. In the same village, the “Magarika” international festival, which is dedicated to pottery, attracts potters from all over the world. Many cultural authorities and associations organize celebrations of a cultural, educational and folklore content the whole year through. Also, some of the cultural companies who run their business in this area organize premium celebrations, concerts and conferences.

Religious fairs take place the whole year through. At the beginning of the year, don't miss the fair of Agios Vasileios at Plevriana. If you happen to attend the Ipapanti fete at Lagka on 2 February, the locals will offer to put you up. On the Sunday of the carnival period, a carnival takes place at Perama and on Clean Monday the folk event called "Kidnapping the bride" is held at Melidoni in the sight of hundreds of visitors. The Holy Passion is celebrated by decorating the Epitaph in the churches early in the morning and walking it around the village narrow streets in a ritualistic way on Holy Friday. Judas is burnt in squares and neighbourhoods every Holy Saturday. In the

afternoon of Easter Sunday, don't miss the Evening Prayer of Love at the monastery of Atali at Bali where the Gospel is read in many languages before eggs and fruits are blessed. The Battle of Crete is celebrated on 21 May with formal celebrations in the whole Prefecture of Rethymno and especially with a memorial celebration at the war memorial at Latzima site near Prinos, where German parachutists fell and battles took place after the German invasion in Crete. On 24 June, during the Klidonas fete, locals celebrate the summer solstice in the neighbourhoods with mantinades and evening parties where young people jump over a fire. On 20 July, the name day of prophet Ilias, there is a fair at Ancient Eleftherna and on the next Sunday every year people walk to the country church of Ai Giorgis at Aravanes, on the glaxis of Psiloritis and attend mass. The fair of Koimisis Theotokou on 15 August at Harakas attracts many people who walk around with the Sacred Icon and attend the evening prayer and the Encomium of Theotokos. At Margarites on 15 August there is a big Cretan fete at the village square. On Agios Fanourios day (27 August) at Orthes a traditional dance takes place in the church precinct. Out of Ahlades, in the country church of Agios Fanourios many people go to pray and hang their dedicative items on the sacred tree at the place



where the icon was found. On Agios Mamas day (2 September) the village of Agios Mamas celebrates with a fete and Cretan mantinades competition to honor the protector of stockbreeders. On 5 September at Gournolakas site, the municipalities of Geropotamos and Kouloukonas organize together a commemoration for people who died in the war. On 30 December the memory of Gedeon Karakallinos is honored at Margarites.



TOURISTIC INFRASTRUCTURES

In the wider area of lower Mylopotamos you can choose between staying at the tourist infrastructure of the coastal zone, the rented apartments in the hinterland, the agrotourist units in the country or the luxurious villas and guest houses found in many of the area’s villages.

Gastronomically, the area of lower Mylopotamos offers a variety of experiences. You can enjoy Cretan tastes made of pure materials of the Mylopotamian land. In every village you can sip your coffee or a hot beverage made of herbs, accompanied by “kallitsounia” with thyme honey in the shade of a mulberry tree in one of the little coffee shops scattered in the hinterland. Visit Panormo or Bali for fresh fish with a view of the sea or one of the many taverns which are scattered in the nearby villages and offer traditional dainties.

Useful telephone numbers	
Municipality of Geropotamos	28340 22650
Geropotamos Citizen Service Centre (KEP)	28340 23345
Municipality of Arkadi	28310 72731
Arkadi Citizen Service Centre (KEP)	28310 73960
Perama Health Centre	28343 40000
Perama Police Station	28340 22349
Perama Post Office	28340 22218
Panormo Post Office	28340 51249
Pancretan Corporate Bank	28340 20700
Agrotiki Bank	28340 22511
Perama Pharmacies	28340 22701 28340 22990 28340 22550
Panormo Pharmacy	28340 51115
“Land of Psiloritis” Network	28340 31008
Mountaineering Association of Rethymno	28310 57766
Psiloritis National Park	28340 31606

WHAT TO BUY BEFORE LEAVING

A visit to lower Mylopotamos certainly offers many and various experiences to visitors. We recommend you to buy many useful souvenirs from this region, such as ceramics made in a modern or traditional fashion by the potters of Margarites. In many villages there are shops selling folk art items where you can find interesting ideas for your gifts.

In this mainly oil-producing and stockbreeding area, you can buy standardized



pure olive oil with the protective destination of origin “Kato Mylopotamos”, meat (mainly goat or sheep meat) produced locally, standardized pork “apakia” (smoked meat) and sausages, Cretan gruyere and other cheese products from cheese-dairy and butchers’ shops at Perama and the biggest villages of the area. You can also buy wine, tsikoudia, honey, confectionary and bakery products, and summer fruits and vegetables at Panormo, as well as season fruits and vegetables.



NEAR THE AREA

The monastery of Arkadi is a live monument of religious life. The katholikon honors the Transfiguration of the Saviour and Agios Konstantinos. It is a combination of the renaissance style with baroque and gothic elements. During the Cretan renaissance this was a centre for the copying of manuscripts and the art of filigree. At the end of the 1866 revolution, armed revolutionaries, women and children prefer to die rather than surrender. Ever since, Arkadi has been a symbol for self-sacrifice. In the museum of the monastery, visitors can admire pictures of Cretan art, sacred vessels and canonicals, as well as reminders of the holocaust that took place in the monastery in November 1866. At the village of Amnatos in the municipality of Arkadi you can visit the School Museum. Also, the Olive Museum at Kapsaliana and the sea life environmental station at Pagkalohori are open to visitors after contacting ARHELON association (2831072288).

