

Study Trip Report:
Study Trip 5: Day 1 - Monasteries and Akrotori crafts village, Day 2
Samaris Gorge

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Visit 1 – Xrispogis Monastery, interview with nuns

The nuns described when the monastery was founded and dedicated to Mother of God, (1560), and its history was described as it was burnt by the Turks and then the church rebuilt with two further chapels and a porch. The monastery had a great influence with a famous library, but in 2nd World War the Germans expelled the monks and then by 1976 the monastery was in ruins. The nuns renovated the monastery and now work to cultivate the 130 ha land, and to curate the paintings rescued from being burnt, and they practice restoring and painting icons, embroidery, and restoring books. There are now 20 nuns. Spring of life is important in their iconography.



We had the impression they see their role as in keeping the traditions maintained relating to their religious beliefs, and they see this as continuing God's work. They sell some of their crafts (soap) and produce (mandarins and olive oil) as something incidental rather than to survive. They appeared to be fairly self-sufficient. At the same time they are quite modern in outlook and well educated, and interested and knowledgeable about their icon/art history. They see a role in education as they take school groups from more urban areas around their cultivated areas and landscape, as they perceive that children are getting to be out of touch with 'nature' and with rural activities and cultivation – where food comes from. All their products are organic.

We felt very welcome and were very happy to make this visit.

Visit 2 – Arts and Crafts Village Akritori, interview with potter

A group of artists and craftspeople had the idea to make this group 25 years ago, and the centre was built 10 years ago. They make ceramics, silver, gold work, etc, etc. The group have made the buildings from modern materials, rather than the traditional materials they had hoped because they did not have the money. They received a grant for funding but not enough to realize their aims. They do not have enough sign posts or parking, and need a café and reception area – problems which they recognize. They have too many cats, and some buildings are empty – a general feeling of not being very welcome, or the place being quite derelict. Their inspirations are quite modern, and although they draw on ancient themes to some extent, we felt they could make more of their Cretan history to appeal to their market.



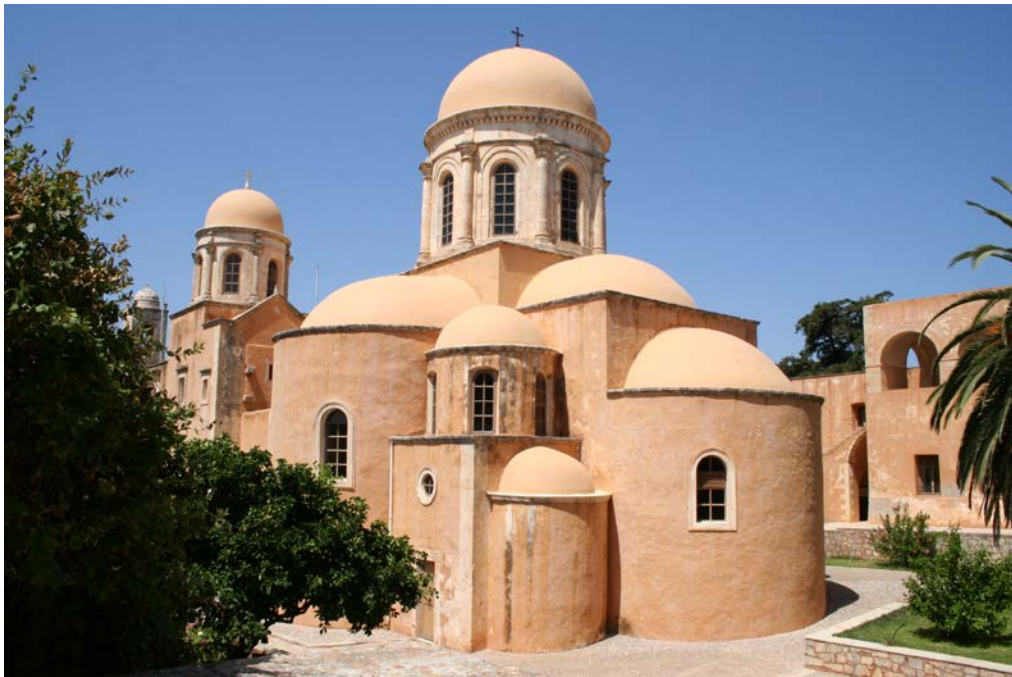
We feel that they should be better funded and supported to be able to focus on their craft and product, rather than the marketing and the upkeep of the buildings which someone else could then do. Perhaps they could use some more young people's input. The local society and regional authority need to take more interest in this facility, and decide whether or how they value it. The idea that the items are too expensive – was expressed by the artists, and some of

the group. However, if the tourists and Cretans are persuaded or reminded that quality and home-produced craft are important, and standards are maintained others of the group thought that people should be prepared to pay the prices.

Visit 3 – Aghia Triada Tzagkarolon Monastery, interview with Mr Vlavgilakis

Holy Trinity built in 1612. Burnt by Turks in 1821.....

At this monastery there are only 4 monks; they used to have school at the monastery but it had been moved away and the premises within the monastery may be used for a conference facility or similar function in future. They seemed to have same thoughts as the nunnery in wanting a role in today's society, but seem to be more outward-reaching in terms of use of land to grow olive and grapes, and in their production of olive oil and wine. An important role in their view was employment of local people of which they employed more than 15.



We did not see or speak to the monks themselves who actually run or own the place, but a manager who was an economist. The monastery is used also for masses and functions in local society, as well as attracting many tourists. The mix of religious and economic activities left some of the group uneasy.... While others think that this has always been a role of the monastery in introducing new approaches for instance to architecture, arts and agriculture



Samari Gorge Visit

Interview local people at Omolus village – a very poor region, before 2nd WW they were agriculturalists, and now they rely on tourism but it is not enough to sustain them or to ensure they can inhabit the region throughout the year. Through the recent past some of the villagers had been for e.g to Germany to work and then returned – they also spoke of loss of young people who leave to work and be educated elsewhere, the local people wanted government encouragement and funding to enable them to inhabit the area all round.



The gorge is very busy during the short tourist season, and when we arrived the tourist buses were all arriving for the daily walk of this natural attraction. We feel that there is not enough information about the gorge in terms of the type and length of walk – i.e. that it is very long, very hot, and that maybe not suitable to walk a short distance and then return as the slopes are very steep!



The gorge is designated as a National Park. There is a notice written by the Forest Directorate of Chania, positioned at a view point near the beginning of the walk, which expresses their philosophy on landscape. To them, Landscape forms the whole, covering both natural and cultural aspects, formed of a relationship between people, animals and nature through time –to quote “The separation between the natural and cultural landscape is almost impossible..”





Donald's poem (or limerick to give its proper title):

*There was an old monk from Triada
Who insisted on wearing pyjamas
When the nuns came to stay
He was then heard to say
I won't bother with all that palaver*

