



GODDESS PILGRIMAGE TO THE SACRED CAVES, HOLY MOUNTAINS,

SETTLEMENTS, AND RITUAL CENTERS OF MINOAN CRETE

And their feet move
Rhythmically, as tender
feet of Cretan girls
danced once around an
altar of love, crushing
a circle in the soft
smooth flowering grass

--Sappho, trans. Mary Barnard

. . .while I drew my sharp sword from beside my thigh, and dug a pit of a cubit's length this way and that, and around it poured a libation to all the dead, first with milk and honey, thereafter with sweet wine, and in the third place with water. . .

--Homer, no doubt reporting customs that (except for the use of the sword) were ancient in his time

Thurs. June 1--Arrive Athens; change money (rec.min.\$350-400); clear customs; transfer bags to OA flight for Heraklion; lunch or snack at Olympic catering across the street; arrive Heraklion; transfer to hotel; meet at 7:30pm in hotel lobby for welcome and introductions; about 8:30pm walk with group to dinner; overnight in Heraklion

Fri. June 2--Breakfast in hotel; meet in hotel lobby at 10:00am to walk together to Heraklion Archaeological Museum, lunch and shopping in Heraklion, meet in lobby of hotel at 2:45pm to meet bus to go to Knossos Palace (first palace built c2000bce, current palace recreated by Evans on "New Palace" foundations 1700-1380bce); meet for storytelling at 7:30 pm; evening free in Heraklion (see Kofou, 92-107; 126-137)

Rituals: We will create a simple ritual at Knossos; in Heraklion please stock up on milk, honey, wine, and water (in reclosable containers) for libations during the trip--you will not be able to replenish supplies until we get to Amnissos on Tuesday night.

Sat. June 3--Breakfast in hotel: meet in lobby with bags packed at 9:30 am; visit Paliani Convent (known as "old" in 668ce, rebuilt after Turkish destruction in 1821) with its Sacred Myrtle Tree (said to be over 1000 years old), its worship a probable survival of Minoan practices; continue to Zaros, a village in the Psiloritis Mountains, which has a working water mill, two tavernas with freshwater fish, and a gorge that burned in 1994; lunch in Zaros; afternoon free to rest, swim in the hotel pool, gaze at the sacred mountains (home to both the Kamares and Idean caves), visit the monastery of Agios Nikolaos (c200m up the hill, starting from the lake, north aisle has 14thc frescos, note the birth of the Virgin), hike up to the church above the lake, or take less strenuous walks on the dirt farm roads to the right and left of the lake; evening free in Zaros (see Kofou, 144-6)
Rituals: Paliani is a very mystical place: small offerings, ribbons, etc. may be tied to the tree with prayers; candles lit in the church; we will quietly create a circle around the tree (but we must be sensitive to the feelings of the nuns, who are Orthodox Christians)

Sun. June 4--Leave at 9:30am to visit Phaistos Palace (first palace c1900bce; second palace c1700bce accounts for most of extant remains); visit Agia Triada villa or settlement (c1600-1450bce); visit the Museum of Cretan Ethnology in Vori (suggestive of Minoan life); stop for swim or return to Zaros for lunch; meet for storytelling at 7:30pm; evening free in Zaros (Kofu, 148-152)

Rituals: We will create a quiet ritual in the Neolithic house on the Phaistos site where we can pour libations--milk, honey, wine, and water

Mon. June 5--Free day in Zaros to rest, hike, walk to town, swim in pool; meet at 7pm in hotel bar area for storytelling followed by taverna dinner (the use of the taverna for music depends on our all eating there); evening of Cretan music beginning at about 9pm--plan to stay up late!

Tues. June 6--Meet in the hotel lobby at 9:30am with bags ready to leave Zaros (wear or bring "cave clothes"); visit the archaeological museum in Archanes and the peak shrine on Mount Juktas with its deep crevice where offerings were thrown down into the mountain; lunch in Skoteino; descend into the mysterious Skoteino (the name means Dark) cave with its four levels, site of worship from Minoan times up to the present day; overnight in Amnissos (Kofou, 140-3,168)

Rituals: At Mount Juktas we will pour out libations and throw offerings into the crevice (think about what you want to leave behind); in Skoteino, we will pour out libations and make offerings on the natural altar under the stalomite image of Britomartis on the second level of the cave; those who feel drawn may descend further to the fourth level for meditation in silence and complete darkness with the Goddess of the cave whose other name I discovered to be Skoteini (Dark)

Wed. June 7--Leave the hotel at 9:30am to visit the Eilithia cave in Amnisos and to look at the Minoan villa in Nerou Hani; continue on to the palace and tombs of Malia (first palace built c1900bce, second palace c1700-1450bce accounts for most of present remains; lunch on the way to the pottery-making village of Thrapsano; meet for storytelling at 7:30pm in hotel lobby; dinner and overnight in Amnisos (Kofou, 168-175)

Rituals: The Amnisos cave is sacred to Eilithia, Goddess of childbirth; we will pour out the traditional offerings of milk and honey, bring eggs from breakfast; we may quietly fill the sacred round kernos stone at Malia with all the fruits of the earth; purchase fruits and vegetables, if possible

Thurs. June 8--Meet in hotel lobby at 9:30am with bags packed; ascend into the mountains; stop to see the convent of Kera Kardiotissa with its unusual icon to the Virgin in Chains (frescoes in the chancel date to the 14thc bce); continue climbing towards the picturesque Lasithi plateau with its traditional windmills and twenty small villages; visit the Trapeza cave (used from the Neolithic period for burials and in the earliest Minoan periods as a sanctuary; perhaps abandoned in the Middle Minoan period c.1700, due to greater popularity of the Psychro cave); lunch in the village of Tzermiado; visit the Psychro cave (optional donkey ride)(traditionally known as one of the birthplaces of Cretan Zeus--along with the Idean cave--that was a cult place at least as early as c2200bce, with burials from earlier epochs--earliest offerings were pottery vessels for food and liquid offerings, after 1700bce double axes and weapons begin to appear; offerings were thrown into a small lake, as well as embedded in crevices); shopping, dinner, and overnight in Agios Nikolaos (Kofou 178-185)

Rituals: We will create a ritual in the intimate Trapeza cave

Fri. June 9--Meet in the lobby of the hotel at 9:30am with bags packed; visit the archaeological museum; leave from archaeological museum at 11:30am; drive to church of Panagia Kera (with stunning 14thc frescos of the life of the Virgin--the matrifocal subtext of Christianity); continue on to Gournia (a late Minoan town c1550-1400bce that gives a sense of ordinary life; stop for lunch and afternoon swim; dinner and overnight in Siteia (Kofou, 186-192, 194-199; 200-1)

Rituals: We will leave fruits and vegetables and other offerings on the kernos stone at Gournia; we may want to create a procession, dance

Sat. June 10--Meet in the hotel at 9:30am with bags packed; visit archaeological museum of Siteia; ride through the wild tropical landscape of Crete's eastern coast to the Ano Zakros from which we will walk (optional one and a half hour hike) down the river-cut gorge (where caves were used as tombs in the Early and Middle Minoan periods, c3000-1700bce) to the palace of Kato Zakros (Late Minoan c1550-1450bce); lunch and afternoon swim in Kato Zakros; drive to Mochlos for dinner and overnight (Kofou, 206-211, 216-9)

Rituals: the Kato Zakros site is public; no group ritual

Sun. June 11--Meet for check-in at 10:00 am in hotel garden: spend a quiet day in the fishing village of Mochlos with its small tavernas and stunning views of the archaeological site on a nearby island once attached to the land (traces of Early Minoan c3000-2300bce occupation, with most of the remains of the settlement being from Middle Minoan to Late Minoan I periods c2200-1450bce: on a calm day, the island is easily accessible to most swimmers: we may arrange a lecture by the archaeologist: meet for storytelling at 7:30pm: evening free (Kofou, 203)
Rituals: You are on your own today

Mon. June 12--Meet with packed bags at 9:30am: stop briefly in Ierapetra (if museum is open) to see the museum and the statue of Demeter: drive along the south coast of Crete and up into the mountains to Kato Symi where we will visit the stunning Minoan peak shrine with sacred spring that later became a temple of Aphrodite and Hermes of the Tree: lunch in Kato Symi: visit the hilltop settlement at Phournou Koriphi (c2500-2170bce: in the southwest corner is the shrine where the Myrtos Goddess was found: swim: stop (time allowing) to see the Early Minoan (2600-2200bce) settlement at Vasiliki: dinner and overnight in Heraklion (Kofou, 167,187,200)

Rituals: We will read Sappho as part of our ritual at Kato Symi (choose a poem): libations can be poured and offerings left at Myrtos: shop in Heraklion (if you haven't done so already) for a small gift to give away at the Idean cave

Tues. June 13--Meet in hotel lobby at 9:30am: visit the Minoan villas at Tylissos: drive and hike to the Idean cave, one of the so-called birthplaces of Cretan Zeus (where pottery and other offerings date from the Middle Minoan-Late Minoan I c1700-1440bce with many finds from the later Geometric period c750-650bce): lunch at the taverna in the Nida plain near the cave: coffee, folk museum, and shopping in Anogeia: dinner and overnight in Heraklion (Kofou, 156-9)

Weds. June 14--Meet in hotel lobby at 10:30am for good-bye ritual and give away: final visit to the museum: afternoon free for lunch and shopping: meet in front of the hotel at 6:00, to depart for the ferry: you will be assigned your cabin at the reception desk on the boat: dinner on the boat: arrive in Pireaus, the port of Athens at 6:00am

Thurs. June 15--Transfer to hotel in Plaka, Athens: breakfast at hotel: early morning visit to the National Museum: lunch in Plaka: afternoon visit to the Parthenon: shop: meet for final goodbyes at 7:30pm: walk to taverna in Plaka for farewell dinner

Fri. June 16--Arrive at airport for your return flight: or continue your travels in Greece: Kalo Taxidi! Have a good trip!