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Excursion to the necropolises of Armeni / Prefecture Rethymno

One of the biggest necropolises from late Minoan time (1390 – 1190 BC) can be visited in close vicinity to the village *Armeni*, approx 5 miles south of *Rethymno*. The Minoan grave field is one of the biggest cemeteries of this time and is located on a 4 ha large, covered with Walloon-oak's, hill. From *Rethymno* drive the main road into the south towards Agia Galini; the access to the grave field is right of the street, see the sign.

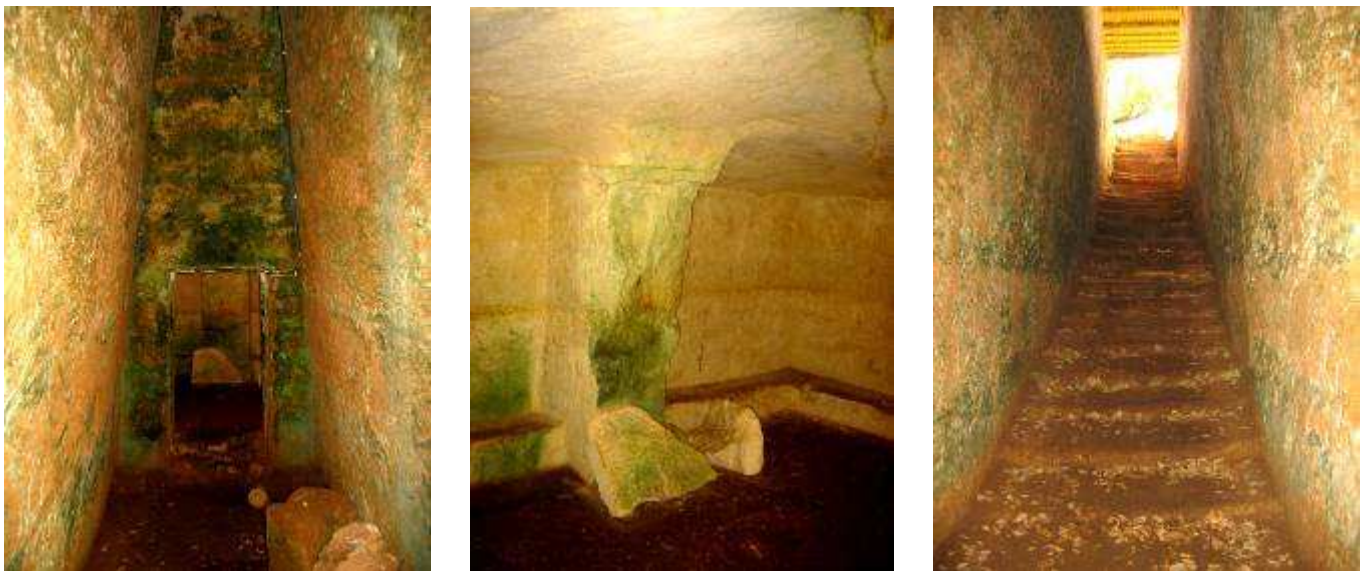


The appearance of the rock chamber tombs generally facing east is characterized by a corridor (drómos) which leads to an inherent sepulchre. Common to all is the lowered passage; the basic sepulchre, which once is rectangular, once semicircular hewn into the rock, was “secured” by a stone plate. The dead were buried in clay sarcophagi (and urns in the walls of the corridor) in the floor of the sepulchre. Bronze kettle, stone vases, jewellery and seals were found in the family graves. The clay coffins were painted with the Minoan axe, cult horns and ritual hunting scenes and thus are an important note on life in the post Palace time. The burial objects can visited in the archaeological museums in *Rethymno* and *Chania* but unfortunately not photographed.

Until today, about 280 burial chambers were discovered including a Tholos Tomb¹, whose chamber measures 4 x 4 m and where you can stand upright. A total of approx. 500 skeletons were found; the average age of burials is specified with 30 years for men and 23 years for women. Today it is still unclear to which settlement this over 3000 years old cemetery belong.



The pictures (left and right) show the lowered passage (sometimes with stairs, right) to the particular sepulchre, the stone cover plate were “sometimes” left on-site. The middle picture shows the inner part of a semicircular (cleared) sepulchre.



The picture left is showing the entrance, the picture right the exit of the Tholos tomb at Armeni. The middle picture is showing the approx 16 sq m sepulchre, where you can stand upright. **Pictures:** U. Kluge/H.Eikamp (2004)

¹ The Cretan burial traditions of early Minoan period (3rd Millennium BC) resembled those of Western European megalithic culture. Group burials were common in circular, Tholos tombs called burial places, whose large ceremony places in front of the entrances point out that burials were celebrated with a feast. K. BRANIGAN has demonstrated in a study that each facility served a family clan as Tomb. The family formed an important social unit in the Minoan culture and in many cases, two or three of such tombs directly border on each other. The Minoan communities generally consist only of a few members, even if the population of Knossos for example, at the end of the 3rd Millennium should have counted around 18,000 people.

The culture of the old Europe lived on the island of Crete some thousands of years longer than on the Mainland and came in the first half of the 2nd Millennium BC to heyday. L. WOOLEY described the Minoan culture as an "enchanted fairy tale world" and the "most perfect affirmation of the grace of life, the world has ever seen".



The picture shows a partial view of the graves hill with tombs directly bordered to each other. Tombs like the graves field of Armeni among to residential areas and are usually never far from these. The settlement belonging to this necropolis (still not excavated) should be about 700 m Northwest!

Pictures: U. Kluge (2004)

The picture below shows a *Larnax* with motives from Armeni.

