

# *A BRIEF HISTORY OF VRAHASSI*

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A Brief History of Vrahassi

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## Acknowledgements

My thanks for help in compiling information for this little booklet go to those kind people of Vrahassi who took the time to talk to me of their past, and to members of the local council for supplying census data, especially Papa Yiorgos, Dimitri Kiriakakis, and the late Manolis Ierapatriis.

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## **Introduction**

This booklet is specifically about Vrahassi, its people and its place in history.

I have gathered my facts from reliable sources and wherever possible have substantiated those facts with archive material. The tales of men often grow, and Cretan tales are no exception, but they do usually have a basis. Such statements as "The Turks never came to Vrahassi" do seem difficult to swallow but then again, when you have lived in Vrahassi as long as I have you will know that it would have taken a brave Turk to even think about coming here.

This is not a history book, neither is it in any way politically inclined. It is simply a picture of the village as it was and how it is today. It is meant as 'information' for those people who have come to live here and for those holiday makers who want to know a little bit more about the life of a traditional Cretan village.

I have raised a few questions and should anyone have any further information regarding the content of this book please don't hesitate to contact me.

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## **5700 - 2800 B.C.**

### **The Village in the Stone Age**

If you stand in the square in the center of Vrahassi and look to the mountain behind the village, you will be looking at Anavlohos. Yes, Anavlohos is a mountain. It stands 625m high (just under 2000 feet) and Vrahassi nestles nicely on its slope at 365m (just over 1000 feet). According to the Oxford dictionary 1000 feet is the requirement to qualify for the title 'mountain'. 'Braxos' (Vrackos) means 'rock' in the Greek language.

So, what went on, on the slopes of Anavlohos during the Stone Age? The oldest evidence of human habitation in Crete dates to this time but as yet the caves and surrounding area on the top of Anavlohos have not been systematically excavated. It is quite possible however that the caves were inhabited by Neolithic man. Vrahassi, of course, as we know it did not exist.

Neolithic houses were constructed of rough clay bricks, stone and wood. They were often built on a stone foundation and consisted of several rectangular rooms. Is it just coincidence that the very old Cretan houses in the village consist of rectangular rooms? Could this be a pointer to the inherited architecture of those first people?

**2600 - 1400 B.C.**

### **The Village during the Minoan Period**

There are plenty of good books about the great Minoan Civilization which suffice to say was all but wiped out in about 1450 B.C. The eruption of a volcano on Santorini is thought to have caused a tidal wave which destroyed the Minoan palaces around the coast of Crete. Some people did take to the hills. These people were called the Eteocretans (True Cretans) by Homer. They preserved the Minoan language for many centuries. At Dreros, just outside Neapolis, inscriptions have been found dating from the sixth to the third century b.c. so the Eteocretans could well have lived on Anavlohos. There is however no evidence of a village at this time.

**1400 - 1100 B.C.**

### **The Village during the Mycenaean Period**

Looking from the top of Anavlohos towards the sea one can see the once ancient city of Milatos. It is situated on the edge of a natural harbour. Homer, in Book 11 of the Iliad, mentions seven Cities which took part in the Trojan War: Knossos, Gortyn, Lyttos, Miletos, Lykastos, Phaistos and Rhytion.

Did the ancestors of Vrahassi watch from the summit of Anavlohos those eighty black ships sale away from Crete?

**1100 - 69 B.C.**

### **The Village during the Dorian Period**

Eighty years after the sack of Troy the Dorians from Northern Greece descended on the Mycenaeans like a ton of bricks and very soon took control of Crete.

We know that both the Mycenaean and the Dorian people were on Anavlohos because the evidence can be seen today. They built walls using huge boulders. These are known as Cyclopean walls and can be seen on top of the mountain. They date to the Geometric Period (1000 - 700 B.C.).

Well, 'what goes up' as they say, 'must come down', so presumably one or two Dorian people did settle and farm the lower slopes where Vrahassi is situated today.

What is in no doubt is the fact that a settlement did finally become established albeit in the form of a lowly farming community. It is important to note that in the valley opposite Vrahassi there was a village at Kosarianos which also has a 14<sup>th</sup> Century church. The church of Afendi Christos is a delight to visit. Nothing is left of

the houses and the graveyard bones were transferred to Vrahassi. I am told that at one time this community was bigger than the one at Vrahassi and existed first. From those early ancestors came generation after generation of people. Their defensive position, hidden from the sea, would certainly have been an advantage and look outs on the top of Anavlohos would have been able to give early warnings of the many raids that the Cretan people have had to endure.

## **69 B.C. - 1204 A.D.**

### **The Village under Roman Rule**

In **69 B.C.** the Romans invaded Crete. They controlled the island until the Roman Empire split in **395 A.D.** after which Crete was ruled from Byzantium. Roman rule or Byzantine Rule would have effected the indigenous population of Anavlohos very little. Maybe a hint of Italian blood was injected during this time.

There would have been a huge forest of Oak and Cedar on the hills and maybe some Cretan people were employed to cut down trees.

A man named Paul came to the island during the time of the Roman occupation, around **63A.D.** and left a man named Titus to carry on his work of converting the pagan communities to Christianity. This of course transformed the way people lived not only on Crete but throughout the known world.

The first Christian churches were probably built on the sites of earlier pagan worship. In Vrahassi the Church of St John is the earliest recorded church, around 1300. Close to fresh water springs in the area known as 'Platanos' this may well have been a former grove of Artemis or Apollo, as perhaps was the site of an 11<sup>th</sup> Century church were the monastery of St George (Vrahasiotis) stands today.

During the period **823 A.D. to 961 A.D.** there was one battle after another between the Arabs and the Byzantines. They would probably have raided those early temples and sacked the villages. Rape was not uncommon. It is possible therefore that Arab blood did mix with Cretan blood at that time.

In **961 A.D.** Nikepheros Phokas with thousands of men drove the Arabs from the island.

In **1204 A.D.** Constantinople fell to Bonaparte de Monserat who was the leader of the 12<sup>th</sup> Crusade and Crete was sold to the Venetians who ruled for the next 450 years or so. The Venetian people did come 'en masse' to settle on Crete. Their religion was Roman Catholic which is so very close to the Orthodox religion only with allegiance to the Pope. In **1340** a child was born in Neapolis (which at that time was a small village called Kares) obviously with Venetian connections. His name was Petros Philargos. From 1378 to 1381 he held the position of Professor of Greek at the University of Paris. In 1405 he became a Cardinal and in 1409 he became Pope Alexander V. He was only Pope for one year.

It is during this period that we have written evidence of the village of Vrahassi.

**1204 - 1669 A.D.**

### **The village during Venetian Rule**

In 1211 the island was divided by the Venetian authorities into six provinces called 'Sexteria'. Vrahassi would be in the 'Sexterio' of Agioi Apostoloi (St Apostoli, Cannaregio) which included the districts of Sitia, Ierapetra, Lasithi and Merabello, all of which today comprise the region of Lasithi.

The first Venetian settlers seized the property of the Church and of the leading families on Crete. This no doubt angered the locals and they began to retaliate. In 1211 the first recorded uprising broke out in the region of Lasithi. The rebels took control of the castles of Sitia and Merabello and then managed to take over the whole of the East of Crete. The revolt was eventually crushed. Vrahassi people no doubt were involved in this revolt.

Around about 1272 another struggle began, again in the East of Crete. The headquarters for this campaign was on the Lasithi plateau. This revolt was finally stamped out in 1278.

In or around 1300 a church was built in Vrahassi. It is the Church of Agios Ioannis Chrisostomas and it can be found in one of the oldest recorded parts of the village, the area known as 'Platanos'. It is mentioned in the **Register of Civil Order by El Santschi 1391**.

So we do know that at this time there were practicing Christians in Vrahassi. In the same area as the Church of Agios Ioannis Chrisostomas there are fresh water springs which are still in use today.

It is also worth mentioning that around 1303/4 there was a significant earthquake which damaged Heraklion and was therefore probably felt in Vrahassi.

Around about this time Crete was divided into four large regions. The province of Merabello and the Mountain plain of Lasithi came under the Region of Candia (Heraklion of today).

Towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century the Venetians destroyed monasteries that had acted as rebel enclaves in earlier revolts. Maybe the destruction of the early 1005 Monastery of Agios Yiorgos/Agios Dimitris which is situated in the hills opposite Vrahassi was due to the fact that those early rebels did base themselves there. It is on a mountain route between Vrahassi and Lasithi and was certainly used in later revolts as a safe haven for freedom fighters.

The Venetians were definitely angry with the people of Lasithi as in an attempt to control the rebellions they declared the Plain to be 'off limits' and to be inhabited by no-one. People were not even allowed to graze their flocks. The whole area of the Lasithi Plateau was to remain deserted for over a hundred years. Those people had to go somewhere and where more obvious than to their friends in the hamlets on the slopes of Anavlohos.

In 1508 the worst earthquake to hit Crete destroyed buildings in the area of

Heraklion to Sitia and south to Ierapetra. Thousands were killed. Did the stone houses of the village remain standing or did they have to be rebuilt?

The population of Crete fell drastically during the first three centuries of Venetian rule and the plague of **1523** reduced its people even further. Poor and hungry the rebellious Cretans of Vrahassi would have suffered terribly during this time having to eke a living from the land.

The village would have been self sufficient having livestock making cheese, growing vines. There was a degree of religious tolerance by the Venetians so Orthodox worship would have continued.

In **1577** there were 475 inhabitants of the Vrahassi area. That would have included homesteads that were dotted about the mountain and hillside: Kosarianos, Selinari, Sissi, Pigos, Agia Varvara, Karsinianos and others. There was little education and most villagers would have been illiterate.

During **1420-1620** huge tracts of land all over Crete were planted with olive trees. The Venetians increased exports of cheese, acorns (used for tanning), honey, wax and meat, all of which could have been produced by the people of Vrahassi.

We must also remember that one of the old routes from the west came through the Selinari Gorge, across the mountain side, through the village of Vrahassi and on towards the East (the main road up the mountain from Selinari did not exist until 1923). In those days the old mule track was the main route. It can be found by going up the hill past 'Platanos' Taverna, and on.

By the **17<sup>th</sup> Century**, Vrahassi must have been quite established, though nothing like the village of today. Its streets would have been crowded with people, goats and sheep and all the industry of a peasant village.

On **June 29, 1646** the Turks invaded Crete. They took Hania and Rethymnon. By December they had reached Candia (Heraklion) and landed at Merabello. The Venetians mobilized the Cretan population and clergy - was anyone called from Vrahassi? To no avail however as finally virtually all the countryside was in the hands of the Turks (Did the Turks come to Vrahassi?).

## **1669 - 1898 A.D.**

### **The Village during Ottoman Rule.**

Dark days followed the Turkish invasion. There was heavy taxation, poverty and hardships of every kind.

A pasha was appointed by the Sultan to control Heraklion. He also was controller of the eleven Eastern districts (four of which were in Lasithi). The Pasha organized the collection of revenue and organized a military force capable of maintaining internal and external security. There was a redistribution of land to Turkish officials, Military officials, Turkish citizens and Religious dependants. Some Christians did manage to hold on to their land after the Turkish distribution, however they were highly taxed. The Christian peasants cultivated all the land.

Vrahassi farmers therefore, if they did keep hold of their land, would have been

obliged to provide the Ottoman officials with all kinds of products such as olive oil, honey, cheese, raisins, lamb, sheepskins, straw, poultry and firewood. Presumably the tax collector did pass by Vrahassi, and presumably he did collect taxes from the farmers, however he may not necessarily have been Turkish himself. (The Turks never came to Vrahassi! Local opinion today claims that at this time Vrahassi was a Cretan stronghold and no Turk was allowed to come anywhere near, not even to collect taxes. The Turks, they say, used the road which came over from Lasithi through Krasi, past the monastery of St Geroge and on towards Vrisses and Neapolis).

So let us look at Vrahassi at the **beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**. Crete was in a period of cultural and intellectual darkness. There was no school in the village. Only the rich and privileged would have learned to read and write courtesy of the monks and nuns in the area. The population of approx. 500 were scattered around the hillside and the centre would have been a hamlet around the church of St John (Agios Ioannis). People would have risen with the sun and spent the day doing physical labour on the land; shepherds would have been on the mountain with their sheep, women would have been gathering snails, wild herbs and vegetables. Their day would have been spent continually finding food and cooking it. The place would have smelt of sweaty bodies, animals and dung, and always the shadow and terror of the Turks would have hung over the mountain.

**1823** – Hassan Pasha and his army ravaged the Lasithi area. 3,600 Christian souls were slaughtered whilst hiding out in a cave above Milatos.

**Vrahassi 1800 - 1900 A.D.**

**The inhabitants of the island of Crete, full of the noble and lofty spirit of freedom, took up arms against the Ottomans' tyranny on 14<sup>th</sup> June 18821..." Proclamation of the General Assembly.**

**1327** – Revolutionary forces decided to organize a campaign from the area of Merabello. They crushed the Turks at Kritsa and at Neapolis and they took control of Malia, Stalida, Mochos and Krasi before having to retreat. Some fled the island, others took to the mountains. Did this revolutionary force originate from Vrahassi?

At this time there was in Vrahassi a family who had fled Sfakia after the uprising of 1770. Their name was Michelakis but the people of Vrahassi renamed them Sfakianakis (the Sfakians). It is most likely that this family was involved in revolution. I shall explain why.

In the centre of Vrahassi there stands a statue of one Konstantinos Sfakianakis. The inscription reads:

**KONSTANTINOS SFAKIANAKIS**

**1824 - 1890**

**‘YOU LOOK ON THE SON OF VRAHASSIA FREEDOM FIGHTER TO WHOM WE GIVE OUR GRATITUDE. HE WAS GOVERNOR OF THE EAST OF CRETE DURING THE REVOLUTION OF 1866-78 BETWEEN THE CRETAN PEOPLE AND THE TURKISH INVADERS’**

**Built 1970**

The East of Crete consisted of 6 Provinces: Ierapetra, Sitia, Merabello, Lasithi Plateau, Viano (the area around Ierapetra) and Pethiados (the area around Malia, Chersonisos, Kastelli and Mohos).

As a boy Konstantinos Sfakianakis would have grown up with an inherent fear of the Turks, constant anarchy, hatred and a great will to rid his island of the barbarous invaders. He obviously came from a powerful family. He was not educated however but grew up to be a tough leader. In **1866** at the age of 42 he was appointed Governor of the East of Crete. In this position he was in charge of revolutionary forces, probably more of a ‘war lord’ than an administrator.

The son of Konstantinos Sfakianakis also rose to fame. By profession he was a doctor. In **1897 - 1898** he was appointed Chairman of the Executive Body of Crete. The job of the Executive Body of Crete was to draw up a Constitution for Crete. He was a friend and right hand man of Eleftherios Venizelos who became Prime Minister of Greece in **1910**.

And so we arrive at Vrahassi at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**1900 -2000 A.D.**

### **The Village of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Work was carried out to make the road from Selinari that is used today. It was completed round about **1923**.

In **1926** a new cemetery was created and remains from the old one transferred. This was obviously due to the rise in population, a sure sign that village life was improving and the political situation settling down.

In the census of **1928** it is recorded that there was a population of 1,508 people in the village (including homesteads in the surrounding area), 689 men and 819 women. During the years that followed there was a steady decline in population. The census of 1971 shows 804 inhabitants. During the fifties and sixties people left for America, Australia, Germany, and Britain, where they found a better standard of living and good education.

There were two schools in the village. One was for girls, the old school building can be found up the hill to the left of ‘Platanos’ Tavera. The building that was the boys’ school now houses a library and is used for local council meetings: it is tucked between the church of Agia Sophia and the bigger new school.

There were oxen pulling ploughs and the windmills were working to produce flour.

The church of Agios Ioannis and the Church of Agios Afendi Christos, both 14<sup>th</sup>

Century, were accompanied by the church of Agios Savas 1836, and Agia Triada 1837 (see 'Churches of Vrahassi'). Stone facades had been built around the two fresh water springs at Platanos, dated 1841 and 1887 respectively, plus another fountain dated 1861 which is situated on the road which leads to the cemetery.

**1936** – Work started on the building of the big church Agia Sophia Pnevmatos (The truth of the Holy Spirit). The fabric of the building was completed in 1956 and the interior was finished in 1969 (although not decorated). Decoration of the interior continues to this day.

**1941** – The Germans invaded Crete. That they never came to Vrahassi turns out to be another one of those 'stories'. So who dropped the bombs that fell on a couple of houses in the village? OK they were in the air above. Again Vrahassi was a center of resistance. The old Partisan Office for the East of Crete is now just a dilapidated old room in the back streets but during the German invasion this office was used by organizers of the resistance. The armoury was situated at the back of a house opposite the Church of St John, 'Platanos'. Some villagers say that the Germans were billeted in houses around the village, and that there was a house used as a telephone exchange, another as a doctor's surgery and yet another as a canteen. The more I speak to the locals the bigger the German presence was so I suggest those serious historians among you investigate this further and look for documentation to verify these stories.

**1950's** – Water was piped to the village but not to the houses. Around the streets it is possible to see some of these old taps usually with a stone support and base in which to stand a water pitcher.

Electricity came to the village although there had been a generator for the previous 50 years.

At this time Vrahassi was a bustling place. There were butchers, shoemakers, saddle makers, iron mongers, bakers, a variety of other craftsmen, scores of cafenea, a library, a Vet, a Doctor, a Police Station and a Council Office. The Police Station and other professional offices used to be where the central cafeneo is today, 'Plateia'.

Women sat at looms in their homes, weaving cloth. All around the village were Olive Presses and warehouses. Most families had a donkey if not two or three.

**1960's** – A new school was built for children age 6 – 11 yrs and at this time there were 180 pupils. From then on the number of pupils at the school declined. In **1976** there were 100 pupils, in **1985** only 40 and in 2002 only 9. The school has now closed down and all the children of the area attend the primary school in Sissi. The school building is now being used to house the Council offices.

**1970's** – A sewage system was installed. The National Highway was open and traffic passed through the Vrahassi Tunnel in 1973.

**1980's** – Water was piped to the houses and put on a meter.

**1990's** – By this time the population of the village and surrounding area had been reduced to less than 500 but the tide was about to turn. Tourism had steadily grown on the island since the sixties and by 1990 the small harbor at Sissi had become a small holiday resort. Europeans began to settle in the area. Cretans began to return to their homeland. Slowly the area began to thrive once more. Vrahassi unfortunately had been left to fall into ruin. Most of the shops had closed. There were no butchers, no bakers and no craftsmen trading in the village. Deserted looms lay abandoned, 4 x 4 trucks had replaced donkeys. Houses were derelict. There was, however, at this time a Post Office and a Council Office. (Both destined to disappear). All that was left was the agricultural community; a community that had remained throughout the ages.

## **2002 - 2007 A.D.**

### **The Village of today.**

As you stand in the center of the village and look up towards Anavlohos please take a moment to think of those hundreds of years that have passed, the pain and the sorrow, the hardship, the everyday survival of the families of Vrahassi, and through it all the simple joys of life; the sharing of bread, and the feasting: weddings, baptisms, the thread of Christianity that binds a community.

You can see for yourselves what modern day Vrahassi looks like with its many restored houses rising from the rubble of fallen down homes that continue to crumble year after year. The square with its tavernas and parking along the mountain edge, the brand new concrete houses that have appeared in contrast to the old stone built cottages, the neon street lighting, the growing plague of satellite dishes that sit on rooftops alongside solar panels. Yes we have computers but in many ways there is a time warp in the village that has not budged throughout the ages. You have to live here to know the place; the camaraderie of the cafeneo, the street vendors, the shepherds, the cuisine, the raki, the olive farming, the ringing of bells and Christian rituals that holds it all together.

We have a small grocery store, several places to eat and drink and a newly opened tourist office with Internet access and book exchange. The olive oil factory works throughout the winter pressing local olives to make Extra Virgin Oil as the main occupation of the villagers is olive farming.

Two Priests look after the spiritual needs of the village; conducting weddings, baptisms and funerals, blessing houses and businesses and administering to the sick.

A local council organizes social activities. There is also a thriving football club which also organizes a summer bash with live music, dancing and feasting.

Elderly residents are cared for by their families wherever possible or else live-in care is arranged.

A doctor holds a surgery once a week on a Friday morning.

## **DEMOS VRAXASIOU - Actually the Koinotoita (Council) of Vrahassi, Sissi and Milatos.**

When I first wrote this booklet in 2004 the entry read:

-This history would not be complete without mention of the current political situation in Vrahassi. In 1998 the local council office where water rates were paid, civil weddings were conducted, local records kept etc., was closed down by the Government.

There was immediate uproar. I am not going to go into detail about the six year struggle to have the Office re-instated (the truth is the Political ins and outs of it are far beyond me). Suffice to say that there have been road blocks, hunger strikes, mini-riots and sadly, even deaths connected with the continuing fight to retain control of the affairs of the area.

Pasok, (green) the labour party, is definitely out of favour because they did not act to help the cause. Now that the New Democrats, (Blue) the conservative party, are in power a hoped for solution is awaited. Meanwhile the debate goes on. A rising name in the village is that of Kostas Zouraris, who taught Classical Political Theory in the Department of Political Science at Paris University until 2001 when he retired -

**It is now 2008** and the long fought for Council has been re-instated. Of course there have been many celebrations, feasting and fireworks. **On Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2007** there was an official 'swearing in' of the new Council appropriately held at the Monastery of St George. It was attended by the Despotis of the Heraklion area and other officials.

The old Junior School is being utilized as new Council Offices and I am told that eventually the old Council Office in the center of Vrahassi will be refurbished to house the Mayor, Mr George Sfirakis.

Huge amounts of money are now available to be used by the new administration of Vrahassi, Sissi and Milatos and this should mean that improvements will be made in the area. Such things as making a tarmac road to the Monastery, providing a promenade at Sissi, car parking facilities in Vrahassi and a general improvement of the upkeep of the area, are all scheduled. A new rubbish truck has already been purchased and a better service for rubbish disposal has been implemented.

So, it is onwards and upwards for Vrahassi. The Archaeologists are busy excavating a major site on the top of Anavlohos and eventually this will be an attractive spot for tourists. We have come full circle then, from those early Neolithic people of Anavlohos to the Neo-Vrahassians of 2008: a blink in God's eye.

## **The Churches of Vrahassi.**

There are nine churches in Vrahassi, plus the Monastery of Agios Yiorgos/Dimitris which is located across the valley on the opposite hillside. Plus umpteen tiny churches dotted about the olive groves.

**The Monastery of St George Vrahasotis, Agios Yiorgos/Agios Dimitris** – The Monastery as we see it today was built in **1450 a.d.** However there are remains of an earlier church on the site (below and to the rear of the bell tower) which date to **1005 a.d.** The bell tower was damaged by bullets apparently fired by the Turks when they attacked the monastery and killed its fifteen inhabitants in **1770**. There is a story that one of these bullets hit the tower, ricocheted off and killed the Turk who fired it.

Inside the monastery there are frescos on the walls (unfortunately very faded) at the back of the church near the area known as the 'Pre-nous' area where the novice monks used to stand during a service. The superb iconostasis was carved from local oak, in **1860**, by Panayotis and Joannis Makraki of Messa Lasithi. It is a most beautiful piece of work incorporating dragons, flowers and even the skull and cross bones. The icons which adorn it are of about the same age.

In **1866** the monastery was the stronghold of the partisans who started the 1866 uprising led by Konstantinos Sfakianakis.

The Monastery was also used by the partisans during the German invasion of the Second World War. I am told that members of the church were employed in melting down metal and making bullets. A small cave nearby was used as an ammunition store.

Renovation work around the Church has been completed in the last few years and when there is a service on 23<sup>rd</sup> April (St George's Day) and 26 October (St Dimitris' Day), the normally fenced and locked area is open to the public and the restored 'cells' and living areas together with the old olive press, are open to view. It is really worth going to one of these services. They do begin early in the morning but it is not necessary to be one of the first to arrive, especially as the service lasts for about two hours. It is quite acceptable to arrive at any time during the service. These are quite formal occasions and beach ware is definitely not acceptable!

Take the old road out of the village as if you are going to Latsida or Milatos. After several bends you will come to a road on your right. Follow this road until you come to the Monastery. (Approx. 5 km ).

## **The Church of St John Chrisostomas - Agios Ioannis Chrisostomas**

This church was built in the **14<sup>th</sup> Century** and is mentioned in the Register of Civil Order by El Santshi in 1391. It is situated near the tavern 'Platanos'. Nearby there are two natural springs both of which are still in use today. The stonework around

the springs bares the dates **1841** and **1887**. It is the oldest recorded area of the village.

### **The Church of the Holy Spirit - Agia Sophia Pnevmatos**

This is the largest church of the village. The building was erected over a twenty year period between **1935** and **1956**. Work on the interior began in 1969 and is still being continued as at 2007. Each year a little more of the inside walls are painted with colourful frescoes of the Orthodox Saints. The church is also dedicated to Agios Titos (St Titos) and the Three Holy Men; Ioannis, Vasilis and Gregorious.

### **The Church of St Savus - Agios Savas**

This church is situated in the front of Agia Sophia Pnevmatos . This church was built, according to the inscription above the door, in **1836**. It is named after a holy man from Israel who, in the year 350 a.d. was said to have seen the face of Christ in a communion cup. It is worth noting that the orientation of this church is slightly off East/West and I am told that this is due to the lie of the land on which it was built.

### **The Church of the Virgin Mary - Agia Panagia**

This church is situated on the main road through the village. It is at the west end on a raised position as you pass through the village towards Selinari.

It is worth mentioning that the spiritual needs of the village are tended to by two Orthodox Priests. Papa Yiorgos is in charge of the main church, Agia Sophia, and takes most of the main services there and in other smaller churches. Papa Nikos is in charge of Agia Panagia taking all main services there and assisting Papa Yiorgos with big services such as weddings and funerals. He also takes his turn at the smaller churches. Apart from the two main churches services are only held on name days and special holidays at the other seven.

### **The Church of St Evangelia - Agia Evangelia**

This church is positioned to the right of the main tavern in the square, up the steps and a small slope a little to your left. It was built in **1914**.

### **The Church of Afendi Christi**

Continue through the narrow street to the left of St Evangelia and take an upward right hand turn which will bring you out at the Church of Afendi Christi. Please take note of the small east window which is very ancient and thought to have come from an earlier church built on the same site.

### **The Church of The Father, Son and Holy Ghost - Agia Triada**

Known also as the church of St George Galactos this church is hidden in the back streets. Go behind St Evangelia and turn right. On the bell tower is the date 1883 and inside there is an Icon dated **1887**. Look also at the old wood panel of the iconostasis where a very faded image of Adam and Eve is still visible. Over the door of the church you will see a cross of the Knights of St John.

### **The Church of Agios Panteleimon**

This is a very special small church, situated just off the road which leads down from the village to the tunnel. Also in the church there is an Icon to Agia Marina. It is obvious from looking at the outside of the building that this church has been reconstructed. Look out for interesting features such as a stone carved in the shape of a pomegranate which is a very ancient symbol.

### **The Church of Agios Nectarios**

This small church is to be found on the edge of the village by taking the road past the old Post Office down between the houses and keeping right. It is a comparatively new church being only about ten years old. Apparently if a woman wants a child then she should make supplication to Agios Nectarios. The villagers paid for this church after a woman who still lives here had a dream that Agios Nectarios asked her to build a church.

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### **On a personal note**

I feel very privileged to have found Vrahassi, it is such a beautiful place to live. I could go on about the abundance of wild flowers, butterflies, and birds that can be found all around the village, the Griffon Vultures which circle on thermals in the skies above, the ancient paths that lead to the olive groves, the track up the mountain that leads to the top of Anavlohos, the fantastic view of the Cretan sea framed by the cliffs of the Selinari Gorge and the summer sunset over Dia Island . But I urge you to experience all of these for yourselves. Walk the streets of Vrahassi, the old footpaths, the overgrown donkey tracks, and at every corner you will discover something special. Take the time to sit at one of the cafenea. Sit and watch the world go by. Taste the local food, drink a drop of raki (a drop will not hurt you). Breathe the pure Vrahassi air and relax in the shadows of times gone by.

I hope that you have enjoyed this brief history of Vrahassi. If you would like to know what is happening in the village today then log on to: [Jane's Vrahassi Information Board](#)

For information about which houses are for sale in the village.

Contact: Jane Sharp 6945 872 472 or call in at the Office in the centre of Vrahassi.

If you would like to check on what is happening in Vrahassi click below:

[Jane's Vrahassi Information Board](#)