



Renate Löbbecke
GREECE: Crete 1997 + 2016

GREECE: Crete

3/1997 and 9/2016

Mitato

The shepherds' huts are located in high-altitude pasture areas (1500-2000 m), especially on the Nida Plateau of Mount Psiloritis (Mt. Ida), but also on the Asfendou plateaus there are *mitata* with corbelled domes. Since the shepherds remain in the mountains during the animal migrations from May to the onset of winter, these dwellings were quite large and also well equipped for overnight stays. Sometimes several *mitata* form a small settlement, a *metochia*.

Etymologically, the name *mitato* is ultimately derived from the Latin word "metatus" (rural military habitation). The word was taken up by the Byzantines with the implication of a temporary shelter. It retains something of the same meaning today in Crete.

The first *mitata* were built at the end of the 19th century, but most did not emerge until 1900 (through 1958), after the Turks had left the island (1898). With increased mobility from motorization, since 1980 they are no longer used as lodgings but, if they are used at all, only as a stable, a shed, or to provide a brief rest.

Nida Plateau in the eastern Ida Mountains

Approximately one hundred *mitata* supposedly exist in the region around the Psiloritis (Mt. Ida). They were usually built by professional craftsmen. Here the name Stelios Parasyris is known, for example. He signed his structures with S. P. and died in 1958.

The *mitato* has the form of a squat tower (type 3). The internal diameter varies between 3,5 and 6,5 meters. The interior space often has stone seats, niches, but seldom windows. On an open fire place the cheese was manufactured and the smoke could escape through a central opening in the roof which could be closed by a big flat stone lying beside.

On the outside, there is often a small courtyard which was used as the dining area with stone benches and stone table and always a pen – a large enclosure into which the sheep were driven for milking.

In addition to residential buildings, there are also storage huts in which the locally produced cheese can mature (tyróspita or tyrókelli).

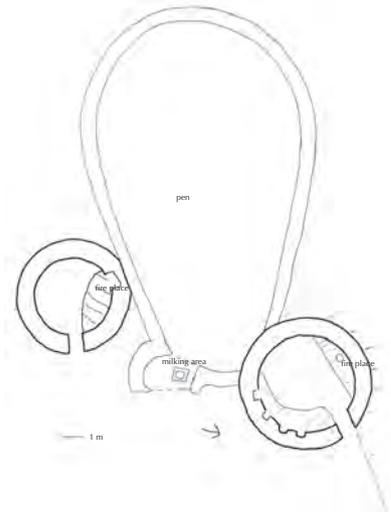
At the beginning of March 1997, most of the *mitata* were still standing in snow.



In September 2016 we tried to visit again *mitata* on the Nida Plateau. I was well prepared by studying Google Earth where many of the round and flat buildings are to be seen.

In September the shepherds were still working and a lot of sheep flocks were grazing and resting sometimes near *mitata*. And they were accompanied by barking dogs which kept us at a distance. Often the stone huts were closed. Nevertheless we could see many different examples and it was very impressive to experience the stone huts in the strikingly similar surrounding stone structures.





This *mitato* consists of 2 huts and a big pen. In 1997 we could see it from the street from Anogia to the Nida plateau, but in 2016 it was difficult to find because it was hidden behind newly grown trees. The milking area seemed to be still in use.





Photos: 1997





In 1997 this complex system with 4 huts and a big pen was covered with snow. In 2016 this areal was still in use with dogs guarding the sheep and the *mitata*.

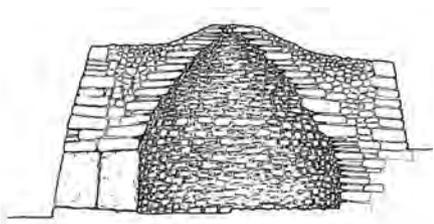
At the end of the pen is a particularly large hut, perhaps a former cheese storage. Inside there are many niches, no stone furniture.





Photos: 1997





n. Christophoros Vallianos

From the outside, the *mitata* of Nida have the form of a blunt cone. Inside is a typical corbelling construction. The interior space often has stone seats and beds, built-in wall niches and a fire place. The thickness of the shell is between 1,0 and 1,9 m. With its 0.80–1.25 m height and 0.55–0.75 m width, the entrance is relatively small.





The *mitato* above was inhabited in summer 2016 by a foreign seasonal worker.

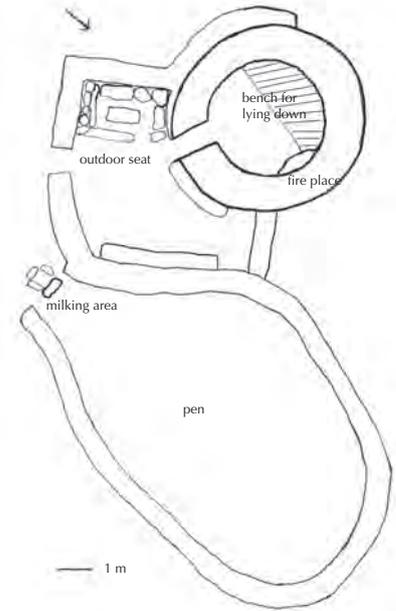


Around the plateau of Nida (1700 m) are very elaborately constructed *mitata* to be found. These and the *mitata* shown on the next page are located on the north-west side. A closure stone is next to the opening on the flat roof.



This ensemble consists of 2 *mitata* connected by a courtyard with stone benches and table. The stones are carefully cut and jointed. Over the main entrance the initials S.P. in Greek letters are written (Stelios Parasyris) and "1937".





n. Christophoros Vallianos

Also built by Stelios Parasyris in 1939, this *mitato* seems to be the original for the drawing beside. Although it was closed we could identify it by the outdoor constructions as the sitting place and the pen.





On the south-east side of the plateau a group of several *mitata* spread over the rocky hills. Almost all of them were closed with new metal doors. Some are combined with a courtyard, the bigger ones stand alone without seats. 1896 is written beside one entrance.





Asfendou Plateau

In a bar in Komitades near Chóra Sfakíon on the south coast, quite by chance, we saw in 1997 a photo that showed the family *mitato* which looked different from the ones on the Nida Plateau. We were sent into the austere and windy mountains in the direction of Asfendou. A very narrow asphalt street led to a radar station, from where we spotted the stone huts in a dip of the crest. If we hadn't looked for them, we would never have found them, because they blend in so well with the surrounding rocks that provide shelter from the sea winds. Here again we have a complex ensemble for shepherds, but the huts correspond more to type 1, looking like beehive huts.

Two adjoining "residential" *mitata*, ruin, animal pen and a deeper-set, flatter cooling chamber for milk and cheese.

2016 we visited this *mitato* again and except some newly grown trees and shrubbery nothing had changed.

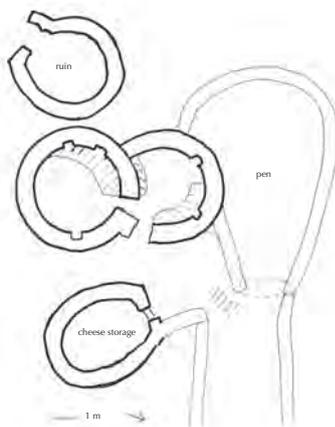
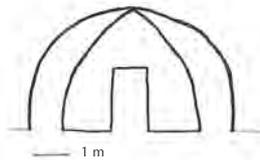




Photo: 1997. A similar photo we saw in the Taverna in Komitades.





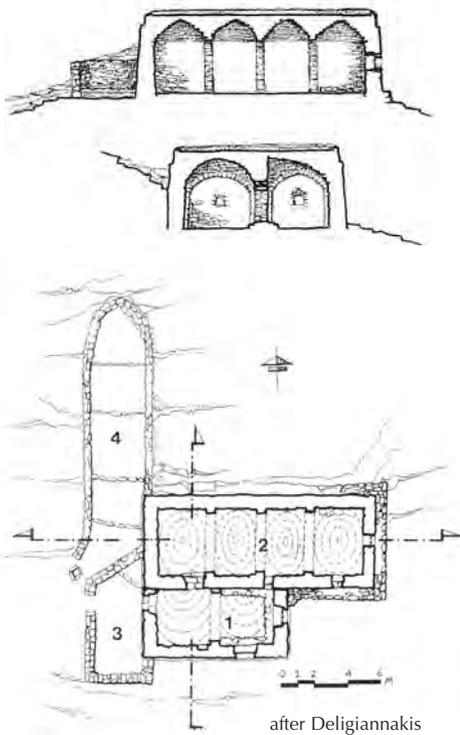
Photos 1997 above, below and next page. Less vegetation, you can see the stone structures better.

Stairs go down into the cheese cellar, which is covered by large stone plates.





In 2016 we visited the bar in Komitades again and Giorgos told us that on the other side of the road to the north we could find another *mitato*. To my surprise it was the rectangular building with corbelled domes supported by arches of which I had found a drawing in the article by Maria Arakadaki. From the outside one would not expect corbelling because of the flat roof and the size of a normal house.



1. *coumosmen* residence, 2. *tyrocelli* (cheese deposit), 3. yard, 4. *mandra* (yard for milking the ewes).

The first living room has collapsed, but the large cheese deposit with 4 corbelled domes is in very good condition. Similar constructions I've only seen as stables in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence or as living rooms in Apulia (*trulli*).



The building was inhabited by goats. The west side of the *mitato* with the beginning of the pen, the yard and the collapsed first room. So the arch of the entrance to the still standing *coumosmen* (1) was filled in part.



Still standing room 1: Remains of benches and interesting windows with metal grid and opening as a triangle above.





Entrance to the cheese deposit.





Literature and Webpages

Arakadaki, Maria: "Corbelled dome architectur in Greece". In: *Earthen Domes et Habitats*. Edizioni ETS, Pia, 2009

Bosineki-Didoni, Paraskevi: *Kreta. Griechische Traditionelle Architektur*, Athen, 1985

Conrads, Ulrich/Vallianos, Christophoros: "Erhebungen wider die Unbilden der Natur. Die Mitata der kretischen Hirten". In: *Daedalos*, 1980, 30, pp. 110-117 (German-English)

Löbbecke, Renate: *Corbelled Domes*. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln, 2012

<http://prismanet.gr/data/canepal/view.php?id=599>

http://www.pierreseche.com/mitata_de_crete.htm

http://www.pierreseche.com/cabanes_anogia.htm

Google Earth: Following the road from Anogia to the Nida plateau and from Imbros to Asfendou, near the radar station.

Photos by Renate and Hermann Löbbecke

© Renate Löbbecke 2016