

Living Stone – The Cave at Vari

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The Cave at Vari is located on the southern slopes of Mount Hymettos near the modern town of Vari, approximately 25km south of Athens, Greece. The cave was an active site of worship of nymphs c. 500 B.C. to A.D. 150. It was rediscovered in the early nineteenth century by Richard Chandler during his travels of Greece with the Society of the Dilettanti. It was subsequently excavated by the American School at Athens in 1901.

The interior of the cavern is divided into two large rooms by a natural rock wall. The cavern is limestone. Steps have been carved into the rock at the entrance, allowing for visitors to descend with ease.

The two most interesting features of this cave are both sculpture, which have been carved from the living rock. The first is an altar, which bears a crude image of a sculptor carving out another seated statue. An inscription on the altar allows us to identify the sculptor as Archedemos, whose name appears around the cavern on a number of inscriptions.

The statue which the sculptor is carving on the altar is found within the cave, and is the second feature carved out of the living rock. The sculpture is of a seated woman, most likely a nymph. It would appear that this nymph statue appears in other relief sculpture panels which were found in the cave.

The cave at Vari presents an interesting use and interaction with stone. The way the natural substance from which the cave is made is used to decorate it is quite unique. The statue and altar are complimented by other inscriptions found in the cave, as well as other relief sculptures though these are movable and not made from the rock of the cave.