The favourable climatological conditions prevailing in Crete (large number of clear-sky nights per year) combined with the high mountains, place the island of Crete among the best locations in Europe for high quality astronomical observations. These facts were influential in the establishment of the Skinakas Observatory.

The Skinakas Observatory has been built and operates as part of a scientific research collaboration between the University of Crete, the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH) [1] and the Max-Planck-Institut fur Extraterrestrische Physik [2] of Germany. The site of the Observatory, chosen on scientific and functional grounds, is the Skinakas summit of Mount Ida (Psiloritis), at an altitude of 1750 m and 60 km from Heraklion.
The Observatory has two telescopes: a Modified Ritchey-Chrétien [3] telescope with a 1.3m aperture (focal ratio of F 7.6) and a 30cm telescope (focal ratio F 3.2). The building for the small telescope was built in 1986, and observations started in 1987. The 1.3m telescope commenced its observations in October 1995 and remains the largest operational telescope in Greece to date. The optical system was manufactured by Carl Zeiss, and the mechanical parts by DFM Engineering [4].

The instrumentation of the 1.3 Telescope includes:

- a Focal Reducer which more than doubles the field of view of the telescope.
- autoguider
- three optical CCD cameras: one with 1024x1024 pixels and two with 800x2000 pixels.
- a low resolution optical spectrograph.
- a wide field near-infrared camera.
- a specialized optical polarimeter (Robopol).

Under construction are:

- a high resolution (R=35000) Echelle Spectrograph.
- an Adaptive Optics system for the reduction of the atmospheric seeing

The main ongoing astronomical projects at the Observatory of Skinakas include the study of:

- galaxies and Active Galactic Nuclei
- planetary nebulae
- supernovae remnants
- globular clusters
- binary systems where the compact object is either a white dwarf, a neutron star, or a black hole

For more information visit the dedicated web site of Skinakas Observatory [5].

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Links: