

Generations of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and scientists have chosen Crete as the focus of their research. A combination of factors that pertain to Crete alone have engendered both this commitment and the resulting contributions to scholarship. The dramatic and rugged topography of Crete (relief up to 2400 m) and relative isolation (separated from the mainland since the Middle Pleistocene) have resulted in a remarkably diversified environment. The island comprises a 8,620 square kilometer area, and within these bounds an ecological range can be found that is unrivaled

elsewhere in the Aegean. Its intermediate geographic location between North Africa and Europe places it in a marginal climatic zone that must have fluctuated frequently. Crete is therefore a particularly good place to study climatic change and its impact on flora and fauna. In addition, being situated between the cultures of the Near East and the Greek mainland makes Crete a fruitful place to study cultural processes, especially change and adaptation. Its position in the southeastern Mediterranean Sea enabled Crete to exercise a great deal of influence over sea lanes; contacts with outsiders

promoted cultural development, as well as invasion.

These factors—diversified physical environment, location, and rich history—are compelling reasons for study, but for most scientists and scholars who live and work in Crete there are two more: no individual who visits the island can forget its beauty or the generosity and kindness of its people.

Barbara Hayden,
Jennifer Moody,
Polymnia Muhly

—Ὅμορφη πούναι ἡ Κρήτη,
ὁμορφη! Ἐ, καὶ νᾶμουνα ἀετὸς νὰ
τὴν καμάρονα ὄλη ἀπ' τὴν κορφή
τοῦ ἀέρα!

"How beautiful Crete is, how
beautiful! Ah! If only I were an
eagle, to admire the whole of Crete
from an airy height!"

Nikos Kazantzakis, *Freedom or Death*. Trans. Jonathan Griffen (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 64-65.



Chronology

6500/6000 to 3650/3500 B.C.: Neolithic Period

Larger boats and the ability to fish and travel across long distances result in settlement near the north central coast of the island, at Knossos. From the first, pottery-making appears to be a developed industry; well-built houses, and sheep and pig bones indicate a thriving community; seeds suggest cultivation of cereals. Occupation of caves and inland sites occurs gradually throughout the island as the population slowly increases.

3650/3500 to 2160/2025 B.C.: Early Minoan Period

The appearance of metal-working (copper) in the Aegean is accompanied in Crete by the establishment of sizeable towns, with elaborate architecture and cemeteries, at sites near the sea, such as Mochlos, Gournia, and Vasiliki. Pottery continues to be handmade, but is technically of high quality, as demonstrated by Early Minoan II Vasiliki ware, with a mottled black and red surface, and the Early Minoan III White-on-dark Style, with linear motifs, that will develop into the Kamares Style of the Middle Minoan period. Burials are made in circular built tombs in southern Crete, and in cists and ossuaries elsewhere.

2160/1979-20th c. to 1700/1650 B.C.: Middle Minoan I-II Period

This period witnesses the rise of palatial Crete as bronze becomes the dominant metal. The first palaces are constructed at Knossos, Phaistos, and possibly Malia, where storage areas, central courts, and shrines belonging to the Middle Minoan I-II period have been excavated. Cult places are established on peaks across eastern and central Crete. Scripts develop to serve the economic and administrative needs of the palaces, while outside of palatial "central-places," Minoan urban life flourishes with the enlargement in number, size, and complexity of town-sites. The potter's wheel is introduced early in this period and a wide range of shapes are decorated in the Kamares Style, in which white, red, orange, and yellow paint on a black background is used to illustrate a variety of decorative motifs. Pottery of this style, or local imitations, occurs on the mainland, in Egypt and in the Levant, indicating the extent of Minoan trade.

1700/1650 to 1425 B.C.* or 1800/1750 to 1525/1500 B.C.**: Middle Minoan III-Late Minoan I Period

Earthquakes destroy the first palaces on Crete and initiate a period of rebuilding at the major palace centers. The Linear A script is developed and survives on clay tablets, accidentally preserved in the destructions marking the end of this period. "Villas"—large, elaborate structures, incorporating room types, layout, and features derived from palatial architecture—are built across the island and are integral to the administrative and economic life of the palaces. A style of pottery with pale ground and dark-painted motifs which range from naturalistic to abstract replaces the Kamares Style. The impact of Minoan culture on early Mycenaean Greece is attested by the assimilation of Minoan styles in pottery, wall painting, and architecture, as well as by the presence of Minoan objects. The eruption of the volcano on the island of Thera may have affected some coastal sites, but the major damage to both town and palace occurs later, possibly as a result of internal disputes between the palace centers, associated with Mycenaean (mainland Greek) intervention. The palace of Knossos survives into the Late Minoan II period and beyond.

1425 to 1200/1190 B.C.* or 1525/1500 to 1200/1190 B.C.**: Late Minoan II, Late Minoan IIIA-III B Period

Crete is now dominated by Mycenaean Greeks as the two cultures merge in this period, which is still not well known in the archaeological record. Mainland Greek influence is attested in the development of the Linear B syllabic script (a Mycenaean Greek script related to Linear A and used at Knossos), in pottery shapes and styles, and to a lesser extent in burials and architecture. Many of the towns destroyed at the end of the Late Minoan I period are reoccupied, but house design changes as simple, axially built structures often replace earlier, more elaborate Late Minoan I house plans. Knossos, the only palace to escape destruction, continues to be occupied and used as an administrative center; the time of its final abandonment and destruction is still debated. Burials in rock-cut chamber tombs within painted clay *larnakes*, or chests, are common; though shrines on peaks are fewer in number, cultic activity in caves is still attested, and house and town "bench" sanctuaries are numerous. The female element, so important in earlier Minoan religion, continues to dominate in the form of large wheel-thrown terracotta figurines found within these and later shrines.



Neolithic stone figurine from Knossos



Vasiliki Ware "teapot" Early Minoan Period



Kamares Ware jar Middle Minoan Period



"Little Parisienne" wall painting, Knossos Late Minoan I Period



Late Minoan III larnax or bathtub

* Chronology based primarily on correlations with Egyptian chronology ** Chronology according to C14 determinations

1200 to 700 B.C.: Early Iron Age Period

1250/1200 to 1100 B.C.: *Late Minoan IIIC Period*; 1100 to 1000 B.C.: *Sub-Minoan Period*; 1000 to 900 B.C.: *Protogeometric Period*; 900 to 700 B.C.: *Geometric Period*

The Late Minoan IIIC period is in many respects even less well known than the preceding Late Minoan IIIA-B phases, though current excavations (Kavousi) and surveys (Vrokastro) will contribute much new data. Toward the end of the 13th century, a new wave of destructions causes abandonment of sites in Crete and throughout the Aegean, followed by a period called the "Dark Age" by many Aegean scholars. Coastal populations within Crete retreat inland and establish towns in mountainous areas that afford more protection. A new wave of immigrants to the island, following the Mycenaeans, are the Dorian Greeks, a tribe held accountable in epic tradition for the destruction of the Mycenaean citadels. Iron tools and weapons appear along with evidence of this new metal-working technology. Continued Mycenaean influence is seen in the presence of corbel-vaulted tombs, but many vase shapes and motifs can still be described as Minoan in origin. Later in this period new Athenian pottery styles and shapes (Protogeometric and Geometric) are adapted to Cretan tastes, yet local traditions remain strongly rooted.

700 to 66 B.C.: Greek Period

700 to 600 B.C.: *Orientalizing Period*; 600 to 500 B.C.: *Archaic Period*; 500 to 330 B.C.: *Classical Period*; 330 to 66 B.C.: *Hellenistic Period*

During the Orientalizing period Crete plays a major role as it adapts and transmits Oriental ideas and motifs to the mainland. The Dorian city-states of Crete develop in the 9th and 8th centuries and become known for their early law codes and conservative traditions. Gortyn, a town near the ruins of the Minoan palace of Phaistos, becomes the leading power of the time, eclipsing Knossos. Towns are ruled by a Dorian aristocracy, while helots or serfs, descendants of the old Minoan/Mycenaean stock, work the land. Crete during the next few centuries turns inward as these city-states battle one another for political dominance and territory. Hellenistic Crete was renowned for the quality of its mercenary soldiers—an export considered invincible in ambushes, skirmishes, and raids.

66 B.C. to A.D. 550: Roman Period

In the face of the Roman threat, some of Crete's warring cities begin to form alliances, but the island is subjugated in 69 B.C. at the end of a campaign led by the Roman general Metellus. Gortyn becomes the capital of a Roman province that includes most of North Africa. Population levels soar, and roads, towns, monuments, and aqueducts mark this prosperous and peaceful period. St. Paul organizes the Church of Crete, and the first Cretans are martyred for the church in A.D. 249.

A.D. 550 to 1204: Medieval Period

550 to 827: *First Byzantine Period*; 827 to 961: *Arab Invasion*; 961 to 1204: *Second Byzantine Period*

The First Byzantine Period ends in A.D. 827 when Crete falls briefly to Arab invaders. Their fortification on the north coast—El Khandak—becomes the later town site of Candia (Herakleion). During the First Byzantine period life follows the pattern of Late Roman times; Crete is a settled, prosperous land of large estates and large Christian basilicas administered through Gortyn. Nicephoras Phocas reconquers the island in 961 and expels the Arabs. Little is known archaeologically of the Second Byzantine period. Candia develops into the main town, though as a whole Crete, administered by local towns for Constantinople (Byzantium), is less prosperous. Piracy becomes a major threat to coastal settlement, and continues almost to the modern period.

1204 to 1669: Venetian Period

After the 4th Crusade, the Franks plunder Constantinople and divide up Greece; Crete is sold to Venice. Venetian lords intermarry with Cretan noble families and initiate a period of stability and some prosperity, although this is built on a repressed and heavily taxed peasantry. The fall of Byzantium in 1453 drives many scholars and artists westward, thus initiating the Byzantine "renaissance" in Crete and influencing the Italian Renaissance.

1669 to 1898: Turkish Period

After a long siege, heavily fortified Herakleion falls to the Turks, though some citadels remain in Venetian hands until the 18th century. This period is marked by heavy taxation, repression, and local and island-wide rebellions against Turkish overlords, all of which fail. Monasteries become centers of resistance, and establish secret schools to educate Cretans, who are forbidden an education under Turkish law. Many old Cretan families conspire against the Turks and lead the long resistance movement.

1898 to 1913, 1941 to 1944: Independence to World War II; The Battle of Crete and the Resistance

A brief period of independence is initiated when European powers sail into the port of Chania, signaling the end of Ottoman domination in the Aegean. In 1910 Crete becomes part of the Greek state, and in 1922 the last of the indigenous Muslim population leaves the island. During World War II poorly armed Cretans once again withdraw to the mountains to fight, at great cost, the German occupation of the island.

Post-War Period

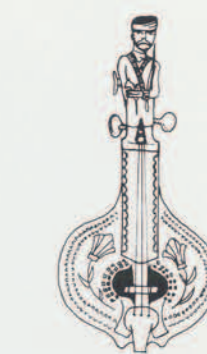
Although Crete did not experience the tragic civil war that follows the devastation of World War II on the Greek mainland, economic recovery requires several decades. Within the last twenty years Crete experiences intense development for tourism and agriculture. While this means unprecedented prosperity for many of the island's population, a great price is paid in terms of continuing destruction of archaeological sites and antiquities. These remain both the heritage and legacy of Crete.



Byzantine icon
Byzantine Period



Venetian fountain
ornament
Venetian Period



Turkish period lyra



Late Minoan III-Early
Iron Age female figurine
with raised hands



Incised metal plaque, Kato
Syme sanctuary
Greek Period



Coin, Knossos
Graeco-Roman Period

