

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN MINOAN CRETE

Neopalatial Crete – the ‘Golden Age’ of the Minoan civilization – possessed Palaces, exquisite artefacts, and iconography with preeminent females. While lacking in fortifications, the island was cloaked with ritual symbolism, an elaborate bureaucracy logged transactions, and massive storage areas enabled the redistribution of goods. We cannot read the Linear A script, but the libation formulae suggest an island-wide *koine*. Within this cultural identity, there is considerable variation in how the Minoan elites organized themselves and others on an intra-site and regional basis. This book explores and celebrates this rich, diverse, and dynamic culture through analyses of important sites, as well as Minoan administration, writing, economy, and ritual. Key themes include the role of Knossos in wider Minoan culture and politics, the variable modes of centralization and power relations detectable across the island, and the role of ritual and cult in defining and articulating elite control.

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CULTURAL IDENTITY
IN MINOAN CRETE
SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN THE
NEOPALATIAL PERIOD

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- Table 7.1 Administrative documents in Neopalatial Crete. Wa and Wc are listed whether inscribed or not; Wb, Wd, We, Wf and misc. are listed here if inscribed. After Schoep 2002, 21, Table 1.2 (in turn adapted from Hallager 1996, 25, Table 2); with additions: del Freo 2008; 2012; Watrous 2015, 434–8. 167

PREFACE

On Saturday, 2 July 2016, I took a break from thinking about an island on the south-eastern margins of Europe and joined a pro-EU march in the capital of an island situated in the diagonally opposite north-western corner. Forty-eight per cent of the population of Britain (plus those who had come to regret their decision) were still in shock from the result of the EU referendum just a few days earlier. Appallingly – and yet not entirely surprisingly – the Brexiters had won: the people of Britain had instructed their government to trigger Article 50, which would expel the UK from the EU. It was typical ‘layer’ weather – ideally you’d have three, to pile on or shed as required, in response to the rather icy fresh breeze, teasing rain, and sections of full sun that gloriously baked the tens of thousands below. Possession of both sunscreen and an umbrella, and an undying fascination with what the heavens send (combined with an appropriate dry retort), is typically British; the identity being embraced (or mourned), however, was wholeheartedly European.

The fallout from the result was equally shocking, involving the unapologetic retraction of promises made by the Leave campaigners, the tortured realization by the Remainers that the measured, for many realistic, promotion of the EU (rather than an impassioned celebration of it) had badly backfired, the shameful sneering of UKIP’s Nigel Farage in the European Parliament (he had seven times attempted to become a British MP, and seven times failed – so settled with becoming an MEP for the entity he despised), Shakespearean backstabbing among the governing Tory party, and a Labour opposition that was bent on self-implosion rather than doing any actual opposing. The European dream was, for us at least, broken.

There is a good case to make for viewing Minoan Crete as the first European civilization, as we generally understand the term; unsurprisingly, coffee-table works such as *Knossos: At the Threshold of European Civilisation* are keen to exploit this idea.¹ The Minoans built vast, complex buildings, had writing, produced incredibly sophisticated art, and managed their lives in a surprisingly (and perhaps deceptively) familiar fashion, from their bureaucracy to flushing toilets. If a shared European identity is to be constructed from the remains of the past, both in antiquity and today, then this culture is important and relevant to all of us.² Like Britain, Minoan Crete had a very distinctive cultural identity,

but could not effectively (and *splendidly*) function without significant interaction with other landmasses, both near and far. And, as Britain discovered so sharply in June 2016, the apparent homogeneity of its elite culture masked considerable variations within, of age, class, and region; these demographics generally escape us in the essentially prehistoric Cretan material, but the regional variations at least are clear.

In Greek myth, Europa is the Phoenician princess seized from the shores of the East by Zeus, disguised as a bull, who rapes and settles her on the shores of Crete. The message seems to convey the *ex oriente lux* narrative of European civilization, while the abuse involved renders the choice of Europa as an emblem of Europe a rather odd one.³ Greatness was forced upon the continent; unity arose from violence. Europa was deposited on Crete, where she bore her three sons, including Minos – who, of course, lends his name to the great Bronze Age culture. Bulls abound in Greek myth associated with Crete – Minos' wife, Pasiphae, lusted after and seduced the bull sent by Poseidon, god of the sea, the result being the doomed Minotaur; Minos' competition in love was eventually killed by Heracles. Minoan art reveals an obsession with the bull, from bull leaping to remarkable stone libation vessels shaped as bull's heads, and it is not unreasonable to interpret the 'Horns of Consecration' symbol as those of a bull. It is debatable whether such myths contain kernels of historical truth, but it remains the case that the island produced modern Europe's first literate civilization.⁴

This book is the result of many years of thinking about Crete. I first formally studied the island as an undergraduate under Sofia Voutsaki, who became my main PhD supervisor; I am very thankful for her sound advice. I am also grateful to the supportive graduate community at the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge, and the AHRB for financial support during my MPhil and PhD. I have spent highly productive periods at the British School at Athens, as Cary Student from 2000 to 2001, and later with the support of a Leverhulme Trust Study Abroad award from 2003 to 2005. The Taverna at Knossos served as a useful base on several trips over the years, and I am appreciative for the numerous discussions held there. I thank the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences for a two-year postdoctoral award, and the Department of Classics at Trinity College Dublin for incredible support during the planning of this book; I would like to thank Hazel Dodge, Christine Morris, and Sofia Voutsaki for their advice on the proposal. Finally, this monograph would not have been possible without two sabbaticals taken during my time at King's College London, and I would like to thank the Department of Classics for being such a fantastic place to work.

I have published a number of articles on Neopalatial Crete, and taken the readers' responses to heart; they have helped to shape this book for the better, I hope. The two readers of this book gave many insightful, constructive, and

supportive notes for improving the work, and I trust I have done them justice. Andrew Shapland not only read the manuscript in its entirety, but also when it was at first draft stage; this is very much appreciated. Peter Warren was kind enough to read Chapters 1 and 2, and Fritz Blakolmer read Chapter 9; the comments were excellent, as were the offprints provided. Christine Morris and Todd Whitelaw helped me source relevant papers not available in London, and thanks are due to Christine, Alan Peatfield, and Evangelos Kyriakidis for helping with queries related to peak sanctuaries. I am particularly grateful to Beatrice Rehl for fielding my numerous queries, and to the production team for its work and support.

The argument has been made that too little has been excavated and published for anyone to ask theoretical questions in a synthetic manner.⁵ I disagree. Minoan Crete is one of the most researched areas in the world, if not *the* most explored one. It has, if anything, too much data for one researcher to absorb, even for a restricted time-frame like the Neopalatial period. But we have a responsibility to present our findings to the outside world, both academia and the general public, and we need to tack constantly between data and holistic interpretation in order to reach some kind of (temporary) understanding of the past. The spirit of this synthesis is that it will by no means produce a definitive version of the past, and that it is subject to change; indeed, it is hoped that it provokes as many questions as it answers.

More justification is required for the use of published material alone. The simple reason here is that, if it is unpublished, then it may as well still be in (or on) the ground – in fact, it may be *better* if it were. Minoan archaeology has a notable backlog of unpublished fieldwork, with plenty that has been dutifully disseminated. It is also necessary to make decisions at every point about what to include or not in a synthesis, especially when dealing with sites like Knossos, which was mainly explored at the birth of scientific archaeology and has some significant taphonomic problems. There simply has not been the space to set out and justify the rationale for certain decisions, which I acknowledge produces frustrations on all sides (see below, p. 253, fn. 69).

My interest in Crete began at the age of thirteen, during my first foreign holiday with my mother, stepfather, and sister. It fascinated me, and the spacious and timeless Heraklion Museum sparkled with its exhibits (even before the recent splendid renovation). It also spurred me to start going on a local dig not long after. I would like to thank them, and my father and stepmother, for support over many years. This book is dedicated to the memory of my stepfather; Phaistos, on the book's cover, was understandably his favourite site.