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Twelfth to Fifth Centuries BC  
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PART ONE

Crete between east and west, state collapse  
and state emergence

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## I INTRODUCTION

In a post-Cold War age, as alternative political structures have become weakened, marginalised, or fragmented along ethno religious lines, 'democracy' is increasingly held up as an ideal. At the same time, the concept also seems to be becoming more morally ambiguous, and more controversial: recent years have seen forceful external attempts to introduce democratic regimes to societies voicing active resistance to the concept. The cultural and conceptual attributes of the earliest democratic states, the Classical Greek poleis, have long been appropriated by various nationalisms (particularly Greek nationalism) and most recently by 'Europeanism' in a global context – promoted, for example, as symbols of world peace and friendship during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games and cited as a cornerstone of common European heritage in the draft European constitution (Dunn 1992: vii; European Union 2003; Hamilakis 1999; Hamilakis and Yalouri 1996; Lowenthal 1985: 74–125; Morris 1994; Morris and Raaflaub 1997; Ober and Hedrick 1996b; Simandiraki 2004; Yalouri 2001). More than ever, it seems, we need to review how far we can characterise consensualist/democratic ideologies as a 'natural', permanent, or desirable social outcome. Investigation of the degree to which the earliest known democratic systems developed out of specific material and historical conditions and were constructed, consciously and otherwise, through cultural practice, can help in this, allowing us to trace and evaluate important alternative trajectories in historical perspective (Cartledge 1998).

The exercise takes us back to the end of the Aegean Bronze Age. The period around 1200 BC marks the collapse across the region of Late Bronze Age states (LBA: c. 1700–1200 BC) which had been ruled by highly stratified, regionally centralized elites. Collapse or disturbance occurred at the same time across much of the rest of the east Mediterranean, where related kinds of palace-based state had existed (Gitin et al. 1998; Ward and Joukowsky 1992). By the seventh century BC, a new kind of small bounded state, structured around the principle of participative government by a class of nominally 'equal' citizens, had developed in much of the Aegean, with an extreme form of directly participatory democracy becoming established in Athens by the fifth century.

This was not, however, a standard outcome throughout the region. Crete, for example, contained states with a distinctive type of political structure, which failed ever to take on the democratic characteristics seen in many central Greek regions. Using the island as a case study, I will show that this fact relates to a consistently divergent path of social development in Crete between the twelfth and fifth centuries – that is, the Early Iron Age (EIA: c. 1200–700 BC) through Archaic period (Archaic: c. 700–480 BC). Scholarly interest in the historical reasons for structural variance between Archaic-Classical state forms in different Aegean regions has recently been increasing, but some regions remain neglected (Brock and Hodkinson 2000; Cartledge 2001: 21–39; Davies 1997: 25; Morgan 2003: 1–2). Crete is one of these – often presented as

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a sketchy template of contrast to central Greek patterns, or as the subject of extreme generalizations, based on isolated elements of the cultural record, about 'continuity' in social structures between the Bronze Age and Classical periods. These inadequacies are recognised (Lemos 2002: 1; Morris 1998: 12–13), and scholars have started to redress the balance by focusing in depth on specific themes relating to the EIA-Archaic period, or by looking at selected parts of that period, in the island (Prent 2005b: 53–84; Sjögren 2004: 3). Still, however, a detailed, accessible, consistent, and broadly based social narrative for the whole period between Bronze Age state collapse and polis emergence in Crete is lacking (Perlman 2000: 59–60).

One reason is that sources of text evidence are patchy: the structure of Classical Cretan states is much less well documented than that of their counterparts in the central Aegean, particularly Athens. Another is the nature and quantity of archaeological evidence: there is both too much, and too little, of it available for the period between the twelfth and the fifth centuries in Crete. A large and complex body of data now available for the EIA, constituting the densest and best-quality coverage for any Aegean region, meets what has long been viewed as a 'gap' in the record for the later Archaic period (c. 600–480 BC). Research has only just started to reveal the partly illusory nature of this perceived gap, suggesting that it has arisen from high levels of selectivity about the kinds of material worth studying (Erickson 2004, 2005; Haggis et al. 2004: 344). For the Classical period, the archaeological record from Crete is simply not well investigated. In particular, no large Cretan settlement site occupied continuously through the Archaic and Classical periods has yet been extensively or systematically excavated using up-to-date techniques.

Because synthesis is so challenging, single elements of the record, or individual sites, are often seized on for interpretation in a decontextualised way that fails to realise their full informative potential. My aim here is to engage with the full weight and complexity of Cretan archaeological data through this period, as well as the insights available from contemporary texts (the latter known only from the eighth century BC onward), to achieve an improved understanding of the long-term social changes that produced the special features of Cretan society through and beyond the rise of the polis state.

The analysis must, I argue, start from the great horizon of state collapse at circa 1200 BC, which I will show to have strongly conditioned the nature of the new state forms established by the late eighth century. In many areas of the east Mediterranean, the collapse was of a dramatic and often violent nature, involving the destruction and/or abandonment of major settlement centres. In Parts Two and Three I show that Crete's collapse process had a special character, involving a significant degree of preemptive cultural and social adjustment. Though the island's social and political structures *were* deeply disturbed, this seems to have occurred in a remarkably well-insulated environment, permitting Cretan societies to accommodate and adapt to changing wider political and economic circumstances more smoothly than groups in some other Aegean regions. In Parts Three and Four I go on to identify patterns of newly emergent social complexity in Crete (directly prefiguring the formation of small states) from the tenth century BC – that is, much earlier than in most other Aegean regions. This phenomenon seems directly linked to the positive way in which Cretan communities had collapsed about two hundred years earlier, as well as to macroeconomic and geopolitical trends in the east Mediterranean as a whole. By the late eighth century, the period at which states are usually considered to have emerged in central Greece, I argue that Cretan societies were already well launched on a particular trajectory of social development that ensured that they never developed democratic structures. That is, the 'successful' nature of social collapse circa 1200 BC was directly linked to the later development of social conditions in which democracy did not/could not emerge. Instead, a range of distinctive cultural and structural features characterised Cretan states between the seventh and fourth centuries. I analyse these, relate them to earlier developments, and compare Cretan state

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structures to those of other regions in Part Five. Notwithstanding these differences, macroscale factors, operating at the level of the Aegean in some cases and of the whole east and/or central Mediterranean in others, continued to affect Cretan societies deeply. The record shows that they saw themselves as closely tied into a pan-Hellenic heritage and culture. Part Five explores the historical factors producing this outlook, and how the latter was reconciled with local structures of political and economic life.

Because it attempts to cover as broad a range of archaeological and textual data as possible, I have titled this book a 'cultural history'. The phrase has been used recently by Morris (citing Hunt 1989) to describe how different types of ancient cultural evidence can be analysed together to write history in its broadest sense – that is, to explain and interpret change in society over time. The approach emphasises the centrality of culture in embodying, structuring, and reproducing society (Gellner 1983: 37–8). Here I identify and discuss a wide variety of types and levels of interactions among the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres in the long term, while recognising the impossibility of writing a 'total history' (Braudel 1979: 901–3; Febvre 1938: 2–4, 9; Hodder 1987; Trigger 1998: 167–79). The recognition of social change as culturally conditioned, particular, reflexive, contingent, and conjunctural emerges as a major theme. Using the Cretan case, I aim to offer a microcosmic insight into contingent processes of social change *and* a generalizing comparative analysis of the origins, structure, and cross-influence of early small states. In attempting this dual perspective, I return regularly to the questions of how local, particular, and contingent factors interacted with large-scale processes to produce Mediterranean communities that were strongly linked in cultural, ethnic, and political terms, yet retained consistently different social structures, and of how cultural practice conditioned social change repeatedly, continuously, and at a number of different levels. The latter is especially notable in this case with regard to the development of group identity structures linked into a strong historical consciousness. Ancient communities' conceptions of space and place, both at intrasite levels and in the wider landscape, are a particular focus in this connection: I attempt to build an integrated understanding of different fields and scales of cultural activity over time in relation to fixed spatial parameters – including Crete's boundaries as an island, its dissected landscape, and its positioning between the Aegean and Near Eastern geographical regions – as well as to changing social structures.

One of the book's approaches is to assess the relative 'success' (in terms of longevity, cohesive strength, and influence) of different early Greek state forms, nearly all of which incorporated some elements of consensualist/participatory ideology. Investigating the links between 'successful' outcomes and 'alternatives to democracy' seems especially interesting in a present-day political climate where the collapse of political systems is presented as able to be engineered, with defined and predictable consequences, and democracy seen as able to be artificially imposed on a post-collapse 'blank slate' if it does not emerge naturally. Within the limits of its ancient subject matter, the study challenges notions of the historically inevitable emergence of consensually governed states (whether through 'organic' evolution or revolutionary action) and concludes that collapse, though it may be engineered or modified in many and varied ways, has deep, uncontrollable, long-term, and materially embedded political consequences. I highlight the self-consciousness and agency of communities in determining their own political identity and development, but also their vulnerability to broader forces of change. Ultimately, I suggest that the conscious, articulated resistance to adopting democratic systems that seems to have emerged by the fifth century in Crete grew out of a set of historically and culturally framed conditions which could not easily have permitted another course.

At a regional level, too, the book's aims and scope are closely related to the time of its writing – at which the body of archaeological data for Crete has become so rich and varied as to

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demand a deep and wide-ranging interpretative synthesis. In view of the fact that existing Aegean-wide syntheses have significant gaps, I have recognised an important chance to use a really solid and well-informed body of interpretation from an area with close links to other Aegean regions throughout this period to pose newly angled research questions concerning those other regions. Interpretations based on the Cretan data are used throughout the book as a comparative basis from which to explore aspects of the EIA-Classical record in other regions, including the Cyclades, central and northern Greece, Ionia, Cyprus, Sparta, and the west Mediterranean colonies. Strong contrasts in social and cultural developments between regions, but also some instructive parallels, are highlighted. The depth of comparative analysis varies, depending on the type and quality of evidence available for each region and the perceived value of the comparison in throwing light on the study's main issues of concern. Given the focus of the book on Crete, *all* the compared areas are treated at a much briefer and more superficial level than the island itself. The comparisons are enriched by reference to selected cross-cultural models. However, by the very nature of its approach – that is, to highlight and explain significant regional differences in social patterns, as well as shared features, over time – the book avoids positing universalising models for social change either at the pan-Aegean level or across the whole period covered. Rather, the intention is to contribute to contemporary archaeological and anthropological thought by siting a complex case study within, and using it to engage with and develop, some important perspectives in archaeology since the 1990s (including, for example, approaches focused on agency and on cognitive and symbolic systems). While the study's tendency is to move away from processualist standpoints, not least by deconstructing several influential examples of processual models previously applied to this period, a number of models are developed, and patterns identified, that clearly have wider potential applications in archaeological research. These include, for example, the notion of 'successful' collapse; the recognition of state formation as a partly diffused process, occurring at distinctly different horizons and in different ways, but within a relatively short period; and the recognition of multitype reference to past material culture (including very recent material culture) as a powerful social phenomenon and mover in crisis periods. As explained later, some approaches used here (for example, close attention to settlement patterns and landscapes) diverge from those most often previously used to explore this period in the Aegean. I aim to highlight the value of such aspects of the record by integrating them fully into the interpretative picture: Again, I hope this approach will have resonance beyond the region treated.

One note of caution should be sounded at this point. Despite its intended relevance to general political history and theory, this book is primarily a study of ancient (mainly prehistoric) archaeological evidence, with all the inexactitude that involves. The societies under discussion, which were small-scale, agriculturally based, and technologically undeveloped, are difficult (if not impossible) to compare directly with modern or recent historical societies, and ancient Greek democratic systems differed greatly from those of any modern state (Raaflaub 1997b: 35). Thus, the relevance of this study to modern history and politics can only be stretched so far: In this regard the general conclusions will be of most interest, while the detail of the work is intended to make a contribution in its own right to the study of Mediterranean prehistory and early history.

## 2 METHOD AND STRUCTURE

### *Data sources and data coverage*

Given the time span covered, the majority of which is prehistoric, most evidence used here is archaeological. Notwithstanding the comparative richness and diversity of the archaeological record for EIA-Classical Crete, it still contains a large number of gaps. Overreliance on selected *fragments* of archaeological information to support a case can still be a tendency of scholars from a Classics background, but few experienced archaeologists would feel comfortable with this. What I attempt to do here is to build broad general interpretative arguments based on what can reasonably be evaluated as the most representative data sources, avoiding reliance on small or unrepresentative elements of the data to support major points. My view is that interpretations are often more convincingly supported by identification of strong, widespread patterns of lower-resolution data than reliance on one-off cases of high resolution: consequently I often give more weight to the former. For example, in suggesting that the roots of the well-documented interstate conflict in Classical Crete lie in a set of tensions reached from the Early Archaic period onward, I rely more on a broad base of data indicating settlement development and growth by this period to back up my points than, say, the deposition quantities of particular artefacts, such as weapons, in Archaic graves and sanctuaries. Approaches of the latter kind, examples of which are illustrated at several points in the book, often seem naïve, given the plethora of social factors that can affect the way societies deposit goods in the mortuary and ritual record.

The book follows a broadly linear chronological structure, starting with the collapse period circa 1200 BC and ending by considering the Classical polis. This structure, the origins of the study, my own balance of expertise, and the types and limitations of data available, all influence the work's emphases and the types of data on which it relies most heavily. For example, much of the newest, most detailed settlement evidence for Crete dates between the Early Iron Age and Early Archaic periods. A large proportion of it relates to settlement pattern at a very general level, since it has been acquired through intensive and extensive survey. This is supplemented by evidence from settlement excavations of a varying standard and at different stages of publication. Unfortunately, by contrast, we still have no detailed published stratigraphic record of any sizeable Cretan settlement or cemetery used through the late Archaic to Classical period, and thus contemporary with the first detailed textual sources for the island. On mortuary practice, the recent high-quality publication of a large cemetery at Knossos (North Cemetery) offers considerable insight into social and economic developments during the Cretan EIA, but at a single and rather exceptional settlement (Coldstream and Catling 1996). Otherwise, much mortuary

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evidence (especially for the Archaic period) comes from old research projects, incompletely published, or from small rescue excavations of scattered tombs, without wider context. Cult practice is fairly well documented at settlement level in the Cretan EIA, but the practice of using caves and open-air sites for cult, often without any architectural context and over very long timescales, means that extra-settlement sanctuaries are less well understood. Cult sites of both types have often been particular victims of unsystematic early excavation and damage through looting. Whole areas of potentially fruitful analysis (such as ceramic production) can receive only limited discussion here because of the lack of provenance and technological studies undertaken to date for this period in Crete.

This uneven balance between the types of evidence available has helped us push the study into productive new directions, including a focus on cultural landscapes as a whole, and on the investigation of subsistence and environment as factors in cultural and social change. This represents a move away from the more narrowly mortuary-, architecture-, or artefact-focused discussions of the Greek EIA dominant in the literature, which often cover only a small selection of well-known sites. The latter approach partly reflects the somewhat different character and patchy geographical spread of EIA evidence in central Greece, but also, often, a rather limited breadth of scholarly vision. As noted earlier, I shall show that considering, in a consistent and balanced way, the *full range* of EIA data in Crete (uneven though it is) can help identify productive research directions and develop enhanced interpretative frameworks for other parts of the Aegean in this period. The sheer variety of data sources studied here contributed to one of this book's major conclusions – that very diverse elements of cultural practice conditioned the structure of social and political systems in this period. The picture is further enriched by reference to textual sources alongside archaeological data. However, the study of texts raises additional issues of approach, which I discuss separately later.

### *Defining the region*

The study aims at comparison of 'Crete' with 'other' Aegean and Mediterranean regions, but how are these boundaries defined, and how far can a single book go in drawing such comparisons? Three decades after Coldstream, Desborough and Snodgrass published major syntheses on the 'Dark Age' Aegean, important new primary data about the period have come to light for a number of Greek regions (Coldstream 1979a; Desborough 1972a; Snodgrass 1971). However, the volume of these data, their scattered nature and variable quality (many from rescue excavations), and the expectation today that meaningful archaeological analysis will address data from a number of different thematic and theoretical angles mean that broad yet deep research syntheses in the vein of these earlier works are now difficult – if not impossible – to write. Alternative approaches have recently included the writing of textbooks covering the whole period, and the entire Aegean region, at a fairly superficial level, with a focus on the best-known sites (Dickinson 2006; Osborne 1996; Whitley 2001; Wallace 2009). At the advanced research level, scholars have often chosen to focus in depth on just one part of the period, or some regions only, or to emphasise specific aspects of material culture (Eder 1998; Lemos 2002; Morgan 2003). Edited volumes have made important contributions, often mixing textual studies with archaeological ones and including some valuable new field reports. By their very nature, though, these volumes often lack the kind of synthetic analytical scope needed to integrate different types of research satisfactorily (Deger-Jalkotzy and Lemos 2006; Fisher and van Wees 1998; Kyparissi-Apostolika and Papakonstantinou 2003; Stampolidis and Giannikouri 2004).



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If Aegean-wide synthesis with an adequate depth of regional coverage is now difficult to achieve, restricting the analysis of social and economic interactions to the island scale alone makes little sense as an alternative. Thanks to Crete's geographical position, these interactions always went well beyond the island's physical boundaries, while still feeding back substantially into economic, social, and political changes within it (Broodbank 2000: 68; Cherry et al. 1991: 9; Horden and Purcell 2000: 123–73; Knapp and Blake 2005). This recognition informs the present study, which builds partly on approaches to the archaeology of the Mediterranean using world-systems theory developed in the 1990s (Rowlands 1987; Sherratt and Sherratt 1991, 1993) to show how Crete's changing types and levels of interaction with outside regions influenced local developments in multiple spheres – conflict and defence, economic growth, and the construction of community identity.

Analysis even at the island level is sometimes too general to be meaningful, and we need to move down to the level of the small region: Bintliff has recently called for more 'regional, intra-island, in-depth explorations of specific [Cretan] landscapes to get a surer feel for what our general interpretative problems come to at grass-roots level' (Bintliff 1999: 6). One of the most successful examples of this approach for the EIA has been the Kavousi survey and excavation project in the east of the island, with a recent offshoot at Azoria (Day et al. 1986; Gesell et al. 1983, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1995; Haggis 1993: 165; 2005; Haggis et al. 2004, 2007a, 2007b). However, it is much more difficult to define regional political or economic boundaries for the Early Iron Age in Crete than it is for the Late Bronze Age, when a hierarchical organisation of settlement and territory seems to have operated. Interaction between social and economic groups in the EIA can be shown to have taken place within a number of strongly defined, but partly overlapping, identity frameworks. To understand these properly, research needs to bridge the gap between studies of small regions like the Kavousi project or other recent regional intensive surveys (e.g., Hayden 2004, 2005; Watrous et al. 2004), which are limited in the wider generalisations they can make, and scholarship that, in attempting to generalise about the Aegean as a whole, relies on superficial and often misleading summary 'overviews' of EIA Crete as a whole.

In sum, in this book, I treat the island in this period as a valid, but never restrictive, analytical unit. Close similarities in natural environment, ongoing contacts, and strong links in material culture and social phenomena between its regions *do* allow meaningful generalisation. By undertaking synthesis at the island scale, in conjunction with a representative range of external comparisons, I aim to make it much more difficult to arbitrarily select microregional or otherwise isolated aspects of the Cretan EIA data to illustrate arguments about wider Aegean developments which they may not actually support (Morgan 2003: 49–50). When making comparisons with other regions, the Cretan evidence and its interpretation are always used here as the main focus point, reference, and guide. As a result, my generalisations about other regions are often too shallow to cover the full complexity of developments there. I suggest, however, that this superficiality is justified within the corrective scope of this study. Throughout, the regional boundary designations I use outside Crete can vary considerably, depending on the type and level of comparison being drawn.

### *Structure of the book*

The range of cultural fields examined and my interest in cross-regional comparison have led me to divide each part of the book into thematic subsections within a linear chronological framework. However, there is no systematic or repetitive ordering of these sections for each period

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covered: the work is intended to be neither a gazetteer nor a textbook, but an integrated historical synthesis and narrative. The arguments made often rely on the combined force of several different bases of evidence. Many of the latter have been described at length, and often resummarised, in other publications so it is needless to discuss them here again at any length. The broad diachronic themes investigated, such as the construction of social and cultural identity, relate by their very nature to multiple sets of cultural behaviours. Thus, while evidence relating to cult, burial practice, settlement layout and distribution, subsistence data, and ancient texts is drawn on to support certain arguments, the discussion of it is not always divided into self-contained categories.

Examination of the nature of state collapse in Crete at the end of the LBA, and its comparison with the type of collapse experienced by other areas at this time, is the subject of Part Two. I follow this with a discussion of the island's external relations in the period between collapse and the seventh century, by which time new kinds of small state had emerged on the mainland and in Crete (Part Three). I show that Crete's external contacts continued, yet changed significantly in character, during and immediately after the collapse period and that a major factor in state emergence and development here, and throughout the rest of the Aegean, was a significant growth in the luxury goods/materials trade with the east and west Mediterranean from the tenth century onward. I compare Crete's role in, and response to, this development with those of other Aegean areas, finding unusual features in Crete's case that applied right through into the seventh century and beyond. Part Four moves back again in time to the tenth century, to look in detail at changes within Cretan culture and society from this important horizon onward. In examining why and how a regionally precocious level of complexity was emerging in the island from this time, I show that, although connected with external economic developments, the phenomenon had strong roots in the conditions created by the twelfth-century collapse. In the second half of Part Four the discussion follows the development of large Cretan polities through the period of their consolidation as states by the seventh century.

Part Five discusses the development and expansion of these states and the details of their structure during the period in which written sources become available – the late eighth century onward – and draws comparisons with other Aegean regions in these respects. Texts are referred to extensively here to allow a deeper insight into political and social structures and supplement the relatively thin archaeological record for late Archaic to Classical Crete. However, using them poses particular problems of interpretation, concerning the way in which social identities and power relations were being represented and manipulated through writing. Monumental inscriptions provide fragmentary and narrowly limited information on political structures, and ceramic inscriptions are few on Crete. Literary texts concerning Archaic to Classical Crete are also few in number, are often written from an external perspective, and mostly date later than the fifth century. By their nature, they can never be treated as accurate historical accounts. My strategy in Part Five, then, is to select certain important and distinctive characteristics of Cretan states referred to in, or inferable from, the texts, including the absence of democratic systems, as the focus of exploratory discussion. I assess the origins and interrelationships of these features in the context of comparisons with other Aegean regions, and of the foregoing archaeologically based investigation. In its conclusion, Part Five raises questions about the long-term consequences of Cretan states' intrinsic and perceived difference from their Aegean counterparts and evaluates the main factors that produced this difference in a long-term perspective.

Ultimately, the book is structured so as to provide a bridge between two important historical horizons – state collapse and state emergence – in both a descriptive and an analytical sense. It also aims at explanation of each development in terms of and in relation to the other. I hope that in reading about the developments analysed at the end of the book, the reader will gain a better understanding of those discussed at its beginning, and vice versa.