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978-1-107-68841-4 - Ancient Crete: From Successful Collapse to Democracy's Alternatives,
Twelfth to Fifth Centuries BC
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ANCIENT CRETE

FROM SUCCESSFUL COLLAPSE TO DEMOCRACY'S
ALTERNATIVES, TWELFTH TO FIFTH CENTURIES BC

'Ancient Greece', with its associations of city-states, democratic governance, and iconic material culture, can no longer be envisaged as a uniform geographical or historical entity. The Classical city-states of Crete differed considerably in culture, history, and governance from those of central Greece. In this book, Saro Wallace reaches back into Crete's prehistory, covering the latest Bronze Age through the Archaic periods, to find out why. She emphasizes the roles of landscape, external contacts, social identity construction, and historical consciousness in producing this difference, bringing together the wealth of new archaeological evidence available from the island with a variety of ancient text sources to produce a vivid and up-to-date picture of this momentous period in Crete's history.

Saro Wallace is currently a Glassman Holland Research Fellow at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. She was previously a Humboldt Senior Research Fellow at Heidelberg University's Institut für Klassische Archäologie, in 2010–12. Until 2009 she was Lecturer in Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Reading, having previously held lectureships at the Universities of Bristol and Cardiff. A recipient of a Leverhulme Postdoctoral Research Fellowship and of regular grants from the British Academy and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, she has published many papers and reviews in the field of Bronze to Iron Age Greece. She currently directs excavations at the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age mountaintop site of Karfi, Crete.

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013-2473, USA

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107688414

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First published 2010

Reprinted 2011

First paperback edition 2014

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Wallace, Saro, 1973–

Ancient Crete : from successful collapse to democracy's alternatives, 12th–5th centuries BC / Saro Wallace.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-11204-8 (hbk.)

1. Crete (Greece) – History – To 67 B.C. 2. Crete (Greece) – Politics and government. 3. City-states – Greece – Crete – History. 4. Democracy – Greece – Crete – History. 5. Social change – Greece – Crete – History. 6. Landscape – Social aspects – Greece – Crete – History. 7. Group identity – Greece – Crete – History. 8. Crete (Greece) – Social conditions. 9. Material culture – Greece – Crete – History. 10. Crete (Greece) – Antiquities. I. Title.

DF261.C8W35 2010

939'.1801-dc22 2009033585

ISBN 978-0-521-11204-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-68841-4 Paperback

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ABSTRACT

In today's politics democracy is often presented as a largely self-contained system, able to be introduced abruptly into a variety of social environments with predictable and permanent success. The idea that social collapse (whatever its origins) can be orchestrated and managed to the same end has also gained ground. Against this background, this book's investigation of how far the earliest consensualist states, those of Greece, developed out of specific, regional material and historical conditions following Bronze Age state collapse, and of the role played by cultural practice in structuring them, seems especially pertinent. Interest in regional variance between early Greek state forms has recently grown among archaeologists and text historians. The book is sited within this context: as a comparative regional study focused on Crete it counters teleological/evolutionary notions of a widespread, uniform trajectory of social change towards a single democratic 'light at the end of the tunnel' in early Greece. Between the horizons of east Mediterranean state collapse in the twelfth century and Greek democracy establishment by the fifth, Crete's course of social and political development diverges markedly from that of much of central Greece: democratic systems did not develop there. Analysis of the island in its broad Mediterranean context shows how regional and contingent factors interacted with larger-scale processes and structures to produce Crete's difference, as comparisons are drawn across the ancient world (Cyprus, Athens, the western Greek colonies, the *ethnos* states of north central Greece, Ionia, and Sparta). At island level, the project necessitates writing the first synthetic social archaeology of Crete in the Early Iron Age to late Archaic periods, drawing together a very large amount of good-quality archaeological evidence produced in the last twenty years and a broad range of older data of more variable quality. Archaic and Classical text sources are additionally examined, particularly to illuminate issues around cultural and political identities in Crete by the end of the period covered.

The issue of how far agency, self-consciousness, and choice determined contrasts between regional social systems is an important focus here. However, the book's main argument is that a series of important developments in *cultural* practice, ultimately rooted in the process of Bronze

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Age state collapse, conditioned the way states emerged and developed in different Aegean regions. Crete's collapse is shown to have involved a unique degree of planned, preemptive cultural adjustment that, viewed together with macroeconomic and geopolitical factors, helps explain the remarkable degree of social stability in the island during the immediate post-collapse period. The book identifies a horizon of social complexity emerging in Crete in the tenth century BC – much earlier than in most other areas of Greece – showing it to have been closely tied into this earlier cultural history. This precocious development is argued to have played a strong role in producing an especially bounded, oligarchical small state in the island by the seventh century BC. In contrast, central Greek societies were characterized by extreme and long-term instability and tensions after the Bronze Age collapse, and experienced a different rate and scale of economic and political growth in the period prior to democracy's emergence. The book questions the notion of developmental 'progress' or 'success' and its association with democratic outcomes by suggesting that the early development of complex and stable social structures in Crete *limited* the dynamism of the island's participation in international trade and politics and ultimately helped discourage participative political structures from taking root there. Specific local constructions and conceptions of historical, cultural, and ethnic identity also had strong roles in structuring the state and were heavily manipulated to this end: the book concludes by showing how and why Cretan societies took on a status of ideological 'other' for other Greek communities, deeply affecting the way the Cretan states viewed themselves, were viewed, and operated in the perspective of Classical democracy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many organisations and institutions in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Greece have supported the research needed to write this book. I am grateful to them for supplying the resources that allowed me to work with primary data in the field and secondary sources in a range of libraries. I thank them, too, for funding vital time for slow reflection on and improvement of the work at the writing stage. The Institute for Aegean Prehistory, A. G. Leventis Foundation, British Academy, Leverhulme Trust, Greek Government State Scholarships Foundation, and Mediterranean Archaeological Trust have all contributed significant resources, including field research grants for the Karfi Project and the Roots of the Cretan Polis Ceramic Study Project (the results of which have contributed to this book). The British School at Athens offered small grants for a variety of purposes. I would like especially to note the generosity and efficiency of funding from the Institute for Aegean Prehistory and the Leverhulme Trust. The Samuel H. Kress Foundation generously funded the inclusion of the colour plates.

The British School at Athens offered excellent library research facilities between 2001 and 2004. My employment as a lecturer in Greek and Mediterranean archaeology at the Universities of Bristol, Cardiff, and Reading from 2004 onwards offered a salary to live on and access to some internal research grants and facilities that helped the book's production: I must particularly thank Sue Giles at Bristol, Howard Mason and Ian Dennis at Cardiff, and Margaret Mathews at Reading for help in scanning, correcting, and advising on some of the illustrations used here, as well as the holders of copyright illustrations who have allowed me to adapt and reproduce their images. The 24th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of the National Archaeological Service in east Crete supported my recent work at Karfi, which has greatly informed this book, with permissions to work at the site.

Another important acknowledgement should go to the individual members of the scholarly community who listened to my ideas with patience, wisdom, and interest, using their own knowledge and experience to refine and improve them. Among them I count many close friends as well as colleagues. The constant moral support of Krzysztof Nowicki, and his incredibly detailed understanding of Crete's ancient landscapes, as well as his

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permanent readiness to engage in highly informed and passionate debates on Aegean prehistory, had a special role in improving my work, for which I offer many thanks. Donald Haggis (whose work inspired my first studies of the Cretan economy in the Early Iron Age) has been a tireless critic, friend, and supporter of my work; so has Leslie Day. James Whitley is acknowledged here not only for the level of personal support and stimulating discussion he offered me in the years 2002–4, but also for the amount of original and creative thought he has given to the study of the Aegean Early Iron Age generally and the Early Iron Age of Crete in particular. Though I disagree with many of his positions here, if he had not put them forward in his characteristically polemical style, this field would be considerably poorer.

Among the other colleagues who have stimulated my thinking through personal discussion in a friendly and open way, I would like to mention Tom Brogan, Cyprian Broodbank, Jan Driessen, Birgitta Eder, Brice Erickson, Geraldine Gesell, Carl Knappett, Nota Kourou, Irene Lemos, Sandy MacGillivray, Nicoletta Momigliano, Margaret Mook, Cathy Morgan, Laura Preston, David Ridgway, Sue Sherratt, Lena Sjögren, Metaxia Tsiopoulou, and Todd Whitelaw, but there are many others who have helped me in this way, including all those who have kindly given me permission to reproduce their illustrations. I especially thank Chris Mee, who has offered steady and generous support in all my academic endeavours.

Another group of helpers has been the residents of Crete and many other parts of Greece, who have spent hours chatting about their history, environment, and ways of work; have refreshed me with their hospitality; and have shown me the way through their landscapes with such friendliness and humour. There are too many of them to name, but all have played a role in giving Greece the irrepressible spirit and zest that warm me whenever I visit. I would like to mention here only some very particular friends, the Kargiotakis family of Tzermiado in Lasithi. The regular group of staff and affiliates at the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) Study Centre for East Crete, who create a uniquely friendly, stimulating, and dynamic environment for all those working on Cretan archaeology, should be given special thanks, too.

The staff at Cambridge University Press in New York have been most enthusiastic, supportive, and efficient throughout, and I would like to thank warmly in particular Beatrice Rehl and Susan Thornton.

In the United Kingdom, Robin Turner's kind, steady, and quiet support during the early stages of my research career will always be remembered. I would also like to thank Simon Walton and Lada Jamnický for the entertaining distractions that were so much needed during the various stages of writing. I have very much enjoyed writing this book and hope it will be used by both prehistorians and historians of Greece, who will wrestle further with the questions I have tried to address, and who constantly improve the base of data I have used. All errors, inadequacies, and misunderstandings in the text are my own.

Saro Wallace
Reading, UK
April 2009