

Brief History of Crete

Basic Features of Cretan History and Reports on the Character of the People, in Support of the Study of the Epistle to Titus

Crete is an island which forms a southern boundary to the Aegean Sea, and lies southeast of Greece. Crete is 156 miles long, seven to thirty-five miles wide, and 3,189 square miles in area. It is the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea (after Sicily, Sardinia, Cyprus, and Corsica), and is on the spine of an undersea mountain range thought to have formed at one time a land bridge between the Greek Peloponnesian peninsula and southern Turkey. In ancient times, Crete was the main stepping stone (by sea) between Greece and Africa, and between Asia Minor and Africa. The Philistines may have migrated to Palestine from Greece, having been located on Crete for a time in the ancient past.

Homer attributes to this island only ninety cities, **ennhkonta polhev**, yet in other places he gives it the epithet of **eJkatompoliv**, hundred cities. And this number it is generally allowed to have had originally; but we must not let the term city deceive us, as in ancient times places were thus named which would rate with villages or hamlets only in these modern times. [¹]

Few places in antiquity have been more celebrated than Crete: it was not only famous for its hundred cities, but for the arrival of Europa on a bull, or in the ship Taurus, from Phoenicia; for the Labyrinth, the work of Daedalus; for the destruction of the Minotaur, by Theseus; for Mount Ida, where Jupiter was preserved 254 from the jealousy of his father Saturn; for Jupiter's sepulchre; and above all, for its king, Minos, and the laws which he gave to his people; the most pure, wholesome, and equal, of which antiquity can boast.

Their lawgiver, Minos, is said by Homer to have held a conference every ninth year with Jupiter,

from whom he is reported to have received directions for the farther improvement of his code of laws; though this be fable, it probably states a fact in disguise. Minos probably revised his laws every ninth year, and, to procure due respect and obedience to them, told the people that he received these improvements from Jupiter himself. This was customary with ancient legislators who had to deal with an ignorant and gross people, and has been practised from the days of Minos to those of Mohammed.

According to ancient authors, Crete was originally peopled from Palestine. That part of Palestine which lies on the Mediterranean was by the Arabs called *Keritha*, and by the Syrians, *Creth*; and the Hebrews called its inhabitants *Kerethi* or *Kerethim* which the Septuagint have translated **krhta**. In Ezekiel 25:16, we find "I will cut off the Cherethims", translated by the Septuagint **kai exoloqreusw krhtav**, I will destroy the Cretans; and Zephaniah 2:5: "Woe unto the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites, Septuagint, "the sojourners of the Cretans." That these prophets do not speak of the island of Crete is plain from their joining the Kerethim with the Pelishtim as one and the same people. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I will stretch out my hand upon the Philistines, and will cut off the Cherethims, and destroy the remnant of the seacoast;" Ezekiel 25:16. "Woe unto the inhabitants of the seacoasts, the nation of the Cherethites; the word of the Lord is against you: O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee;" Zephaniah 2:5.

Accordingly it appears that the Kerethim were a part of the Philistines. **The Kerethim in Palestine were noted for archery**; and we find that some of them were employed by David as his life guards, 2 Samuel 8:18; 15:18; 20:23; 1 Kings 1:38; 1 Chronicles 18:17; in all which places they are called, in our translation, Cherethites.

Idomeneus, who assisted Agamemnon in the Trojan war, was the last king of Crete. He left the regency of the island to his adopted son Leucus,

who, in the absence of the king, usurped the empire; the usurper was however soon expelled, and Crete became one of the most celebrated republics in antiquity. The Romans at last, under Quintus Metellus, after an immense expenditure of blood and treasure, succeeded in subduing the island, on which he abolished the laws of Minos, and introduced the code of Numa Pompilius.

Crete, with the small kingdom of Cyrene, became a Roman province; this was at first governed by proconsul, next by a quaestor and assistant, and lastly by a consul. Constantine the Great, in the new division he made of the provinces of the empire, separated Crete from Cyrene, and left it, with Africa and Illyria, to his third son Constans.

In the ninth century, in the reign of Michael II., it was attacked and conquered by the Saracens. About 965, the Emperor Nicephorus Phocas, in the following century, defeated and expelled the Saracens, and reunited the island to the empire, after it had been under the power of the infidels upwards of 100 years. It remained with the empire until the time of Baldwin, earl of Flanders, who, being raised to the throne, rewarded the services of Boniface, marquis of Montferrat, by making him king of Thessalonica, and adding to it the island of Crete. Baldwin, preferring a sum of gold to the government of the island, sold it to the Venetians, A. D. 1194, under whose government it was called Candia, from the Arabic (Arabic) Kandak, a fortification, the name which the Saracens gave to the metropolis which they had built and strongly fortified.

In 1645, in the midst of a peace, it was attacked by the Turks with a fleet of 400 sail, which had on board an army of 60,000 men, under the command of four pashas, to oppose whom the whole island could only muster 3,500 infantry, and a small number of cavalry; yet with these they held out against a numerous and continually recruited army, disputing every inch of ground, so that the whole Ottoman power was employed for nearly thirty years before they got the entire dominion of the island. In this long campaign against this brave people the Turks lost about 200,000 men! [End of Clarke notes. wd]

Crete is centrally located, but very little was known of its history prior to the Greek period. It was not until the archaeological expeditions of Sir Arthur Evans in the late 19th Century that some of the true facts of ancient Cretan history became known. Evans was an out-of-work millionaire in England, so he took a position as the curator of the Ash-

molean Museum of Oxford University in Oxford, England. He was an avid amateur archaeologist, but he was to achieve a reputation which placed him among the most professional.

Evans was also a numismatist, and he heard about some very interesting signet rings which had supposedly been left on the island of Crete by some ancient Egyptians. Taking an extended vacation from the museum, he sailed his personal yacht to Crete in 1894. He arrived in the harbor at Knossos in that year, and he began an archaeological dig at a place nearby called the Kephala site. On the very first day of digging, he uncovered the top of a bronze age palace. He knew that he had found something, but the property didn't belong to him; so he covered up the hole and began negotiations with the Greek government on Crete to purchase the site.

The place that Evans bought was the site of ancient Knossos; and the palace he had found was that of King Minos, who had, up until that time, been thought of only as a legend. Evans called the civilization of King Minos the Minoan civilization. This civilization flourished from early times up until about 1400 B.C., and its discovery has been invaluable to the study of Greek and European history and languages, especially those of the eastern Mediterranean area.

The Minoan culture is distinguished by the originality and high development of its art and architecture. In fact, the Minoan culture is considered to be a forerunner of the Mycenaean civilization of ancient Greece.

Many examples of pictographic script were found at the palace site; and two basic forms were identified, labeled Minoan Linear A and Linear B. The work of decipherment began in the 1930's, but it was not until 1953 that the Linear B script puzzle was solved, by two men named Ventris and Chadwick. They determined that Linear B is an archaic form of early Greek. Linear A is still under examination.

Sir Arthur Evans was recognized with many honors: he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Archaeologists; he was knighted in 1911; he was named president of the Society of Antiquaries from 1914 to 1919. He died at Oxford in 1941.

The Minoan civilization was destroyed in about 1400 B.C. with the eruption of the Santorini volcano at the island of Thera, about 70 miles north of Crete. It is thought that first a huge tidal wave

struck the island, destroying coastal cities and populations, and that then volcanic ash came down, burying the whole island. Arthur Evans uncovered the buildings 3300 years later.

Of course, the island began to be repopulated immediately as people migrated from the mainland. In about 600 B.C., Dorian Greeks came in force and settled the island by conquest. Their cousins were the Spartan Greeks from the Peloponnesus and the Philistine Greeks of Palestine. Spartan Greeks settled on the western side of the island in cities like Lyttus. All of the Greeks on the island were warlike, fierce fighters who prided themselves on their independence and warrior qualities. Island people have a tendency to be independent, and this trait was augmented by their heredity.

There were Cretan Jews at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:11; and Paul stopped at least once at Crete, on his voyage to Rome, Acts 27:7ff.

The following excerpts are from the works of Polybius, one of the most famous and prolific Greek historians of Roman times. The quotations are taken from his *Histories*, Volumes II, III, and VI. The citations indicate volume and page numbers as [II, 319], etc.

On the Cretan military [II, 319ff] - "The Cretans both by land and sea are irresistible in ambushes, forays, tricks played on the enemy, night attacks, and all petty operations which require fraud; but they are cowardly and down-hearted in the massed face-to-face charge of an open battle".

On Crete's internal strife and civil wars [II, 429ff], "The city of Lyttus met with an irremediable disaster. Knossians and Gortynians had subjected the whole island, except for Lyttus (about 225 B.C.). Since Lyttus would not surrender to them, they declared war against it. At first, all the Cretans took part in the war against the Lyttans; but jealousy sprang up from some trifling cause, as is common with the Cretans. Several cities went over to the aid of Lyttus.

"Meanwhile, the city of Gortyn was having civil war, in which the elder citizens were taking the side of Knossos and the younger were siding with Lyttus. The elder Gortynians, with the help of Knossians and Aetolians, whom they had secretly let into the city and the citadel, put to death the younger citizens, delivering the city of Gortyn to Knossos.

"At about the same time, the Lyttians left with their whole force for an expedition into enemy territory. But the Knossians got word of their depar-

ture and used the opportunity to occupy Lyttus, destroying the town and sending the populace into slavery. The Lyttus military returned to a gutted city and were so distraught that they didn't even enter the town, but sought refuge in the city of Lappa, becoming in one day cityless aliens instead of citizens.

"Thus, Lyttus, a colony of the Spartans, and allied to them by blood, the most ancient city in Crete, and the breeding place of her bravest men, was utterly and unexpectedly made away with."

On the greed of Cretans [III,373ff] (In a comparison of the Spartan and Cretan constitutions) - "In all these respects the Cretan practice is exactly the opposite (to the Spartan). Their laws go as far as possible in letting them acquire land to the extent of their power; and money is held in such high honor among them that its acquisition is not only regarded as necessary, but as most honorable.

"So much, in fact, do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful...owing to their ingrained lust of wealth are involved in constant broils public and private, and in murders and civil wars."

On Cretan treachery and conniving (this is Polybius' rebuttal to the statements of Ephorus, Xenophon, Plato and Callisthenes that the constitutions of Sparta and Crete are similar) [III, 375ff] - "Such are the points in which I consider these two political systems to differ, and I will now give my reasons for not regarding that of Crete as worthy of praise or imitation.

"In my opinion, there are two fundamental things in every state, by virtue of which its principles and constitution are either desirable or the reverse. I mean customs and laws. What is desirable in these makes men's private lives righteous and well-ordered and the general character of the state gentle and just. What is to be avoided has the opposite effect.

"So, just as when we observe the laws and customs of a people to be good, we have no hesitation in pronouncing that the citizens and the state will consequently be good also. Thus, when we notice that men are covetous in their private lives and that their public actions are unjust, we are plainly justified in saying that their laws, their particular customs, and the state as a whole, are bad.

Now it would be impossible to find, except in some rare instances, personal conduct more treacherous,

or a public policy more unjust, than in Crete. Holding then the Cretan constitution to be neither similar to that of Sparta nor in any way deserving of praise and imitation, I dismiss it from the comparison which I have proposed to make.”

On the treachery of some citizens of the cities of Cydonia and Apollonia [VI, 31] – “The people of Cydonia at this time committed a shocking act of treachery universally condemned. For although many such things have happened in Crete, what was done then was thought to surpass all other instances of their habitual ferocity.

“For while they were not only friends with the Apollonians, but united with them in general in all the rights observed by men, there being a sworn treaty to this effect deposited in the temple of Zeus, they treacherously seized on the city, killing the men, laying violent hands on all property, and dividing among themselves and keeping the women and children, and the city with its territory.”

From Crete vs. Rhodes [VI, 285] – “Antiphatas ... for, as a fact, this young man was not at all Cretan in character but had escaped the contagion of Cretan ill-breeding.”

The Story of the Capture of Achaeus

(a true, and truly Cretan, episode)

First, some background Greek history -

Philip of Macedon had won recognition as a Greek by force of arms. He announced his intention of leading a united Greek army against Persia to overthrow it once and for all. He was elected general at the city of Corinth in 335 B.C., but he was murdered shortly thereafter, and the army and generalship passed to his son, Alexander.

Alexander crossed the Hellespont in 334 B.C. with an army of 35,000 Macedonians and Greeks. He visited Troy, dedicated his armor to Athena, and placed a crown on the tomb of Achilles, whom he regarded as his ancestor. His first engagement with the Persians was at the river Granicus, east of Troy, which opened his way into Asia Minor. The second main battle was at Issus, after which he overran the whole east coast of the Mediterranean, conquering as far as Egypt. His third great battle was at Guagamela in 331 B.C., which brought the final downfall of the Persian empire. He went on to conquer territory over into India, but died at the age of 32 of a fever probably made worse by alcoholism.

Alexander had begun to think of world empire, but it was not to be. His generals fought each other

to be his successor; and they finally divided the conquered territories among themselves. Ptolemy began his dynasty in Egypt, which lasted until Cleopatra. The Seleucid dynasty in Asia Minor, with the kings named Seleucus or Antiochus, lasted until 65 B.C. when Syria became a Roman province. The Antigonid rulers of mainland Greece and Macedonia also remained independent until the Roman takeover.

For the next century and a half after Alexander, the history of Asia Minor is that of the attempts by various kings to extend their dominion over the Mediterranean area. There was continuous fighting between Greeks, Egyptians, and Syrians, as first one and then the other became ambitious for more territory.

In about 215 B.C., Antiochus III took an army to hunt down a man named Achaeus, a member of the Syrian royal family, who had proclaimed himself king in Asia Minor. Achaeus and his army were forced to retreat into the city of Sardis, and Antiochus troops were camped almost all the way around the city in siege.

Now - at this time, Bolis, a Cretan, was a high ranking official in the court of Ptolemy, the Egyptian king. He was possessed of superior intelligence, exceptional courage, and much military experience. He was approached by Sosibius, the Egyptian “secretary of state”, and asked to work up a plan to save Achaeus from the clutches of Antiochus. In about three days, Bolis told Sosibius that he would take on the job; mainly because he had spent some time in Sardis and knew the layout of the land and the city. And he knew that Cambylus, another Cretan, and a friend of his, was the commander of the Cretan mercenaries in Antiochus’ army.

In fact, Cambylus and his force of Cretans had charge of one of the outposts behind the citadel where Antiochus was not able to build siege works. This portion of the surrounding forces’ line was occupied by Cambylus’s troops.

Sosibius had almost given up the idea of rescuing Achaeus; but now he thought that if anyone could do it, Bolis could. And Bolis was so enthusiastic about the idea that the project really began to move. Sosibius advanced the funds necessary for the project; and he promised Bolis a large reward from Ptolemy himself, pointing out also that King Achaeus would probably express his gratitude with money.

Bolis set sail without delay carrying dispatches in

code and credentials to Nicomachus in Rhodes, a close friend of Achaeus, and to Melancomas at Ephesus. These two men had previously acted as Achaeus' trusted agents in foreign affairs. They were in agreement with Bolis' plan and began to make arrangements to help him in the rescue attempt. Bolis also sent word to Cambylus at Sardis that he had a matter of great urgency to discuss with him in private.

Bolis, being a Cretan and naturally astute, had been weighing every idea and testing the soundness of every plan. When Bolis met with Cambylus, (according to Polybius), "They discussed the matter from a thoroughly Cretan point of view. For they did not take into consideration either the rescue of the man in danger or their loyalty to those who had charged them with the task, but only their personal security and advantage. Both of them, then, Cretans as they were, soon arrived at the same decision, which was to divide between them in equal shares the ten talents advanced by Sosibius and then to reveal the project to Antiochus; and undertake, if assisted by him, to deliver Achaeus into his hands on receiving a sum of money in advance and the promise of a reward upon delivery of Achaeus adequate in importance to the enterprise."

So, Cambylus left to talk to Antiochus; and Bolis sent a messenger to Achaeus with coded messages from Nicomachus and Melancomas outlining the plan to the king. Should Achaeus agree to make the attempt at escape, Bolis would go ahead with the rescue plan. Antiochus, for his part, was surprised and delighted at the offer from Cambylus. He was ready to promise anything to get Achaeus in his hands; but he was equally wary of any Cretan plan. So he demanded a detailed account of their project and how they were going to carry it out. Cambylus was able to convince him, so Antiochus urged him to put it into execution, and he advanced several talents for expenses.

Bolis, meanwhile, communicated with Nicomachus and Melancomas, who, believing that the attempt was being made in all good faith, immediately drew up letters to Achaeus in a secret mercantile code so that only Achaeus could read the messages. The letters urged Achaeus to put his trust in Bolis and Cambylus.

Bolis' messenger gained access to the citadel in Sardis with the aid of Cambylus, and he handed the letters to Achaeus. The messenger had been completely briefed in the fake plan, and he was able to give an accurate and detailed account of ev-

erything in answer to Achaeus' numerous questions about Bolis and Sosibius, Nicomachus and Melancomas, and especially Cambylus. The messenger was able to support the cross-questioning with confidence and honesty because he had no knowledge of the real agreement between Bolis and Cambylus.

Achaeus was convinced and agreed to the plan. He sent word back to Rhodes to Nicomachus, to tell Bolis to proceed. Achaeus figured that once he had escaped he could travel quickly back to Syria, while Antiochus was still occupied in the siege of Sardis, and create a great movement in his favor.

The rescue plan was as follows –Bolis and the messenger would go into the citadel and lead Achaeus out. The messenger would lead the way out because he knew the path and there was a new moon, making it completely dark. Bolis would be last and stick close to Achaeus. If Achaeus were to be alone, there would be no problem. But they wanted to take him alive; and if he brought some people with him, they didn't want to take any chances of his escaping in the dark when he found out he was being kidnapped.

Cambylus took Bolis to talk personally with Antiochus, who again promised a huge reward for Achaeus. That night, about two hours before daybreak, Bolis went through the lines to the citadel and met Achaeus. Here, let Polybius pick up the narrative –

"As, however, Achaeus was second to none in intelligence, and had had considerable experience, he judged it best not to repose entire confidence in Bolis. He announced that he would first send out three or four of his friends, and after they had made sure that everything was all right, he would himself get ready to leave. Achaeus was indeed doing his best; but he did not consider that, as the saying goes, he was trying to play the Cretan with a Cretan. For there was no probable precaution of this kind that Bolis had not minutely examined."

Achaeus dressed himself in rude clothing and put fairly good clothing on some of his retainers. Then, in darkness, they went out on the steep and difficult trail down from the citadel, the messenger in front as planned, with Bolis bringing up the rear. Again, Polybius:

"Bolis found himself perplexed ... for although a Cretan and ready to entertain every kind of suspicion regarding others, he could not owing to the darkness make out which was Achaeus, or even if he were present. But he noticed that at certain slip-

perly and dangerous places on the trail some of the men would take hold of Achaeus and give him a hand down, as they were unable to put aside their customary respect for him. So Bolis very soon determined who was Achaeus.”

Achaeus was taken in ambush by Bolis and his men, who kept Achaeus’s hands inside his garment to prevent suicide. He was taken bound hand and foot to Antiochus, who summarily executed him. Bo-

lis and Cambylus received their rewards and went their way.

A final word from Polybius: “Thus did Achaeus perish, after taking every reasonable precaution and defeated only by the perfidy of those whom he had trusted, leaving two useful lessons to posterity, firstly to trust no one too easily, and secondly not to be boastful in the season of prosperity, but, being men, to be prepared for any turn of fortune.”