

THE ENIGMA OF LATE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN CRETE: UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACTS

**Veronica Casali and Silvia Donadei
Findings from the Basilica of Mitropolis: new contributions**

The Justinianic period seems to mark the acme of the Gortynian bishopric and corresponds to the new archiepiscopal role assumed by the diocese. The contacts with Constantinople are evidenced by the activity of bishop Theodoros, who renewed the mosaic pavements of the cathedral, and, a few decades later, by Betranios, archbishop in the last quarter of the century.

The episcopal quarter (corresponding to the village of Mitropolis) was the focus of a series of religious buildings with notable architectural and decorative features, including an impressive circular baptistery, becoming a central aggregative nucleus in the organisation of the city. In the second half of the 6th century, some typically Constantinopolitan modifications can be noted in the church, namely the insertion in the bema hemicycle of a synthronon with a semi-circular corridor and the re-arrangement of the central aisle for the liturgy: a solea and an ambon were built, all belonging to the same phase as the mosaic decoration. Later, a second monumental ambo was built, inspired by the one erected at Haghia Sophia. These elements characterise a ‘high rank’ international architecture, probably for the influence of the Gortynian bishops of non-Cretan origin, too: wide dimensions, aggregation of religious buildings to the main nucleus, choice decoration and liturgical furniture with elements and models also imported from the capital, the use of special typologies and of precious materials, wall paintings, stucco and mosaic decoration elsewhere unknown in the island, and, finally, use of the building prolonged in time through constant architectural and decorative renewal activity. The cathedral seems to survive at least to the 8th century, acquiring further importance for the absence of a secular local power. Since 2013 the study of findings from the Mitropolis Basilica has gradually provided significant data, both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, for the various types: common table ware, coarse ware, red slip ware, amphorae, lamps and glass vessels.

The majority of the findings seems to belong to Cretan and, more particularly, local production, over a span of several centuries. One of the first methodological problems concerns the interpretation of the different classes (both of liturgical and non-liturgical use) in relation to the religious environment which they belong to and to their stratigraphical context. Therefore, it is necessary to compare the framework derived from the analysis of Mitropolis’ findings with similar case-studies within the Cretan area, in order to try to define properly the way in which the objects were used, and the various phases of the development of the building.

Michael J Curtis

The Colloquium on Roman Crete – a new platform for networking and collaborative research

The Colloquium on Post-Minoan Crete was launched in 1995 with the help and support of the British School at Athens. It was intended to create an opportunity for researchers working on field projects and research on Crete in the periods after the decline of the Minoan civilisation to the modern historical period to get together and discuss their research and ideas. It led to two international conferences and one publication.

The Colloquium on Roman Crete was launched in 2016 and to some extent follows in the spirit of the Post-Minoan Colloquium. Whilst the aim of the Colloquium is still to create a forum where academics can meet and discuss their research, the longer-term objective is to raise the profile of Hellenistic and Roman Crete through a networking platform that can provide useful information, share data and assist with the development of new collaborative research projects for both terrestrial and marine environments. The paper will set out the ideas and preliminary plans for the Colloquium on Roman Crete.

Jane E Francis

Crete in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries: Cultural Changes in a Period of Transition

This paper explores the changes that occurred on Crete in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, after the initial phase of the Roman conquest had stabilised and the island began to thrive as part of the Roman Empire. This period is marked by substantial affluence, manifest in extensive architectural construction and development, much of it of a decidedly Roman nature, and in the widespread adoption of Roman pottery, iconography, and items of interior decor. Crete was also an active participant in Rome's maritime economy, both importing foreign goods and materials from a wide variety of sources and also contributing its own amphora-borne wine to imperial marketplaces. Yet within this era of seeming success are signs that Crete's prospects were not all positive. While its inhabitants could not have foreseen the devastating earthquake of A.D. 365 and the changes it forced upon the island, it is clear that this period, and the 3rd century in particular, were already preparing for change. An exploration of various classes of archaeological evidence from this era indicates how pivotal a point this was in Crete's history.

Scott Gallimore

Deconstructing Patterns in the Distribution of Cretan Amphorae

The role of Crete in the broader Roman economy is a topic deserving of further consideration. Research over the past few decades has begun to shed light on Crete's economy and the island's widespread participation in Mediterranean and European exchange networks. Distribution maps illustrating the presence of Cretan amphorae in disparate areas of the Roman Empire have been particularly helpful for moving this discussion forward. These distribution maps provide a very limited picture, however, and often mask subtle but significant patterns. In the first and second century CE, for instance, AC1 amphorae are the most common Cretan vessel type identified at Mediterranean sites, while AC4 amphorae are predominant in northern Europe. What mechanisms led to this dichotomy? A similar distinction is visible in Late Antiquity. Finds of Cretan amphorae at Aegean sites in the sixth and seventh centuries CE mainly comprise the TRC2 type, while sites around the Black Sea instead produce TRC4–6 vessels. Even the quantity of finds is not properly illustrated in most

distribution maps. Excavations of Early Roman levels at the city of Rome have revealed tens of thousands of Cretan amphora fragments. At many other sites, only a single example has been unearthed. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of Crete's economic role in the Roman Empire, we must critically assess the stimuli behind these patterns as well as any others that might become apparent from careful analysis of the distribution data. The goal of this paper is to provide a preliminary attempt at addressing this topic. Through use of Geographic Information Systems, a series of analyses can be conducted that attempt to tease out these patterns. The use of GIS also provides an improved platform for evaluating what factors led to the development of those patterns. Overall, this research should provide improved insight into the island's Roman period economy and should also help to promote the idea that Crete was not a single, coherent entity. Instead, it was made up of numerous micro-regions, many of which may have played very distinct roles within exchange networks across the Roman world.

George W.M. Harrison

“Stitching Shadows” – Re-emergence of local traditions

It is an almost unavoidable trap to talk and write about Crete during the Roman Empire but to do so within the framework of the Classical Greek past, forgivable perhaps because the mistake of writing about the present in the terms of a glorious past is a prominent, and charming, feature of Plutarch. This contribution demonstrates the argument that perception of Crete from the second through the fifth centuries, AD, was a *mélange* of a Crete that would have been recognizable from the Classical writers and Hellenistic scholars, such as Apollodorus of Athens, with versions of stories and events that were unique to Roman imperial appropriations of history, starting with Tacitus *Histories* 1, and the creative flourishes of the Second Sophistic, centering on Athenaeus and Lucian. Symptomatic of the Roman Empire was cross-fertilization among genres – literary, performative, and visual – in which re-performance of Cretan plays by Aeschylus and Euripides competed with variant versions popularized in mime and pantomime. Mosaics and fresco, especially, show the convergence, that is, hybridity, of old and fresh takes that makes perceptions about Crete during the Roman Empire distinctly different from other periods.

Athina Malapani

Materia Medica in Roman Crete: Are there any similarities with other Mediterranean regions?

This paper is about the medical material found and used in the island of Crete during the Roman period. This material was thought to be of any kind (like vegetarian, animal and mineral) and used in the pharmaceutical manufacturing. In addition, the same material was found in many other areas of the Mediterranean; the most characteristic example is the island of Cyprus, where a great variety of medical material is witnessed in many ancient texts. Furthermore, the archaeological evidence of many recent surveys has shown interesting conclusions about the medical material used in Cyprus. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine whether there is a connection between Roman Crete and Cyprus as far as it concerns the medical material used in the pharmaceutical manufacturing of the ancient times and the reasons why these similarities may have existed.

Stavroula Markoulaki
Kissamos: the profile of a Hellenic-Roman city

This paper aims to provide a general outline of a Roman city in the northwest region of Crete, after almost 40 years of rescue excavations. The town planning follows the tradition of the Greek gridding system framing insulae with public and domestic buildings. The results of the excavations bring into focus the domestic architecture which is characterised by large residences of the ruling class with floor decoration of splendid mosaics. The architecture and decoration recall the Roman luxuria and indicate the willingness of the upper class to imitate the Roman way of life. A chronological evolution of mosaics can be followed based on the stylistic features and the chronological data of the houses to which they belong. The prosperity of the city in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD was fuelled by its port and the role it played at the crossroads of the commercial maritime routes of the Empire after the decline of Hellenistic Phalasarna.

Daniela Massara
“About mosaics in *domus* and *villae* of Roman Crete: a focus on *sectilia pavimenta*”

Thanks to the latest studies about mosaics in Roman Crete and more archaeological excavations of household buildings there is more available data to consider.

This paper aims firstly to examine the distribution of decorative patterns inside rooms, with specific attention to the use of space (as for *triclinia*, *stibadia*, *cubicula*) within the context of the domestic sphere. The more significant cases - known from published works - are from buildings discovered in Kastelli Kissamos, Chanià, Eleutherna, Knossos, Iraklion and Chersonissos; other examples, less complete, had been found in towns as Argyroupolis, Gortyna, Kouphonisi.

Secondly the paper aspires to focus on the use of marbles or stones for floors in *domus* or *villae* in Roman Crete, whereas *sectilia pavimenta* are recurring - as well known - in Late Antique thermal buildings and early Christian churches. In fact, tessellated mosaics are well known in Crete since 1st century A.D. (especially between the 2nd and 3rd centuries) but there is less evidence for the use of other kinds of techniques in holding structures (as *opus sectile*, decorated *opus caementicium* or shaped bricks). Except for paved floors (common in thermal spaces or for *impluvia*'s coverings), very few cases of *sectilia pavimenta* are documented and all are concentrated only in one city: at Kastelli Kissamos. Two different typologies may be seen: pseudo *emblemata* and unitary framework. They may be dated in the central Imperial period, both on their technique and ornamental patterns. The decoration of the second one is attested as *opus sectile* at Villa Adriana in Tivoli and in other examples of tessellated pavements, but there is no other documentation of the use of this decorative motif as unitary framework; therefore, the one from Kastelli Kissamos appears to be a *unicum*.

This presentation arises from current excavations of a late roman thermal building in Gortyna (conducted by University of Milan) and a thesis research of Archaeological Specialization School, about floors of Roman civic buildings in Crete (discussed in 2011).

Anna Moles

A preliminary study of the human skeletal remains from Hellenistic to Late Antique Knossos

Human skeletal remains are an under-studied resource for the Roman period in Crete. This paper aims to demonstrate the potential research questions that can be addressed by assemblages which have come from rescue excavations at Knossos, and to present some preliminary results from the skeletal analysis from Hellenistic to Late Antique contexts. This material has suffered twofold from being under-valued material at the time of excavation and an under-valued time period for the region.

My research aims to investigate the impact of urbanism, and other social and environmental factors, on age-at-death and skeletal and dental health, as well as intrapopulation variation by social status (as inferred by burial group and tomb architecture), age and sex. As a site of long-term significance and having been intensively investigated and extensively excavated, Knossos offers an excellent setting for studying how demographic and economic growth (Hellenistic and Early Roman) and decline (Late Antique) can impact the lifeways of individuals. Skeletal health and age-at-death can be reflective of the urban environment, the climate and farming yields, impacts of warfare, natural disasters and plagues, and social differentiation within the population and over time.

During the Late Hellenistic to Roman period Knossos was an urban centre of a large enough scale that could have suffered from the effects of dense, unhygienic living conditions and infectious disease. Epidemics could be proposed as a factor in the 2nd century movement of population from Knossos to coastal Heraklion and the final abandonment of the site as a significant centre in the 7th century. Large numbers of deaths in the older sub-adult and young adult categories could be indicative of a high prevalence of infectious disease. Warfare is attested throughout the Hellenistic period on the island. Though warfare itself can cause an increase in mortality, a more significant impact is often caused by the secondary factors such as resource deficits and famine. Population growth at Knossos during the Hellenistic period, and the establishment of the *Colonia Iulia Nobilis Cnosus* may represent new and increased contacts, which may bring in new produce, food technologies or fashions that would have affected a change in the diet of the population. Climate change in the 2nd century, in the form of significant aridity and cooler temperatures, could have had significant ramifications for agriculture and productivity, and thus, an impact on the prosperity, diet and longevity of the population. With the introduction of Christianity it is likely that changes would be observed in the diets, particularly those who could afford to adhere to monastic-style dietary regimens. The methods were selected to be feasible within what is a fragmentary skeletal assemblage, maximising the amount of data that could be extracted for effective interpretation of the living population. This enables the use of a new resource to give greater insight and a new perspective into the lives of individuals at Knossos from the Hellenistic to Late Antique period.

Nicholas Sekunda

The Export of Whetstones from Hellenistic Crete to Republican Italy

It seems to be common opinion that during the Hellenistic period the activities of Cretan pirates prevented maritime trade between Crete and the rest of the Mediterranean world. This modern conception seems to be based on a suggestion of Rostovtzeff (S&EHHW p. 785f.).

Other evidence is accumulating to demonstrate that this impression is false, but I would like to add the evidence for the export of whetstones from Crete to Italy in the Hellenistic/Republican period. The main evidence for this trade comes in two passages in Pliny's (*HN* 18. 67. 261: 36. 47. 164-5). There are only two places in Crete in which appropriate stone for whetstones can be found. One is in the Sphakia, and the other is at Elounda, the ancient Olous (V. Raulin, *Description physique de l'Isle de Crete (Paris 1869)* I p. 271, II p. 463). A passage taken from the late Republican jurist Alfenius (or Alfenus) Varus is preserved in Digest XXXIX 4.15, From this passage it would appear that the export of whetstones from Crete ceased thanks to a law introduced by Caesar in the 40s B.C (Jörs, Klebs, 'Alfenus (8)' *RE* 1 (1894) col. 1472-4.).

Daniel Stewart and Jennifer Baird

Framing Roman Knossos: Geophysics and Legacy Data

The BSA has been investigating Knossos intensively for over a century. The primary focus of that research has been the prehistoric period, though major excavations and publications have also documented components of the long post-prehistoric occupation. Far less attention has been given to the not inconsiderable remains of Roman Knossos: *Colonia Iulia Nobilis Cnossus*.

This paper will present preliminary results of a geophysical survey at Knossos, undertaken under the auspices of the BSA. Previous geophysical research at Knossos has been relatively limited and focused on specific areas of the landscape to provide local contexts for excavations, such as the (unpublished) survey by Richard Jones delimiting a Hellenistic fort (KS 37), and the immediate environs of the Villa Dionysus (Shell 1997; Wardle 1998; Wardle and Wardle 1994, 1996). More recent geophysical research on Lower Gypsades to the south of the Minoan Palace (The Knossos Gypsades Geophysical Project, AGOnline no. 1921) focused on magnetometry survey on the periphery of the site, capturing a limited swathe of land use types and underlying geological morphology

Much of the current understanding of Roman Knossos is built upon excavations at the Villa Dionysus (Hayes 1983; Paton 1998) and Unexplored Mansion-(Sackett *et al.* 1992) areas. More recently, rescue excavations have provided further insight into keyholes in the urban fabric of the Roman era site (Sweetman and Grigoropoulos 2010). While these publications provide knowledge of local ceramic sequences and specific structures, they provide no information regarding the broader topography of the inhabited landscapes, the relationship(s) between public, private and religious spaces, the nature of occupation within the valley as a whole, nor the place of Knossos within the province.

The aim of the present survey, of which two of four planned seasons have been completed, is to provide a spatial framework into which the current constellation of excavated but unstudied archival material from Roman Knossos can be placed. This paper presents the preliminary results of the survey and uses them to reinterpret what is known about the history and topography of the Roman city, and propose implications for its place within Crete as a whole, in light of other new and ongoing work (Francis and Kouremenos 2016).

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Theotokis Theodoulou

Roman Crete. The picture derived from shipwrecks, harbour works and coastal sites

In 2010 a Department of the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities was established in Herakleion, Crete in order to better serve the needs of the underwater and coastal heritage of the island. In the six years that followed an archaeological map/database was created using data from the already known bibliographical information and also from extensive surveys or limited scale investigations that took place in several sites around the island and enriched the archaeological database and our knowledge about the island.

In this framework extracting data related to the Roman period yields a better understanding of the "harbour and coastal sites" network of the island, as well as the nautical routes around it. Ships with Roman cargoes left evidence at the area of the eastern cape of Crete, Salmonion, the area of Zakros, Gavdopoula, the western promontories of Gramvousa and Rhodopos as well as around Dhia island north of Herakleion. In islets like Dhia, Mohlos, Pseira, Leuke, Crysi, Traphos, Gavdos, Roman settlements witness the stop points of Roman nautical routes that are also testified in literary sources like Strabo, the Acts of Apostles etc. At the same time evidence of Roman harbour installations at Kissamos, Chersonessos, Elounda, Kouremenos, Lendas, Matala, possibly Herakleion, etc. and the transfer of the island's capital from Knossos to Gortys show the importance of the sea-routes and the relation of the establishment of harbour cities.

The presentation will comprise a synthesis of the available information, in an attempt to clarify the picture of nautical Roman Crete.

Conor Trainor

Daily Life at Hellenistic Knossos: A view from the KWW'77 Excavations

The conventional view of Hellenistic Crete as an inward-looking, war-plagued and economically depressed region has been informed by accounts of several ancient authors. However, archaeological studies have presented a challenge to this view, and helped present Hellenistic Crete as a considerably more complex, globally connected and nuanced entity. Newly studied material from the KWW'77 excavations at Knossos, presents a case study to further bolster the picture of a complex and connected island during Hellenistic times. Drawing from previously unpublished finds, this paper presents two unpublished deposits from Knossos: 1) A Hellenistic house of late 3rd- early 2nd century B.C.E. date, and 2) a wine production facility of Hellenistic/Roman transitional (earlier 1st century B.C.E.) date.

Excavated by J. Carington Smith in 1977, the architectural and faunal remains from the KWW'77 programme were published in 1994; most of the small-finds, however, including the ceramics, have remained unstudied until now. Owing to the thoroughness of the excavation and range of material which was recorded, the finds from these deposits afford us a rare picture of food preparation and dining practices, textile manufacture, wine production and domestic cult practice at Hellenistic Knossos. They also enable us to view the site within its wider economic context indicating links with exchange networks of the Aegean, the Dodecanese and with Asia Minor. These two deposits serve as case studies to help establish a social and economic picture of daily life at Hellenistic Knossos which calls into question the conventional view of an inward-looking and economically depressed people.

Conor Trainor and Todd Whitelaw

A City in Flux: Hellenistic and Roman Knossos

As Crete's largest Hellenistic state, and the subsequent location of a Roman colony, Knossos serves as an excellent case study for analysing shifting power dynamics on Crete between the 2nd century BCE and the 7th century CE, within the wider perspective of a major urban centre occupied continuously through the Hellenistic to Late Antique periods. That history is documented through a range of research and rescue excavations in the city and cemeteries, which can now more fully be contextualised with evidence from the intensive and comprehensive survey of the Knossos Urban Landscape Project (KULP). This paper will present an overview of Hellenistic and Roman Knossos based on the hyper-intensive survey of 11 km², encompassing the city and its surrounding mortuary landscape. With c. 400,000 artefacts collected from c. 17,000 20m x 20m collection units, the emerging diachronic picture from KULP affords us an unparalleled view of nine millennia of settlement development in the Knossos valley, including three millennia of urban dynamics. While study is still underway, the finds of Hellenistic and Roman date from KULP enable us to track the overall development of the city through its last millennium as a major urban centre. It reached its maximum extent of some 1.3 km² in the Hellenistic period, contracted to c. 0.8 km² after the Roman conquest, with further contraction during the Late Roman period and eventual effective abandonment in the 7th century CE.

As well as documenting the long-term history of the community, the distributions of ceramics and other finds provide insight into its internal organisation. The abundant material is allowing us to assess the nature and distribution of production within the city and, more broadly, its participation within wider and changing Mediterranean exchange networks. These data align with historical accounts relating to Knossos, such as documenting a

significant contraction in the size of the city between Hellenistic and Early Roman times. However, other data present a more complex picture than that of economic stagnation or decline offered by the traditional reading of the ancient authors. For example, the KULP data suggests that Knossos experienced significant growth in the agricultural and export sectors of its economy during the early years of Roman rule.

Overall, the intensive and comprehensive coverage of the survey allows us to explore the city as a dynamic entity toward the end of its existence as an independent polis and throughout its time as a Roman colony.