

## Roman Crete: New Perspectives

Edited by Jane E. Francis and Anna Kouremenos. Pp. ix + 246. Oxbow, Oxford 2016. \$65. ISBN 978-1-78570-095-8 (cloth).

Reviewed by [Rebecca J. Sweetman](#)

Following a concise summary of scholarship on Roman Crete, Francis posits two key aims of this publication in the introduction: to highlight the importance of Crete and to show how it could contribute to debates about Rome and the provinces. In many respects these kinds of issues have been addressed in individual publications over the last decade, and more focused questions are now required to move the discussion forward. Papers in this volume on material culture such as pottery, beehives, and Italian sigillata stamps provide opportunities for focused engagement on Roman Crete, while other papers offer wide-scale views on climate, relationships within the province of Crete and Cyrene, and diachronic examinations of cities such as Gortyn and Aptera.

In the first of the broad views, Chevrollier tackles the longstanding question of the relationship between Crete and Cyrenaica during the Roman period. It has been assumed that although they were administered as a joint province, there were few connections between the two disparate areas. By examining material such as coins, inscriptions, and ceramics from both areas, Chevrollier highlights a variety of contact often overlooked. While conclusions remain tentative, it seems that there was at least one-way trade in the form of Cretan lamps being imported to Cyrene. He postulates reasons for the foundation of the joint province such as the creation of a trade zone or as a means of overcoming pirates (15).

Moody applies the climate change data from indirect sources such as tree rings, pollen, microshells, stable isotopes, lake levels, and geomorphology to a diachronic examination of the economy and settlement patterns of the island, with some interesting results. Of note are variances across the island. For example, a stress in the economy is indicated by a gap in second- and third-century C.E. imported wares in Sphakia, which is matched by discontinuity in settlement here and in the Akrotiri peninsula. Conversely, data from Vrokastro indicate a steady settlement continuity. Survey data indicate an increase in settlement evidence beginning in the early fourth century on the Lasithi Plain, at Sphakia, and at Vrokastro, which is paralleled by a decrease on the Mesara Plain. This upland focus may be explained by a declining water supply between the second and fifth centuries impacting on lowland settlement.

A summary of the different types of evidence for land use in Crete opens Francis' discussion of beehives. This is followed by a detailed examination of beekeeping and equipment in the Sphakia region and in Crete more broadly. Francis postulates that the larger numbers of examples from central and western Crete may be explained by a wetter climate producing more vegetation than in the East. Her paper is a useful contextualization of Cretan beekeeping in the wider Roman empire.

Baldwin Bowsky explores cultural identity using Italian sigillata stamps as an index. This builds on her earlier work on Cretan epigraphy and prosopography, which has made an important contribution to the study of individuals and their roles in the Roman period. Her analysis further supports the growing body of evidence (epigraphic, mortuary, mosaic) for Italian settlers at Knossos in the early years of the colony, which, by the late first century C.E., is no longer visible in the archaeological record.

In a similar manner, Karanastasi's reevaluation of Roman imperial sculpture also shows how the island is connected to broader imperial developments. The discussion of sculpture in Crete, and of Cretan origin outside the island, highlights the dynamic Cretan economy and the bustling nature of cities there. This paper is one of the highlights of the collection, presenting a deeply contextualized review that is well integrated and makes good connections with others in the volume.

Other papers focus on individual objects or sites. Miliakis and Papadaki's work on an Attic marble table support found during the Health Centre excavations at Kiasmos supports suggestions of a close relationship between Cretan and Attic workshops in the Imperial period.

Harrison begins his paper on theaters by contextualizing the supposed third-century financial crisis and comparing it to that of some economies of the 21st century. He notes that there was not as much investment in the third century because cities were already well equipped with buildings. Kouremenos questions the general acceptance that "labyrinth" is etymologically connected with "labrys" (double axe) and notes that there is actually very little to show this. She concludes that following the Bronze Age, the labrys had evolved into an apotropaic symbol and was not necessarily associated with a particular god.

Two cities other than Knossos are examined in detail. The stunning site of Aptera is introduced by Niniou-Kindeli and Chatzidakis, who reveal its history and its relationships with Rome as it grew in wealth between the first and second centuries and then its decline in the fourth (and not in the third as once assumed). The focus of the paper is the recent excavations (particularly on the theater), and this is set within a detailed discussion of the topography and architecture of the city from the walls to grave monuments, which is accompanied by extensive illustrations. The diachronic overview presented by Lippolis of the work undertaken at Gortyn as well as the topography and history of the city is an important contribution to the volume. He successfully illuminates the complex development of the city from the Classical to the Late Antique period, a view that has been difficult to achieve given the necessary excavation focus on individual areas rather than periods of the site.

The final two papers, which focus on ceramics, are important contributions. By moving beyond the constraints of periodization, Gallimore offers a fresh diachronic interpretation of amphora distribution during the first to third centuries, showing that Cretan amphoras were widespread across Europe and probably represent trade in valuable goods; this is in contrast to earlier perceptions of a failing economy in Crete. Data from Eleutherna, Gortyn, and Hierapytna indicate high numbers of imports in the third century, dropping in the fourth, and growing again in the seventh. This is paralleled in the chronological distribution of mosaics on the island.

Yangaki's paper on pottery from the fourth to ninth centuries offers important information on the period of transition from late antiquity to Arab occupation: an area that is in desperate need of some good focused work. She notes the issues with realizing an islandwide view of pottery circulation for this period and that more work on locally produced pottery and fabric analysis is needed to shed light on this otherwise elusive period in Crete.

Altogether, the papers in this volume present individual analyses on a wide range of material, and it would have been useful to provide more direction toward marshaling this data into coherent contributions to wider debates about the Roman empire. Some common themes run through the volume, and although a few scholars cross-reference one another, discussion would have benefited from more engagement between the papers and more attention to bringing these ideas together. Further to this, some consistency in the way chronologies are expressed would have helped unify the volume and make it more coherent. Many of the contributors refer to Sanders' *Roman Crete: An Archaeological Survey and Gazetteer of Late Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Crete* (Warminster 1982) and offer renewed insights on his fundamental work. However, some traditional ideas prevail, such as the idea of warring states overshadowing progress in the Hellenistic period and a decline in the second and third centuries. The volume is impressively well illustrated, though a few images are blurry.

Following this volume and the recent conference "The Enigma of Late Hellenistic and Roman Crete: Unanswered Questions" (held in Nottingham in 2016), which build on a recent volume (M. Livadiotti and I. Simiakaki, eds., *Creta romana e protobizantina: Atti del congresso internazionale [Iraklion, 23–30 settembre 2000]* [Padua 2004]), the next step for studies of Roman Crete is surely to hone specific province-wide research questions and to create a more enhanced study of the island as it, and the empire, changed over time. To progress, however, scholarship needs to move beyond countering old biases. This volume is a constructive contribution to the study of Crete in the Roman period, and it also serves to highlight what work still needs to be done: for example, on religious and public space, rural settlement, a more refined view of diachronic changes in relation to the wider empire, and the nature of Crete outside Crete.

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