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ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Study of the Roman and Late Antique Mosaics of Crete

Until the latter part of the twentieth century, the archaeology of Roman and Late Antique[1] Crete was commonly seen as an inconvenient stepping stone to reaching the more tantalizing levels of Minoan occupation. Recently, a significant change in approach has been exemplified by the increase in research excavations which focus specifically on post-Minoan levels[2] and through progressions in survey methods.[3] The resulting data have partly been the motivation for the now buoyant interest in synthetic analysis and publication on a range of material and issues concerning Roman and Late Antique Crete.[4] In view of the enlightened perspective, this work attends to two key topics. It contributes to mosaic research agendas, and it uses the material to provide an up-to-date interpretation of Roman and Late Antique Crete. Altogether, this study applies a contemporary theoretical approach to a once poorly published body of evidence. Traditional studies of provincial mosaic corpora supply essential discussion of iconography, techniques and style, but tend not to apply the analysis to comment on the socio-economic nature of the provinces in question.[5] An archaeological approach to the study of the Cretan mosaics enables a wide-ranging view of contexts and associated material. This demands a reassessment of long-established views, for example, assumptions concerning absolute cultural change when Crete became part of the Roman Empire, the rise and decline of the island's settlements and the impact of earthquakes. All of this can be achieved through the acknowledgement of such psychological biases as creeping determinism and hindsight bias that shape our interpretation of the past (see Chapter 3).[6] In turn, the application of theoretical methodologies such

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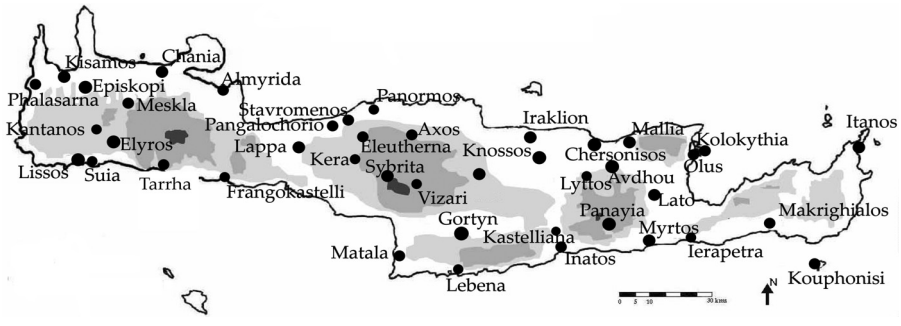

Fig. 1 Map of Crete showing location of mosaics.

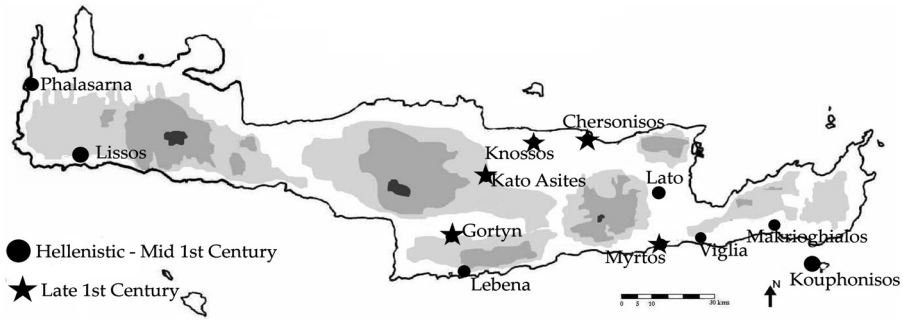

Fig. 2 Map of Crete showing Hellenistic and first-century C.E. mosaics.

as spatial analysis, globalization and Christianization[7] facilitates insights from multiple perspectives (e.g., Cretan and Roman, and craftspeople and patrons). Diachronic diversity between cities and between the urban and rural landscapes is reflected in the analysis of mosaics. For example, the distribution of mosaics (Figs. 1–6) illustrates the diversity of urban occupation in the first century after the island became part of the empire; they demonstrate that by the second century Crete has become firmly part of the koine of the Eastern Empire, and together with other evidence, they provide indications of how and why this happened. The resulting diachronic study from Hellenistic to Late Antique will present a much-needed insight into the transformations within Cretan society, when the island became part of the empire and when Christianity became the state religion. It will ultimately illustrate how Crete played a pivotal role as part of the Roman network society, with the mosaics and other material reflecting its character and success.

1.2 Mosaics as Material Culture

Mosaics are an ubiquitous element of the Roman and Late Antique periods and are found in a range of contexts. Their durability is such that they are often the

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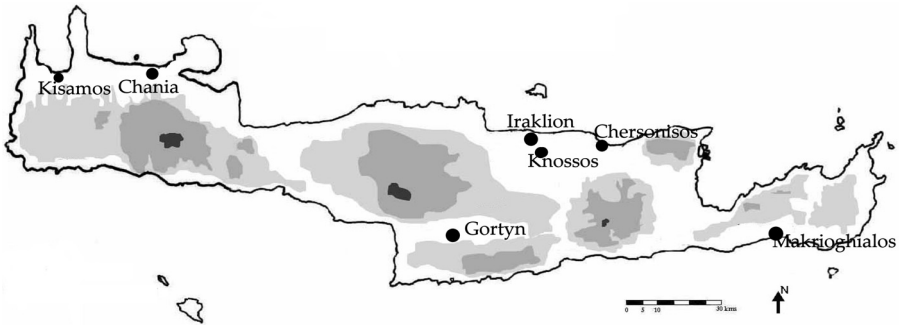

Fig. 3 Map of Crete showing second-century mosaics.

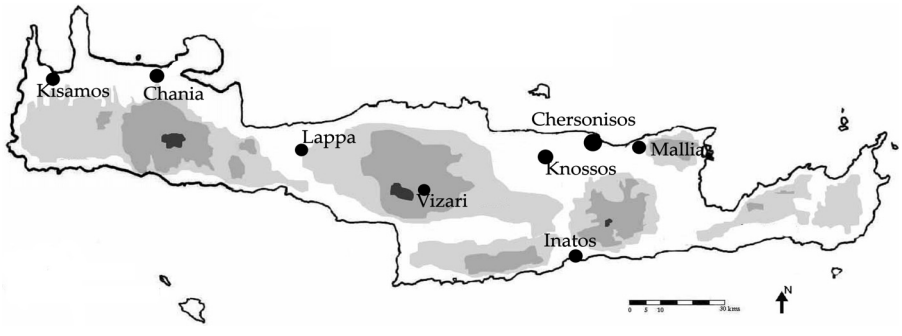

Fig. 4 Map of Crete showing third-century mosaics.

sole surviving representative of an entire context or feature in terms of archaeological evidence. Consequently, when in context, mosaics are often essential dating evidence for otherwise poorly preserved domestic, public or religious remains and associated artefacts. Furthermore, mosaic studies have provided the archaeologist with iconographic dating options, however reliable given the inherent subjectivity. Given the increasing number of rescue excavations, a dependence on using mosaics as the crux on which to build the interpretation of the site has become more common, and often subjective iconographic interpretations are accepted as 'fact'. Mosaics are commonly a case in which the art is primary, but the human agency is rarely explored.

Mosaics studies are generally more concerned with issues of iconography, style and influence than with interpretations of context.[8] The use of terms such as 'style' and 'influence' are dismissive when mosaic studies can be applied with significant results. If mosaics are described as Western or Eastern 'in style', an indication of social designation is often implicit.[9] Although mosaics may have identifiable Western or Eastern elements, this should not automatically mean that they are indicative of the origins of the craftspeople who laid them or the patrons who commissioned them. The term 'influence' presents another problem as it suggests passive rather than active processes. As Baxandall notes,[10]

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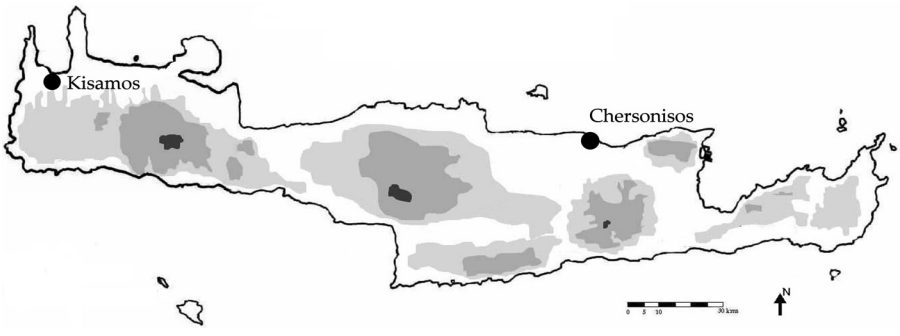

Fig. 5 Map of Crete showing fourth-century mosaics.

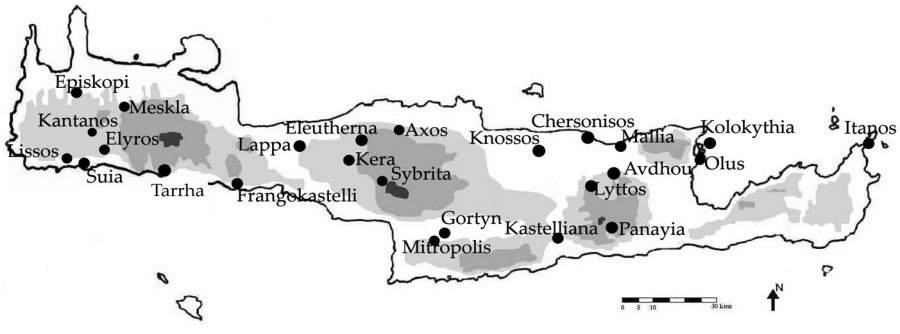

Fig. 6 Map of Crete showing Late Antique mosaics.

influence has been used too often as a short-cut phrase which does not provide detailed explanation for the complexity of processes involved in the contact between populations and the exchange of ideas. Mosaics are neither the results of passive influence nor solely indicative of specific cultural groups. They are the product of cognitive choices made for a multitude of reasons relating in part to the socio-political context.[11]

In the early twentieth century, the removal of a mosaic (or more commonly of figured sections) from its context, often without recording full details, for a prestige acquisition in a museum could be considered an act of its time, as was the case of the Antioch excavations.[12] But even as archaeological practice developed, the treatment of mosaics as typological studies intensified and the importance of context was marginalized. Mosaics, much like archaic and classical painted pottery, began to suffer the ravages of connoisseurship; they were viewed as superior ancient art and divorced from their archaeological contexts. The connoisseurship of mosaic studies is perpetuated by the way in which figured mosaics are more valued over geometric in museums and in publications. In museum environments mosaics are commonly displayed on walls, which further divorces them from their contexts.

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Whereas pottery research has moved on significantly,[13] mosaic studies are still somewhat focused on the minutiae of iconography and style. This is not to suggest that iconographic studies are redundant. Moreover, they provide crucial data, such as identification of the scene, the date and the possible hand, but that should not overshadow application of further detail. Iconographic studies can be quite subjective, but to balance the bias scholars should be open about the methods used and through visual aids bring the realms of connoisseurship into discourse while still accepting the inherent subjectivity in the study. It is not unusual to discuss processes of cultural change while using mosaics as indicative. Millet's work on Romanization in fact reflects a commonly held view that mosaics can be used as evidence for provincials' adopting elements or for symbols of Roman power.[14] Dunbabin[15] also suggests that Western mosaics can be seen as 'one index of Romanisation: immigrant settlers and elements of the indigenous population adopted the Roman way of life, expressed through public building and a certain style of housing, complete with its comforts and ornament'. A more nuanced approach is one already taken by Papaioannou on domestic architecture in Roman Achaea. Rather than focusing on ideas of indiscriminate Western or Eastern influence, or ascribing indices of change, individual elements of the form and iconography of mosaics can be examined to identify the variety of socio-political, historical and geographical reasons for their occurrence.[16]

Studies of both figured and geometric decoration can provide a wealth of information concerning craftspeople and workshops. This information should be developed to further our knowledge of Greek and Roman society, allowing a range of informative contributions to be made pertaining to Crete: chronologies and distribution; different levels of communication within and between the island and other parts of the empire; identification of the function and use of areas and architecture; everyday life and significant events; knowledge of different groups across the island; access to a diachronic view of the island, from Hellenistic to Roman to Late Antique periods and, importantly, the diverse nature of Crete in the eastern Roman Empire.

To date, Romano-Cretan society can be understood through a variety of archaeological data; for example, mortuary evidence reveals broad patterns of settlement, chronologies and changes in religious practice, but generally the osteological data is limited. Epigraphic and numismatic sources[17] commonly provide closer insights on communities and their populations. Architecture can be a more revealing element of material culture which allows access to both the cognitive and personal elements of society. As Marx noted, what separates 'the most incompetent architect from the best of bees, is that the architect has built a cell in his head before he constructs it in wax'.[18] Ingold stated that the creation of art, artefact or architecture is a reflection of both natural and

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cultural developments allowing access to the routine as well as to extraordinary events.[19] Substantial evidence has been lacking for the Romano-Cretan culture and its subsequent transition in the Late Antique period, but an archaeological approach to the study of the mosaics of Crete provides some significant data to redress this issue.

1.3 Chronology

The focus of this study is on the period between the first century B.C.E. and seventh century C.E.,[20] starting with the fall of Crete to the Romans in 67 B.C.E. For this work the chronological range of the Late Antique period is from the early fifth century to the Arab invasions of 827. The Christianization of Crete occurred slowly from the second century onwards, and by the late fourth century the religion had been centralized.[21] Although there is little transformation in secular material in Crete, the start of the Late Antique period is marked by the mass construction of the Christian churches.

1.4 Geographical Focus

The primary focus in the catalogue of mosaics is on the Cretan *nomoi* of Iraklion, Rethymnon and Lasithi (central and eastern Crete) (Fig. 1). The reason for this focus is one of practicality: the mosaics of western Crete are currently being published by Stavroula Markoulaki of the KE' Prehistorical and Classical Ephorea. Notwithstanding, the published mosaics of western Crete will be drawn upon to provide as complete a picture as possible. These mosaics are given a separate set of catalogue numbers, starting with the supplementary number S200. The material presented has been collated from a range of sources, and the latest archaeological reports that were consulted are *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 1999, no. 54 B'2, 844–80; *Annuario della Scuola Archeologica di Atene* 2008, 86; *Κρητική Εστία* 12 2007–8, *Αρχαιολογικές Ειδήσεις*, 233–345; and *Archaeological Reports* 2008–9, no. 53, 1–121.

1.5 Crete: Landscape and Historical Contexts

1.5.1 Historical Context

Sanders's analysis of literary sources remains the foundation for the study of Roman Crete.[22] The majority of the surviving literary evidence is confined to the period of Rome's early intervention in Crete. By any standard this is inadequate, but the limitations are most pronounced for the Late Antique period.[23] This dearth of sources has meant that scholars are dependent on a narrow range, and consequently only partial views, for the occupation of Crete and its role in the empire.[24]

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1.5.2 The Hellenistic Background

From literary sources such as Livy, Dio and Diodorus there are two key traditional (if not overtly propagandist) beliefs: that the inclusion of Crete in the Roman Empire was necessary so that the Mediterranean would be free from pirates, and that the Romans brought peace and prosperity to the warring islanders of Crete. The most common perception of Hellenistic Crete is that it was an island which rarely saw a prolonged period of peace.[25] This view is over-simplified, and it is increasingly apparent that all of Hellenistic Crete was not as under-developed and economically restrained as once believed. Recent historical analysis and excavation have led to a reappraisal of Crete's piracy and its war-worn state.[26] Three Hellenistic mosaics are certainly known (66, 76, 142)[27] and two possible examples (67, 77–9). Several Hellenistic cities[28] have been investigated, and for the most part buildings and other architecture suggest that these cities were no less developed than were other parts of the Hellenistic world.[29] However, Chaniotis has argued that although Crete shows similarities with other parts of the Hellenistic world in terms of ceramic and terracotta production, there were key economic differences, such as Crete's lack of long-distance trade or participation in the network society, craft specialization and, to an extent, conspicuous consumption.[30] Westgate's discussion of the evidence of domestic architecture from Classical and Hellenistic Crete highlights the diversity and uniqueness of the style rather than the old view of residences inferior to those in the rest of Greece. She also notes the bias on the evidence created by a lack of systematic excavation.[31] There is little evidence of island-wide cooperation, and Chaniotis argues that it was the lack of a predominant manager or even leader within a collection of self-contained states that emphasized the island's communal organization.[32] When the island came under Roman control, Rome filled the vacant position of communal organizer and as such enabled the more visible wider scale projects to be realized.[33] De Souza goes further and suggests that Crete's prosperity was what attracted Roman attention and, in the Late Republic, Rome's determination to seize the island.[34] Regarding the historical source explanations for Rome's intervention, it is fair to say that Crete prospered by its inclusion in the empire. However, the extent of Cretan piracy in the Mediterranean and the urgent need for an external arbitrator to quell the inner state conflicts are likely to have been over-emphasized excuses for the Roman invasion of the island.[35] The main attraction of Crete for Rome is likely to have been its location and as such its potential as an economic resource.

From 195 B.C.E. the Romans were conservatively involved in Cretan affairs, apparently under the guise of bringing peace to the Cretan states. There was no serious attempt to take the island until 71 B.C.E., when many Cretan cities openly supported Mithridates VI and the island was accused of piracy or harbouring pirates.[36] Although this attempt by Marcus Antonius failed, the timing

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Fig. 7 Gortyn, Gymnasium.

clearly indicates that Roman interest in Crete was more likely to have been part of the general expansion of the empire in the east – a need for harbours and ready resources – than revenge for a serious transgression.[37] That support for Mithridates was a veiled excuse is further emphasized by Rome's restrained involvement in Crete up to this point, even over the issue of the return of Roman prisoners.[38] In 69 B.C.E. Q. Caecilius Metellus landed on the island with three legions. The first part of the island to be seized was Kydonia (around Chania) in the west (Fig. 1). Metellus was then quick to take Knossos, central Crete and the southeast. With the fall of Lappa, the three-year battle was over and the island finally succumbed in 67 B.C.E.[39] Gortyn (Fig. 7), the one city which surrendered, was made the provincial capital, and despite its initial resistance to the Roman invasion, Knossos was chosen as the site of the only colony, Colonia Julia Nobilis Cnosus, in the province.[40] The date of the foundation of the colony is contentious, but both Paton (1994, 142) and Sanders (14) suggest that it must have been around 27 B.C.E. Moreover, the status of the colony, whether military or civilian, is still not certain but the weight of evidence points to a civilian establishment. Baldwin Bowsky argues that although there may have been some evidence for military colonization in Crete after the conquest, the new population would have been a commercial one, particularly after the fall of Delos.[41] Under Augustan administration, the Senate combined the government of Crete and Cyrene, making it a joint praetorian province.[42] It was not until 295–7 C.E.

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that Crete was separated from Cyrene and made into a single province under an equestrian *praeses* in the Diocese of Moesia.[43]

The dearth of historical accounts of Roman Crete is an indication of the peace the island experienced under Roman rule: contemporary writers were more likely to have been interested in sensational accounts rather than tales of tranquil life. Only one reference to a potential city war is known, between Kisamos and Polyrrhenia, which was quickly brought under control through Roman intervention.[44] The Roman system of installing a governor to supervise the pre-existing city-state organization was successful and as with most areas of the empire, as long as taxes were paid and the infrastructure was in place to allow this, there was little intervention.[45] Epigraphic remains evince 55 governing proconsuls. The majority of evidence accounts for the first-century governors, with 15 in the second century and 4 in the third; after the split from Cyrene only one governor is known of.[46] Seventeen quaestors and four procurators are also known.[47] The Provincial Council officiated over the imperial cult and over the games held every five years and issued coins until at least the second century.[48] The significant contribution that Cretans made in official administrative and political positions, often with commercial connections, is clear from inscriptions.[49] Whereas Rome called upon many of its provinces to assist in its internal and external struggles, the Cretans were only occasionally called upon to help. For example, Cretan archers were used in Gaul under Caesar, and supplies of corn and archers from Crete were also raised by Pompey during the civil war with Caesar.[50]

1.5.3 Late Antique Crete

Although evidence of Christian populations is found at sites such as Mount Ida,[51] Eleutherna[52] and Knossos,[53] the visual impact of the monumentalization of the cities and countryside through churches does not begin until the fifth century. Written sources for Late Antique Crete consist primarily of a collection of episcopal letters (dating between the sixth and seventh centuries), accounts of the lives of saints (which date from the sixth century onwards) and the sixth-century *Synekdemos* of Hierokles (an account of the 64 Byzantine provinces and their some 900 cities).[54] It is known that St. Paul organized the first Christian church on Crete, and Titus is credited with its subsequent development.[55] The paucity of evidence for domestic occupation, even from well-excavated cities such as Gortyn, Knossos, Itanos and Eleutherna,[56] dictates a reliance on religious architecture and burials. Epigraphic sources, ranging from religious dedicatory to civil inscriptions, often provide indirect evidence for the nature of the administration on the island. A fourth- to fifth-century inscription from the area of Mount Ida indicates that some of the clergy were being brought into the church from the upper social classes (as was common in other areas of the empire).[57]

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Spyridakis suggests that the first monasteries of Crete were likely located in the Mesara to exploit the fertile land of the plain.[58]

In terms of political and administrative changes, Constantine I (324–37) upgraded the island to a senatorial province under a *consularis* in the Diocese of Macedonia in the Prefecture of Illyricum and this arrangement lasted until the seventh century.[59] Other than Justinian's promotion of the governorship from *consularis* to proconsul[60] there appear to have been few administrative changes between the fifth and seventh centuries. Politically, Crete was administered by the Eastern Empire, but as part of Illyricum it came under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the West and remained under papal control until the first half of the eighth century.[61] Crete suffered a series of unsettling events from the fifth century to the eighth, such as Vandal attacks in 457[62] and Slavic raids in 623.[63] The almost incessant threats to the imperial security from the Avars, Moors and Persians and, during the sixth and seventh centuries, the problem of plague had an adverse economic impact on the empire. Yet Crete appears to have remained prosperous and reasonably secure, as marked by the construction of a church at Vizari and possibly one at Fodele in the eighth century. The Arabs made their first concerted raid on the island in 674, and from then on the island was continuously threatened by raids and suffered economically, until it was finally taken in 827–8.

1.6 Topography of Crete

Crete is an island some 240 km long and 48 km wide at its maximum width. Located in the middle of the eastern Mediterranean, it was an essential communication hub and as such was always a pivotal trading point. The topography of Crete delineates regions which are separated by mountains: the Dictaean range divides the eastern part of the island from the central, the White Mountains separate the west from the centre and the Idean range in the middle creates a divide between the north and the south central area (Fig. 1).[64] Though largely mountainous, the island has two fertile plains, Lasithi in the east and the Mesara in the central south part. Survey evidence in recent years suggests that both these areas have always been heavily exploited agriculturally (see later discussion). Key land routes through the plains between the mountains are found between Ierapetra and Mirabello Bay, Gortyn (Matala) and Knossos (Iraklion), Agia Galini and Rethymnon and possibly Inatos and Chersonisos. The route between Ierapetra and Mirabello Bay is the shortest across the island, at *c.*15 km, while one of the longest is between Gortyn (Matala) and Knossos (Iraklion) at *c.* 65 km, and both routes were well exploited. The island is sufficiently watered in the winter, with a network of rivers originating in the mountains. The majority of these rivers dry up in the summer months.

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