

CHAPTER 1

DAWKINS' INTRODUCTION

This book is based upon journals and notes taken in Crete between the years 1903 and 1918, and therefore aims at giving a picture of the life and appearance of the island as it was in that period of transition from the old Greco-Turkish Crete to its present condition as a part of free Greece. It will not be out of place to inform the reader of the circumstances of my visits to Crete. Every spring from 1903 to 1906 and again in the early summers of 1913 and 1914 I was in Crete working at archaeological excavations on behalf of the British School at Athens, at first at Palaikastro in East Crete and later in 1913 at the cave of Kamares and in 1914 at the village of Plati in Lasithi. During these years I made not a few journeys in the island and spent many winter and even summer months at Candia, working for the most part in the Museum there but at the same time seeing much of the life of the island. In 1916 I returned to Crete in the service of the British Naval Station at Suda Bay and remained almost continuously in Crete till the month of April 1919. During these years I was continually cruising round the coasts of the island and made many overland journeys. It was in these years that I made the acquaintance of the western part of the island.

Depicting then as it does a phase of Cretan life that is now past, the book is therefore in a sense one that is out of date before being written. But much of the matter deals with things which either do not or it is hoped will not change; the rest will have some historical interest and if its merits deserve may be consulted much as we now consult Pashley and Spratt.

The island of Crete lies like a great bar across the southern end of the Aegean Sea, running roughly east and west. The western passage from the open Mediterranean is interrupted by the island of Cerigo [Kythira], the eastern by Rhodes and, within clear sight of Crete, by Kasos and Karpathos. Crete is thus not only a bar to the Aegean, but a bridge between the peninsula of Greece and the south-western corner of Asia Minor, a bridge some *////* miles in length and of a width varying from *////* to *////* miles.¹ It is thus one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean, containing *////* square miles, and exceeded in area only by *////* with *////* square miles and *////*.²

Natural divisions make it easy to understand the geography of Crete. The island from west to east contains three great and one lesser mass of mountains. These are first the White Mountains south of Canea, next Ida, now called Psiloriti, between Retimo and Candia, next Lasithi, the ancient Dicte, between Candia and the Isthmus of Hierapetra,³ and lastly the lower mountains of Siteia at the extreme east of the island. These mountain regions divide so narrow an island into distinct areas, each of which is dominated by one of the towns. Thus all the land to the west of the White Mountains looks towards Canea. Retimo dominates the country between the White Mountains and Ida, and Candia, with subsidiary centres in the Mesara plain, the country between Ida and Lasithi. The isthmus to the east of Lasithi belongs to Hierapetra, though modern conditions are bringing Agios Nikolaos into greater prominence. The land east of the high mountains of Siteia has as its centre the town called Siteia, or in Greek more properly Limani Siteias, the Harbour of Siteia.

On these lines a description of Crete falls into the following divisions, and on these I have based the headings of the chapters in this book.

1. The country west of Canea and the White Mountains, with Canea and Akrotiri: Chs 2-4.
2. The White Mountains and Sphakia, and Apokorona: Chs 5-8.

3. Retimo and with it the Valley of Amari and the mountains of the province of Agios Vasilis which border the sea from the White Mountains to the Gulf of Mesara: Chs 9-12.
4. Mount Ida and the country to the north and south: Chs 13-16.
5. Candia and the land between Ida and Lasithi to the north of the watershed: Chs 17-20.
6. The Mesara plain and the mountains between it and the sea: Chs 21-23.
7. Lasithi and the country to the north and south: Chs 24-26.
8. The Province of Mirabello: Ch. 27.
9. The Isthmus of Hierapetra: Ch. 28.
10. The mountains of Siteia as far east as a line drawn almost due south from Limani Siteias. This is a natural boundary as it is formed by two great valleys, one running south from Limani Siteias to Praisos and the other running up north from the southern sea by way of Lithines: Ch. 29.
11. The high plateau east of this with its seaward valleys and the peninsula of Kavo Sidero: Chs 30-31.

Until the last years of the nineteenth century the condition of Crete was very much what it had been ever since the Turkish conquest more than two hundred years earlier. Since then has come the political union with Greece and with it many changes in the life of the people and in the appearance of the island. The most striking of these only made their appearance in the years subsequent to my Cretan travels. These are the expulsion of the Turks and the rapid increase of carriage roads.

Nothing has so much altered the character of the Cretan towns since these notes were taken as the departure of the Turks; and from the point of view of the traveller very much for the worse. Candia especially, which was in some ways hardly inferior to Rhodes in beauty and interest, was when I last saw it little more attractive than any ordinary small provincial Greek town. Crete under the Sultans I never saw; the extent of the Turkish population both in the towns and in the villages is shown graphically on one of Kiepert's maps, and the Turks amounted to perhaps 1/4 of the whole population.⁴ When Turkish rule gave way in the nineties to an occupation by the powers, many Turks left the island for Asia Minor. It is interesting to note that a colony of them went to Adalia where they still preserve the Greek language, which all the Cretan Turks had adopted; very few of them knew more than perhaps a very few words of Turkish.⁵ With these Turko-Cretans of Adalia I spoke in 192/ and found that they live there somewhat segregated from the other Turks with their own café and bath, and that the children born there are still talking Greek in preference to Turkish. To return to Crete: the result of this first movement was that the Turks left the villages for safety and gathered in the towns, and in the first years of this century there were Turks only in the five towns in Crete – in Canea, Retimo, Candia, Hierapetra and Limani Siteias. To these may be added the few Turkish fishermen in the island of Spina Longa, turned out later to make room for the lepers.⁶ Their houses in the villages were deserted and the village mosques fell into ruin. By the time of the war⁷ some of these village Turks had returned to their homes, at least for the purpose of cultivating their fields; but even this was, I believe, confined to the north-eastern parts of the province of Monofatsi, always one of the most Turkish parts of Crete. But this return was of no real significance; the Turkish element in Crete was doomed. A striking mark of this was the destruction of minarets, [since] the mosques, which had been in Venetian times Latin churches, [were] now by a further vicissitude made into churches for the Greek rite. The destruction of fountains in the towns and the cutting down of the little gardens which the Turks thought ornamental to

a town had been earlier outward signs of the change from Islam to Christianity. And finally in 1923 came the removal of the Turkish population. Before leaving this subject it is of interest to note that it was commonly held that many of the Cretan Moslems were of Venetian descent. At the Turkish conquest it seems that the poor remained constant to Christianity; the wealthy apostatised to save their lands, and in Crete the wealthy were, many of them, the Venetian settlers. In 1923 it may indeed be said that these people paid for the sins of all their predecessors, whether Turkish or Venetian.⁸

The Turks went and roads came, and few things alter a country more than the construction of carriage roads. When I first went to Crete in 1903 the only roads were these: from Canea to Suda Bay and so to the fort of Izzeddin, ultimately to reach Retimo; three miles or so of road eastwards from Candia; a beginning of a road to Neapolis, of which the only other part made was a bridge below Avdou;⁹ the road from Candia to Knossos; the beginning of a road to Arkhanes and to the Mesara plain; perhaps a piece westwards from Canea. These I believe were all. By the end of the war the following roads had been made: from Canea west to Alikianou and perhaps further; from Canea, I believe, a road to Theriso, but on this I never went; from Canea to Retimo; of the Retimo-Candia road the piece had been made from Retimo to Perama, and the construction was being continued up the Mylopotamo valley; from Candia the westward road towards Retimo went to the foot of Stromboli;¹⁰ from Candia to Agia Varvara, which was to lead over into the Mesara plain; from Candia to Peza, which had the advantage that when one went to Lasithi it was not necessary to go over the terrible track over the Kaki Rakhi, the Bad Ridge, which well deserved its name;¹¹ from Neapolis to Agios Nikolaos; from Hierapetra to Bashinamo¹² it was just possible to drive. These were all the roads then made. Elsewhere it was still necessary either to take mules or to walk. A few cabs at Canea and Candia, mostly with the windows closed by red blinds and used for giving a mild airing to the veiled wives of the wealthier Turks, were almost the only vehicles to be seen, and even when I left almost the whole of the island had still to be visited in the old way, with horses and pack mules. And the successive wars had made mules both scarce and dear in Crete. As I saw Crete in this way it will always be convenient for me here to reckon distances in hours riding, the pace being, it is to be understood, about three or four miles an hour. On this basis Crete is from end to end a week's journey. By aeroplane it is about two hours. By carriage when the roads are all made, it will be – perhaps it now is – about four days.¹³

The late date of road-making means that horse vehicles have played only a small part in Cretan travelling. With very few exceptions the roads were made after the invention of motors, and the island therefore is passing directly from the pack-mule stage of transport to the modern motor car.¹⁴

Another thing which has greatly altered, and for the worse, the appearance of Crete is the appearance of the red roofing tile imported from France. I think it may be said that before 1906 all the roofs in the villages were flat. Practically the only tiled roofs in the island were in the towns and these were of native make with tiles of the usual south European shape with a semi-circular section. The old flat roofs were made thus. First rafters were laid across. In the better houses these were square planed beams, but in the older cottages the unshaped trunks of trees, often of the wild olive, were used. How foreign the squared beam appears from its foreign name, *trava* (τράβα), Latin *trabs*, Italian *trave*. Above these rafters the better houses had neatly plaited matting made of reeds and the common houses simply bundles of brushwood. Above this again was earth, often mixed with seaweed. This earth was called *πηλορόδωμα* and a kind of shaly earth called *λεπιδόχωμα* was very often used.¹⁵ The surface was kept smooth by rolling, though the stone rollers so commonly seen in the Cyclades were never, I think,

common in Crete. The walls rose a little above the edges of the roof, so that all the water flowed off at certain points, often going into a cistern. The effect was always most beautiful: a little grass grew on the roofs and the colour, being that of the earth, harmonised in a wonderful way with the whole landscape. They were warm in winter, cool in summer. But against them it must be said that with the summer heat they dry and crack and so when the autumn rains come there are few houses in which the roof does not drip with muddy water.ⁱ But by 1908 or so the pinkish red scientifically moulded flat French tiles had begun to reach Crete, and during the war it was rare to see a village without one or more houses roofed with them. It is a pity that their colour, ugly in itself, in the Cretan landscape looks positively hideous. Where there are many of these new roofs, the look of a place is quite transformed. There coming has, however, stimulated the manufacture of the much less offensive native tiles, which are largely made at Khersonnesos.

It is interesting the way in which these French tiles were used. In the towns hip roofs had always existed, but they did not reach the villages at once with the new tiles: the village architects only felt their way to them gradually. At first they used the new tiles for simple sloping roofs with a very slight incline, a roof as like as possible in fact to the old flat roof. Then the slope increased, and a gable was made with a ridge. Lastly in some places during the war the builders grew bold and made hip roofs.¹⁶

There are in Crete a few new settlements which have been made to suit the requirements of trade or of some social want. The oldest and largest of them is Neapolis in a valley to the north of the Lasithi mountains. The valley contains numerous large villages and is fertile; the New City serves as a commercial centre for these places and is set on the east and west road from Candia to Mirabello. Kourmouzis writing in 1842 gives a list of the villages in the valley which he calls Skaphi, but does not mention Neapolis at all. We shall see below that it was founded about 1860. It is now the largest place in the district, the seat of the bishop.¹⁷

The rest of these new settlements are less important, and all are by the coast. I give the list beginning from the west. All but Agia Galini are on the north side of Crete. And naturally, for the south coast is so much exposed to bad weather that it has hardly any coasting trade, and moreover faces not Greece and the islands but the open sea towards Africa. The settlements are:

Kolimbari, on the coast by the monastery of Gonia in the west corner of the Gulf of Canea. It was formed for administrative purposes and to have some sort of outlet to the sea.ⁱⁱ

Touzla, the Place of Salt, at the top of Suda Bay was founded for the Turks who were removed from Suda Island. This took place after the 1866 rebellion when the present arsenal at Suda was constructed.¹⁸

Yoryoupolis (*Γεωργιούπολις*) on the low-lying coast west of Retimo was founded in the time of Prince George.¹⁹ The people are mostly from Askaphou. The situation on a knoll at the mouth of the Armyros river is damp and unhealthy.

Panormo is a village by the sea east of Retimo near the mouth of the Mylopotamo valley. Its old name was Kastelli, on Kiepert's map Rumili-Kastelo [Rumeli-Kastelo]. There was formerly a castle here, whence the old name of the place, and a few houses. Now there are a number of new houses for which the castle has probably been made to furnish much of the building material; in any case only very scanty remains of it are to be seen on the rock by the sea which is the nucleus of the

ⁱ [Ms. note:] It is satisfactory to me to think that when I had to construct the houses for [?] station on the [?site] of [?] I had [?followed] [?????]. The buildings [were to be handed over to Toplou [?????] the site.

ⁱⁱ See Trevor-Battye p. 55.

settlement. The place serves as the port to take off the carobs produced in quantities in the Mylopotamo valley. The old name is not now in use; Panormo, the Universal Harbour, was probably simply invented and applied to the place when the new houses were built; it is exactly the sort of colourless name which is particularly grateful to the modern Greek ear, like Neapolis, Kalokhorio [Good Village], and others of the sort.²⁰

Plaka is on the coast at the mouth of the bay of Spina Longa. It consists of only a row of small houses and looks new. I associate it with the expulsion of the Turks from Spina Longa island. The Turks themselves went for the most part to Limani Siteias, where they could continue their trade as fishermen, but some place was needed for trade purposes and to serve as a depot for the leper settlement which was put on the island.

Bashinamo was, whilst I was in Crete, very much on the increase and will no doubt soon cut out Kavousi as the important point on the north side of the Isthmus of Hierapetra. It is on the sea and steamers stop there. The road from Neapolis to Siteia was to pass through it, and here too would be the branch road to Hierapetra.²¹ A fairly good khan²² was established there where one can sleep in comfort. I speak below of Mr Seager's house there.²³ The name Bashinamo is in Greek *Η Παχεία Άμμος*, the Deep Sand. It is naturally generally heard in the accusative and this sounds in Cretan exactly as *tim Bashinamo*. It is interesting that in a proper name, which I am assured is an old one, the word *άμμος* preserves its old feminine gender; in common Greek nowadays *άμμος* is always masculine.²⁴

Palaikastro on the east coast of the Siteia peninsula is another comparatively new place. The inhabitants of the villages on the plateau, Magasa and perhaps Karydi, who have always had their olive gardens down here by the sea, came down and built houses at Palaikastro after the insurrection of 1866 when things in Crete became better for the Christians. They avoided thus the winter cold of the upper villages and had the convenience of the sea for boats and easier access to their low-lying fields. Most of the people now have two houses, one above at Magasa and another at Palaikastro.²⁵

Agia Galini at the mouth of the Amari valley is a new place although the name is old. The people are all from Melabes.²⁶ Nearly all the houses there are quite new.

Peter Mackridge's notes

¹ Crete measures 260 km from east to west and between 14 km and 60 km from north to south, according to the online Perseus Encyclopedia, s.v. Crete).

² According to Wikipedia: 8312 sq. km. (3,209 sq. miles); exceeded by Sicily (25,460 sq. km.), Sardinia (23,813 sq. km.), Cyprus (9,251 sq. km.) and Corsica (8,681 sq. km.).

³ By Lasithi Dawkins means here not the Lasithi plateau but the Lasithi mountains (Λασιθιώτικα βουνά in Greek).

⁴ According to Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1813-1914* (Madison, Wisconsin 1985), p. 117, in 1872-4 Crete had 90,000 Muslims and 120,000 non-Muslims, making the proportions approximately 43% to 57%. The estimate of the proportion of Muslims must be exaggerated, since many had already left the island by that time as a result of intercommunal violence. The Kiepert map that was in Dawkins' possession and is currently in the Taylor Institution Library (see my Preface) is not the one that contains indications of population.

⁵ Dawkins doesn't make it clear that the Cretan Muslims (whom he calls "Turks") were descended from two different groups: the vast majority from Christians who converted to Islam after the Ottoman conquest, and a smaller number from Turks who settled in

the island. The former group continued to speak their native Greek, while the latter (like most of the Venetian settlers before them) soon adopted the local language. Muslim Cretans who moved to Turkey in the late 19th and early 20th century continued to speak Greek in their new homes. Adalia is Antalya in southern Turkey. In fact, in 1897-8 a large number of Cretan Muslims successfully petitioned the Sultan to settle elsewhere in the Ottoman empire, with the result that there are colonies of their descendants living in Libya, Lebanon and Syria as well as the south coasts of Turkey as far east as the Gulf of Alexandretta or İskenderun. The compulsory exchange of religious minorities under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) brought the remaining Muslim Cretans to Turkey, mostly to the west coast.

⁶ See ch. 27.

⁷ He means of course the First World War.

⁸ The survival of many Italian surnames in Crete today (with the addition of the characteristic Cretan suffix -akis) suggests that many Cretans of Italian Catholic origin became Orthodox Christian, and their descendants remained so during the Ottoman period. However, one also finds Muslim Cretans who had similarly Italian surnames, such as Hüseyin Muharrem Litsardakis, who in 1892 opened the elegant draper's shop called "Οθωμανικόν Au Bon Marché" (Ottoman Au Bon Marché), which today houses a hairdresser's in what is now no. 8, Agiou Mina St, Herakleion. The surname Litsardakis, which is also borne by Christian families in Crete, must once have been one or other of the Italian names Licciardi and Lizzardi.

⁹ See ch. 25.

¹⁰ Dawkins writes Stromboli (which is the name of a volcanic island north of Sicily) and (in ch. 13) Strombolo for what is actually Stroumboulas (the 336-metre mountain immediately to the west of Herakleion). All these names ultimately derive from Ancient Greek στρογγύλος 'round'. The Sicilian name for Stromboli is Struògnuli, from Ancient Greek Στρογγύλη.

¹¹ Kaki Rachi is north of Kounavoi, east of Archanes and south of Herakleion.

¹² This how Dawkins normally writes the name of the village of Pachia Ammos; see below.

¹³ Nowadays the whole island can be crossed from east to west coasts in about five hours.

¹⁴ For references to *kalderimia* (paved mule tracks) see ch. 8, 18 and 29. The sudden and rapid pace of modernization in Crete during this period is similar to the sudden entry of the Middle East into modernity as described by Eugene Rogan in *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York 2015).

¹⁵ Dawkins' text contains a lot of queries concerning the Greek terms. I have used the terms found in Pangalos' dictionary of Cretan dialect. Pangalos derives *πηλορόδωμα* from a hypothetical ancient word *πηλοδόρωμα*.

¹⁶ A hip roof is one in which all four sides slope down towards the walls, and there are therefore no gables.

¹⁷ For more on Neapoli ('New City') see ch. 25.

¹⁸ By the top of Suda bay Dawkins means the area at the west end, which includes the settlement today known as Souda. Turkish *tuzla* means 'salty place' or 'salt pan'. The Byzantines and the Venetians had salt pans there. According to Spanakis, in 1870 Mehmed Rauf Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Crete, drained the salt pans at Tuzla and built a village there, which he named Aziziye in honour of Sultan Abdul Aziz, and where he settled 150 Muslim families who had been living on Souda island. This is now known as Kato Souda.

¹⁹ Prince George of Greece was High Commissioner of the Cretan State from 1898 to 1906.

²⁰ There was an ancient city of Panormos, but not where the settlement bearing this name is situated today (which was formerly called Kastelli); the erroneous position is due to Andrea Cornaro (16th cent.), according to Stylianos Alexiou, “Πόλεις της βορείου παραλίας της Κρήτης”, *Κρητικά Χρονικά* 26 (1974), pp. 34-53. The name Panormos has an illustrious ancient history, being the name from which the Sicilian placename Palermo derives.

²¹ These roads exist today.

²² Turkish *han*, Greek χάνι ‘inn’.

²³ The American archaeologist R. B. Seager. His house and his hospitality are mentioned briefly in ch. 28.

²⁴ The name means ‘Thick Sand’. There is something odd about Dawkins’ story. His name for the place, Bashinamo, must be based on hearing the *masculine* form τον Παχύν Άμμο, which would have been pronounced in Crete *to bashinámo*. Dawkins’ use of this form may also have been an in-joke among British archaeologists, a play on the phrase “bashing ammo” (i.e. striking ammunition). In 1630 Basilicata uses the form Pacchianamo (Spanakis II 618), which represents the accusative of the feminine form. In today’s Standard Modern Greek, *amos* ‘sand’ is once again feminine, as in Ancient Greek, and the official name of the village is Παχειά Άμμος.

²⁵ For more on Palaikastro, where Dawkins conducted excavations in 1903-6, see ch. 30.

²⁶ Elsewhere he writes this place name as Melambes. For more on Agia Galini see ch. 7.