

The Book of the Ancient Greeks

An Introduction to the History and Civilization of Greece
from the Coming of the Greeks to the Conquest
of Corinth by Rome in 146 B.C.

By
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The book of the ancient Greeks



Photo Alinari.

HERMES OF PRAXITELES.
4th Century B.C.

**HERMES OF PRAXITELES.
4th Century BC.**

To
M. C. S. M.

PREFACE

This book, like the first of the series the *Book of the Ancient World*, was used in its original manuscript form by one of my history classes. It carries on the story of the way in which man has been learning how to live from the time of the Coming of the Greeks to the loss of Greek independence in 146 B.C.

The spirit of a nation is expressed and its history is recorded in three ways: in its political history, in its literature and in its art. The aim of this book has been to use such parts of the political history of the Greeks, of their literature and of their art as seem to have been the outward and visible signs of the spirit that inspired them.

It would not have been possible to write this book in this way without the kind permission of translators and publishers to use copyright translations. I gladly take this opportunity to acknowledge my debt to Professor Gilbert Murray and the Oxford University Press for the translation of the *Iphigenia in Tauris*; to Mr. A. W. Pickard—Cambridge and the Oxford University Press for the translations from *Demosthenes*; to Mr. A. E. Zimmern and the Oxford University Press for passages from the *Greek Commonwealth*; and to the Trustees of the Jowett Fund and the Oxford University Press for translations from *Plato* and *Thucydides*; to Sir Arthur Evans for passages from an article in the *Monthly Review*; to Mr. G. S. Freeman for translations from the *Schools of Hellas* by the late Kenneth J. Freeman; to Mr. A. S. Way for a passage from the *Persians*; to Mr. A. W. Crawley for passages from the translation of the *Odyssey* by Butcher and Lang; to Mrs. Putnam for an extract from *The Lady*; to Miss Leslie White

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This book is only intended as an introduction to the history of Greek civilization, and the difficulty of my task has been to decide on what to omit. Everyone will not agree with me as to what I have taken and what I have left, but my aim will have been accomplished, if the book should create a desire to know something more of the great heritage which has come to us from the Greeks.

DOROTHY MILLS.

NEW YORK, March, 1925.

CRETE AND THE CIVILIZATION OF THE EARLY AEGEAN WORLD

CHAPTER I THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

To the people of the ancient world the Mediterranean was "The Sea"; they knew almost nothing of the great ocean that lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules. A few of the more daring of the Phoenician navigators had sailed out into the Atlantic, but to the ordinary sailor from the Mediterranean lands the Ocean was an unknown region, believed to be a sea of darkness, the abode of terrible monsters and a place to be avoided. And then, as they believed the world to be flat, to sail too far would be to risk falling over the edge.

But the Mediterranean was familiar to the men of the ancient world, it was their best known highway. In those ancient times, the Ocean meant separation, it cut off the known world from the mysterious unknown, but the Mediterranean did not divide; it was, on the contrary, the chief means of communication between the countries of the ancient world. For the world was then the coast round the sea, and first the Phoenicians and later the Greeks sailed

backwards and forwards, North and South, East and West, trading, often fighting, but always in contact with the islands and coasts. Egypt, Carthage, Athens and Rome were empires of the Mediterranean world; and the very name Mediterranean indicates its position; it was the sea in the "middle of the world."

In the summer, the Mediterranean is almost like a lake, with its calm waters and its blue and sunny sky; but it is not always friendly and gentle. The Greeks said of it that it was "a lake when the gods are kind, and an ocean when they are spiteful," and the sailors who crossed it had many tales of danger to tell. The coast of the Mediterranean, especially in the North, is broken by capes and great headlands, by deep gulfs and bays, and the sea, more especially that eastern part known as the Aegean Sea, is dotted with islands, and these give rise to strong currents. These currents made serious difficulties for ancient navigators, and Strabo, one of the earliest writers of Geography, in describing their troubles says that "currents have more than one way of running through a strait." The early navigators had no maps or compass, and if they once got out of their regular course, they ran the danger of being swept along by some unknown current, or of being wrecked on some hidden rock. The result was that they preferred to sail as near the coast as was safe. This was the easier, as the Mediterranean has almost no tides, and as the early ships were small and light, landing was generally a simple matter. The ships were run ashore and pulled a few feet out of the water, and then they were pushed out to sea again whenever the sailors were ready.

Adventurous spirits have always turned towards the West, and it was westwards across the Mediterranean that the civilization we have inherited slowly advanced. The early Mediterranean civilization is sometimes given the general name of Aegean,

because its great centres were in the Aegean Sea and on the adjoining mainland. The largest island in the Aegean is Crete, and the form of civilization developed there is called Cretan or Minoan, from the name of one of the legendary sea-kings of Crete, whilst that which spread on the mainland is called Mycenaean from the great stronghold where dwelt the lords of Mycenae.

CHAPTER II

CRETE

The long narrow island of Crete lies at what might be called the entrance to the Aegean Sea. This sea is dotted with islands which form stepping stones from the mainland of Europe to the coast of Asia Minor. Crete turns her face to these islands and her back to Egypt, and the Egyptians, who did not travel very much themselves, called the inhabitants the "Great Men of Keftiu," Keftiu meaning *people at the back of*. They were the men who dwelt beyond what was familiar to the Egyptians.

The Aegean world is a very beautiful one. The Islands rise out of the sea like jewels sparkling in the sunshine. It is a world associated with spring, of "fresh new grass and dewey lotus, and crocus and hyacinth,"^[1] a land where the gods were born, one rich in legend and myth and fairy tale, and, most wonderful of all, a world where fairy tales have come true. In 1876 a telegram from an archaeologist flashed through the world, saying he had found the tomb of wide-ruling Agamemnon, King of Men and Tamer of Horses; and later on, in Crete, traces were found of the Labyrinth where Theseus killed the Minotaur. The spade of the archaeologist brought these things into the light, and a world which had hitherto seemed dim and shadowy and unreal suddenly came out into the sunshine.

I. LEGENDS OF CRETE

There is a land called Crete in the midst of the wine-dark sea, a fair land and a rich, begirt with water, and therein are many men innumerable and ninety cities.^[2]

Legend tells us that it was in this land that Zeus was born, and that a nymph fed him in a cave with honey and goat's milk. Here, too, in the same cave was he wedded and from this marriage came Minos, the legendary Hero-King of Crete. The name Minos is probably a title, like Pharaoh or Caesar, and this Minos, descendant of Zeus, is said to have become a great Sea-King and Tyrant. He ruled over the whole of the Aegean, and even demanded tribute from cities like Athens. But Theseus, helped by the King's daughter Ariadne, slew the Minotaur, the monster who devoured the Athenian youths and maidens, and so defeated the vengeance of the King. This Minos fully realized the importance of sea-power in the Aegean. Thucydides, the Greek historian, tells us that he was the first ruler who possessed a navy, and that in order to protect his increasing wealth, he did all that was in his power to clear the sea of pirates. Piracy was a recognized trade in those days, and when strange sailors landed anywhere, the inhabitants would come down to the shore to meet them with these words: "Strangers, who are ye? Whence sail ye over the wet ways? On some trading enterprise or at adventure do ye rove, even as sea-robbers over the brine?"^[3] Minos himself may have been a great pirate who subdued all the others and made them subject to him, but whether this were so or not, he was evidently not only a great sea-king; legend and tradition speak of him as a great Cretan lawgiver. Every year he was supposed to retire for a space to the Cave of Zeus, where the Father of Gods and Men gave him laws for his land. It is because of the great mark left by Minos on the Aegean world, that the civilization developed there is so often called Minoan, thus keeping alive for ever the name of its traditional founder.

The Labyrinth in which the Minotaur was slain was built by Daedalus, an Athenian. He was a very skilful artificer, and legend says that it was he who first thought of putting masts into ships and attaching sails to them. But he was jealous of the skill of his nephew and killed him, and so was forced to flee from Athens, and he came to Knossos where was the palace of Minos. There he made the Labyrinth with its mysterious thousand paths, and he is also said to have "wrought in broad Knossos a dancing-ground for fair-haired Ariadne."[\[4\]](#)

But Daedalus lost the favour of Minos, who imprisoned him with his son Icarus. The cunning of the craftsman, however, did not desert him, and Daedalus skilfully made wings for them both and fastened them to their shoulders with wax, so that they flew away from their prison out of reach of the King's wrath. Icarus flew too near the sun, and the wax melted, and he fell into the sea and was drowned; but Daedalus, we are told, reached Sicily in safety.

The Athenians believed that Theseus and Minos had really existed, for the ship in which, according to tradition, Theseus made his voyage was preserved in Athens with great care until at least the beginning of the third century B.C. This ship went from Athens to Delos every year with special sacrifices, and one of these voyages became celebrated. Socrates, the philosopher, had been condemned to death, but the execution of the sentence was delayed for thirty days, because this ship was away, and so great was the reverence in which this voyage was held that no condemned man could be put to death during its absence.[\[5\]](#) It was held that such an act would bring impurity on the city.

II. THE PALACES OF CRETE

The first traces of history in Crete take us back to about 2500 B.C. but it was not till about a thousand years later that Crete was at the height of her prosperity and enjoying her Golden Age. Life in Crete at this time must have been happy. The Cretans built their cities without towers or fortifications; they were a mighty sea power, but they lived more for peace and work than for military or naval adventures, and having attained the overlordship of the Aegean, they devoted themselves to trade, industries and art.

The Cretans learnt a great deal from Egypt, but they never became dependent upon her as did the Phoenicians, that other seafaring race in the Mediterranean. They dwelt secure in their island kingdom, taking what they wanted from the civilization they saw in the Nile Valley; but instead of copying this, they developed and transformed it in accordance with their own spirit and independence.

The chief city in Crete was Knossos, and the great palace there is almost like a town. It is built round a large central court, out of which open chambers, halls and corridors. This court was evidently the centre of the life of the palace. The west wing was probably devoted to business and it was here that strangers were received. In the audience chamber was found a simple and austere seat, yet one which seizes upon the imagination, for it was said to be the seat of Minos, and is the oldest known royal throne in the world.

In the east wing lived the artisans who were employed in decorating and working on the building, for everything required in the palace was made on the spot. The walls of all the rooms were finished with smooth plaster and then painted; originally that the paint might serve as a protection, but later because the beauty-

loving Cretans liked their walls to be covered with what must have been a joy to look at, and which reminded them at every turn of the world of nature in which they took such a keen delight. The frescoes are now faded, but traces of river-scenes and water, of reeds and rushes and of waving grasses, of lilies and the crocus, of birds with brilliant plumage, of flying fish and the foaming sea can still be distinguished.

The furniture has all perished, but many household utensils have been found which show that life was by no means primitive, and the palaces were evidently built and lived in by people who understood comfort. In some ways they are quite modern, especially in the excellent drainage system they possessed. These Cretan palaces were warmer and more full of life than those in Assyria, and they were dwelt in by a people who were young and vigorous and artistic, and who understood the joy of the artist in creating beauty.

Near the palace was the so-called theatre. The steps are so shallow that they could not have made comfortable seats, and the space for performances was too small to have been used for bull-fights, which were the chief public entertainments. The place was probably used for dancing, and it may have been that very dancing ground wrought for Ariadne.^[6]

III. DRESS

The dress of the Cretan women was surprisingly modern. The frescoes on the walls, as well as small porcelain statuettes that have been found, give us a very clear idea of how the people dressed. The women had small waists and their dresses had short sleeves, with the bodice laced in front, and wide flounced skirts often richly

embroidered. Yellow, purple and blue seem to have been the favourite colours. They wore shoes with heels and sometimes sandals. Their hair was elaborately arranged in knots, side-curls and braids, and their hats were amazingly modern.

The men were not modern-looking. Their only garment was a short kilt, which was often ornamented with designs in colours, and like the women, they had an elaborate method of hair-dressing. In general appearance the men were bronzed, slender and agile-looking.



SNAKE GODDESS.

From Knossos.
ca. 2000 B.C.



CUP-BEARER.

Fresco from Knossos.
ca. 1500 B.C.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

SNAKE GODDESS. From Knossos. ca. 2000 B.C.
CUP-BEARER. Fresco from Knossos, ca. 1500 B.C.
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Some of the frescoes are so lifelike that as they were brought to light during the excavations, it almost seemed as if the spirits of the long-dead Cretans were returning to the earth. The workmen felt the spell, and Sir Arthur Evans, who excavated Knossos, has described the scene as the painting of a young Cretan was found:

The colours were almost as brilliant as when laid down over three thousand years before. For the first time the true portraiture of a man of

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