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Mention of Crete in ancient literature sometimes shed light on the culture of the island. But, also our knowledge of the culture, whether from archaeology or texts, helps us understand better the literature, a product of that culture. All branches of the study of the past, history, archaeology, philology -- whatever -- must work together & be studied together to give the most fully-rounded picture of the past. The Homeric hero Odysseus uses the stereotype of the Cretan that was popular in his day to present a sort of subtext, to tell the reader certain things about himself & his story.

Odysseus, son of Laertes, was the king of Ithaka, an island on the western edge of Greece. He left his wife Penelope & their baby son to join the Greek forces setting out for Troy. After ten years of war, Odysseus began the voyage home, delayed by many an adventure, including shipwrecks & encounters with nymphs & sorceresses, sea monsters & giants, chiefly described in a flashback, as the wanderer recounts them to his host, the king of Phaiacia. Through the enmity of Poseidon god of the sea, he passed another ten years wandering through the Mediterranean before he managed to return home. There his supposedly widowed wife was under siege by a mob of cocky suitors for her hand, enjoying themselves at the expense of Odysseus' estate while Penelope delayed them by the endless weaving & unraveling of a shroud for her father-in-law. Odysseus disguised his real identity until he could enlist the help of some loyal allies, including his now-grown son, & then he destroyed the suitors & reclaimed his own family & kingdom.

The red-headed Odysseus himself is represented throughout the *Odyssey* & elsewhere in Greek myth as a preeminently clever man, wily, "a man of many turns". He is a pragmatist, a manipulator, the one sent on missions requiring smooth talking & persuasion, thinking on one's feet. The other heroes may rival Odysseus for prowess with arms but nobody comes up with better ideas & ruses.

On six occasions in *The Odyssey*, Odysseus, master of guile, conceals his true identity & assumes a fabricated *persona.*, first with the Cyclops., then mainly in the chapters describing his return to Ithake, namely, the fables he concocts for Athena disguised as a young stranger (XIII.256 ff.), for Eumaios his old swineherd (XIV.192 ff.), for Antinoos, one of Penelope's suitors (XVII.415 ff.), for Penelope herself (XIX.172 ff.) & his father Laertes (XXIV.258 ff.). On four of these five occasions, the identity the hero chooses is that of a Cretan; in the final case he describes himself as the citizen of a make-believe land. From story to story the details vary, as the inventor's purposes vary, but the Cretan *personae* seem to suit Odysseus' uses well. What traits would such an ethnic as Cretan, proclaim to his listeners? What does Odysseus intend to conceal or reveal by such a façade? & what does Homer want his listener to learn about the character of Odysseus?

The Greeks of Homer's day (8th cent) looked back to a dimly-remembered past separated from their own time by a long Dark Ages during which the technology, culture, even the writing of Mycenaean or Bronze Age Greece (13th cent) was forgotten & only gradually reinvented. Homer's vision of the heroic past was deeply colored by the world he knew. There are some authentic Bronze Age elements in Homer, evidence of the long memory of basically oral cultures, where stories are passed by word of mouth from

generation to generation. In this particular case there is a definite clue as to which Crete, Bronze Age of Eighth Century, is before his mind's eye. In Book XIX the "Cretan" Odysseus prefaces his tale to Penelope with a description of his homeland:

In the midst of the wine-dark sea there lies a land called Crete, a rich & lovely land, washed by the waves on every side, densely peopled & boasting ninety cities. Each of the several races of the island has its own language. First there are the Achaians; then the genuine Cretans (Eteocretans), proud of their native stock; next the Kydonians; the Dorians with their three tribes; & finally the noble Pelasgians. One of the ninety towns is a great city called Knossos, & there for nine years King Minos ruled & enjoyed the friendship of almighty Zeus. (XIX 172-77)

The Crete of the Bronze Age was a populous place, even after the ascendancy of "Achaian" (Mycenaean Greek) overlords, whose cruder standard of living was assimilated into the gracious & affluent native ("Minoan") culture. Just how many cities the island supported in the thirteenth -- or indeed the eighth -- century BC is not known. But the mixture of tongues & the racial distinctions among Achaians, "Genuine Cretans," Kydonians, & especially "Dorians of three tribes" seem to identify this description as post-eleventh century, the approximate assumed period of the penetration of the Aegean islands by Greeks speaking the Dorian dialect. The cultural horizons of Crete seem never to have suffered such radical contraction as defines the "Dark Ages" of the mainland, partly due to its continued contact with the Near East, but partly because of this constant refreshment of population levels from outside the island. Unlike the Mainland, where many of the more cultured, literate & affluent classes fled at the end of the thirteenth century, Crete actually gained inhabitants. The indigenous inhabitants, already a mixture of non-Greek "Minoans" & Achaians or Mycenaean Greeks by the end of the Bronze Age, reacted in two ways to the influx of new settlers: some of them took to the hills, building refuge towns where they clung to their ways, admitting Dorian innovations such as ironworking only cautiously. Many of these settlements were abandoned by the end of the eighth century. Others continued to exist, but as city-states or *poleis* . Their populations & cultures became mixed, native & Dorian together, later to flower artistically in the seventh century & become a powerful factor in the renaissance of Greek art. Politically, the collapse around 1200 BC of the relatively centralized Achaio-Minoan palace system left the island fragmented into an array of warring city-states, first with kinglets, then with oligarchies. In most of Greece this shift from kings to rule by aristocratic warlords took place in the late eighth or early seventh centuries. The position of Idomeneus, whom Odysseus describes as king of Knossos, was probably similar to that of Agamemnon among the Greeks at large: *primus inter pares*. The patchwork polities of Crete at the end of Homer's own century answer very clearly to the Iron Age description offered by the "Cretan" Odysseus.

In each of his fabricated identities the "man of many turns" carefully builds up a character which answers to a need of the moment. In Book XIII he has finally returned home but is not aware of it because the area has been supernaturally transfigured. When Athena, disguised as a well-dressed youth appears, he must explain his presence with the treasute he has lest he be taken for a thief, & launches glibly into his life story -- "not that he told the truth, but ... held back what he knew, weighing within himself at every step what he made up to serve his turn". He identifies himself as a wealthy Cretan with sons

at home (258), a fugitive who has secretly killed the son of Idomeneus in defense of his booty from Troy (263). Having bought passage on a Phoenician ship, he was blown off course & was abandoned by the crew, who nonetheless have left him his possessions.

The yarn skillfully informs Odysseus' interlocutor of some things while concealing others. His true name is, of course, suppressed, & no other is offered in its place, for the casualness of the meeting does not require full courtesies. He establishes the honestly-gotten nature of his treasure, however, & that he will kill to protect it. He identifies himself as a suppliant (173), hence inviolate. His ruggedly independent temper is stressed, & his status as a Trojan War veteran. Still more, he makes quite a point of his craftiness. Not even the Phoenicians, notorious tricksters, could cheat him: they were blown off course unwillingly. Much of this character sketch is true of Odysseus. Although she knows who he really is, Athena is impressed by his quick thinking. "Even a god might bow to you in ways of dissimulation", she remarks admiringly.

When the returning master presents himself incognito to his swineherd, Eumaios (Book XIV), he has perfected his story, & it is far longer & more elaborate. This time he is the bastard son of a wealthy Cretan. As a man seeking hospitality, the wanderer identifies himself more fully; & the name of his father, Kastor Hylakides, provides a short genealogy by way of convincing detail (204). This aristocratic bastard has made himself a reputation in the world by his cleverness & martial prowess. He is a man with a taste for battle & adventure -- a pirate, in fact, & so successful that "my standing was high among the Cretans" (234). Having returned from Troy, he resumes his buccaneering life. While raiding the Egyptian coast, the greed & disobedience of his men provoke an attack that costs them their lives. Only his own quick-wittedness saves him. He amasses a second fortune in Egypt, throws in with a Phoenician, who victimizes him, but not without his own awareness of the deception. Shipwrecked in Thesprotia, he sees the piled-up wealth of Odysseus, & has it on good authority that that man is nearing Ithake. As for himself, he is seized by the Thesprotians who are supposed to bring him home, but escapes to the Ithakan shore.

Odysseus hints to the old swineherd at the nearness of his return without revealing his identity. Ironically this part of the story Eumaios rejects as too good to be true: he has heard too many travelers with such spurious good news to be credulous any more. Was there not the Aitolian who claimed to have seen Odysseus in, of all places, Crete, repairing his treasure-laden ships & enjoying the hospitality of Idomeneus ? But beyond that, the fabricator has produced a plausible tale. The beggarish rags the goddess has cast about him are explained as the poor garments thrown around him by his Thesprotian abductors. Odysseus portrays himself as a man of much the same social caste as his host, a fallen prince (for the old swinehard is himself a king's son, long ago taken captive by pirates & enslaved). He is formidable in courage & intelligence, not to be trifled with, although in tone somewhat less threatening than to the "young man". Attention is drawn to the hospitality of Eumaios' betters to this "Cretan" Odysseus, as an incitement to his own generosity. This is a more fully modeled *persona* than before & the wily fictitious buccaneer more resembles the real Odysseus. Whenever their characters diverge, in fact, we may perhaps be called upon to ask why, whether to reexamine what we think we know of Odysseus or to consider what effect he is creating. For example, the real Odysseus is presumably longing to return to his wife & son & the domestic otium

which his Cretan double so quickly tired of; is this a sort of veiled warning for the future? On the other hand, in the social structure of Dorian Crete, like the Spartan, the warriors ate in a common mess, even slept apart from their spouses in dormitories up to a certain age, with little opportunity for developing a real sense of domesticity. To what extent this system was in place by the eighth century is not clear, of course, although there is some evidence that it may actually have been Minoan in origin & entered the Dorian sphere through Crete. At any rate, the "Cretan" Odysseus' cavalier attitude towards wife & children may reflect realistically the attitude of the sort of man to whom householding was remote at the best of times.

A third brief yarn is spun in Book XVII by Odysseus disguised as a beggar, as he approaches the suitor Antinoos for a handout, continuing the life story he began for Eumaios, not mentioning his Cretan origin specifically, but concentrating on the Egyptian raid in which he was separated from his men by the death consequent upon their reckless greed, as in his own real case. Odysseus alters the details of the adventure from those of his previous recital --notwithstanding that the swineherd is present & possibly in a position to hear the discrepancy. (It seems, however, that he does not hear the new version, since Eumaios reports to Penelope on the man with a mind open to his veracity. 513ff.) A new detail is added to this variant in the episode of slavery to the Cypriot, perhaps calculated to raise the pitiability quotient of the beggar. It might be worth noting that Eumaios introduces the "beggar" as a man of "the Minoan race", although in fact he is plainly Greek-speaking & his father has a Greek name. The implication may be that Eumaios assumes that the beggar's concubine-mother is an Eteo-cretan, which would perhaps suggest something about the social structure of Crete in the eighth century: Dorians on top, indigenous peoples on the bottom. In some localities at least this may have been the case, as in Dorian Sparta, where the Spartans reduced to serfdom the entire indigenous population of Messenia. There is no corroboration of such a system on Crete. & we may ask what Eumaios hoped to gain by mentioning this detail: is it part of a bid for sympathy from the Ithakans? We cannot be sure without a better understanding of how an eighth-century Greek would relate to an ethnically-other member of a a Hellenic culture. Perhaps there is no real implication of ethnicity at all, & the inhabitants of the island are generically understood as "the race of Minos", since after all, according to Homer's chronology, Minos, the grandfather of Idomeneus must have been a Dorian himself.

In Book XIX, the "Cretan" Odysseus introduces himself to Penelope with his lovely description of the island in the midst of the winedark sea. Perhaps with an eye to her feminine sensibilities he replaces with lyricism his former accounts of warlike exploits & plays a bit coy when she urges him to speak of his past, as if it were too painful to recollect without tears. He too, in other words, knows suffering & can empathize with hers. She promptly opens her heart to him, as he intends. Here too for the first time he reveals his "own" name, Aithon (183), & in this tale (a story fit for a queen) he is not merely a buccaneer but a prince, younger brother of Idomeneus, grandson of Minos. Moreover, he is guest-friend to Odysseus, having shown him hospitality at Knossos on his way to Troy (185). The institution of guest-friendship, *xenia*, was an important social bond among aristocrats; once a man had shown or accepted hospitality he was virtually a blood-brother to the other party, bound to defend & support him, & to supply him with gifts at every meeting. This relationship might endure for generations. Thus Penelope would be

obligated to deal generously with any guest-friends of her husband. There are new first-hand details about Cretan geography in this speech -- the difficult harbor at Amnisos, by the cave of Eilythyia, for example -- designed to establish the wanderer's veracity in the same way as his eyewitness report on Odysseus' dress & companions, reminiscent in their particularity of Menelaos' description of his shipwreck site on Crete (III.291-96). For Menelaos too, the husband of Helen who started the whole Trojan War, was delayed in his return home by a sojourn on Crete during which he made a fortune for himself by pirateering against Egypt. This must have been a regular pattern. Penelope is most interested in his recent news of her husband: here he repeats the story of their nearly crossing paths in Thesprotia, of Odysseus' pilgrimage to Dodona & his imminent return. He adds among the lies some details which are in fact true of the real escapades of Odysseus, for instance the sojourn among the Phaiacians. But this Cretan prince is an interesting character in his own right. Even though as the Cretan Aithon he downplays his "own" praise in an uncharacteristically modest way, the real Odysseus manages to congratulate himself through the "impartial" lips of Aithon. The name he has chosen to reveal to Penelope must have significance as well: *aithon* is defined as *gleaming* or *bright* when used of metals & armor; of animals it refers to a bright fiery color such as tawny (lions) or sorrel (horses). Is this a clue for the woman, who must remember her husband with red-gold hair? Or a reference to the ruddy fox, whom of all animals the wily Odysseus most resembles?

Apart from the variable details in each version of his Cretan identity, Odysseus has chosen Cretanness itself as a significant part of his disguises. The men of the great southern island enjoyed a distinctive stereotype among the Greeks of the historical period. Since farming was carried out by their serfs, the aristocratic landowners themselves led a life devoted to warfare & freebooting. Constantly engaged in internecine struggles, they were known for their jealousy & quarrelsomeness; according to Polybius, a Greek writer of the Roman period, factions, murders & wars were their specialty. For this reason they were much in demand as mercenary soldiers, especially of those "sneaky" sorts, archers (like Odysseus) & slingers. They were notorious pirates. The poetic fragment attributed to Hybrias the Cretan sums up the aristocrat's values well: "great wealth, a spear & sword & a good shield". Polybius comments in disgust that of all human beings only the Cretans valued wealth so much that no means of obtaining it was considered too disgraceful; they were greedy, & despite the spartanness of their personal lives, delighted in flaunting their possessions. Moreover, their own writer Epimenides characterized them as "liars every one, evil beasts & lazy bellies". The kinship Odysseus of many guiles must have felt for this wily, acquisitive & none too honest race is obvious.

One wonders, however, if he was not jeopardizing his credibility by proclaiming himself a lying Cretan -- unless there was a particular reason other than simple fellow-feeling for assuming a Cretan disguse. W. J. Woodhouse (*The Composition of Homer's Odyssey* : Oxford, 1930,127ff.) suggests that this is the case. According to his ingenious idea, it is the story of his fantastical adventures told to the Phaiacians which is Odysseus' yarn; & the tale told piecemeal in the person of the Cretan wanderer (corroborated by Eumaios' Aitolian) which substantially describes the man's real adventures since the fall of Troy. To summarize this "real" Odyssey briefly, the hero was blown off course to Crete at some point on his return; took the opportunity to join in a little piracy & augment his

booty; lost his men & ships in Egypt, but spending some years there acquired another fortune; fell afoul of those rival corsairs, the Phoenicians, & was perhaps enslaved in Cyprus; ended up in Thesprotia. Thus, says Woodhouse, would the promise of the poem's exordium that Odysseus should "see the townlands & learn the minds of many distant men" (I.3) be fulfilled in a way belied by the mythologized Phaiacian account. Odysseus the naturalized Cretan would have experienced many a true-life adventure, & voluntarily postponed his return in order to increase his wealth, until the wanderlust played out in middle age -- perfectly in character. He would have learned the personages of the Knossian court & the ways of the island, perhaps acquiring its accent; & it would have been the natural choice for a make-believe homeland when the need for a disguise arose. An intriguing idea: a Cretan Odyssey, well before Kazantsakis'! In any event, our understanding of Odysseus as a man is greatly enhanced by what he chooses to say in his Cretan *personae,* & another dimension is added to our picture of Homer's world.

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Note: In my last act as President. I regret to inform you of the death of Morton Packer (husband of Jean) on April 22 and of Harry Haldeman (husband of Helen) on May 20. Ippokratis Kantzios, the new President, will contact you before the fall to invite you to renew your membership & to let you know the lecture schedule for 1998-99. Niki Kantzios will takie over as Secretary Treasurer, and I will transfer the CHHSJ account to her. You would continue to make out checks simply to *Classical Humanities Society of South Jersey.*

Fred Mench