

Nicoletta Momigliano, *In Search of the Labyrinth: The Cultural Legacy of Minoan Crete*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, pp. xv +362, ISBN 9781350156708, £19.99

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The starting point for this ground-breaking new book is the phenomenon described by Paul Morand in the early 1960s as ‘Cretomania’. As defined by Morand, Cretomania was the almost immediate embrace of the archaeological discoveries in Crete at the turn of the twentieth century by contemporary artists in the fashionable capitals of Europe. As Momigliano argues, ‘the encounter between Minoan Crete and the late Belle Époque was like love at first sight: the Minoans were immediately accepted as desirable European ancestors’ (p. 86). She identifies this desirability in the contradictory responses generated by the Minoans, as both primitive and modern, exotic and familiar. These responses found expression in the visual arts, but also, she suggests, chimed with political debates in those same capitals concerning the Cretan Question and the suffragette movement.

Whereas Morand placed the end of Cretomania at the outbreak of the First World War, for Momigliano it becomes a much wider phenomenon which can be traced back to the Iron Age and continues to the present day, and which encompasses a wide variety of responses to the Minoan past, from archaeological writings on the subject to Neo-Pagan religious movements. She applies the same inclusive spirit to the definition of Minoan Crete, since the archaeology of the third and second millennium BC of Crete has increasingly been seen as difficult to disentangle from modern archaeological interpretations which, like Sir Arthur Evans’s famous concrete reconstitutions at Knossos, sometimes go beyond the material evidence: ‘Minoan Crete is largely a modern construct – the product of centuries of scholarship, interpretations, reconstructions, and modern responses to this Bronze Age past’ (p. 3). At the heart of this book is a dialogue between the scholarship on Minoan Crete and some of these responses. As an Aegean Bronze Age archaeologist herself, and self-diagnosed sufferer of Cretomania, Momigliano proves the ideal guide to a diverse and multilingual set of sources.

The book, following an introductory chapter, is organised along chronological lines. Chapter 2 deals with a span of about 3000 years, from antiquity to the mid-nineteenth century. Momigliano perhaps stretches the definition of the Minoan cultural legacy by noting contemporary second millennium BC responses by Egyptians and others to the Cretans they

encountered. There is, however, a strong case for describing an early first millennium BC cemetery at Knossos as an example of ‘ancient Cretomania’ (p. 191) given the evident borrowing of Minoan visual culture there. A more enduring legacy from around this time is the reworking of the Minoan past into the well-known Cretan myths centring on the Labyrinth. Despite acknowledging that these myths are responses to the Minoan past, Momigliano chooses not to examine later works inspired by the myths unless a clear Minoan element is evident. This is a pragmatic decision which maintains the focus of the book on the less well-known subject of the reception of Bronze Age Crete and which keeps the subject matter manageable; but there is a fluid boundary between what might be seen as direct and indirect responses to Minoan Crete elsewhere in the book.

Chapter 3 moves on to a more traditional setting for reception studies, from the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War. It sets the template for subsequent chapters, with a brief outline of the historical background, particularly as it relates to the history of excavation of Crete, followed by an accomplished summary of the archaeological scholarship and then a discussion of the literary, visual and dramatic arts which are connected in some way with the archaeological discoveries. Over seventy illustrations complement the discussion.

Momigliano identifies the first modern example of Cretomania as a 1901 production of the Greek tragedy, *Alceste*, in Athens, whose staging and costumes were directly inspired by some of the discoveries on Crete of the previous year. This illustrates the rapid dissemination of finds made by Evans and others, but Momigliano cautions that there was not always a direct engagement between the arts and archaeological scholarship. Instead, it was figures such as art historians Salomon Reinach and Edmond Pottier who brought Minoan art to the attention of the Parisian artistic scene. Among those inspired there were the artist Léon Bakst and fashion designer Mariano Fortuny, who combined Minoan motifs with others to create an air of exoticism. As Momigliano notes: ‘Early twentieth-century taste was ready for the Minoans’ (p. 74).

In the interwar period discussed in Chapter 4, Momigliano identifies a growing trend in scholarship of contrasting the Minoans with the mainland Mycenaeans, increasingly identified as Aryan invaders. She demolishes the ‘modern myth’ that Arthur Evans regarded the Minoans as pacifist – she attributes this Minoan stereotype to other writers – but does trace the growing consensus that the decadent Minoans were no match for their warlike neighbours. This sense of decadence permeates some of the rather dubious historical novels about Crete written in this period. Momigliano admits that some of the examples she discusses in the book are obscure, and of variable quality, but suggests that all are ‘good to

think with' as she identifies broader patterns and trends (p. 16). One suspects, from the plot summaries, that she has read some novels so that other scholars can think with them without having to endure reading them.

The literary fortunes of Minoan Crete changed in the post-war period, covered in two chapters divided by the horizon of the Greek junta, with the works of authors such as Mary Renault and Nikos Kazantzakis. They exemplify two of the wider themes of the book: Renault continues in a long tradition of domesticating Minoan material culture by understanding it in terms of classical myth, whereas Kazantzakis allies the Minoans with a modern Cretan identity. There is also a sense that the more sophisticated archaeological theory became, the less cultural influence it had. Instead, the goddess theories of Marija Gimbutas helped to reinforce the appeal of Minoan Crete as a feminist utopia, apparent, for instance, in Judy Chicago's (1974–9) installation *The Dinner Party* and Christa Wolf's (1983) novel *Kassandra*.

The final chapter, on twenty-first century responses, sketches out some of the increasing diversity of the reception of Minoan Crete, already apparent in some of the postmodern reactions discussed at the end of the previous chapter, which break away from classical narratives. The advent of the internet has led to an overwhelming variety of new sources, and it is a shame that Momigliano was only able to touch on some of them rather than giving them the same treatment as previous chapters. She finishes with a warning that: 'Minoan specialists ignore at their peril how various media help to disseminate their favourite subject to wider audiences and give it new vitality as well as relevance to the present' (p. 241). As Momigliano shows, however, the relationship between the discipline of Aegean prehistory and the cultural legacy of Minoan Crete is not a straightforward one. By bringing the two together, this impressive and wide-ranging book establishes a framework for understanding the sometimes contradictory intellectual and cultural history of Minoan Crete.