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## ANCIENT CRETE

FROM SUCCESSFUL COLLAPSE TO DEMOCRACY'S  
ALTERNATIVES, TWELFTH TO FIFTH CENTURIES BC

'Ancient Greece', with its associations of city-states, democratic governance, and iconic material culture, can no longer be envisaged as a uniform geographical or historical entity. The Classical city-states of Crete differed considerably in culture, history, and governance from those of central Greece. In this book, Saro Wallace reaches back into Crete's prehistory, covering the latest Bronze Age through the Archaic periods, to find out why. She emphasizes the roles of landscape, external contacts, social identity construction, and historical consciousness in producing this difference, bringing together the wealth of new archaeological evidence available from the island with a variety of ancient text sources to produce a vivid and up-to-date picture of this momentous period in Crete's history.

Saro Wallace is currently a Glassman Holland Research Fellow at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. She was previously a Humboldt Senior Research Fellow at Heidelberg University's Institut für Klassische Archäologie, in 2010–12. Until 2009 she was Lecturer in Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Reading, having previously held lectureships at the Universities of Bristol and Cardiff. A recipient of a Leverhulme Postdoctoral Research Fellowship and of regular grants from the British Academy and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, she has published many papers and reviews in the field of Bronze to Iron Age Greece. She currently directs excavations at the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age mountaintop site of Karfi, Crete.

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## ABSTRACT

In today's politics democracy is often presented as a largely self-contained system, able to be introduced abruptly into a variety of social environments with predictable and permanent success. The idea that social collapse (whatever its origins) can be orchestrated and managed to the same end has also gained ground. Against this background, this book's investigation of how far the earliest consensualist states, those of Greece, developed out of specific, regional material and historical conditions following Bronze Age state collapse, and of the role played by cultural practice in structuring them, seems especially pertinent. Interest in regional variance between early Greek state forms has recently grown among archaeologists and text historians. The book is sited within this context: as a comparative regional study focused on Crete it counters teleological/evolutionary notions of a widespread, uniform trajectory of social change towards a single democratic 'light at the end of the tunnel' in early Greece. Between the horizons of east Mediterranean state collapse in the twelfth century and Greek democracy establishment by the fifth, Crete's course of social and political development diverges markedly from that of much of central Greece: democratic systems did not develop there. Analysis of the island in its broad Mediterranean context shows how regional and contingent factors interacted with larger-scale processes and structures to produce Crete's difference, as comparisons are drawn across the ancient world (Cyprus, Athens, the western Greek colonies, the *ethnos* states of north central Greece, Ionia, and Sparta). At island level, the project necessitates writing the first synthetic social archaeology of Crete in the Early Iron Age to late Archaic periods, drawing together a very large amount of good-quality archaeological evidence produced in the last twenty years and a broad range of older data of more variable quality. Archaic and Classical text sources are additionally examined, particularly to illuminate issues around cultural and political identities in Crete by the end of the period covered.

The issue of how far agency, self-consciousness, and choice determined contrasts between regional social systems is an important focus here. However, the book's main argument is that a series of important developments in *cultural* practice, ultimately rooted in the process of Bronze

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Age state collapse, conditioned the way states emerged and developed in different Aegean regions. Crete's collapse is shown to have involved a unique degree of planned, preemptive cultural adjustment that, viewed together with macroeconomic and geopolitical factors, helps explain the remarkable degree of social stability in the island during the immediate post-collapse period. The book identifies a horizon of social complexity emerging in Crete in the tenth century BC – much earlier than in most other areas of Greece – showing it to have been closely tied into this earlier cultural history. This precocious development is argued to have played a strong role in producing an especially bounded, oligarchical small state in the island by the seventh century BC. In contrast, central Greek societies were characterized by extreme and long-term instability and tensions after the Bronze Age collapse, and experienced a different rate and scale of economic and political growth in the period prior to democracy's emergence. The book questions the notion of developmental 'progress' or 'success' and its association with democratic outcomes by suggesting that the early development of complex and stable social structures in Crete *limited* the dynamism of the island's participation in international trade and politics and ultimately helped discourage participative political structures from taking root there. Specific local constructions and conceptions of historical, cultural, and ethnic identity also had strong roles in structuring the state and were heavily manipulated to this end: the book concludes by showing how and why Cretan societies took on a status of ideological 'other' for other Greek communities, deeply affecting the way the Cretan states viewed themselves, were viewed, and operated in the perspective of Classical democracy.



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Saro Wallace  
Reading, UK  
April 2009

Minoan Art Early Aegean Arts and Culture of Ancient Crete. Main a-z index. Minoan Fresco (c.1500 BCE) Shows two youths boxing National Archeological Museum, Athens. Copper and Bronze Snake Goddess (c.1500 BCE) Archeological Museum, Herakleion. Polychrome Faience figurine from the Palace of Knossos, Crete. Minoan Art (c.3000-1100 BCE). Contents. It was one of the strongest cities on Crete. Ancient Lato was destroyed about 200 B.C. During the Roman times its port, Lato Etera at the side of Agios Nikolaos, became an important city, the administrative centre was transferred there by the middle of the 2nd century A.D. and Lato was subsequently abandoned. Ancient Lato was the birth-place of Nearchos, the admiral of Alexander the Great. The island of Crete. So many places to visit, so many treasures to discover. It is impossible to explore all Crete during one visit.