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Migration on Crete in Classical and Hellenistic times

ABSTRACT

On the island of Crete migration was triggered by different reasons as elsewhere in the ancient world. From Classical times onwards, some inland cities positioned on mountains or hills were abandoned in favour of already existing coastal towns. In some cases, a slight shift of location from a hill near the coast to the coastal plain led to the emergence of new harbour towns. But ceramic evidence leads to the conclusion that the older settlements were not totally abandoned, and a small group of people remained there. This phenomenon of emigration of a major part of the inhabitants, presumably mostly due to economic changes, can still be seen nowadays in faraway regions.

Sometimes the movement of part of the population of a polis to the territory of another one on the basis of a treaty of isopoliteia could solve problems of over-population. On the other hand, migration was caused by wars between Cretan poleis. But there are also legendary cases of migration movements which may be based on real events.

KEYWORDS: Crete, Classical, Hellenistic, migration, shift of location, movement on basis of treaty, wars, legends

Migration is the permanent or long-term, voluntary or involuntary change of living-place of individuals, families or larger groups of people (Chaniotis 2006, 98). As in our days, migration also occurred in Antiquity both within and beyond geographical units. Here I want to discuss migration within the island of Crete triggered by different reasons as elsewhere in the ancient world, illustrated by documented examples (Fig. 1).

The first reason was abandonment of some inland cities positioned on mountains or hills in favour of already existing coastal towns from Classical times onwards. In rare cases a slight shift of location from a hill near the coast to the coastal plain led to the emergence of new harbour towns. In west Crete two habitation sites a few kilometers distant from the coast were suggested as being the former acropolis of ancient Kydonia. The sites in question are the Kastellos near Varypetro as well as two hills connected by a saddle near the village of Vryses Agios Georgios (Hoeck 1823, 383; Spratt 1865/1984, 140-141; Zois 1976, 3; Spanakis 1993, 446; Andreadaki-Vlasaki 2000, 42). Although migration of small numbers of people from both sites to the coastal town at any time cannot be excluded, remains of buildings and pottery show that the heights were not totally abandoned in Classical and Hellenistic times (Vryses: Daux 1961, 896; Touchais 1982, 631; Varypetro, Kastellos: Erickson 2010a, 250-251). In Hellenistic times at the latest, probably most of the inhabitants left the settlement on the mountain of Oxa to settle in the prospering coastal town of Olous (Perlman 2004, 1147).



Fig. 1. Map of Crete showing location of sites mentioned in the text (by the author).

In the course of the 2nd century, the upper city of Lato was gradually abandoned in favour of the port town Lato pros Kamara with its seaside advantages, and the political centre was also moved there (Ducrey and Picard 1976; Picard 1992, 154; Westgate 2007, 427). The upper city remained deserted until the 4th century A.D. (Ducrey and Picard 1978, 80). On a peninsula east of the modern town of Sitia, in the second half of the 3rd century B.C. a small harbour town possibly named Poseidonia was founded by a group of people originating from the nearby Kastri of Koutsoulopetres. But the newly founded city was destroyed after only 75 to 100 years (Vogeikoff-Brogan 2011a, 556; Vogeikoff-Brogan 2011b, 410-411). In Classical and Hellenistic times most of the inhabitants left the settlement on the Kastri of Xerokampos. They moved to the low hill of Pharmakokephalo (Schlager 1991, 24-25), only 2 km distant to the northeast as the crow flies but with better possibilities for harbour installations.

In most of the cases described above, ceramic evidence leads to the conclusion that the older settlements were not totally abandoned, and a small group of people remained there. This phenomenon of emigration of a major part of the inhabitants, presumably mostly due to economic changes, can still be seen nowadays in faraway regions.

A second reason was the movement of part of the population to the territory of another polis on the basis of a treaty of isopoliteia to solve problems of over-population. More than half of the Cretan isopoliteia treaties known so far were concluded between numerous Cretan cities (Priarios, Viannos?, Arkades, Lato, Larisa, Praisos, Itanos) and Hierapytna in east Crete, which probably faced considerable population growth in Hellenistic times. To supply her population with land, Hierapytna made use of clauses included in the isopoliteia treaties which permitted her citizens to settle in the partner cities and to acquire land there (Chaniotis 1995, 73-75).

Third, migration was caused by wars between Cretan poleis. The destruction debris at Prinias Patela, ancient Rhizenia or Apollonia, dating from the first half of the 6th century B.C., possibly hints at a violent end of the settlement (Erickson 2010a, 241). In the course of the following centuries, people may have largely moved to the harbour town also bearing the name Apollonia at modern Agia Pelagia (Faure 1965, 16-17; Blackman 1976, 739). In the early 5th century B.C.

the east Cretan town on the hill of Azoria became a victim of war and was destroyed. Survivors seem to have fled to the coastal town of Istron, as ceramic evidence shows that immediately after the end of Azoria the population of Istron expanded suddenly (Erickson 2010a, 307; Erickson 2010b, 343-344).

The most prominent example of migration following a war is the case of Lyttos. After the complete destruction of their city by the Knossians around 220 B.C. the Lyttians marched to Lappa, about 100 km to the west as the crow flies (Pol. 5,54; Chaniotis 2004, 481). In order to get there, they had to cross the borders of at least three states, depending on the route they followed. The southern route would have led through the territories of Arkades, Gortyn and Sybrita, the northern route through the territories of Knossos, Tylisos, Axos and Eleutherna (Chaniotis 2004, 484).

On the contrary, the surviving inhabitants of Phaistos being conquered by Gortyn and Praisos being conquered by Hierapytna in the 2nd century B.C. (Strabo 10, 4, 12. 14) only moved to the more or less nearby countryside. The Phaistians went to the Mesara, the Praisians possibly to the upland basins of Katelionas and Lamnoni in the Ziros region (Phaistos: Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004, 326; Chaniotis 2006, 99; Praisos: Branigan *et al.* 1998, 90). While the Lyttians decided to return and rebuild their hometown some years later, the sites of Phaistos and Praisos remained deserted.

Fourth, there are also legendary cases of migration movements which may be based on real events. The report of Aelian about the troubles of the inhabitants of Rhaukos, a city on the eastern slope of the Psiloritis range, possibly hints at an event in prehistoric times. People fled after an invasion of aggressive bees to a place in the vicinity, now modern Agios Myron, and founded a new city (Ael. *NA* 17, 35; Sporn 2001, 50). However, neither the position of the former settlement, which perhaps lay nearer to Psiloritis as C. Hoeck assumed (Hoeck 1823, 415), nor the date of the movement of the Rhaukians are known.

But an event of historic times seems to be referred to by Plinius and Seneca citing Theophrast. They report that the town of Arkades at modern Ini in an environment rich in water was abandoned after destruction by enemies and the land remained unworked for years. This had devastating effects on the natural environment (Plin. *HN* 31, 53; Seneca *QN* 3, 11, 5; Bursian 1872, 562; Sanders 1982, 151; Chaniotis 1996, 24; Erickson 2010a, 307). Agricultural terraces preventing erosion¹ seem to have collapsed and in the course of time the springs dried up. Resettlement six years later, including rebuilding the terraces, is said to have made the springs flow again. But we are not told if the city was rebuilt by returning survivors of the mentioned war, or by newcomers.

Another interesting case is the somewhat legendary origin of the people founding the city of Stalai on the south coast of east Crete. Inscriptions testify to its existence as a dependent polis of Praisos but neither the position of the original city nor that of the new one can be identified. The Stalilai are said to have come from the town of ΣΤΗΛΑΙ (STELAE), according to

¹ On terracing providing a flat work surface and reducing erosion, its further function, particularly on marls, of breaking up the bedrock and increasing root penetration see Hayden, Moody and Rackham 1992, 314; on building of terrace walls against erosion already in MM times see Watrous *et al.* 1993, 204.

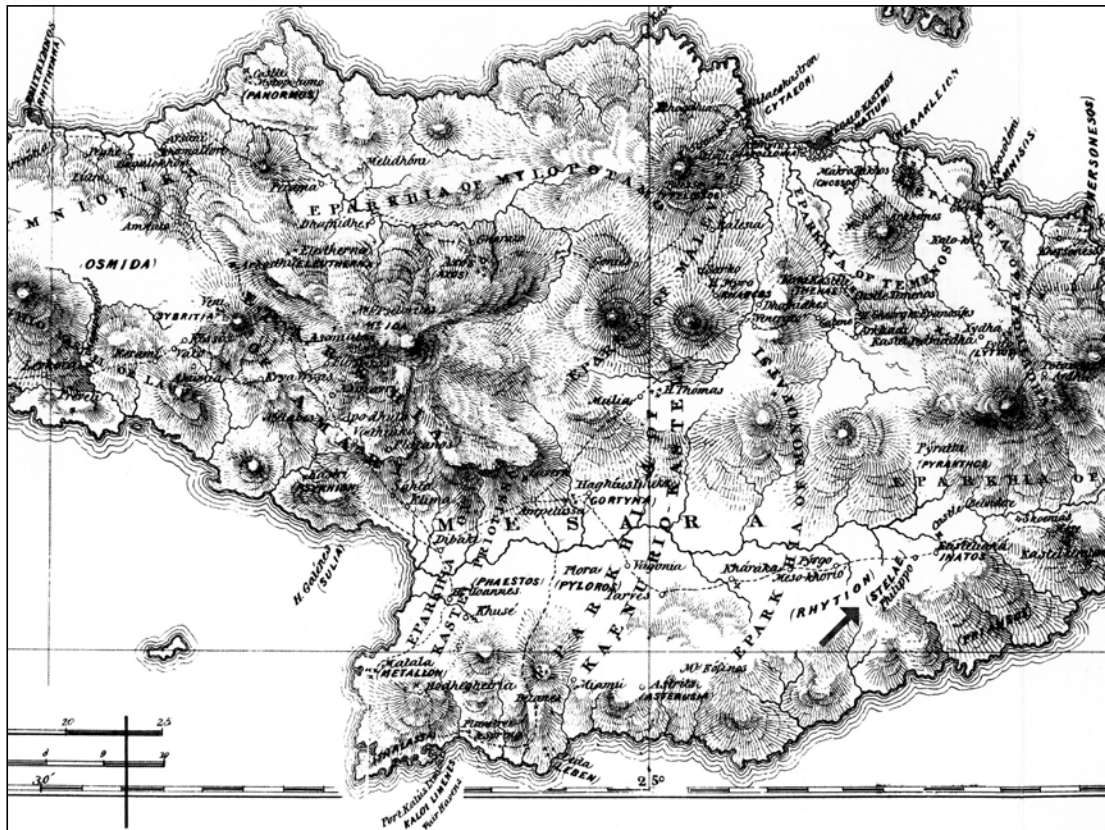


Fig. 2. Map of Central Crete with hypothetic position of ΣΤΗΛΑΙ / STELAE (after Mlinar and Schlager 2010, 343 fig. 83 based on map of Pashley 1837/1989).

different authors lying somewhere between “Rethymno and Praisos” (Spanakis 1957, 295, 301), or more exactly between Rhythion and Praisos (Hoeck 1823, 414; Pashley, I 292) or especially detailed between Rhythion and Inatos (Fig. 2) in the modern district of Monophatsi near the Castel Belvedere and the monastery “I Agii Apostoli” (Angelakis 1935, 34). The detailed description of the location of ΣΤΗΛΑΙ alludes to the place of Praisos on the hill with the medieval Castel Belvedere. The reason why some authors place ΣΤΗΛΑΙ between Rhythion and Praisos may be the location of Praisos by early commentators on the coast at Tsoutsouros, but this is now believed to be the site of Inatos, the port of Praisos (Cross 2011, 208). However, ΣΤΗΛΑΙ seems to have been not too far from the sea because the inhabitants of the city are said to have fled with their fleet for an unknown reason to the south coast of Sitia, occupying the land from Cape Erythraion to Kato Zakros in the East together with the small offshore islands Chamili, Prasonisi and the rocky Kavalli islands, settling there in the territory of Praisos (Angelakis 1935, 34). The most probable places are in the area of modern Makrygialos or the Pharmakokephalo hill of Xerokampos (Fig. 3) as suggested in an article published by Norbert Schlager and myself some years ago (Mlinar and Schlager 2010). The reason why the population of ΣΤΗΛΑΙ in Central Crete went to Southeast Crete could have been a conflict with a neighbouring polis, a stasis or an environmental catastrophe.

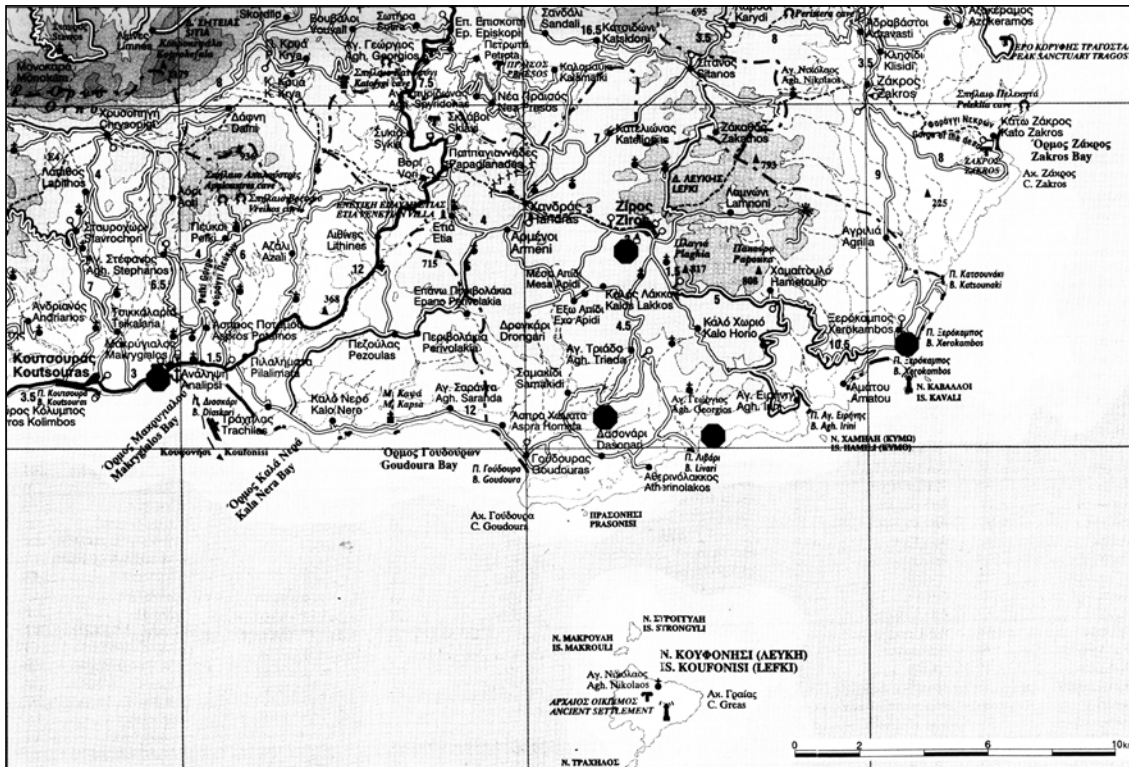


Fig. 3. Map of Southeast Crete with possible locations of Stalai (after Mlinar and Schlager 2010, 345 fig. 84).

To sum up, we can see that there were various reasons that forced populations to leave, often a shift of economic practices, sometimes over-population or warfare. The only known migration movement on Crete caused by a war described in detail by an ancient author is the story of the Lyttians reported by Polybios. Environmental problems as a reason for migration seem to have been rare (Table 1). It seems that people in Classical and Hellenistic Crete preferred to move to nearby areas within the island, because the possibilities of long-distant travel, especially for larger groups of people, were probably limited. Only the Stalitai and the Lyttians decided to go to more distant places. While the Stalitai founded a new city, the Lyttians returned and rebuilt their home town. This, however, shows that it was not absolutely excluded that people returned to their former places. As regards the enigmatic origin of the Rhaukians and the Stalitai, this would deserve further investigation. Lastly, most of the migration movements known are attested in the eastern part of Crete, maybe due to the state of research.

Origin		Destination		Distance as the crow flies	Time (B.C.)	Reason	
Inland	Coast	Inland	Coast				
West Crete							
Varypetro, Kastellos			Kydonia	7 km	unknown	oikonomy	
Vryses Kydonias			Kydonia	10 km	unknown	oikonomy	
East Crete							
Rhizenia or Apollonia			Apollonia	27 km	6th/5th cent.	war, oikonomy	
Azoria			Istron	12 km	5th century	war	
Oxa			Olous	3 km	3rd century	oikonomy	
Lato			Lato pros Kamara	6 km	3rd/2nd cent.	oikonomy	
Koutsoulopetres, Kastri			Poseidonia	4 km	3rd century	oikonomy	
	Xerokampos, Kastri		Pharmakokephalo	2 km	3rd century	oikonomy	
Phaistos		Mesara Plain		0-? km	2nd century	war	
Praisos		High Plain of Ziros		6 km	2nd century	war	
Stelai			Stelai	80 km	unknown	unknown	
Lytos		Lappa		100 km	around 220	war	return
unknown		Rhaukos			unknown	environment	
Arkades		unknown			unknown	war	return ?

Table 1. Migration movements on Crete.

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