

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

MOMIGLIANO (N.) **In Search of the Labyrinth: The Cultural Legacy of Minoan Crete** (New Directions in Classics). London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp. xvi + 362, illus. £21.99. 9781350156708.
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In Search of the Labyrinth is a rich-in-information publication presenting, for the first time in monograph form, the breadth and depth of the many receptions of Minoan Crete across Europe and North America from the late 19th to the end of the 20th century. What makes it stand out is its power in narrating the trickle effect that lies behind how the past is remembered, largely through secondary and tertiary sources (i.e. modern popular readings, and rereadings, of Minoan art and archaeology) rather than through exclusive reliance on primary evidence. This book is a must-read for all those interested in Aegean archaeology, early and modern Greek history, historiography, reception studies and above all in Crete.

Following a brief introduction which sets out the scene and tone of the book, Nicoletta Momigliano presents in seven chapters, chronologically ordered from antiquity to the present day, the various episodes surrounding the reception of Minoan Crete. These episodes are preceded, in each chapter, by the historical framework within which they occurred as well as, from the late 19th century onwards, by brief histories of Minoan and Aegean archaeology and of key discoveries that shaped and/or framed them. By doing so, Momigliano not only successfully contextualizes these receptions but also preserves for posterity important voices and works that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. To paraphrase one of Paul Klee's famous quotes, this book 'does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible' (*Schöpferische Konfession* (Berlin 1920), 28 (original in German), quoted on p. 1). By doing so, Momigliano establishes connections and relations previously little known or understood, undoubtedly also offering bridges for connections yet to be established.

Some perceptions and conceptions of Minoan Crete that emerged in the last 140 years (for example, a civilized 'other' to Greek mainland-/Atheno-centrism, a sea empire and a tragic place associated with some key female characters, such as Europa, Pasiphae, Ariadne, Phaedra) may well owe their origins to Greek and Roman classical tradition. The (originally) philological, later historical and ultimately archaeological interest in Crete in the course of the long 19th century appears to have led to the re-emergence and reactivation of these classical readings.

However, when these textual readings met archaeology in the late 19th century, a new era of creative cultural engagement began coupled with the academic pursuit of the origins of ('European', as it was argued at the time) civilization. It was, after all, this quest for origins (in this case, of the Mycenaean civilization that was being unearthed more systematically from the 1870s onwards) that led to the methodical exploration of the island's pre-classical remains; and it is in relation to Mycenaean Greece that Minoan Crete (especially its Middle and Late Bronze Age phases) was to be discussed and understood for a long time. The relationship between Mycenaean Greece and Minoan Crete became even more entrenched in the interwar period solidifying further these labels as now describing groups of people ('Minoans' and 'Mycenaeans') which had to behave accordingly: and while before the First World War some of the characteristics that originally made the 'Minoans' famous worldwide, such as their

civilized, graceful, artistic outlook, were viewed positively, during the interwar period they became elements of their downfall against rising Aryanism and militarism, which the Mycenaeans encapsulated all too well.

Many specialists and non-specialists credited Arthur Evans as a source for the pacifist attitude of the 'Minoans', an idea successfully rebuked by Momigliano, who thinks that Harriet Boyd Hawes, herself a renowned archaeologist of Crete, may have had more to do with that idea than any of Evans' other contemporaries; whatever the source, this concept developed a life of its own, through popular reception. Post-Second World War, for example, Minoan pacifism resurfaced not as a negative trait, but as a positive characteristic and a source of hope. That shift is particularly noticeable in authors and artists critical of the Cold War era and the period's precarious political and military balance. Indeed, as argued in the book, every generation seems to have the 'Minoans' it deserves and desires.


Duality, ambivalence and contradiction characterize the cultural legacy of Minoan Crete, Momigliano argues: lurking between modernity and primitiveness, vitality/high attainment and decadence, civility and cruelty, Europe and Orient, familiarity and strangeness. It is a 'culture that straddles contrasting or even opposite camps, and yet maintains its distinctiveness' (56). It has to be said that for the most part there is a heavy Eurocentric, elitist, bias in these receptions at least until the 1970s, if not also beyond that period. More non-elite and more local voices (to those already included in the book) could in the future offer a welcome addition to the many Minoan receptions.

In the last 50 years, archaeological work has expanded exponentially and so has the reception of Minoan Crete. There is now more of everything: sites and discoveries, publications and exhibitions, but also popular representations of Minoan Crete in performing arts, cartoons, comic books and computer games, TV and radio shows, culinary events and amusement parks. Political and socio-economic developments, including mass tourism in the post-Second World War era, have certainly had a significant impact on the wider reception and popularization of the image of Bronze Age Crete, also through reproductions, tourist bric-a-brac and the commercialization of the Minoan past as a Cretan brand appropriate for modern consumption.

Despite differences in emphasis and interest over time, however, some common threads criss-cross all periods (232–33): (1) the persistence of classical texts in the modern, popular, construction of Minoan Crete; (2) the use of the 'Minoans' as a mirror for concerns related to different types, and levels, of identity in the present; (3) the position of women within Minoan society (which has attracted numerous modern discussions ranging from sexuality and femininity to social organization and religion); and (4) the island's Bronze Age (especially Neopalatial and Final Palatial) artistic identity, which is often seen in modern writings as a forerunner of Classical Greece and the Renaissance (an approach that made the 'Minoans' more delightful and beautiful not least because Belle Époque and Art Nouveau had already created an aesthetic environment receptive to Minoan artworks leading to their familiarization, domestication and popularization). Another common denominator, I would add, is the emphasis of Minoan receptions on destruction and drama, on looting and reconstructions, and the stories of the Minotaur/labyrinth and of Atlantis – with Minoan Crete becoming a setting and backdrop for such stories and for human action to unravel.

With 1,115 endnotes over 63 pages (some very detailed and valuable) and 38 pages of bibliography covering a thousand titles, this publication is primarily intended for specialists though there is something here for everybody. Ultimately, reading this book

makes one more aware of the multilevel influence the many receptions of the (Minoan) past have exercised on specialists and non-specialists alike, and the numerous ideas that have emanated from both groups. Receptions, after all, help to popularize perceptions of the past which, as this book effectively shows, are often interconnected and all-pervasive.

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