Chapter 5 – Crete
(“the Labyrinth and the Minotaur”)

Our cruise ship arrived at the port of Heraklion in Crete before 7:00 AM. I took several pictures, from the left side towards the island, and from the right side where I saw a ship with the name Minoan on it.

https://youtu.be/2pgK0elBArc (Drive through Heraklion – Part 1)
http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/crete1.wma (audio file)

Our guide on the island was a young lady named Thalia Zervaki, a free-lance tour guide. She greeted us after we got on the bus, and her cheerful pleasant voice made it easy to listen to every word that she spoke:

Good morning, welcome to Crete. Today it’s cloudy, but hopefully it won’t rain. So we will see. Welcome to this island, welcome to Heraklion. You actually approached the city through the port of Heraklion, which is part of Heraklion city. This is the capital of the island.

And we are, more or less, on the central part of the northern coast of Crete, the one that faces mainland Greece. If you ever noticed the shape of this island on a map, it’s elongated, stretching from east to west. And to also give you the numbers, stretching from east to west, the island is 260 kilometers long – that’s a straight line. Driving time is over six hours. And from north to south the widest part of this island is 60 kilometers, and the most narrow part is only 12 kilometers.

So the island is elongated from east to west, and you approached the northern coast of this island. The northern coast of this island is more developed, and the ports are mostly on the northern coast. The central part of the island is mountainous. Greece, generally speaking, is a
mountainous island, so the central part has mountain ranges one after the other. The southern coast of Crete is the unspoiled part.

My name, by the way, is Thalia. We also have a driver taking care of us, and his name is Chromis. Kalimera ("good day"), Chromis. Chromis is driving through the seaside of Heraklion so you can see the traditional port of Heraklion. Later, we will come downtown. On the left you can see the stone construction with the algae; these are places for the boats, which dock during winter, or when there needs to be done some repair work. You can also see the castle to the right. The castle is of Venetian construction – Venice. There was a time in our history when Venice occupied Crete, and this is a construction of the 16th century AD. The Venetians called this castle ‘Roccamare,’ which means the rock in the sea. You see why they called it like that. It’s a castle in the sea: Rocca and mare.

To the right you see a pedestrian street, which leads to the center of the city of Heraklion. The heart of Heraklion is in the inner part of the city, not the part near the port. This was the prehistoric center also of the island.

So we will have about ten to fifteen minutes of driving time before we approach the archaeological site of Knossos. The archaeological site of Knossos is the most important of the archaeological sites on the island. And not only on Crete, but in all of Greece. Knossos is among the most important archaeological sites of Europe. Knossos was the center of the first advanced civilization of Europe. We’ll stay there more or less about two hours. Then we will come downtown.

In the center of Heraklion you will have some free time before we return to the port. This is our plan for the day.

To the right you can see part of the fortification wall. This is Venetian construction again from the 16th century AD. This was during the same time period as the castle. This wall is four kilometers long with seven bastions. This wall now only surrounds the center of the capital. But back when this wall was constructed, it surrounded the whole capital.

Heraklion nowadays has a population of 200,000 people. The total population of Crete is 600,000 people. Almost one-third of the total population of Crete is living here in the capital. It is the economic center of the island.

Now we’re going to Knossos, the archaeological site. Let me take advantage of the rest of the driving time to mention a few basic things about the archaeological site, the palace of Knossos. First of all, what we see today used to be the prehistoric center of the island. Knossos was the prehistoric center of Crete. Knossos is not the only palace, the prehistoric palace that we have on this island. So far four prehistoric palaces have been excavated. Most of the tours include the palace of Knossos, because Knossos is the largest and most glorious palace, the most luxurious one. This is also the reason for the archaeologists and scholars to know – and believe – that the most important center of the Minoan civilization was Knossos.

The Minoan civilization – the name is given to the civilization by the archaeologists. When they excavated the palaces and they were thinking of the name, their idea was to name the civilization after its legendary king. The legendary king of this island was King Minos. So they called the civilization Minoan. And we call the prehistoric people of this island Minoans, although we really don’t know how these people called themselves back then. And you may have already heard of the legendary King Minos. Or you may have heard of some other mythological stories.

You may have heard of the labyrinth, a complicated construction with many corridors and rooms. You may have heard of the monster of the labyrinth – the Minotaur – the monster that was half-man and half-bull. Or you may have heard of the two men who managed to fly away from this island of Crete – Icarus and Daedalus. This is a long mythological story that the prehistoric period of this island is connected with. You may know that Greece has a long mythology; every single part of Greece has its own myth. And here, of course, we have these myths.
The legendary King Minos was actually a son of Zeus and Europa. Europa was a beautiful princess of a Phoenician king. Zeus saw the beautiful princess Europa, and he fell in love with her. To approach her, he decided to transform himself into a bull. It was easier for Zeus to approach a mortal lady by transforming himself. In our story he decided to transform himself into a bull. By the way, if you have noticed, the two Euro Greek coin has an image of a lady (Europa) sitting on a bull (Zeus). The coin reflects this exact myth. So the bull got close to Europa, and Europa started playing with the bull. And as she was playing with the bull, she sat on the back of the bull. As soon as that happened, the bull Zeus ran away from the shore so quickly that the young princess could do nothing but hold tight to the horns of the bull. Zeus brought Europa here, on this island of Crete. He brought her back to his own birthplace. The ancient Greeks believed that the birthplace of Zeus was this island of Crete. So he brought Europa here and took on his normal appearance. From this union of Europa with Zeus, Europa gave birth to three boys: their names were Minos, the one who later became the king, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon. [Note: Minos, Rhadamanthus and Sarpedon became the judges of the Underworld when they died.]

Zeus had to leave. Europa found herself alone on this island, so secretly she married the first king of Crete named Asterius (aka Asterion). They were happy for many years till Asterius died. And when the first king died, one of the three sons had to rule. One of the three had to take the throne. Minos was the oldest one, and since he was the oldest one, he demanded to be the king. However, his brothers were not convinced. They told him, if you have to be the king, you have to give us a sign, a sign from the gods. Minos asked Poseidon (Neptune) – the god of the sea – to help him. And Poseidon agreed. And as the three brothers were arguing by the shore of this island about who’s going to be the king, and who’s not, suddenly a wild bull came out of the sea. That was the sacred bull of Poseidon, and it stood next to Minos. And this is how Minos managed to become the king. This was a sign from the gods. And this is how mythology starts.

So this was the legendary King Minos, and the Minoan civilization was named after him. This is how mythology starts. But let me explain something about mythology. Mythology is not history. I know it’s not history, it’s not reality, but what mythology really is in its core – it was the way the ancient people made stories about the things that were happening around them. If you think for a while, nowadays we take many things for granted, things that we don’t question. We have answers, that’s the reason. To give you a simple example, let’s say we know what rain is, and we know why it rains. People back then were observing reality, and they had to explain reality. So they created stories, stories to explain the things that were happening around them. So mythology is exactly that. What I’m trying to say is that behind each and every myth there is an amount of truth, because they had to have a reason to create a myth back then.

But of course, after so many centuries, mythology has been combined with so much fantasy, that the truth behind the myth is hard to be found. Until the very end of the 19th century, we didn’t know if a palace existed on this island or not. Only these myths were known. And they thought that these were just fairy tales from the past. But at the end of the 19th century, they started thinking: maybe the legendary king that we know was not that legendary, and if he existed, the ruins of his palace must be somewhere. And we were lucky enough to excavate first the palace of Knossos, and then they continued with more excavations. And all these findings gave us a very good understanding of the prehistoric life of this island, and of the first advanced civilization of Europe.
But it was mythology that forced a search for a palace. So mythology is not a different chapter; it’s an important chapter. And there’s always a connection between mythology and the archaeological findings. Always a connection.

Let me tell you what happened with that king. King Minos made a big mistake. As soon as he managed to be the king of this island, he made a big mistake. That mistake was not to sacrifice the sacred bull of Poseidon – the god of the sacred island. So to punish the king, Poseidon chose a strange punishment. The punishment was to make the wife of King Minos (Pasiphae) to give birth to a monster, and this monster is what you know as Minotaur, a monster who had the body of a man, but the head and horns was of a bull. Minotaur lived in a labyrinth, which was a complicated construction with many corridors and rooms that one could enter, but also could very easily lose his way. And I will stop here with this myth.

Now we’re about to exit and come to the parking lot. We will see a palace that was built on a very fertile area so that they could cultivate the area. Most of it was olive trees which they cultivated for olive oil. These trees with a silver-leaf color are olive trees. Back then it was the same as now – olive oil, wine, honey. This was the agriculture for them.

And here we are.

[At the entrance there was a map of the main visitors’ route with numbered descriptions.]
Sign: The Palace of Knossos. The Palace of Knossos is the largest of all the palaces in Crete. It is surrounded by an extensive city. The Palace was built on the low Kephala hill at the confluence of two streams. The choice of location and the subsequent growth of the settlement are connected with its proximity to the sea and the fertile earth of the region. (click on link to read more) http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete1.jpg

Sign: History of the Excavation and Restoration of the Palace. Excavations first took place at Knossos in 1878 when an antiquarian businessman from Heraklion, Minos Kalokairinos, uncovered part of the West Wing of the Palace. Systematic excavations began in March 1900 under Arthur Evans, then Director of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Two years later, the excavation of the Palace had almost been completed. (click on link to read more) http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete2.jpg

[We enter through the West Court and see the Kouloures, three large circular pits]

Sign: ‘Kouloures’ – Three large pits, known as ‘Kouloures’, with stone-lined walls were built in the West Court during the Old Palace period (1900-1700 BC). The excavation workmen gave them their name and Arthur Evans kept it. The function of the circular pits is not clear. They have been interpreted as rubbish dumps either for all the refuse from the Palace or just the left-overs from sacred offerings. Support has also been given to the idea that they were for storing grain. In two of them, it is possible to see the remains of houses of the Pre-Palatial period (3200-1900 BC). In
the New Palace period (1700-1450 BC), the ‘Kouloures’ were covered and went out of use.  
http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete3.jpg


The bull is the animal of mythology that is prominent at Knossos. They were sacrificing the animal, we know that. We have wall paintings. And they were sacrificing the bull with the double-edged ax. In Greek we call this symbol (double ax) 'lavry' (labrys). Keep that word in mind. And these three circular pits were where they placed the offerings of their sacrifices. So bones of animals were found, and broken ritual vases were found. There is another theory, mentioning these pits as storage places. But the most accepted theory seems to be that it was a sacrificial place because of the bones.

Sign: West Court, West Façade. The court is crossed by the so-called ‘Processional Causeways’, which stand out from the rest of the paving and intersect each other. One idea is that processions paraded along them during ceremonies. The West Façade of the Palace rises up along one side. The façade is constructed of massive gypsum blocks (‘orthostats’) set on a plinth. The façade is indented or protrudes corresponding to the interior arrangement of space. In front of the West Façade, two bases can be seen, thought to belong to stone-built altars. Settlement remains of the Neolithic (6700-3200 BC) and Pre-palatial (3200-1900 BC) periods have been found beneath the level of the ‘West Court’.  
http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete3.jpg

So we’re still outside of the palace (West Court). Now we’ll move towards the south wing where the main part was. So take a look at this wall, don’t you think that this wall is new? It is. These are some reconstructions. You won’t see many archeological sites being reconstructed, because nowadays the tendency in archaeology is to consolidate the monuments, to protect them – not to rebuild them, not to introduce new building material. What you see is concrete. These reconstructions nowadays have been criticized. The excavation here was done at the beginning of the 20th century, and the tendency in archaeology then was not like today. Concrete then was the most modern material, and it was material that could help preserve the sites. And the good thing about these reconstructions is that you can straightaway tell the difference, cause the new looks new. Keep that in mind.

And we continue.
Sign: West Port, Corridor of the Procession. In front of you is situated the 'West Porch'. It was a roofed area opening onto the Court, supported by one column of which part of the gypsum base remains. The east wall was decorated with a bull-leaping fresco. There was a small 'guard-room' at the back. (fig.1) The Porch was closed off by a double door and from here began the long ‘Corridor of the Procession’. The corridor is so named from the wall painting decorating its east wall and depicting a procession of people holding gifts, and musicians (fig.20). The floor was very fine. The ‘Corridor of the Procession’, according to Evans, initially went to the ‘South Propylaeum’ and continued on to the Central Court.

This place was three-stories high, and we have reconstructions here and there. And now that it’s easier for you to understand it, I will explain to you about the excavations. Wherever you see concrete, it’s because the palace was made out of wood. The only building materials that these people had, almost four thousand years ago – this was built the first time about 1,900 BC – so the only building materials that they had back then was stones and wood. The excavators had found the stones here, even though the wall had collapsed. So he supported the stones (with concrete) to make the wall strong again. The concrete was put where the wood was, because wood is a material that cannot be preserved. The idea was to place concrete on this part of the palace where the material was not preserved.
Sign: ‘South Propylaeum’. The ‘South Propylaeum’, as we see it today, is a result of the restoration of Evans who put up a copy of the ‘Cup-Bearer’ fresco here (fig.1). The wall painting depicted a man holding a libation vase (rhyton). Its theme is connected with the ‘Procession Fresco’ which, according to Evans, reached here, the ‘South Propylaeum’. The pithoi (large storage jars) on the east side of the Propylaeum belong to the Postpalatial Period (1450-1100 BC), and indicate that the area was later used for storage.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete5.jpg

Only the base was made out of stone. The excavators had the columns and concrete parts painted to resemble wood. You can see lots of wood between the stones today in the palace, and that was a clever thing to do. This place had earthquakes. So by placing wood between the stones, it made the construction flexible. It absorbed the shocks and gave elasticity to the structure. What I’m telling you has no other meaning than architectural meaning. But to think that thousands of years ago, to make such a structure, that is interesting. We will talk more about the construction of this palace as we go along.
Come a little bit closer to see this wall painting. This is a decoration of the main entrance. What do you think these people are, men or women? Yes, men. I ask you because the only difference between men and women in their paintings is just the color. White for women, and reddish-brown for men. The figure is the same. Do they remind you of Egypt? Yes, it’s the influence in art that makes you think of Egypt. They painted their figures also in profile with one eye; it’s a clear influence from Egypt. The Egyptian civilization existed parallel to the Minoan civilization. It’s most likely that the Minoans had been to Egypt. Let me explain something: from the south coast of Crete, Egypt is a bit further than Athens is. There are no islands between Egypt and Crete. No compasses. To reach Egypt they had to leave from the northern coast to the Aegean islands, then to Asia Minor, and from Asia Minor all the way down to Egypt. It would last several months. It’s impressive that they had been there and to sail so long.

Now we will go to the first floor of the West Wing of the palace. And by the side here you will see some of the jars they found; all the darkest pieces are the original pieces, cause all of these were found broken.

Take a picture of this important symbol, the horns of the bull, the horns of consecration as they are now called. But I think at the top of the staircase you will have a better view for a picture.
A noisy peacock made a call for attention. We stopped to listen. It was a short break for Thalia to catch her breath and savor the moment with us.

When they were excavated, they were full with jars. For the archaeologists it was easy. Whenever they find a room with jars, they know it’s a storage room. So here they found more than 400 jars. This meant that the system is centralized. The large production of jars meant they were exporting pottery. They were also exporting the agriculture production, and they were exporting jewelry. Imports were all the materials that they couldn’t find on this island: gold, ivory, semi-precious stones, and bronze. It’s the bronze age. This is what they were doing.

Sign: ‘Piano Nobile’. The great staircase and the upper floor to which it leads are largely Evans’s creations. Evans thought that it had a function rather like the first floor of Italian Palazzi of the Renaissance, which was called the ‘Piano Nobile’ (fig.1). In this instance, he considered that the important reception rooms of the Palace would lie on the upper floor. Evans also thought that there existed a shrine, the ‘Tri-Columnar Shrine’, and its Treasury. The basis for his restoration lies in the column and pillar bases and the ritual stone vases found collapsed onto the ground floor, like the alabaster one in the shape of a lioness head (fig.2). The rectangular building next to the stairs was built a long time after the destruction of the Palace. Evans interpreted it as a ‘Greek Temple’ based on finds of the historic period. [Image: http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete6.jpg]
So let’s continue. All the wall paintings you’ve seen are reconstructions; the originals are down in the museum in Hieraklion. The wall paintings we see are exact copies, and they’re at the spot where they were found.

What do you think so far of the palace—big or small? Yes, big. I will show you a picture that is not 100% accurate, but I think it will help you. This is just to give you an idea. If this is big for us—for some of us nowadays have seen such buildings—and we’ve seen houses with two, three, and four rooms, and many more than that. If this is big for us, then for the people back then it must have been a labyrinth.

What do we know from the myth? We know something about a labyrinth. And we know the labyrinth was a complicated construction with many corridors and rooms. I will show you something that is 1,000% accurate.

This is the ground plan of the palace. You can see the complication of it. This is the labyrinth of mythology. They called their palace labyrinth, but they meant something totally different. Labyrinth, labyrinthos—remember the word that I mentioned before? Labrys (lavrys), if it was translated to you from the Greek, it means the House of the Double Ax. This is what labyrinth means. So they called their palace like that. But then the centuries passed, and the word labyrinth lost the first meaning of the double ax, and slowly the word derived a second meaning. The second meaning was what this was—a huge, complicated construction with many corridors and rooms. Is it starting to make sense how mythology meets with reality. Even for us who are Greeks, we use the word labyrinth exactly the same way you do. Even for us, it’s lost the first meaning.
So it's like a labyrinth here. One has to search the etymology of the word to come to the word labrys (double ax).

[Recent research shows, I discovered, that there are other meanings to the labyrinth and the House of the Double Ax. One meaning that intrigued me was that the Double Ax was a symbol of the Solar Deity Zeus, whose lightning bolt (like an axe) splits a tree during a storm. Also, the Solar Deity (Sun) runs a circular path through the zodiacal houses. The Minoan civilization flourished during the Age of Taurus, the Bull. The Bull (as Zeus) was the engendering power of the sun.]


This room (with pillars, behind Tripartite Shrine) has a collection of wall paintings. Not all of the wall paintings are from this room. It’s a collection. The other wall paintings are from places where they were found. First of all, this room is very small. There are four doors here, plus a window. All the rooms in the palace were built on this system. During the warm days, they opened the doors and windows and let the fresh breeze cool the rooms, thus there was a perfect circulation of air. It was like a natural air conditioner. During the cold days, they closed the doors to create small rooms, and the small room would conserve the warmth.

This is the most famous wall painting, I think – it’s a game that is depicted of a bull dance. They were actually jumping over the bull. The most important detail that you should notice is the positions of the two women (in white), and the man (in brownish-red). To see women taking part in sports, it shows that woman has an active role. You know the Olympic games? During the Olympic games, women were not even allowed to watch the games. The Olympic games were almost 1,000 years after the end of the Minoan civilization. The Acropolis of Athens is the same, almost 1,000 years after. Sometimes comparing them makes it easier to see the differences, from pre-historic to historic times. That's why it's important information.

In the bull fresco you can see that when a bull attacks, the acrobat had to catch the bull by the horns in order to jump on top and then down to the ground. The lady to the right has already jumped; he is now on top of the bull; and she (to the left) is about to jump on top. Three different persons, one following the other – or actually, one person in three different positions,
showing the steps of bull jumping. It was dangerous. The acrobats had to be well trained. Keep that in mind.

There are other wall paintings, like this one of women. The women symbolized motherhood and mother nature. Some of the paintings are reconstructions. The wall paintings helped the excavators identify the rooms.

And this other one is my favorite, where we see a gathering of people, women and men, and olive trees. On the bottom painting, where you see the blue color, we see women dancing. Four thousand years ago. Such events and gatherings show the quality of their life. Don’t you feel that these wall paintings are happy? We don’t see any paintings of war or strife, no weapons.

If you look at the rest of the wall paintings, you see nature. On one you see an octopus, or part of an octopus. There are floral decorations, nature and flowers.
Some paintings depict monkeys. We didn’t have monkeys on Crete.
We never had monkeys on Crete. So this was extra information for the scholars to know that the people of Crete had seen monkeys elsewhere. So the wall paintings had important social information.

We will go out the same way we came in. I will wait for you out front.

[My favorite painting was a small painting in a small frame with several runners. Only one male runner was fully depicted. The other two were only shown with their feet; the top parts were missing and were not reconstructed. The runner seemed to be running a race. Perhaps this was a precursor to the Olympic games, and maybe even to the marathoners.]

Sign: West Wing. The stairs on the right lead from the Central Court to the upper floor of the West Wing. This is largely reconstructed by Evans. The area left of the stairs has been identified as a shrine, called by Evans the ‘Tripartite Shrine’. Its façade had columns and was divided into three parts, the central element being the highest. There is a depiction of a comparable shrine
on a wall painting now on display in Herakleion Museum. Inside the shrine were found clay talbets in the Linear B script and clay seal impressions which were possibly connected with the archive of the shrine. The remaining areas behind the ‘Tripartite Shrine’ are thought to have been connected with the sanctuaries of the Palace. At the back, two small dark rooms with pillars are known as the ‘Pillar Crypts’. The depressions in their floor are said to indicate that these rooms were used for libations. In another room, two large, rectangular, stone-built repositories were found, sunk into the floor. They were full of clay vases and valuable objects, amongst which were the statuettes representing the ‘Snake Goddess’ (fig.1,2). The repositories have been interpreted as the ‘Temple Repositories.’


I want you to observe now where we are. I want you to see where the palace is. The palace is on a low hill. We can observe the area around – it's a low hill. But for sure we cannot be protected. If an enemy would come to attack, this would have been a disaster for those people living here.

It's very clear it's an open palace.

The other palaces are also open like that. So it appears from every aspect that they are enjoying peace and harmony. It's a different civilization. Some say, of course, they were peaceful. They were peaceful because they were sailing all around the Mediterranean Sea. Few others could sail, so who would come to attack? But this is not the right way of thinking.

On this island we had four palaces: Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, and Zakros. If they wanted to have war, they would. Remember what happened later, with Sparta and Athens, the city-states? So we have to accept the fact that the Minoans were peaceful people enjoying peace and harmony. This is an important detail, I think.

We will go now downstairs, and we will be in the heart of the palace, in the center of the palace, the Central Court.

Knossos (archaeological site, labyrinth & minotaur) on island of Crete

https://youtu.be/TGy-18eECIA

The orientation of the rectangular-shaped Central Court is North-South. It was open air, so you can imagine the balconies all around. This was three-stories high, so you have to imagine two more stories above the Central Court, so the balconies were all around in the open air. We have pavement here, so you have to imagine that the whole of it was paved. But much of the building material was gone after the last disaster of the palace. It was gone, of course.

The quarries were up there – see the slope of the hills? You see the straight line? These were the Minoan forests. They were getting stones from there to build the palace here. After the
collapse of the palace, instead of going up there to get more stones, of course they were taking
the collapsed stones from here after the end of the civilization. So much of the building material
was gone.

I’m stopping here for you to look at the opening in the floor. From now on you’ll see many
openings in the floor. Wherever you see these openings on the floor, always keep in mind it’s the
sewer system of the palace. It’s an excellent canalization underneath the palace to channel away
from the palace all the waste waters. I’m stopping here because it’s the deepest part. You cannot
really see the bottom – it’s more than six meters deep. There is a reason for it to be deep here.
We are on the level of the Central Court. For the West Wing of the palace, we are on the ground
floor. But for the East Wing of the palace we are already on the third floor. They took advantage
of the hill. They started building on the low part of the hill, and they kept on building until they
reached the Central Court, which was already the third floor. So they built the sewer system here
so that the East Wing could take advantage of it. What I’m trying to say is that the construction
of the palace was well thought out even before it was started. Architecture, again.

Unfortunately, we cannot show you everywhere. Fifteen years ago, we could see every
single room of this palace. Then one could easily get the feel of a labyrinth. I remember it as a
child.

Sign: ‘Throne Room’. You are in the antechamber of a complex of rooms that Evans named the
‘Throne Room’. Its name comes from the stone seat found in the room behind the antechamber
(fig.1). Stone benches are preserved in the antechamber, and between them were discovered traces of a burnt wooden construction. Today, a wooden seat has been placed here which is a
copy of the stone one in the neighboring chamber. After the antechamber is the central room of
the complex. Right and left of the stone seat are yet more stone benches. Pieces of fresco
depicting plants and griffins, mythical beasts with a lion’s body and bird’s head (fig.2) were found
in the same room. (to read more, click on the link)

Anyway, we will now follow the corridor to see the room inside. It’s the Throne Room. Not the Throne Room the way we understand it – not for the king, not for the king’s
decisions. Don’t expect a big room, and don’t expect a big throne. It’s a small dark room inside
there. The room was for ceremonies. They didn’t have temples; they just had rooms in the palace
to worship the god.
There are three things I want you to see inside there. In the second room you will see a stone throne to the right, the original one; it's the oldest throne known so far in Europe. On that throne either the high priest or the high priestess was sitting. In that room you will see the wall painting with mythological creatures, the head of a bird and the body of a lion and the tail of a snake. The bird symbolizes heaven, the lion symbolizes earth, and the snake symbolizes the underworld.

[The Griffin Fresco]

In the first room you will see a wooden throne, a copy of the stone throne that is inside. Such a throne is in the international court in Hague. But the one here is the oldest throne in Europe, and according to mythology King Minos was a judge. So that's why they have a copy of that throne in the international court. I also want you to look at the floor in the first room; you have to imagine the floor polished.


We are now standing in a corridor that leads straight to the center of the palace, the Central Court. And this corridor is decorated with this wall painting, which is not flat. It's a relief. So it's all the more important, because the most important paintings are done in relief. That's why they called it the Prince. It's not white, it's reddish. It's not as dark as before, but still a man. The Prince of Lilies. See his hat, the feathers (a crown of lilies and peacock feathers)?

The mythological prince, a great athlete, was named Androgeos, the son of Minos. He had taken part in athletic contests, and he decided to go up to Athens and take part in the Panathenaic Games. He took part in those games, and he took all the prizes. The Athenian athletes got jealous, and they killed him.

When King Minos was informed that his son is dead, and that the Athenians killed him, he left his luxurious life in the Palace of Knossos and went to fight against the Athenians. King Minos won, and in that way he forced the Athenians to send seven young boys and seven young girls to Crete. They had to be sent into the labyrinth, and they lost their way in the labyrinth. In that way King Minos could find them and kill them, using the minotaur who was half-man and half-bull. Nice story, huh?
Since the prince of this palace had taken part in the Athenian games and was killed there, then the Athenians as a tribute had to send seven boys and seven girls – notice the number seven, seven days of the week, seven has always been an interesting number – anyway, seven boys and seven girls had to enter into the labyrinth to be killed by the minotaur. Now you know that the labyrinth is this place, the palace. In the center of the labyrinth is the Central Court that we crossed. If this palace is the labyrinth, then the center is the Central Court. So do you think that the Central Court was a nice arena? Remember the sport, the bull jumping game? In the center of the labyrinth where the minotaur is – the minotaur, the monster half-man, half-bull, does not exist – the minotaur concept is derived from that sport of bull jumping. The minotaur represents the central part of the palace where the sport was taking place.

If we approach it from another sport, if the prince had really taken part in the Athenian games and was killed, then logically speaking, the tribute, the punishment would have been the same. I took part in your games, boys and girls, now take part in my games. And to take part in the Minoan sport was to jump over a bull. This was only Minoan. If the Athenians had taken part in a sport they were unfamiliar with, then for sure some of them would have been killed.

Then the years passed again, the dangers passed again, and the human mind created a monster, half-man and half-bull, living in the center of the labyrinth and was killing the Athenians. Now the story is complete.

Mythology is not created during that period, because from the mythology we know that King Minos was the son of Zeus. But then I also mentioned we didn’t have any Zeus. So mythology was created based on the past memory of a civilization. And then it’s combined with other elements at a later period, after the Minoan period. So one has to be careful where to find truth, and where not (to find it). That is what mythology is all about. And this is how it can be explained.

So now we will exit and go to the East Wing of the palace.

Sign: South Entrance, Corridor with the ‘Prince of the Lilies’ Fresco. The south part and south façade of the Palace is very eroded. Today one can only see foundations on tiered levels. At the bottom, a tower-like projection is all that remains of the south entrance to the Palace. An ascending corridor led to the Central Court. The section of the corridor closes to the Central Court is reconstructed. Evans put a copy of a relief wall painting here, of which only a few fragments were found (fig.1). On these it was possible to make out a figure wearing jewelry in the shape of lilies.

The reconstruction you see here is uncertain. In Evan’s opinion, it represented the ‘Priest-King’. Other scholars think that it is a prince, whilst others believe it depicts a female figure. http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete11.jpg

So far we haven’t seen any king’s room, or any queen’s room. This is not the palace the way we understand it. It’s not for the king, not just for the royal family. The most correct thing to keep in mind is that this is the center of the town, like an agora. We know the royal family was here, and it was a center. But it was also a religious center, an economic center. Now we’ll go see the king’s and queen’s rooms.
Sign: Central Court. The Central Court (dimensions ca. 50 x 25 m) is an architectural element common to all Minoan palaces. The Court connects the different wings with one another. There was also direct access from outside the Palace. Part of the paving, which once covered the whole court, is preserved in the northwest and southwest corners, whilst near the ‘Throne Room’, parts of the drainage system can be made out which ensured the evacuation of rain water.

It is thought that the area must have been for meetings and rituals of both a sacred and profane character. [http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete12.jpg](http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete12.jpg)

I will point out one very interesting room, a very narrow room, which is connected with the sewer system. It was an important feature. The W/C, from prehistoric times.

You see here an open channel, made out of stone to collect the rain water, to take advantage of the slope of the hill. The same system was made out of metal, but this one is of terracotta, of clay. So we have seen a sewer system; we have seen a W/C (toilet); we see now a channel for the rain water. They had access to water because a river passed through the lower part of the hill. So they had access to water. They also had bathrooms, rooms with bathtubs inside, clay bathtubs. Only one was found to be made out of stone. It was probably the queen’s bath. And they had another system which I find to be the most interesting piece of construction generally – clay pipes, starting from a mountain spring that was eight kilometers away. They were supplying their palace with drinkable water.

My grandmother had to go to the spring 80 years ago. And this place 4,000 years ago had every single system. You see, the know-how is here, and they had an excellent know-how. And notice now a difference: the know-how is here, but they don’t have any intention to impress. The construction is very simple. The linear construction is very simple, adjusting very well to the environment.

If one visits Egypt, one gets impressed there from the first moment. The construction is impressive. Here one needs to walk, to explain, to understand to get impressed. See the difference of the two civilizations? Do you know Frank Lloyd Wright? He was inspired from the Minoan construction, constructions that fit well in the environment, that adjust well. And they are done according to human status and according to life conditions.
The next thing – we will go down on the staircase. We will see a corridor directly underneath. It’s very narrow there.

Sign: East Wing, ‘Grand Staircase’. A large part of the East Wing cannot be seen from the Central Court as it is built into the side of the hill on top of which lies the rest of the Palace. It is one of the most interesting parts of the palace because two storeys are preserved below the level of the Central Court. Today, a large part of it has been reconstructed in concrete. The storeys are connected with one another by means of a system of stairs known as the ‘Grand Staircase’. The staircase was found during the excavation in its original position (fig. 1, 2). There is a total of four flights of stairs, two for each storey. The two lower flights are preserved as they were found. The steps are broad and deep, with a gentle incline that makes for an easy ascent. The staircase is lit by a large lightwell and was surrounded by a colonnade of wooden columns. A series of corridors, spacious halls and small rooms is connected to the Grand Staircase. Evans, who believed that the Palace was the seat of the king of Knossos, hypothesized that the residential quarters of the Royal family lay in this part of the site.

Sign: Shrine of the Double Axes. The room before you was made into a shrine at the end of the Postpalatial period (1375-1200 BC). It is known as the ‘Shrine of the Double Axes (fig.1). On a bench at the back, different ritual objects were found amongst which were a stone double axe and votive clay idols (fig.2). Similar small shrines have been found in houses of the same period.
Another discover I made about the double axe was that it symbolized duality: two-faced Janus, solar (bull) & lunar (cow), sun & moon, and Plato’s story of human origins (splitting in two into male and female). There was more, but mainly it was the aniconic image of divinity.

What I want you to see is from the door you will see the queen’s yard, and the queen’s yard is behind this high wall and there is a skylight there. So from the door you will see the yard, and from the large opening you will see into the queen’s room. There will be a wall painting there. And I also want you to count the doors. You will find five doors – one to the right, two across, and two to the left.

Fifteen years we were coming to the queen’s room from the corridors; five different passageways were leading to one room. That is the building of the labyrinth that I mentioned before.

So come at your own pace.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/audios/crete5.wma (audio file)
How do we know that this was the queen's room? The decorations. This is the most beautifully decorated room, with dolphins and flowers. This is the most beautifully decorated room in the whole palace. First of all, we are in the East Wing of the palace where the residential quarters are, the living quarters. And they excavated this room with dolphins and flowers, so they called it the queen's room. One of the doors to the left was leading to the queen's bathroom, where there was the only stone bathtub in the palace. It's still there. It's not in the museum. Unfortunately, we cannot see it.

So this is why they called it the queen's room ("Queen's Megaron"). Maybe it was a princess – we don't know.

And here behind me is the king's room, or the throne room the way we understand it – for the king. Most of the overhead had collapsed. This is totally reconstructed, even with the cement pillars and beams painted to look like wood. There are no doors or walls. And the very last room that can be seen is again a skylight. You see the light? So this is the king's room and the throne way in the way we understand it now.

And now slowly we will exit and leave the residential quarters, and we will go upstairs. We will see some jars, but these are the larger size. And then we will approach the North Wing of the palace. One final stop.

Sign: The Hall of the Double Axe / The 'Queen's Megaron'. The 'Hall of the Double Axes' (fig.1) was so named by Evans due to the double-axe signs engraved on the walls of the light-well at its rear. He also thought that it was the residence of the king of Knossos. (King's Room)
Near the 'Hall of the Double Axes' is a smaller hall, comparably arranged and richly decorated (fig.2). Evans thought that it must have belonged to the Queen.
Fragments of frescoes with dolphins and dancing ladies were found.
The room is largely restored and copies of the wall paintings have been put up on the walls (fig.3). At the end of the room, a low partition wall with one column created a small space. It was thought
that it was the ‘Queen’s Bathroom’ since pieces of a clay ‘bath’ were found there.  [To read the entire sign, click on the link]

Sign:  ‘School Room’, ‘Lapidary’s Workshop’.  Here is the so-called ‘School Room’, an area where, according to Evans, scribes were taught to write on clay tablets.  He supposed that they kneaded the clay in the built mortar next to the bench (fig.1).  It is more likely, however, that it was a workshop for ceramics or wall-painting.

Behind the ‘School Room’ is the ‘Lapidary’s Workshop’, where blocks of unworked or semi-worked lapis lacedaemoniae (Spartan basalt) and stone tools were brought to light.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete15.jpg (click on link to read the sign)

Sign:  The ‘Magazines of the Giant Pithoi’, and the ‘East Bastion’.  The great pithoi (storage jars) you see before you, were found in a place named by Evans, the ‘Magazines of the Giant Pithoi’ (fig.1).  These magazines are one of the older parts of the Palace.  The pithoi are set apart by their size, number of handles and the richness of their relief decoration with ropes and discs.  On the right you see a staircase which has been reconstructed by Evans and descends to the east entrance of the Palace.  The entrance is a robust construction that gives the impression of a ‘bastion’ (fig.2).  From this point it would have been easy to reach an important building of the palatial period, the so-called ‘Royal Villa’ which lies outside the main archaeological site.
Sign: ‘Corridor of the Draught-Board’. The Royal Gaming Board was found here, a kind of board game made of ivory, rock crystal, Egyptian blue, silver and gold, now in Heraklion Museum (fig.1). To the right of the corridor are the 'Royal Pottery Stores', where Kamares pottery of the Old Palace period (1900-1700 BC) was uncovered, and to the left, storage and workshop areas.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete17.jpg

Sign: North Entrance, North Pillar Hall. An open air passage linked the Central Court with the North Entrance. It was paved and sharply inclined towards the north. The passage is narrow. Right and left were two raised colonnades known as ‘Bastions’ (fig.1). Arthur Evans reconstructed the ‘Bastion’ on the west side. He also placed a copy of a restored relief fresco of a bull here. The wall painting may have formed part of a hunting scene. The passage ends in a large hall with ten square pillars and two columns (fig.2). The pillars and columns probably supported a large hall on the upper floor. Evans suggested that, due to its position on the seaward side, it was here that the produce of seaborne trade would have been checked when it reached the Palace. It was therefore named the ‘Customs House’.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete18.jpg
Here you can see the most prevailing wall painting in the whole palace – the painting of two very important things – the bull, one of their sacred symbols, and an olive tree, one of the things they were exporting. This imposing wall painting up there is the decoration of the north entrance. As we will go straight ahead, you will see exactly underneath a ramp that leads straight to the Central Court. It’s not a staircase, but a ramp.

They were using wheels; we know that from pottery. The North Wing was close to the port, so they were exiting the North Wing to go to the port, and the ones from the port were entering this way, too. So the goods were gathered here. So to bring the goods straight to the Central Court, they would wheel the goods up the ramp. You will see that.

You see the pillars? They say these rooms were the castle of the palace, and between the cypress trees there is another road going to the court.

The people here seemed to have a need to remember – cause memory cannot help you – so they had a system of writing. We speak of civilization as people who recorded things, and we know they had clay tablets. They would write things down.

Another charming thing, as far as archaeologists are concerned, was the discovery of clay tablets. It happened that when the people wrote on wet tablets and left them out in the sun to dry – they didn’t have a need to fire the clay tablets – the tablets would have been destroyed eventually. However, the fire in the palace was so fierce -- especially in the storerooms which were close to the rooms where the clay tablets were kept – that the clay tablets were baked by the fire. And in that way they were preserved. It was only by chance.

Once we will exit through these three doorways, we will be outside of the palace as well. We will make just a short stop to point out a very important area outside of the palace – the theater and the royal road.

The Royal Road is the oldest road in Europe. The processional way comes through here. So this is the story of this place. You can have fifteen minutes free time, and then we will meet in the parking lot at the bus.
Sign: ‘Theatral Area’, ‘Royal Road’. The area before you was called the ‘Theater’ by Evans because its shape reminded him of later theaters (fig.1). It is a platform and rows of steps that form an angle. At the bottom of the steps is the end of a narrow raised road that divides a paved court. Evans believed that the court was used for ceremonies watched by the standing viewers. The raised paved road continues in the opposite direction. It passes underneath the modern road to Herakleion connecting the Palace with the Minoan town, which extended to the West and North. Evans named the road the ‘Royal Road.’ Along the length of the road are town houses with workshops on the ground floor and residential areas on the upper floor.


Standing on the Royal Road - a Minoan road that connected the port to the palace complex.

Sign: The Work of the Knossos Scientific Committee on the Palace and Archaeological Site of
Knossos. The ‘Restoration – Promotion of the Palace and Archaeological Site of Knossos’ project was included in the Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship Operational Programme of the National Strategic Reference Framework at the end of 2010, under the responsibility of the Knossos Scientific Committee, to be implemented by the Archaeological Receipts Fund. The project was completed in 2015 by the Heraklion Ephorate of Antiquities. . . . (to read the rest of the sign, click on the link) http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete2.jpg

[The gift shop outside the palace had a model of the Minotaur holding the double-edged ax. On top of its head were the bull horns that we had seen at the East Propylaeum (opposite the South Propylaeum) at the palace. The Minotaur as an embodiment of human nature (half-animal, half-man) came to mind, and to defeat the minotaur was like conquering our animal nature. I also thought of the Minotaur as an embodiment of the solar deity Zeus, that reproductive energy that was at the heart of Mother Nature, and featured in one representational form (anthropomorphic) or another (aniconic, without imagery) in most religions and mythologies.]


On the ride back to Heraklion, Thalia continued her discourse about the island of Crete:

We're leaving from the parking lot, and we're leaving the archaeological site of Knossos. Unfortunately, this was a short tour, and you didn't have a chance to see the countryside of the island. The only chance you had was to observe the area around Knossos. And I don't know if you had a chance to hear about the main cultivation of this island -- olives, olive trees. It's not an exaggeration to say that every mountainous part of this island is covered with olive trees.

There are 35 million olive trees on Crete. To have 35 million olive trees one would think that every Cretan family owns olive trees. We all have olive trees. The olive oil that we produce and sell is an income for all of us. So every Cretan household has an olive tree. And the olive tree cultivation is a major cultivation. The only period that the olive tree demands work is during the harvesting period, and this is during the winter months, from December till the end of February. Even nowadays, the harvesting of the olives is a family thing.
So the economy of this island is based on two different things. First of all, the island has tourism from April until November when the island becomes busy, alive, with all the people who come here to spend their holidays and vacations. And then in the middle of November the island gets more quiet, and we’re left alone here. And that’s kind of convenient, because during the winter months we are busy harvesting the olives. So this is how our economy is for this island, based on agriculture and production of oil, and the development of tourism from the 1970’s until today. Tourism, of course, brought economic relief to this island. And this is how life goes on for us, with these two different periods, the summer period being more busy and the winter period being more quiet.

We’ll be approaching the city of Heraklion soon. The capital of Heraklion is a modern city, with all the advantages and disadvantages of a modern city. Heraklion was bombed during the second world war by the Nazis, the Germans. So now we don’t have much of the old town preserved because it was destroyed. By the way, the main towns of Crete are in total four: the main town in the west is Chania, then halfway here to the town of Heraklion is Rethymno, the Heraklion the capital, and lastly Agios Nikolaos. All four are on the northern coast of Crete. The other towns of Crete have preserved the old look of Crete, and they have, of course, a better atmosphere. But the capital city here is a modern city due to the bombing.

The center of Heraklion has a nice pedestrian area. We will walk together in that pedestrian area, just a very short walk, no more than ten minutes. It will be an orientation tour, just to give you directions where to walk. Then you’ll have your free time. You may also want to visit the archaeological museum, where all the important findings of the Minoan civilization are preserved: the original wall paintings, the jewelry, the vases, the figurines of Mother Earth, and more. The entrance fee is ten Euros per person.

The monuments of the capital city – you some of them this morning as we were leaving the city – you saw the castle, and you saw sections of the wall. These two are the main monuments of the capital. The rest of it is a modern city.

I did want to say a little more about Knossos and how everything came to an end. First of all, mythologically speaking, after the Athenians had been sending the boys and girls for many years, and Athenian decided to come and kill the minotaur. He was an Athenian hero named Theseus, who came and managed to kill the minotaur cause a lady helped him. The lady was the princess of the palace – Ariadne. In order to help Theseus, Ariadne asked for advice, which came from the architect of the labyrinth – Daedalus. Daedalus gave the advice, if you want to help him, give him a bowl of wool, a thread or string. He will tie one end to the entrance, then he will enter the labyrinth – and if, by the help of the gods, he manages to kill the minotaur – then by following the string he will find his way out. And this is exactly what Theseus did. He managed to kill the monster, the minotaur.

King Minos got angry, not at the Athenian hero Theseus, but at the architect Daedalus, because he was the one who revealed the secret of the labyrinth. So he imprisoned Daedalus. But Daedalus was a clever man, and he was trying to find a way to escape. His idea was to fashion wings, so he made wings for himself and for his son Icarus. So Icarus and Daedalus managed to fly away from this island. Icarus was a young boy, and he got excited from the experience of the flight, and he flew so close to the sun that the sun melted the wax that was holding together the feathers of his wings. His wings were destroyed, and he fell into the sea. The sea still bears his name; it’s what we call the Icarian Sea. And an island nearby is called Icaria, where according to mythology Icarus fell. His father had advised him not to fly too high, and do not fly too low. And this is generally good advice, I think. And this is how everything comes to an end, mythologically speaking.

In reality, we have a totally different story. Everything came to an end because they lost their power, and it’s always like that. The loss of power – this is how the end comes. And the Minoans lost their power because they decided to stop the imports and exports; the peak was all the wealth that they had accumulated, always sailing around the Mediterranean Sea. This peak
came to an end when they stopped sailing. And they stopped because of the volcanic eruption. You will be on Santorini (Thira), and you will see there the remnants of that eruption, and you will understand. Your tour guide will tell you how huge the volcanic eruptions were, and you will see that half of Santorini Island is gone. Santorini is only 70 miles away, so such a volcanic eruption in prehistoric times shocked the Minoans. Most probably the fleet was destroyed. And since they stopped with the sailing and trading, they started to lose their power. The ones who took advantage of this situation, of course, were the Mycenean Greeks. The Myceneans from mainland Greece – the ones with King Agamemnon, the one who went to fight in Troy – they were warriors. When the Myceneans came on this island, the Minoans got scared and abandoned the island. They went up in the mountains, where they didn’t have the luxury to build and decorate, and so there we slowly lost the traces of the Minoans. So this is what really happened.

So here we are (in Heraklion). To the left you see one of the modern squares of the capital city. That’s where the pedestrian area is. To the right you see one of the bastions, the outside part of the fortification wall. And the yellow building straight ahead is the archaeological museum of Heraklion. If you go to the museum, make sure you see all the rooms of the ground floor, and then on the first floor is the room with all the original wall paintings. There are also rooms from different periods.

So we will now go on a short walking tour which will last about ten minutes.
Murals at the front of the church of Apostle and his disciple Titus, the first bishop of Crete.

Service at Church of St. Titus in Heraklion. The priest gave the homily (sermon).
I left the service at the Church of St. Titus and headed for the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion. I had to hurry through the museum in order to catch the bus back to the port at the appointed time. I wasn’t able to go through all 27 rooms, however I was able to walk fast enough through most of the rooms in order to see as much as I could of the archaeological finds from the Neolithic to Roman times (6th millenium BC – 3rd century AD). The greatest surprise for me was what I found in the Greco-Roman period sculpture collection.

https://youtu.be/Xui-4erirxM (YouTube video of museum)

The Double-Axe display, ‘House of Labrys’

Original Bull-jumping fresco, with bull leapers.

Jars, pottery

Phaistos Disc with hieroglyphic ‘seals’
Model of Knossos. Sign: Architecture. Minoan architects broke new ground in both building planning and construction techniques, mostly evident in the palaces and buildings with palatial features. The epitome of Minoan architecture is the imposing palace of Knossos. An emblematic Minoan innovation is the “polythyron hall” with pier-and-door partitions and lightwells offering various possible combinations of circulation, lighting and ventilation. Another pioneering invention is the addition of wooden columns to the facades, forming colonnades and balconies looking onto the great courts. The crowning achievement of design and construction is the “Grand Staircase” of Knossos, with its successive flights supported on columns. (to read the rest, click on the link) [http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete21.jpg](http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete21.jpg)
Seals, signs, or hieroglyphs.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete23.jpg

Sign: The Cult in Palaces and Settlements. The Palace of Phaistos has produced a multitude of cult vessels, such as offering tables, a concave altar, human and animal vessels and figurines. On an altar and bowl are depicted the first known epiphany scenes, in which the goddess miraculously appears in the human world: the divine image, or a priestess with a flower, are shown between groups of dancing women. The scene is a reference to the goddess’s attribute of rendering nature fertile. The skulls bulls and Cretan wild goats have been found in well-like pits at the settlement of Poros, the harbour of Knossos, together with ‘bell-shaped’ figurines and vessels. These are the remains of sacrifices and ritual offerings. The ‘bell-shaped’ figurines and hornlike appendages are actually models of ritual masks, as we can see from a white faience model with painted facial features (1900-1700 BC).

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete22.jpg

Necklaces, small pots & cups, figurines. Sign: Prehistoric Crete (7000-1100 BC) The Minoan World. At the crossroads of the sea routes linking three continents, Crete has always been both a bridge and a melting pot of cultural expressions, innovative ideas and knowledge. During Bronze Age, the constant enrichment and renewal of Cretan culture, through interactive communication with the civilizations of the Aegean, Egypt and the East, created favourable conditions for the emergence of the first great urban-palatial civilization in Europe, named Minoan after Minos, the semi-divine genarch and king of Knossos. This was preceded by a lengthy period of developments, from the stage of Neolithic communities, starting in 7000 BC, to the
establishment of complex social structures during the course of the 3rd millennium BC. Through control of production and trade, ruling classes rose to wealth and power. . . .

Natural disasters that shocked the Minoan World, such as the earthquake and the cataclysmic eruption of the Thera volcano (Santorini), did not cause its decline. The Minoan civilisation collapsed circa 1450 BC, probably due to internal causes. The main Minoan centres and the palaces, with the exception of Knossos, were destroyed. However, a power gap was filled immediately. New dynasties were established, first at Knossos (1450-1300 BC) and then in Kydonia, at Chania (1300-1250 BC). They controlled a complex bureaucracy using Mycenaean script, the first form of Greek writing. The gradual arrival of tribes from central Greece, especially from the 13th century BC onwards, led to the permanent incorporation of Crete in the cultural and political structures of the Greek world, at the turn of the 2nd to the 1st millennium BC. (to read entire sign, click on the link) http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete24.jpg

Reliefs

Egyptian trade object

Marble gravestone in the shape of a small temple.

Statues of gods.
[This was the big surprise for me at the museum! I had no idea I was going to run into one of the great philosophers during the time of Christ – Apollonius of Tyana (aka Paul, Apollos).]

Sign: Marble statue of a philosopher. It represents a mature, bearded man with a staff in his hand and books beside his leg. The head is rendered in the Roman iconographic type for the representation of philosophers, but the body follows prototypes of the 5th cent.BC. The statue probably portrays Apollonius of Tyana, the Neopythagorean philosopher, teacher, healer, magician and mystic, who visited Knossos with his students, taught at Gortyna and Lebena and died at the sanctuary of Diktyosa in west Crete. Gortyna, late 2nd - early 3rd cent. AD.

Classical Greek and Roman sculpture
probably portrays Apollonius of Tyana, the Neopythagorean philosopher, teacher, healer, magician and mystic, who visited Knossos with his students, taught at Gortyna and Lebena and died at the sanctuary of Diktynna in west Crete. Gortyna, late 2nd – 3rd cent. AD.

Sign: Group of statues with gods Pluto (Hades) and Persephone (Proserpine) depicted as the Egyptian deities Serapis and Isis, who were worshipped in the Greek world from the Hellenistic period onwards. Pluto-Serapis has the modius on his head, a utensil used for the measurement of grain. Persephone-Isis with covered head bears her symbols at the forehead, i.e. the crescent moon, the solar disk and the snake (uraeus). She is depicted holding in her right hand the sistrum, an Egyptian musical instrument also known to Crete from prehistory, and in the left probably the straps that kept the dog Cerberus. The inclusion of Cerberus, guardian of the underworld, in the group defines the two deities despite their Egyptian symbols as Pluto and Persephone, gods of the underworld. The composition is a typical example of syncretism, namely the mingling and integration of beliefs from different religions during Hellenistic and Roman times. Gortyna, Temple of Egyptian Deities, Roman period, mid. 2nd cent. AD.
http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete27.jpg

Sign: Marble statue of emperor Hadrian (Publius Aelius Hadrianus, 117-138 AD). A humanist, a poet and a philosopher Hadrian was also a philhellene, who graced many cities of Greece and
Crete with important buildings. He is shown here as a triumphant army commander with a cuirass, where Medusa Gorgo and Victories, crowning Pallas Athena and treading on fallen barbarians, are depicted. Athena is standing above the she-wolf, emblematic allegory of Rome, feeding Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. A figure kneeling on the same plinth apparently represents the defeated enemy. Knossos, Roman period, 2nd cent. AD.


Sign: Marble statue – portrait of a roman mistress of the sculptural type of the Large Herculanean, dating to 320 BC and probably made by Praxiteles. She is dressed in tunic, over which a cloak is wrapped covering the whole body, arms and head and wears an elaborate hairstyle with wavy curls forming a high arching crown over the forehead. Chersonessos, Roman period, 2nd cent. AD.

http://wigowsky.com/travels/GreeceRome/signs/crete29.jpg

The god Pan.


Back on the bus. Drive back to the port. Once again, we see the fortification wall. Thalia told us some more history of Crete:
During the time of Venetians, there was a twenty-one year siege here. All around Crete we have Venetian castles and fortification walls. These walls were built during the 16th century when the people of Crete sensed that an enemy will come and attack Crete. So they started constructing these castles and walls, and sure enough the enemy came. It was the Turks. And so from the middle of the 17th century, the Turks started attacking Crete. The Turks laid siege to the capital here for twenty-one years. That’s a long siege, and after the twenty-one year siege the Turks came up with an idea to use a more powerful weapon. They couldn’t think of anything else to do after all that time because of the strong walls. So they decided to use gold instead. The Turks gave gold to the Venetians so they would surrender. So we had two different historical periods, the Venetian (13th to 17th centuries AD) and the Turkish (mid-17th to 19th AD).

And two historical figures came from that time: El Greco, the painter, reflecting the Venetian art of that period; and Kazantzakis, who was born during the Turkish occupation period. Nikos Kazantzakis was the writer of Zorba the Greek, if you remember the movie with Anthony Quinn. [Kazantzakis also became famous or infamous – according to one’s particular views – for his novel 'The Last Temptation of Christ'.]

And so slowly we’re returning to the start. Our focus today was the prehistoric palace of Knossos, a palace that was large and excellent in its construction, a palace that was also beautiful, decorated with all those wall paintings. There was no other palace in the whole of Europe at the time – the Bronze Age. And this was considered to be the first advanced civilization of Europe. And remember the mother of King Minos – Europa.

It’s time to say good-bye, and I want to say thank you. It’s always nice to be with people who support our place. I really appreciate that. Stay happy, enjoy life, and keep traveling. And promise to stay a little bit longer next time.

[On the way back to the cruise ship (at the port authority area), I spotted this vase with the bull-jumping scene with the leapers.

I reminisced about the tour of Knossos and what I had learned about the Labyrinth and the Minotaur. My brain felt like a labyrinth with all the convolutions, twists and turns, and tortuous passes – a virtual maze of thoughts, concepts, and ideas that seemed to lead to one overarching idea: Life is A-Maze-ing, full of wonder and mystery, a continuous journey through the “houses” (signs) of the zodiac and the universe. Life was also a “Double Ax” – like the proverbial Janus – pointing to the past and the future, to the dual nature of reality (sun-moon, male-female), and to the knowledge (gnosis) of good and evil. And I would “take the bull by the horns” and conquer every obstacle in the way.]
After leaving Crete, my mind kept going back to the image of Apollonius of Tyana that I had seen in the museum. I had read that Apollonius had been to the island of Crete twice, once when he visited the shrine of Aesclepius (aka shrine of Leben, “lion”) at Mount Ida circa 62 AD, and apparently when he died (or “ascended”) from the Temple of Dictynna (aka Artemis) in northern Crete circa 98 AD. (Life of Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus, Book 4, Ch. 34; Book 8: Ch. 30).

I had also read that Apostle Paul - in Acts Chapter 27 - sailed on a ship of Alexandria on his perilous sea voyage to Rome and stopped at a place (in Crete) called Fair Havens (v.8), presently known as Kali Limenes, circa 62 AD. Furthermore, a passage in Titus 1:5 implies that Paul and Titus ministered together in Crete, probably at an earlier date prior to Paul’s journey to Rome. My visit to the Church of Saint Titus in Heraklion seemed to confirm that.

The two stories seemed to flow like two tributaries into one river. Both stories ended up about the same time in Rome, with different outcomes.