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Summary Article: **Crete**

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(krēt), Gr. *Kríti*, island (1991 pop. 539,938), c.3,235 sq mi (8,380 sq km), SE Greece, in the E Mediterranean Sea, c.60 mi (100 km) from the Greek mainland. The largest of the Greek islands, it extends c.160 mi (260 km) from east to west and marks the southern limit of the Aegean Sea, the southern part of which is also called the Sea of Crete. The rocky northern coast of Crete is deeply indented, and the interior is largely mountainous, culminating in Mt. Ida (8,058 ft/2,456 m). Iráklion is the capital of the Crete governorate and is the island's largest city; Khaniá is the only other large city.

Crete has many small farms, whose chief crops are grains, olives, and oranges, and food processing is its main industry. Sheep, goats, and dairy cattle are also raised. The island has few mineral deposits, but tourism is an increasingly important industry. Transportation facilities include a developed highway system and an airport.

History

Crete had one of the world's earliest civilizations, the Minoan civilization, named after King Minos, the legendary author of Cretan institutions; in the ruined palace at Knossos invaluable finds have been made. The Cretan kingdom reached its greatest power, prosperity, and civilization c.1600 B.C. Later, for reasons still obscure, its power suddenly collapsed; but Crete flourished again after the Dorian Greeks settled on the island in large numbers and established city-states. Among the most powerful of the cities (110 in number, according to Homer) were Knossos and Cydonia (modern Khaniá). Although important as a trade center, Crete played no significant part in the political history of ancient Greece. It became a pirate haven in the 3d cent. B.C. but was conquered (68 B.C.–67 B.C.) by the Romans under Quintus Metellus.

It passed (A.D. 395) to the Byzantines, fell (824) to the Arabs, but was reconquered by Nicephorus Phocas (later Nicephorus II) in 961. As a result of the Fourth Crusade, the island passed to Venice in 1204; and in 1212, after expelling rival Genoese colonists, the Venetians set up a new administration, headed by a duke. Under Venetian rule Crete was generally known as Candia (Iráklion) for the duke's residence. Insurrections against the arbitrary Venetians were frequent, and the Cretans were not displeased at changing masters when the Ottoman Turks conquered (1669) virtually the whole island after a 24-year war. Two offshore island fortresses remained in Venetian hands until 1715.

A series of revolts against the Turks in the 19th cent. reached a climax in the insurrection of 1896–97 that led to war (1897) between Greece and Turkey. The European powers intervened in the war, forcing Turkey to evacuate (1898) Crete. An autonomous Cretan state was formed under nominal Turkish rule, but it was governed by a high commission of the occupying powers (England, France, Russia, and Italy). The Cretan national assembly, led by Eleutherios Venizelos, declared in favor of union with Greece, but the powers rejected its demand. The Young Turk revolution of 1908, however, enabled the Cretans to proclaim their union with Greece, and in 1909 foreign occupation troops were withdrawn.

Cretan representatives were admitted to the Greek parliament in 1912, and in 1913, as a result of the Balkan Wars, Crete was officially incorporated into Greece. The followers of Venizelos controlled

Crete during their uprising (1935) against the imminent restoration of the monarchy but were defeated by Gen. George Kondylis. A new revolt (1938) against the dictatorship of John Metaxas was also suppressed.

In World War II, Crete was used as a British military and naval base late in 1940. The British and Greek forces on the Greek mainland evacuated to Crete in 1941, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the Germans in a large-scale airborne invasion, the first of its kind. Late in 1944, British ships isolated the German occupation troops, who eventually surrendered. In the postwar period there was some Communist guerrilla activity on the island.

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See also bibliographies under Aegean civilization and Minoan civilization.

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