

Ancient History Sourcebook:

Reports of Minos and Knossos

[Prof Arkenberg writes] *Here are two texts on the Minoans. Of course, these have always been suspect. However, recent archaeological finds have begun to show the kernel of truth in both the tale of Theseos--and the child sacrifice that occurred in the Labyrinth--and Herodotus' accounts of the two depopulations of Crete do seem to have a basis in fact. Of course, Herodotus doesn't mention the Thera explosion, but famine and pestilence which would undoubtedly have accompanied that blast appears to have remained in Greek memory.*

Plutarch, *The Life of Theseus*

Not long after arrived the third time from Crete the collectors of the tribute which the Athenians paid them upon the following occasion. Androgeos having been treacherously murdered in the confines of Attica, not only Minos, his father, put the Athenians to extreme distress by a perpetual war, but the gods also laid waste their country; both famine and pestilence lay heavy upon them, and even their rivers were dried up. Being told by the oracle that, if they appeased and reconciled Minos, the anger of the gods would cease and they should enjoy rest from the miseries they labored under, they sent heralds, and with much supplication were at last reconciled, entering into an agreement to send to Crete every nine years a tribute of seven young men and as many virgins, as most writers agree in stating; and the most poetical story adds, that the Minotaur destroyed them, or that, wandering in the labyrinth, and finding no possible means of getting out, they miserably ended their lives there.

Theseos, who, thinking it but right to partake of the sufferings of his fellow-citizens, offered himself for one without any lot....When he arrived at Crete, as most of the ancient historians as well as poets tell us, having a clue of thread given him by Ariadne, who had fallen in love with him, and being instructed by her how to use it so as to conduct him through the windings of the labyrinth, he escaped out of it and slew the Minotaur, and sailed back, taking along with him the Athenian captives....

Years later, after Minos' decease, Deucalion, his son, desiring a quarrel with the Athenians, sent to them, demanding that they should deliver up Daidalos to him, threatening upon their refusal, to put to death all the young Athenians whom his father had received as hostages from the city. To this angry message Theseos returned a very gentle answer excusing himself that he could not deliver up Daidalos, who was his cousin, his mother being Merope, the daughter of Erechtheos. In the meanwhile Theseos secretly prepared a navy. As soon as ever his fleet was in readiness, he set sail, having with him Daidalos and other exiles from Crete for his guides; and none of the Cretans having any knowledge of his coming, but imagining when they saw his fleet that they were friends and vessels

of their own, he soon made himself master of the port, and immediately making a descent, reached Knossos before any notice of his coming, and, in a battle before the gates, put Deucalion and all his guards to the sword.

Herodotos: *The History*, VII.170-171

Minos, according to tradition, went to Sicania, or Sicily, as it is now called, in search of Daidolos, and there perished by a violent death....Men of various nations now flocked to Crete, which was stripped of its inhabitants; but none came in such numbers as the Hellenes. Three generations after the death of Minos the Trojan war took place; and the Cretans were not the least distinguished among the helpers of Menelaos. But on this account, when they came back from Troy, famine and pestilence fell upon them, and destroyed both the men and the cattle. Crete was a second time stripped of its inhabitants, a remnant only being left; who form, together with fresh settlers, the third Cretan people by whom the island has been inhabited.

Source:

From:

Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, John Dryden, trans., (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1910)

Herodotus, *The History*, George Rawlinson, trans., (New York: Dutton & Co., 1862).

Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

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