

Two Periods of the Venetian Rule in Crete: Before and after the “Cretan Renaissance”

حقبتيْن من الحكم البندقي في جزيرة كريت: قبل وبعد "النهضة الكريتية"

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Abstract

The island of Crete, which is the key point of the Eastern Mediterranean, remained under the rule of the Republic of Venice from the beginning of the 13th century to the middle of the 17th century. In Greek and Italian nationalist historiography, this period has been referred to as a period when significant developments, even the Cretan Renaissance took place on the island. However, the situation is exactly the opposite. Until the 1570s, the Republic's Cretan policies reflected an almost colonial order.

The Ottoman Empire, pursuing domination over the Aegean and then the Mediterranean since the reign of Mehmet the Conqueror, completed the conquest of Cyprus in 1571 as a major step in this direction. It was obvious that, after this major step, the next in line would be Crete. After losing Cyprus, Venice started to implement new policies for Crete. Especially after Giacomo Foscarini became the governor-general of Crete in 1574, administrative reforms were implemented, significant reconstruction activities took place, and thus the Republic's new Cretan policy was initiated. This new period of Venetian rule was described by some historians as the “Cretan Renaissance” and the Ottoman period was subsequently denigrated as the “dark age” that ended this renaissance.

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In this paper, we examine this process within the framework of the Mediterranean policies of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice, analyzing the periods before and after the conquest of Cyprus with a comparative method.

Keywords:

Mediterranean; Crete; Cyprus; Venice; Ottoman Empire.

ملخص:

ظلت جزيرة كريت، التي تعتبر نقطة محورية في شرق البحر الأبيض المتوسط، تحت حكم جمهورية البندقية من بداية القرن الثالث عشر حتى منتصف القرن السابع عشر. في التأريخ القومي اليوناني والإيطالي، يُشار إلى هذه الفترة على أنها فترة شهدت تطورات مهمة، بل وحتى نهضة كريتية في الجزيرة. بيد أن الوضع كان على عكس ذلك تمامًا، فحتى سبعينيات القرن السادس عشر، كانت سياسات الجمهورية تجاه كريت تعكس نظامًا شبه استعماري.

لقد أكملت الإمبراطورية العثمانية، التي سعت للسيطرة على بحر إيجه ثم البحر الأبيض المتوسط منذ عهد محمد الفاتح، غزو قبرص في عام 1571 كخطوة رئيسية في هذا الاتجاه. وكان من الواضح أن كريت ستكون الهدف التالي بعد هذه الخطوة الكبيرة. وعليه، بعد خسارة قبرص، بدأت البندقية في تنفيذ سياسات جديدة بالنسبة لكريت، خاصة بعد أن أصبح جياكومو فوسكاريني الحاكم العام لكريت في عام 1574، حيث تم تنفيذ إصلاحات إدارية، وجرت أنشطة إعادة إعمار كبيرة؛ وبالتالي بدأت سياسة الجمهورية الجديدة تجاه كريت. وصف بعض المؤرخين هذه الفترة الجديدة من الحكم البندقي بـ"النهضة الكريتية"؛ وتم بعد ذلك تشويه سمعة الفترة العثمانية، ووصفها بـ"العصر المظلم" الذي أنهى هذه النهضة. في هذه الورقة، نقوم بدراسة هذه العملية في سياق سياسات البحر الأبيض المتوسط للإمبراطورية العثمانية وجمهورية البندقية، وكذا من خلال تحليل الحقبة التي سبقت غزو قبرص وتلك التي تلتها، وفق المنهج التاريخي المقارن.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

البحر الأبيض المتوسط؛ كريت؛ قبرص؛ البندقية؛ الإمبراطورية العثمانية.

Introduction

This paper does not aim to discuss the Venetian period of Crete, but to analyze the administrative and political transformation of the Venetian rule in the last quarter of the 16th century and the reflections thereof. The Ottoman conquest of Cyprus showed the Venetian rulers that the local Orthodox population of the Mediterranean islands was not on their side against the Moslems. The Republic of Venice, which exercised an almost *colonial rule* until the conquest of Cyprus, adopted a more benign and accommodating policy thereafter. This new administration style led to significant developments. This new period is described as the ‘Cretan Renaissance’ by some, while the Ottoman rule starting from the last quarter of the 17th century is claimed to have brought this renaissance to an end and to have initiated a *dark era*. These developments will be analyzed and discussed in this paper.

1. Ottoman-Venetian Partnership in the Mediterranean

Before the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans, the city states of Venice and Genoa were in continuous competition regarding the East Mediterranean trade. The prominent political actors of the region were the Orthodox Christian Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire and the Muslim Anatolian Seljuk state as well as other small Muslim states. Both Venice and Genoa always tried to have good relations with these regional powers in order to carry on their commercial activities smoothly¹. Yet, the relations of these Italian city-states with the East were not always amicable. Indeed, the Fourth Crusade ended in Constantinople in 1204 and the rulers of the Byzantine Empire had to leave their capital city for many years. As a consequence of this event, the Republic of Venice acquired the island Crete, not through the superiority of its arms but through the skills and farsighted policies of Enrico Dandolo². Thus started the Venetian period of Crete, which would last for 450 years. Crete became the military

¹ For these commercial activities, see: **HEYD (William)** : *Yakın-Doğu Ticaret Tarihi*, Tr: Enver Ziya Karal, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1975.

² **ZİNKEİSEN (Johann Wilhelm)** : *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, v. 4, Tr: Nilüfer Epçeli, Yeditepe Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, p. 405.

and commercial base of the Republic of Venice in the Eastern Mediterranean, and remained so until the Ottoman conquest of the island.

The conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans in 1453 and the simultaneous downfall of the Eastern Roman Empire disrupted the existing balances in Eastern Mediterranean trade. The Ottomans, successors to Byzantium, determined the outcome of the centuries-long Venice-Genoa conflict. The prominent actor in the Eastern Mediterranean trade was now the Republic of Venice, partner of the Ottomans. The Republic had actually taken the first step towards becoming a significant actor in the Eastern Mediterranean trade by acquiring Crete in the early 13th century. The allegiance formed with the Ottomans thanks to the grace of Mehmet the Conqueror constituted the second step. Venice was now ahead of Genoa in the Eastern Mediterranean trade and had become partners with the Ottoman Empire. Thus, in a short while its wealth accruing from the eastern trade would increase tremendously.

This turn of events also led to a paradoxical situation for the Republic. The Ottoman Empire's potential expansion zone corresponded exactly to the territories of the Republic's trade colonies³. As the Ottomans' gradually developing Mediterranean policies were added to the picture, the situation became an unsolvable problem for Venice. Indeed, while discussing the end of Venetian rule in Crete, Laroche starts from the conquest of Istanbul by Mehmet the Conqueror⁴.

As famous historian Braudel notes, the Mediterranean trade consisted of trips of a few days, from one port to another⁵. Therefore, the network of colonial stops constituted an important strategic organization for the Eastern Mediterranean trade. Crete was an essential colony for the Republic's eastern trade from the

³ For these routes and colonies in the second half of the fifteenth century see : **BROWN (Horatio H.)** : *Venice. An Historical Sketch of the Republic*, Rivington, Percival & co., London, 1895, p. 298.

⁴ **LAROCHE (Charles)** : *La Crète Ancienne et Moderne*, Société Française d'Éditions d'Art, Paris, 1898, p. 63.

⁵ **BRAUDEL (Fernand)** : *II. Felipe Döneminde Akdeniz ve Akdeniz Dünyası*, v. I, Tr: Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara, 1993, pp. 125 & 182.

13th century until its conquest by the Ottomans. Tükün's claim that Crete was of secondary importance for Venice as long as they had Cyprus⁶ is not valid. Venice acquired Cyprus at the end of the 15th century (1489), yet did not transfer its military, commercial and strategic center from Crete to Cyprus. So, the loss of Cyprus was not of vital importance for the Republic.

2. Crete Under Venetian Rule: The First Period

The 450-years-long Venetian rule in Crete exhibited different characteristics through the years, and to describe all of it with one fixed template does not reflect historical reality. Thus, we consider the Venetian rule in Crete as consisting of two periods, the first being from the acquisition of the island by the Republic in 1204 until 1571, and the second from 1571 until the Ottoman conquest. The breaking point here is the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1571. The main factor underlying this transformation consists of the Ottoman conquests of the Aegean Islands, Rhodes, Egypt, and the North African coasts, the conquest of Cyprus finalizing the Ottoman domination of the Eastern Mediterranean. The next in line was Crete, the key to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean. Undoubtedly, the Republic was aware of that, and the state of the existing hostile relations with the local Orthodox Greek populations of Cyprus and Crete led the Venetian rulers to adopt a new stance. They had seen that the local Greek population of Cyprus had not supported Venice during the Ottoman conquest⁷. This might well be the case in Crete.

The Venetian rule in Crete was quite harsh from early 13th century until the last quarter of the 16th century. Fosses notes that the Venetian rule was very hard for Crete⁸. The Republic appeared to be really successful on the island, however this was not the

⁶ TUKÜN (Cemal) : "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Girit İsyanları-1821 Yılına Kadar Girit", in *Belleten*, v. IX, No: 134, (1945), p. 181.

⁷ FRAZEE (Charles A.) : *Katolikler ve Sultanlar. Kilise ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu 1453-1923*, Tr: Cemile Erdek, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2009, p. 138.

⁸ CASTONNET DES FOSSES (H.) : *La Crète et l'Hellénisme*, Charles Douniol, Paris, 1897, p. 32.

case for the native population⁹. This first period of Venetian rule in Crete was like a colonial period.

After acquiring the island in 1204, the Republic divided it first to six and later to four administrative regions with Candia as the capital. A governor (*provveditore*) with significant powers resided there. His responsibilities included handling the commercial and political relations with the other states in the region, as well as governing the island¹⁰. The land tenure comprised three categories; land managed directly by the Venetian rule, land allocated to the Catholic Church and clergy, and the fief land allocated to the Venetian nobility settled in Crete¹¹. As time went on fiefs were granted to native families such as Kallergis, Kassadi, and Vlasto¹². The fief system now encompassed wide expanses of land not allocated to the Venetian rulers and lying outside the northern cities and their environs. The tax and forced labor obligations of the peasants living on these lands were incredible¹³.

Another issue related to the practices of the Venetian rule on the island was the Catholic propaganda and oppression. The native population was of Christian Orthodox faith, as a legacy of the Byzantine period. They even regarded themselves as the inheritors of Byzantium. The new masters of the island, on the other hand, were of rigid Catholic faith, and with the Fourth Crusade the Catholicism-Orthodoxy conflict had escalated to an almost blood feud. The masters of the island adopted an oppressive policy towards the Orthodox churches and clergy.

⁹ *Id.*, pp. 34 & 35.

¹⁰ For the Venetian rule in Crete see : **KAYMAKÇI (Emre)** : *Venedik Hâkimiyetinde Girit Adası (1204-1453)*, Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Niğde, 2024; **KAYMAKÇI (Hülya Çiçek)** : *Yeni Çağ'da Venedik Hâkimiyetinde Girit (1453-1669)*, Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, İzmir, 2025.

¹¹ The Venetian rule transferred settlers to Crete from the centre a couple of times, in an effort to colonize the island. For more detailed information see: **KAYMAKÇI (Emre)** : “Modern Dönem Öncesi Kolonizasyonuna Bir Örnek: Venedik Cumhuriyeti’nin Girit Adası’na Yerleşme Süreci”, in *Cappadocia Journal Of History And Social Sciences (CAHIJ)*, V. 22 (April 2024), pp. 43-59.

¹² **ZİNKEİSEN (Johann Wilhelm)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 444.

¹³ For detailed information see : *Id.*, p. 489.

The population who was restless due to economic reasons started to react to the administration for religious issues as well. “*In addition to the hatred they felt for Venice, the Greeks were also effected by a religious fanaticism against the Latins who had arrived to slander their ancestors’ religion, according to the secret inculcations and open sermons of their priests.*”¹⁴ The Catholic clergy were insolent enough to interfere with the Greek Orthodox churches and religious affairs as they saw fit.¹⁵ The Catholic Venetian administration regarded the Orthodox Church as its arch enemy¹⁶.

This regime adopted by the Republic led to uprisings in Crete¹⁷. Indeed, from the very early years of the Venetian rule, there were frequent uprisings¹⁸. The native population’s negative sentiments towards the administration, the provocations of the Genoese and Pontus states, the redemption of Constantinopolis by the Byzantine court in 1261, as well as other factors caused these uprisings to become almost an uninterrupted process. These were initially ordinary peasant uprisings, but later, with the organization of native Greek aristocrats evolved to huge insurrections. The uprising which started in 1242 continued for 18 years¹⁹. While discussing the 1347 uprising, Zinkeisen refers to the execution of Emanuel Kapsokalinos, the leader insurrectionists and adds, “*thus, yet again San Marco’s victorious flag was raised in Crete over the dead bodies of its murdered people.*”²⁰

It must be stated that a noteworthy ideology took shape in the great insurrection that took place in 1362, a century after the

¹⁴ ZİNKEİSEN (Johann Wilhelm) : *Op. cit.*, p. 410.

¹⁵ KOPASİ (Andriya) : “Girit’in Ahvâl-i Umûmiye ve Târihiyyesi”, in *Mecmua-yı Ebu’z-Ziya*, v. 7, no: 64, 1314 [1898], pp. 850-854.

¹⁶ DETORAKİS (Theocharis E.) : *History of Crete*, Translated by John C. Davis, Typokreta, Iraklion, 1994, p. 176.

¹⁷ CASTONNET DES FOSSES (H.) : *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁸ For information related to said uprisings, see: KAYMAKÇI (Emre) : *Op. cit.*, p. 56 & sq.; also, HANYAVİ (Hüseyin Kâmi) : *Girit Tarihi*, v. I, Mühendisioğlu Ohannes Matbaası, İstanbul, 1288, pp. 121-201.

¹⁹ LAROCHE (Charles) : *Op. cit.*, p. 57; HANYAVİ (Hüseyin Kâmi) : *Op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

²⁰ ZİNKEİSEN (Johann Wilhelm) : *Op. cit.*, p. 425.

revival of the Byzantine Empire. The insurrectionists declared that they would destroy the Latin culture and revive the Orthodox traditions. This insurrection lasted for two years and was suppressed brutally, after which agriculture and animal husbandry was prohibited for a century in the Lasithi plateau, which was the epicenter of the uprising²¹. This meant an economic disaster for the local population.

From the 15th century on, there were no island-wide insurrections, the uprisings were of a more local and disorganized nature. Yet, neither the native population's uprisings, nor the Venetian administration's oppression in order to suppress them ended. From those years on, part of the local population migrated to and settled in Egypt, preferring to live under a Muslim administration rather than the Venetian one.²² It appears that, some of the native Cretans saw that they did not have any hope left and turned to the Turks. According to Fosses, their desire to escape decisively from the Venetians, whose repressiveness was beyond imagination was not baseless. At least the Turks would be less troublesome masters. They believed that at least it would be easier to deceive and pacify them²³.

To sum up, the first period of the Venetian rule in Crete had not been so good for the native population. The Cretans believed that, in the eyes of their new masters, their island was nothing but a colonized property in the middle of the sea, exploited by the administrators in the name of the central government²⁴. Indeed, the Republic of San Marco was managing and exploiting the island like a farm²⁵. Crete was now clearly a Venetian colony²⁶.

The Venetians' attitude towards the local population did not change much throughout the centuries. According to

²¹ ZİNKEISEN (Johann Wilhelm) : *Op. cit.*, pp. 431-432.

²² CASTONNET DES FOSSES (H.) : *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

²³ *Id.*, p. 37.

²⁴ TUKİN (Cemal) : *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

²⁵ CASTONNET DES FOSSES (H.) : *op. cit.*, p. 32. Fosses uses the term "une ferme d'exploitation" in reference to Crete. Tükün has translated this as "sağmal inek" (cash cow) with a great deal of irony. TUKİN (Cemal) : *Ibid.*

²⁶ HEYD (William) : *Op. cit.*, p. 527; BRAUDEL (Fernand) : *Op. cit.*, v. I, p. 191.

Zinkeisen, on the one hand hatred and a ruthless hostility, on the other an administrative system whose foundation was wrong and which had not attained stability in its evolution: on the one hand the victors' hubris and insensitivity beyond reason towards the land's needs and the opinions and character of the people, on the other the helplessness, humiliation, and despair of the defeated²⁷. Uncultivated fields, deserted plains, destroyed cities and fortresses, villages and towns in deadly silence, plague and hunger, there were traces of the recent years' disaster everywhere²⁸.

The picture was not so bleak for the commercial centers on the northern coasts of the island. Life was easier on commercial port cities like Candia, Chania and Rethymnon. The rural areas, especially the mountains, had become real thorns on the Republic's side, doubtless due to the Republic's own policies. According to Fosses, the Venetian rule had caused the local population to detest it, rather than winning over their allegiance, their affection or at least making them bear with it²⁹.

3. Crete Under Venetian Rule: The Second Period – Ottoman Conquest of Cyprus and the Transformation of the Republic's Policy in Crete

The conquest of Cyprus by the Ottomans in 1571 forced the Republic to radically change its policies regarding Crete. The peace agreement drawn after the loss of Cyprus rendered Crete, which was already being held with difficulty, open to Ottoman attacks. The Cyprus-Crete line was a security line for Venice's Mediterranean route. Now Venice was left with only Crete, which the Ottomans would take from the Venetians in the second half of the 17th century³⁰. Another dimension of the development was particularly noteworthy: During the conquest, the local Greeks had not only refrained from supporting Venetian forces,

²⁷ ZİNKEISEN (Johann Wilhelm) : *Op. cit.*, p. 419.

²⁸ *Id.*, p. 432.

²⁹ CASTONNET DES FOSSES (H.) : *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

³⁰ PEDANİ (Maria Pia) : "Osmanlı Padişahının Adına", in *İstanbul'un Fethinden Girit Savaşı'na Venedik'e Gönderilen Osmanlılar*, Tr: Elis Yıldırım, TTK Yayını, Ankara, 2011, pp. 137 & 159.

but had actively assisted the Ottoman army³¹. This had shown the Venetians what the Cretan Greek population would do in a probable war.

Now, Venice could maintain its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean only by holding on to Crete. From early 17th century on, it was being openly stated in the Venetian Senate that the Ottomans could attack the island using the pirate activities as an excuse³². Venice rapidly adopted the military and administrative measures necessary for the defense of Crete³³. In case of war the locals were not going to undertake any sacrifices for their Venetian masters against whom they had been fighting for centuries, and the Republic was well aware of this. Indeed, Venetian statesman Paolo Sarpi stated, “*One can never depend on the loyalty of the Greeks and the people here would turn their backs on the Venetian rule in order to become subjects of the Turks*”³⁴. Therefore, the Republic felt the need to undertake a series of reforms to alleviate the hostility of the local population at least a little.

The second period of the Venetian rule in Crete started with the appointment of Giacomo Foscarini as governor with extraordinary powers in 1574. During this period important administrative, military, economic and agricultural reforms were undertaken. Foscarini, the reformist new governor, aimed to end the long-standing conflict between the administration and the native population. He was successful and from the last quarter of the 16th century on, a new approach and style of governance was adopted on the island. Foscarini remained in that post for a couple of years, yet his reforms were in effect for a long time³⁵. Although the said reforms were somewhat diluted after Foscarini's term ended, in general the Venetian rule in Crete was

³¹ **FRAZEE (Charles A.)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 138.

Frazee notes that especially the rural population supported the Turks (p. 150).

³² **GREENE (Molly)** : *A Shared World. Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000, p. 13.

³³ **TUKİN (Cemal)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

³⁴ **ZİNKEISEN (Johann Wilhelm)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 509.

³⁵ Zinkeisen has devoted a chapter to the analysis of Foscarini's governance and reforms: **ZİNKEISEN (Johann Wilhelm)** : *Op. cit.*, pp. 439-506. The information here has been taken from the said chapter.

incomparably milder after the last quarter of the 16th century. Even more importantly, these reforms had been adopted on the island, amongst the local population, and not in the secretive chambers of the *Consiglio dei Pregadi* or *Consiglio dei Dieci* in Venice, far from the island³⁶.

Foscarini issued a general declaration as soon as he came to the island. Safety of life and property was ensured for the population, and significant regulations were adopted, regarding the status of the subjects, who were thus granted the right to land ownership. Administrators were forbidden to receive bribes or unjust taxes from the people, and those who had had such experiences were invited to place complaints. An island-wide census was conducted and on its basis, the land tenure, the fief system and the status of the fief holders was reorganized. In addition to certain administrative reforms, important regulations regarding commercial life and customs were also adopted. Another characteristic of the Foscarini period was the immense construction activity. Numerous monumental buildings were constructed, particularly in Candia, Chania and Rethymnon, and the look of the island changed³⁷. All these aimed to reconcile the people with the Venetian rule.

Above and beyond these reforms, everything regarding the military regime and defense of the island was the first priority³⁸. As mentioned above, the fief system and fief holders' status was reorganized and the troops on the island were put in order. Almost all fortresses were repaired, and new ones were constructed at certain strategic points. *Viglas* were constructed and were made operational. The Cretan navy was renovated and strengthened.

The identifying characteristic of the second period of the Venetian rule in Crete was the flourishing intellectual climate. This was no doubt true for the aristocrats living on the island.

³⁶ ZİNKEISEN (Johann Wilhelm) : *Op. cit.*, p. 437.

³⁷ For the architectural structures constructed on the island during Foscarini's term, see: Institute for Mediterranean Studies FORTH - The Project Digital Crete. <http://digitalcrete.ims.forth.gr/index.php?l=1> This site was closed in 2020 due to technical reasons.

³⁸ *Id.*, p. 500.

There were two categories of nobility in Crete. The first group consisted of the native Cretan nobles. They had fought against the Venetian rule for a long time and now the Republic was trying to achieve a reconciliation with them, granting them certain privileges with official agreements. Efforts were made to end the conflicts among the local aristocrats, and the Cretan nobility underwent a significant evolution from early 17th century on. The second group consisted of Venetian aristocrats who were made to migrate to the island. The Republic sent numerous noble settlers to Crete three times during the 13th century³⁹. The goal was to create a Latin cultural universe, but just the opposite happened and the ones who came became Greekified. The Venetian nobles on the island even forgot the Italian and Latin languages. Foscarini couldn't find any teachers for the Venetian aristocrats' sons in Candia, and found only two in Chania⁴⁰. In an effort to protect the purity of the Venetian noble generations, Foscarini forbid them to marry native Greek women⁴¹. However, it was apparently too late. The Venetian nobility was now intermingled with the native nobility.

4. Cretan Renaissance and Its Critique

The reformist climate of early 17th century, created by the developments of late 15th century and the Foscarini reforms of the following century is called the 'Cretan Renaissance' by some scholars. According to them, this process started with the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul. With the downfall of the Byzantine Empire, many scientists and philosophers fled to Crete and 'Crete became the refuge of Hellenism'⁴². These people who took refuge in Crete later went to Padua and Bologna to further their studies, and then returned to the island to establish academies in Rethymnon and Chania⁴³. According to this thesis,

³⁹ For this colonization move see: **KAYMAKÇI (Emre)** : *Op. cit.*, pp. 47-52.

⁴⁰ **ZİNKEISEN (Johann Wilhelm)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 461.

⁴¹ *Id.*, p. 457.

⁴² **LLEWELLYN-SMITH (Michael)** : *The Great Island A Study of Crete*, Longmans, London, 1965, pp. 50-51.

⁴³ **BUONSANTÌ (Michele) & GALLA (Alberta)** : *Candia Veneziana. Venetian Itineraries Through Crete*, Mystis, Heraklion, 2005, p. 27.

more than one thousand Cretans were educated in Padua between the years 1500 and 1700⁴⁴, and thus the human potential of the Cretan Renaissance came into being.

The cultural universe the Venetian administration wanted to create earlier appeared at a later date, in early 17th century, with the contribution of the local culture. The renaissance culture found a favorable climate and a literature developed in the Cretan dialect of Greek language. Nicholas Kalliakis and Andreas Musalus were among the prominent poets, and Vitsentzos Kornaros, who worked at Akademi nei Stravaganti at Candia and who is regarded as the greatest Cretan folk poet wrote his famous *Erotokritos* during this period. This long work in verse has been memorized and recited from memory for centuries⁴⁵. Georgeos (Yorgo) Hortazis' famous *Erophilo* was also created during the same period. Domenicos Theotokopoulos, the painter known as El-Greco was born during the same years in Crete. He studied Byzantine iconography before going to Italy. Moorey argues that maybe the most dramatic examples of the Cretan Renaissance can be found in paintings, particularly in iconographic paintings. According to him, the refugees from the Byzantine Empire brought to the island the latest artistic styles from Constantinople. The impact of the Italian Renaissance made itself apparent in the early 15th century. This combination gradually led to the birth of a distinctive Cretan School in iconographic painting⁴⁶. To sum up, it can be said that in modern ages the Venetian administration spent considerable effort for the development of literature, science, and education in Crete. As a continuation of this process, some institutions which can be called academies were founded on the island in the last quarter of the 16th century, beginning with Foscarini's term⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ **MOOREY (Chris)** : *A History of Crete*, Haus Publishing, London, 2019, p. 98.

⁴⁵ This work has been published in Turkish as well: **KORNAROS (Vitsentzos)** : *Erotokritos*, Tr: Hakkı Bilgehan, Lozan Mübadilleri Vakfı Yayını, İstanbul, 2011.

⁴⁶ **MOOREY (Chris)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁷ For more detailed information see: **KAYMAKÇI (Hülya Çiçek)** : *Op. cit.*, p. 310.

During the term of Foscarini, who was the architect of Venetian reconciliation policy in Crete, there was an intense architectural activity on the island. Many monumental official buildings reflect the Venetian Renaissance architecture. During the late 16th and the 17th centuries, Crete benefited from renaissance architecture⁴⁸. The adoption of the architectural styles of the capital in a land which was the principal colony of the Republic of Venice was to be expected.

The concept of Cretan Renaissance appears to be generally accepted in scholarly literature. Molly Green writes hesitantly about the 'Cretan Renaissance'⁴⁹. Anastasia Papadia-Lala argues that it did not compass all of Crete, that very few were impacted by it, and that the history of Crete is not the history of Cretan Renaissance⁵⁰. Peponakes notes that the Cretan Renaissance was created by the Greek urban nobility⁵¹.

Undoubtedly Cretan artists and philosophers contributed to the renaissance in one way or the other. The artists and philosophers who went to cities like Padua and Venice must have contributed to the revival of the antique culture which constituted one of the foundations of the renaissance in Crete. However, it must be kept in mind that renaissance is not just the dawn of enlightenment. From history of humanity perspective, its significance lies in the mark it left with its consequences. Indeed, in his famous *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Bruckhardt mentions the sophistication of aesthetical life, the discovery of the world, the discovery of the individual, enlightenment, humanism, and reformation of religion impacts as the main properties of renaissance⁵². These consequences definitely can not be observed in Crete.

⁴⁸ BUONSANTÌ (Michele) & GALLA (Alberto) : *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ GREENE (Molly) : *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ *Id.*, p. 8.

⁵¹ PEPONAKES (Manolis G.) : *Islamizations and Re-Christianizations in Crete (in Greek)*, Doctoral Dissertation, "New Christian Crete," Appendix No. 2, Rethymnon 1997. Cited by Prof. Spyridon Dem. Kontogiannes (Translated by Fr. G. D. Dragas), *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*: 44/1-4, 1999, Book Reviews, p. 712.

⁵² BURCKHARDT (Jacob) : *İtalya'da Rönesans Kültürü*, v. I-II, Tr: Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayını, Ankara, 1978, various pages.

The generally accepted Cretan Renaissance thesis has laid the foundation for another ideological claim. For example, Detorakis argues that the Cretan Renaissance which was born thanks to Venice was destroyed by the Ottomans⁵³. This argument reflects a political rather than an epistemological approach. According to this approach, the Ottoman conquest initiated a dark era in Crete. *“Before the Turkish invasion, Crete had reached the summit of her artistic, cultural and architectural glory. The four-centuries-long Venetian rule elevated the Cretan culture”*⁵⁴. Then came the Ottomans and destroyed it. This is a typical example of nationalist historiography. It is well known that Crete was neither wealthy nor enjoying the enlightenment of the Renaissance when it became Ottoman territory.

Conclusion

After acquiring Crete in the early 13th century, the Republic of Venice envisaged the island as the main colonial center of its eastern trade and accordingly established an almost colonial rule. The attitude of the Cypriot Greek population during the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus was an alarm bell for the Republic, and the harsh rule in Crete was replaced by a milder one. This approach was implemented, particularly after Foscarini was appointed as governor.

It is evident that Crete underwent an intellectual transformation after early 17th century. However, calling this a renaissance would be an exaggeration. The ‘Cretan Renaissance’ must be a geographical, chronological and ideological connotation. Neither the transfer of the renaissance experienced at the center of the Republic of Venice to Crete a hundred and fifty years later, nor the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, could have led to such a revival. We believe that it was the consequence of the reconciliatory climate created by the San Marco Republic, which saw that after the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus, Crete was the next in line, and so felt the need to create a new system, a milder rule on the island.

⁵³ DETORAKIS (Theocharis E.) : *Op. cit.*, pp. 270 & 271.

⁵⁴ BUONSANTÌ (Michele) & GALLA (Alberto) : *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

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