A Cretan Odyssey, Part 2

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For example:
A Cretan Odyssey, Part 2

September 24, 2015  By Gregory Nagy  listed under Gregory Nagy

In the posting for 2015.09.17, I showed what can be reconstructed as a Minoan-Mycenaean version of Ariadne. Here in the posting for 2015.09.24, I now turn to later versions, as reflected especially in the visual arts of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. In these later versions, we can see more clearly the connectedness of Ariadne with idea of thalassocracy—an idea inherited from Minoan-Mycenaean civilization.

Introduction

§0.1. In the posting for 2015.09.17, I showed what can be reconstructed as a Minoan-Mycenaean version of Ariadne. Here in the posting for 2015.09.24, I now turn to later versions, as reflected especially in the visual arts of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. In these later versions, we can see more clearly the connectedness of Ariadne with the idea of thalassocracy—an idea inherited from Minoan-Mycenaean civilization.

Ariadne and her garland

§1. I highlight here the myths about Ariadne and her garland. The mythological foundations of storytelling about the garland of Ariadne and how it was turned into a constellation are most ancient, going all the way back to the Minoan-Mycenaean era. From later eras, we get a wealth of relevant evidence from the visual as well as the verbal arts. In the case of the visual evidence, I cite for example the report of Pausanias 5.19.1 describing a scene depicted on the Chest of Kypselos, of Corinthian workmanship and dating to the early sixth century BCE: in this scene, Ariadne is featured together with Theseus, and she is holding a garland while Theseus holds a lyre. Similarly, in a picture painted on an Attic vase dated to the middle of the sixth century (Munich 2243; ABV 163, 2), we see Theseus fighting the Minotaur while Ariadne stands by, holding a garland in her left hand and a ball of woolen thread in her right hand; the goddess Athena is also standing by, holding in her right hand the lyre of Theseus.

§2. The ball of woolen thread is familiar to us from the existing literary evidence for the myth. It is signaled, for example, in Catullus 64.113 and in Virgil Aeneid 6.30. But what about the garland of Ariadne?

§3. According to an epitomized narrative derived from Epimenides of Crete (FGH 457 F 19 = DK 3 B 25), the garland of Ariadne had been given to her as a gift by the god Dionysus, who intended to destroy (phtheira) her, and she was in fact deceived (épatéthē) by the gift; but Theseus was saved (sósthēnai) by the same gift, since the garland of Ariadne radiated for him a mystical light that helped him escape from the labyrinth; after Theseus and Ariadne eloped to the island of Naxos, the mystical garland was turned into a constellation. By implication, the deception of Ariadne by way of the garland given to her by Dionysus is correlated with the salvation of Theseus by way of that same garland. By further implication, Ariadne must die at Naxos, and it is this death that is compensated by the catasterism of her garland.

More on Ariadne and Theseus

§4. According to another version that we find in the Homeric Odyssey (11.321–325), Theseus and Ariadne elope not to Naxos but to an island even closer to Crete, Dia, where Ariadne is killed by the goddess Artemis; the god Dionysus is somehow involved, by way of ‘witnessing’ the things that happened (marturíleiai 11.325).§

§5. According to yet another version, as recorded in the scholia MV for Odyssey xi 322 and attributed to Pherecydes (FGH 3 F 148), Ariadne and Theseus elope to the island of Dia and fall asleep on the shore after having made love there. While they sleep, Athena appears in the middle of the night and wakes up Theseus, telling him to proceed to Athens. When Ariadne wakes up in the morning and finds herself all alone on the shore, she laments piteously. Aphrodite comforts her, telling her that Dionysus will make her his woman. Then Dionysus appears in an epiphany and makes love to Ariadne, giving her a golden garland. Then Artemis kills Ariadne. And the garland is turned into a constellation—an event described as gratifying to Dionysus.

§6. This myth about Ariadne and Theseus is distinctly Athenian, going back to the glory days of the Athenian Empire. The myth is attested in a painting that dates from the early fifth century BCE:
Painting on a lekythos attributed to the Pan Painter, dated around 470 BCE (Taranto IG 4545). The line drawing, presented in rollout mode, is by Tina Ross.

§7. This picture captures the moment when Athena appears to Theseus after he has made love with Ariadne. The couple has fallen asleep after the lovemaking, but Athena awakens Theseus, gently gesturing for him to be quiet and not to awaken Ariadne, who is held fast in her sleep by a little figure of Hypnos perched on top of her head. The details have been described this way:

Here we see the couple at the moment of separation. Athena has just wakened Theseus, and as she bends over him he begins to rise, bending one leg and sitting up from the pillow on which he has lain next to Ariadne. Athena tries to quiet him as he stretches out his arm, a gesture of remonstration or inquiry. In the upper left hand corner is a small female figure flying into the night.

I note that the small female figure who is "flying into the night" is disheveled, with her hair flying in the wind and with her clothing in disarray. I interpret this figure as a prefiguring of Ariadne herself at a later moment, the morning after, when she wakes up to find that she has been abandoned by Theseus. I recall here the verse in Catullus 64.63 where the headress that had held the hair of Ariadne together has now come undone, and she looks like a bacchant, a frenzied devotee of Bacchus, that is, of the god Dionysus. And it is this same Bacchic frenzy, signaled by her disheveled hair, that will now attract Dionysus to her.

§8. In contrast to the morning after, when Ariadne in her Bacchic frenzy will come undone, the picture of Ariadne in the present is eerily peaceful:

Ariadne faces us directly, an unusual pose that points to her oblivion to what is happening behind her as well as allowing us a clear view of the peaceful contentment registered on her face. Her eyes are closed tight, and she will not awaken as Theseus departs, for the figure of Hypnos, Sleep, sits on her head with legs drawn up as he sleeps.

§9. Returning to the picture painted on the lekythos, I draw attention to another figure. Besides the sleeping Ariadne and the little sleeping Hypnos perched on top of her head, we see also the figure of a wakeful boy reclining on the farther side of the bed, to our left, whose head is positioned directly below the miniature figure of the hovering girl with the disheveled hair. In my interpretation, this boy is Eros, who had instigated a night of intense lovemaking between Ariadne and Theseus.

Recalling the blond hair of Ariadne

§10. In my posting for 2015.07.15, I had drawn attention to a detail that now becomes relevant to the interpretation of the painting we have just seen. The detail comes from Poem 64 of Catullus, which mediates earlier Greek sources. Here we will see that Ariadne the Minoan princess has a vertex 'head of hair' that is flavus 'blond'. And I highlight in advance the fact that this description is synchronized with the moment when Ariadne discovers that she has been abandoned by her lover Theseus. The poem pictures her standing helplessly on the island shore, looking out toward the sea, when, all of a sudden, her hair comes undone as she sees the ship of her lover sailing away. At this moment, her beautiful head of hair or vertex is pointedly described as blond or flavus:
§11. At the very moment when Ariadne comes emotionally undone here, her hairdo likewise comes undone, and so too all her clothing comes undone. Now she looks like a perfect Maenad, that is, like a woman possessed by the Bacchic frenzy of the god Dionysus. It is the maenadic looks of Ariadne that attract Dionysus to her from afar, and, as we read in Catullus 64.253, the god is inflamed with passion for the princess as he now hastens toward her.

§12. This detail about Ariadne’s blond head of hair will help me address two basic questions: why is Theseus prompted by Athena to wake up and secretly leave Ariadne, making his way back to Athens, and why must Ariadne be left behind, pathetically abandoned on the shore of the idyllic place where she has just made love to Theseus? The answer is simple: it is because duty calls Theseus back to Athens.

§13. The blond hair of the Minoan princess Ariadne, viewed in the context of her disheveled Bacchic frenzy, matches the blond hair of the Carthaginian queen Dido in Virgil’s Aeneid (4.590: flaventesque abscessa comas), which is being shorn off at the very moment when she too, like Ariadne, comes emotionally undone. Just as Ariadne was abandoned by Theseus, Dido was abandoned by Aeneas.

§14. At a later point in the Aeneid, during his sojourn in Hades, Aeneas encounters the shade of his former lover, the queen Dido, who has committed suicide after he abandoned her in Carthage. Aeneas says to Dido:

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456 infelix Dido, verus mihi nuntius ergo 457 venerat extinctam ferroque extrema secutam? 458 per sidera iuro, 459 per superos et si qua fides tellure sub ima est, 460 invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi. 461 sed me iussa deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras, 462 per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam, 463 imperis egere suis; . . .
456 Unfortunate Dido! So it was true, then, the news that I got. 457 It [= the news] came to me and said that you had perished, that you had followed through on your final moments with a sword. 458 So your death, ah, was caused by me? But I swear by the stars, 459 and by the powers above—and by anything here that I could swear by, under the earth in its deepest parts: 460 Unwillingly, O queen, did I depart from your shore [litus]. 461 But I was driven by the orders of the gods, which force me even now to pass through the shades, 462 passing through places stained with decay, and through the deepest night. 463 Yes, I was driven by their projects of empire . . .
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Virgil Aeneid 6.456–463

In verse 460 of this passage, the poet is making a reference to a verse in Poem 66 of Catullus, where a lock of hair originating from another queen, Berenice, is speaking:

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invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi
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Unwillingly, O queen, did I depart from the top of your head [vertex].

Catullus 66.39

In my posting for 2015.07.15, I argued that the lock of hair that gets severed from the head of Queen Berenice of Egypt and becomes a constellation in the sky is parallel to the Garland of Ariadne. But I argued further that the verse invitus regina . . . in Aeneid 6.460, referring to the doomed love affair of Dido and Aeneas, refers also to a poetic tradition about the doomed love affair of Ariadne and Theseus; and this additional reference is achieved through the intermediacy of the verse invitus, o regina . . . in Catullus 66.39.12

§15. Just as Theseus rejected Ariadne in the Athenian version of the myth, so also Aeneas rejected Dido in the story of their doomed love affair. After all, as Leonard Muellner has noted, the moralistic as well as ritualistic temperament of Aeneas as the future founder of the Roman empire is ultimately incompatible with the furor or ‘frenzy’ of Dido. In the narrative about the death of Dido in Aeneid 4, as Muellner has also noted, we see a clear sign of this incompatibility:
When the self-destructive fire of passionate love within her emerges as the fire of her funeral pyre, she [= Dido] cannot actually die. As a person invested with furor by Venus, she is by definition hostile to fatum, to Aeneas' destiny to be sure, but even to her own wished-for death, which should not have happened at this point in her life. So a dea ex machina, Iris the rainbow goddess, is sent from heaven by Juno to effectuate the impossible.¹³

Here Muellner cites the actual verses of Aeneid 4.696–705, where Iris finally shears off a lock of blond hair from the head of Dido, ending it all for the doomed lover of Aeneas. I quote here only the beginning of the scene:

| 696 nam quia nec fato merita nec morte peribat
| 697 sed misera ante diem subitoque
| 698 accensa furore
| 699 nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertex crinem abstulerat.

| 696 For, since she was about to die neither by fate nor by a deserved death, 697 but before her day, the poor wretch, inflamed as she was by her sudden frenzy [furor], 698 it had not yet happened to her that the blond [flavus] hair on the top of her head [vertex], at the hands of the goddess of death, 699 was to be taken away from her.

Virgil Aeneid 696–699

Just as Dido experiences a Bacchic furor or 'frenzy' in reaction to her abandonment by Aeneas, thus showing her incompatibility with the future founder of the Roman Empire, so also Ariadne in Catullus 64 is furens 'frenzied' in verse 124, experiencing furores 'moments of frenzy' in verses 54 and 94. In this reaction, Ariadne shows her own incompatibility with Theseus, that future founder of the Athenian Empire. But this same incompatibility translates into a compatibility with Bacchus. More than that, it translates into an attraction, even a fatal attraction, since Ariadne, in her Bacchic frenzy, attracted the attention of Dionysus.¹⁴

§16. Just as Aeneas in Aeneid 6 is driven by 'the orders of the gods' (461), by 'their projects of empire' (463), as I have translated it, so also Theseus is driven by the orders of the goddess Athena, whose intervention in the myth of Theseus is an expression of older 'projects of empire'. In this case, I mean the Athenian Empire of the fifth century BCE. According to Athenian mythology as it was taking shape in that era, Athens had become a successor to the Minoan Empire of Theseus himself had overcome once upon a time.¹⁵

The Athenian connection revisited

§17. In non-Athenian versions of the myth, as we have already seen, Theseus was saved from the labyrinth primarily by the Minoan princess Ariadne, with the help of her radiant garland and her ball of woollen thread. In the Athenian version, by contrast, Theseus did not really seem to need the help of Ariadne at all that much.¹⁶ And the garland of Ariadne can even be replaced by a garland given to Theseus by the sea nymph Amphitrite, as we see in Song 17 of Bacchylides (109–116): in that version, the garland is made of roses. In other variants of the myth, the garland is made of gold, as we see from the testimony of Pausanias, who describes a painting that covered one full wall of the sanctuary of Theseus in Athens. In the context of his description, Pausanias offers a retelling of the myth, which he says is only partially retold through the medium of the painting:

When Minos was taking Theseus and the rest of the delegation of young men and women to Crete he fell passionately in love with Periboia, and when Theseus opposed him by objecting, he [= Minos] insulted him and said that he [= Theseus] was not the son of Poseidon, since he [= Theseus] could not recover for him [= Minos] the signet ring [sphragis] which he [= Minos] happened to be wearing, if he threw it into the sea. With these words Minos is said to have thrown the signet ring [sphragis], but they say that Theseus emerged from the sea holding that ring and also a gold garland [stephanos] that Amphitrite gave him.¹⁷

Pausanias 1.17.3

The occlusion of Ariadne

§18. From what we have seen so far, the thalassocratic agenda of Athens are understated in myths about Ariadne and Theseus. Not only does Theseus abandon Ariadne once he is freed from the Labyrinth of Minos. Even more than that, the myth of Theseus no longer really needs Ariadne. Once the thalassocracy of Minos is taken over by Theseus, the role of Ariadne in the achievement of this takeover is occluded. The connection between thalassocracy and Minoan civilization as represented by the Minoan princess Ariadne is now broken.

The occlusion of Minoan thalassocracy

§19. But the understating of thalassocracy in Minoan civilization seems to have been already an aspect of Minoan civilization itself. The power of the thalassocracy must have been so great that Minoan rhetoric could afford to downplay it. I see a vestige of this rhetoric in the ancient Greek proverb about Cretans who pretend not even to know what the sea is, thus flaunting all the more their knowledge and expertise in seafaring. Here is the proverb:
In the scholia for Aelius Aristides Oration 46 (page 138 line 4) we find an explanation for the meaning of this proverb: παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν εἴδησιν μὲν, προσποιουμένων δὲ ἄγνωστων 'This is a proverb applying to those who know but pretend not to know.' To say it another way, the subtext is flaunting its status as a text.

The occlusion of Minoan thalassocracy in the Odyssey

§20. This kind of rhetoric, where the speaker is flaunting by way of understating, is typical of the "Cretan lies" as told by Odysseus in his rôle as a Minoan prince. There is a salient example in the Second Cretan Tale, told by the disguised Odysseus to Eumaeus the swineherd. The story begins with this detail told by the would-be Cretan about his origins:

ἐκ μὲν Κρητῶν γένος εὐρείων
I say solemnly that I was born and raised in Crete, the place that reaches far and wide.

Odyssey 14.199

In the singular, Krētē refers to the island of Crete. But here we see the plural Krētai, which cannot mean a multiplicity of islands named Crete. There is no such thing. Rather, we see here an elliptic plural, meaning 'Crete and everything that belongs to it'. And of course whatever belongs to Crete are all the Aegean islands and lands controlled by the thalassocracy of Crete. In Odyssey 19.178, we see a pronoun that refers to Crete, and, like the noun Krētai in Odyssey 14.199, this pronoun too is not in the singular but in the plural. Here again we see an elliptic plural. I have already noted this pronoun in my posting for 2015.09.17 §1. So, even the pronoun signals the imperial power of Crete.

§21. In the posting for 2015.09.10 §§7–8, we saw a parallel example: it was the elliptic plural Athēnai in the sense of 'Athēnē and everything that belongs to it', whereas the singular Athēnē refers not only to the goddess Athena but also to the place that she personifies. As we saw in Odyssey 7 at line 80, analyzed in the posting for 2015.09.10 §8, the noun Athēnē in the singular can refer not only to the goddess Athena but also to the place that she controls, which was primarily the acropolis of Athens. So, to put that singular form into the plural, which is an elliptic plural, is a way of referring to all the places controlled by the acropolis of Athens. Other such elliptic plurals include Mukēnai 'Mycenae' and Thēbai 'Thebes'.

A Spartan variation on a Minoan-Mycenaean theme

§22. In our Odyssey, the Minoan-Mycenaean world is linked more directly to Sparta than to Crete. To make this argument, I start with the beginning of Odyssey 15, where the goddess Athena appears in an epiphany to Telemachus at Sparta. As Athena tells Telemachus at lines 1–9, it is time for the young hero to conclude his visit at Sparta and to go back home to Ithaca. I highlight the fact that Sparta here is described at line 1 of Odyssey 15 as eurū-khoros (ἐυρυχορόν Λακεδαίμονα), meaning 'having a wide dancing-place'.

§23. I see here a Minoan-Mycenaean signature. Relevant is the word Kalli-khoron, as I analyzed it in the posting for 2015.09.17 §8. As we saw there, Kalli-khoron is explained this way in the dictionary of Hesychius: Καλλίχορον· ἐν Κνωσσῷ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀριάδνης τόπῳ 'Kalli-khoron was the name of the place of Ariadne in Knossos'. And the meaning of this 'place of Ariadne', Kalli-khoron, is 'the dancing-place that is beautiful. The word khoros here can designate either the 'place' where singing and dancing take place or the group of singers and dancers who perform at that place. Such a beautiful place, as we already saw in the posting for 2015.09.17, is made visible by the divine smith Hephaistos when he creates the ultimate masterpiece of visual art, the Shield of Achilles:

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<th>1591 τῇ ἱκελον οἶδαν ποτ' ἐνὶ Κνωσῷ εὐρέθ</th>
<th>1592 Δαιδαλὸς ἐκείνην καλλιπολακάμῳ Ἀριάδνῃ.</th>
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<td>1590 The renowned one [= the god Hephaistos], the one with the two strong arms, pattern-wove [poikilein] in it [= the Shield of Achilles] a khoros.</td>
<td>1591 It [= the khoros] was just like the one that, once upon a time in far-ruling Knossos, 1592 Daedalus made for Ariadne, the one with the beautiful tresses [plokomai].</td>
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Iliad 18.590–592

§24. Then, at lines 593–606 of Iliad 18, we see in action the singing and dancing that happens in the picturing of the divine place. I repeat here what I said in my posting for 2015.09.17 §9, where I argued that the ultimate place for the singing and dancing becomes the ultimate event of singing and dancing, the word for which would also be khoros—this time, in the sense of a 'chorus', that is, a grouping of singers and dancers. And the prima donna for such singing and dancing can be visualized as the girl Ariadne, for whom Daedalus had made the ultimate place for song and dance.

How the telling of Cretan Tales begins only after the sojourn with the Phaeacians
§25. So far, I have concentrated on a moment at the beginning of Odyssey 15 when Telemachus is visiting in Sparta. Now I switch to Odysseus at that same moment. He is already in Ithaca, sleeping in the humble dwelling of Eumaeus the swineherd, after having finished telling his most elaborate "lie" in Odyssey 14, where he had narrated the Second Cretan Tale. So, when did Odysseus arrive in Ithaca, where he is telling his Cretan Tales? He had arrived already in Odyssey 13, which is where he narrated the First Cretan Tale to the goddess Athena herself. And this arrival in Ithaca marks a major transition in the Homeric narrative.

§26. Here I have reached a critical point in my argumentation, which is essentially this: the adventures of Odysseus in the land of the Phaeacians, starting at Odyssey 6 and ending at Odyssey 13.187, are a substitution for the adventures of Odysseus in Crete. Once he is in Ithaca, Odysseus wakes up from his adventures, as if from a dream.

§27. The Homeric narrative about the Phaeacians breaks off at Odyssey 13.187, at the very moment when they are offering sacrifice and praying to Poseidon to forgive them for having offended the god by conveying Odysseus from their island to the hero’s homeland in Ithaca. The narrative break takes place most abruptly, dramatically, and even exceptionally—at mid-verse. In the first part of the verse at Odyssey 13.187, the Phaeacians are last seen standing around a sacrificial altar, praying to Poseidon; in the second part of the verse, Odysseus has just woken up in Ithaca. A new phase of the hero’s experiences has just begun in the “real” world of Ithaca. Once Odysseus wakes up in his native land of Ithaca in Odyssey 13, he is ready to tell his First Cretan Tale, and he tells it to none other than the goddess Athena, who appears to him in disguise.

§28. In all the tales that Odysseus tells in the second half of the Odyssey, there is a strong preoccupation with the island of Crete. And, as we will see, the Odyssey makes contact with Crete also by way of his son Telemachus. As we know, Telemachus goes to Pylos and then to Sparta in our version of the Odyssey, thus making contact with a centerpoint of Minoan-Mycenaean civilization. But there is also an alternative version where Telemachus makes contact with the earlier phase of this civilization, which is localized on the island of Crete.

§29. Further, there is still another tradition, where Telemachus travels not to Sparta or to Crete but instead to the land of the Phaeacians. There are traces of this tradition, as reported by Eustathius in his commentary on Odyssey 16.118 and as channeled, as it were, Dictys of Crete 6.6. According to Eustathius, the sources are Hellanicus (FGH 4 F 156) and the Aristotelian Constitution of Ithaca (F 506 ed. Rose). According to this variant myth, Telemachus has an encounter with Nausicaa, princess of the Phaeacians, who is of course also encountered by Odysseus in our Odyssey. Telemachus and Nausicaa produce a child named Persepolis.

A Cretan adventure as an alternative to a Spartan adventure

§30. For the moment, however, I will concentrate not on the Phaeacian adventure of Telemachus but on his potential Cretan adventure, to be contrasted with the Spartan adventure that is narrated in our Odyssey.

§31. Backtracking from Odyssey 15 to Odyssey 1, we will now look at verses stemming from two different versions of the Odyssey. In both versions, Telemachus first goes to Pylos. That happens in Odyssey 3 as we have it. Also, in our version of the Homeric text, Telemachus then goes to Sparta in Odyssey 4.

§32. After the adventures of Telemachus in Pylos as narrated in Odyssey 3, however, there are two alternative versions for the continuation of his adventures. In one version, as attested in Odyssey 4, Telemachus follows up his visit to the palace of Nestor in Pylos with a visit to the palace of Menelaos in Sparta—and he goes there by way of a chariot. That is the version that we read in "our" text of Odyssey 4. In another version, however, Telemachus goes not to Sparta but to Crete, and of course he goes there by way of a ship.

§33. Both of these travels of Telemachus are mystical. In one scenario, he travels on a ‘thought-chariot’, while in another scenario, he travels on a ‘thought-ship’. In this regard, I await the forthcoming book of Madeleine Goh, who refers to the comparative evidence of Indo-European poetics concerning such shamanistic ideas as ‘thought-chariots’ and ‘thought-ships’.

§34. But what happens if Telemachus goes to Crete instead of Sparta after Pylos? Then he makes contact not with Menelaos of Sparta, who figures in the Troy Tale of Odyssey 4 as we have it, but with Idomeneus of Crete in an earlier Troy Tale of a Cretan Odyssey that focuses on a still earlier strand of narrative traditions centering on the nostoi or ‘homecomings’ of the Achaeans.

§35. These traditions draw on the world of Minoan-Mycenaean civilization in Crete. Let us consider for a moment the textual evidence. I start with some verses from "our" version of the Homeric Odyssey, as transmitted by ancient editors like Aristarchus, head of the Library of Alexandria in the second century BCE:


Odyssey 1.93
First you [= Telemachus] go to Pylos and ask radiant Nestor
and then from there to Sparta and to golden-haired Menelaos,
the one who was the last of the Achaeans, wearers of bronze tunics, to come back home.

Odyssey 1.284–286

Next I turn to the corresponding verses as they appeared in a different version of the Homeric Odyssey, as
we learn from the reportage of Zenodotus, head of the Library of Alexandria in the third century BCE:

§36. What we just saw here is a trace of a "Cretan Odyssey," as represented in our Odyssey by the "Cretan
lies," micro-narratives embedded in the epic macro-narrative of the Homeric Odyssey.

§37. In "our" Odyssey, as Nestor reports at 3.191–192, Idomeneus after the Trojan War returns to Crete
with all his men safe and sound. In the "Cretan" Odyssey, by contrast, Idomeneus seems to have traveled
with Odysseus, even experiencing with him the horrors of the Cave of the Cyclops. I refer here to the
brilliant analysis of Olga Levaniouk, who highlights a red-figure stamnos, 480 BCE, featuring ΙΔΑΜΕΝΕΥΣ
'Ida­meneus' [sic] and ΩΔΥΣΥΣ 'Odusus' [sic], each hanging under a ram’s belly.

§38. As we have already seen my posting for 2015.09.17, the Third Cretan Tale portrays Idomeneus as the
philos xenos 'near-and-dear guest-friend' of Odysseus:

| 172 | Κρήτη τις γαί' ἔστι μέσω ἕνι οἶνον πότις, 173 | καλῆ καί πίειρα, πειρίρρυτος ἕν δ’ ἄνθρωποι 174 | πολλοὶ ἀπείραισι, καὶ ἐννήκοντα πόλιες 175 | ἄλλη δ’ ἄλλων γλώσσα μεμιγμένη· ἐν μὲν Ἀχαιοί, 176 | ἐν δ’ Ἐπεόκριτοις μεγαλόπτορες, ἐν δὲ Κύδωνες 177 | Δαυρίες τε τριχάικες δίοι τε Πελασγοί· 178 | της δ’ ἐν Κνώσος, μεγάλη πόλις, ἐνθα τε Μίνως 179 | ἐννέα ἔως βασίλεια 180 | βασίλειας Διὸς μεγάλου νομα κλυτὸν Α, 181 | ἱπποτὸς γενεθ· ὃ δ’ ἅμα πρότερος καὶ ἀρέων.

| 172 | There’s a land called Crete, in the middle of the sea that looks like wine. 173 | It’s beautiful and fertile, surrounded by the waves, and the people who live there 174 are so
many that you can’t count them. They have 90 cities. 175 Different people speak different
languages, all mixed together. 176 There are Eteo-Cretans, those great-hearted ones. And
Cyclonians. 177 There are Dorians, with their three divisions, and luminous Pelasgians.

| 178 | In this land [plural]24 is Knossos, a great city. There it was that Minos, 179 who was
renewed every nine years [ἐνενέβος], ruled as king. He was the companion [οἱ αἰσθανόμενοι] of
Zeus the mighty. 180 And he was the father of my father, Deukalion, the one with the big
heart. 181 Deukalion was my father, and the father also of Idomeneus the king. 182 That
man [= Idomeneus], in curved ships, went off to Ilion [= Troy], 183 yes, he went there
together with the sons of Atreus [= Agamemnon and Menelaos]. As for my name, which is
famous, it is Aithôn. 184 I’m the younger one by birth. As for the other one [= Idomeneus],
he was born before me and is superior to me.

Odyssey 19.172–184

Cretan adventures of Odysseus

Occluding the Cretan heritage of Homeric poetry

§39. Earlier, we saw a proverb where the typical Cretan pretends not to know much about the sea. And I
argued that this kind of downplaying is a way of flaunting the supremacy of Crete as a thalassocracy. I see
a similar case of flaunting supremacy while pretending ignorance in Plato’s Laws, where the anonymous
Cretan speaks to the anonymous Athenian about Homer:
This poet of yours [ = this poet who belongs to you Athenians] seems to have been quite sophisticated [kharieis].

Plato Laws 3.680c

It is as if the Cretan didn’t know much about Homer, whom the Athenians claim as their own poet. But in fact, as we can see from the traces of a Cretan Odyssey in “our” Odyssey, which had gone through a lengthy phase of Athenian transmission, there was clearly an even lengthier and earlier phase of Cretan or Minoan-Mycenaean transmission in the evolution of Homeric poetry. In that phase, the Cretan Homer was supreme, superior to any Athenian Homer. And this was because the Cretan Odyssey was supreme, superior as it was to all other odysseys.

Bibliography


H24H. See Nagy 2013a.

HPC. See Nagy 2009|2010.


Nagy, G. 2004. Homer’s Text and Language. Urbana and Chicago IL.


Nagy, G. 2013a. The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours. Cambridge MA.


Notes

1 Further background in Nagy 2013b:157–58; also Nagy 2015.07.15.


3 This evidence is surveyed by Blech 1982:262–67.

4 Blech 1982:263.

5 Blech 1982:264.
6. The Homeric passage leaves it open whether Dionysus instigates the killing of Ariadne; so I cannot follow in its entirety the interpretation of Barrett 1964:223.


8. Oakley and Sinos 1993:37. Their interpretation of this painting differs from mine in some other respects.

9. I have much more to say about the poetics of Dionysiac dishevelment and eroticism in Nagy 2007.


12. The argument was first presented in Nagy 2013b.


14. This paragraph repeats my argumentation in Nagy 2013b.

15. On Theseus as the notional founder of the Athenian Empire, understood to be the notional successor of the Minoan Empire, see HPC E§§161–163, 168–169 = pp. 364–65, 368. Such an ideology about an Athenian Empire had a start even before the era of the Athenian Democracy. Already in the era of the Peisistratidai, who dominated Athens in the second half of the sixth century BCE, we see clear signs of what I am calling here 'the projects of empire': see especially HPC E§169 = p. 368. In the same work, I offer a general summary of the imperial ambitions of Athens in the era of the Peisistratidai (HPC I§§7–12 = pp. 6–7). In that era, as we see from the incisive analysis of Frame 2009:323, myths about the love affairs of Theseus with a variety of heroines, including Ariadne, were extensively rethought.


17. For further attestations of the garland of Amphitrite, see Blech 1982:265–66.

18. I translate the particle δή here as indicating surprise at learning something new. In general, the particle δή has an "evidentiary" force, indicating that the speaker has just seen something, in other words, that the speaker has achieved an insight just a moment ago ('aha, now I see that . . .'). See Bakker 1997:74–80, 2005:146.


23. Levaniouk 2011:105

24. As I have already noted, the pronoun τὴν that refers to the land of Crete here in Odyssey 19.178 is in the plural, not in the singular, as we might have expected. And, as I have argued, it is an elliptic plural, matching the elliptic plural of Krētai in Odyssey 14.199.

25. HC §84

Tags: Ariadne, Crete, Minoan-Mycenaean civilization, Odyssey, Theseus

2 Responses to A Cretan Odyssey, Part 2

Thank you , dear professor, 
good reading ( slow one of course).
...ό Κρής δή τον πόντον.... or as we say nowadays...Δ Ἐλλην δή τὸν πόντον.
"Ευή... a wonderful work of ..Love, adventure, enchantment,abandonment,empire building and ... very cinematic frenzy !!

ΚΛΕΟΣ !!