

Defining a “Mediterranean Bridge”: the relationship between Sparta and Crete

The “Mediterranean Bridge”



- ❖ Laconia, Kythera, AntiKythera and Crete constitute a unique geographical area in the Mediterranean.
- ❖ Their fundamental link is the Mediterranean Sea.
- ❖ The resemblance of Landscapes, Institutions and Social classes makes the Bridge a reality.
- ❖ Long lasting relationship.

A stronger bond in the 3rd century B.C.

- ❖ Sparta has to face a severe social and economical crisis: the number of full rights citizens is extremely low and they are unable to furnish the army with enough soldiers.
- ❖ The need for human and material capital in order to fight efficiently with the Hellenistic powers drives Sparta to increase her interaction with the wider world. Crete, geographically and culturally, is the closest place for Sparta and a gateway to the Eastern world.
- ❖ Cypress and Mercenaries are valuable resources of the island and in high demand.

Cretan Cypress Trees



- ❖ Their flexibility, resistance and value make them one of the finest Greek products.
- ❖ Widely used to build ships and parts of temples (*e. g.* the Athenian Parthenon featured some parts made of Cretan Cypress).
- ❖ Used to produce the typical Cretan bow: the lethal weapon of the Cretan mercenaries.

Cretan mercenaries

- ❖ Cretan archers are well known for the military prowess and swiftness which make them so valuable and sought-after even by other Hellenistic powers.
- ❖ Their contributions in the Spartan army is vital as the Hellenistic warfare seems to prefer light-armed troops able to attack from long distances.
- ❖ They fight on the Spartan side in some of the most memorable conflicts of the third century: Siege of Sparta by Pyrrhos (272 B.C.), Cleomenic War (229-222 B.C.).
- ❖ Their presence inside and outside the Spartan territory triggers significant social changes for in some accounts they are called *Mistophoroi* (Bringers of pay) while in others *Xenoi* (Foreigners).



Research implications

- ❖ This research has wider scientific implications as it shows that even a traditionally “insular” and powerful state like Sparta requires contact, support and resources from other states.
- ❖ It also has a concrete connection with the present time since interaction with other people is a modern reality. In a specific location like the Mediterranean basin, interaction is a natural consequence: it is the very sea that connects people from different backgrounds and traditions and shapes their lifestyles.