Introduction: Education and culture in Venetian Crete

The first centuries of Venetian rule in Crete (*c.* 1210–1669) were surely one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the island. For more than two hundred and fifty years, with a few short periods of respite, Cretan Greeks were engaged in a continuous struggle to drive out their entrenched conquerors. Up to the middle of the fifteenth century no fewer than twelve major uprisings are recorded. It was only after the 1460s that the Venetians were finally able to establish undisputed control over the island.

However, neither political and economic measures nor military vigilance was sufficient to secure Venetian domination. The Venetians soon realised that national awareness was closely associated with Orthodoxy, the creed of their Greek-speaking subjects. If the Greeks were to be won over by the Latin Church, this would ensure a greater degree of submission and a much more peaceful coexistence. Thus, from the very beginning the Venetians abolished the Orthodox hierarchy and kept the activities of the lower clergy under tight state control. Such measures were bound to exacerbate the historical animosity between Greeks and Westerners – Italians in particular – and tended to drive a deep psychological wedge between the Venetians and their Cretan subjects. They lived in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust, each attached to their own traditions. Cultural interaction, the merging of Western and Byzantine that was to prove so fruitful later on, is scarcely evident before the fifteenth century, although there are some traces of Western influence, for instance in Cretan frescoes of the second half of the fourteenth century. The Greeks of Crete kept steadfastly to their own culture and continued to look to the declining Byzantine Empire for spiritual guidance and political and military succour. For two centuries after the conquest, the names of the Byzantine emperors continued to be remembered in church inscriptions in the countryside. The strength of the Byzantine tradition had become the moral and spiritual sustenance of the conquered.

However, by the end of the fifteenth century Latin culture (but not Latin dogma) had found ways to penetrate slowly but steadily into the urban centres of the island. Of these there were three: the capital, Kastro or Megalo Kastro or Chandakas, as the city of Candia, today's Heraklion, was called by the Greeks, a large and prosperous town of about 10,000 inhabitants around 1400, Chania (Canea) and Rethymnon (Rettimo). In the Cretan towns Italian culture could and

did take hold much more easily and in a manner more pronounced than in any other Greek-speaking territories occupied by the Venetians or the Genoese.

Byzantine influence is clearly discerned in the sphere of education. In Byzantium education was largely associated with the Church. Young men were taught the rudiments by private instructors, usually members of the clergy, or in classes held within monasteries. From the little that is known, the same seems to have been the case among the Greeks of Crete. Private teachers, mainly ecclesiastics, taught in the cities as house-tutors or attracted a small number of students around them. These teachers would sign a contract with the parents and undertake to teach their charges reading and writing. Alongside the private teachers there were monastic schools, especially in the countryside. We have, for example, the case of the monk Athanasios, to whom Demetrios Kydones wrote the following in 1389:

> I was delighted to hear that you are imparting to young Cretans the wisdom you have acquired. In so doing, you will further increase your knowledge and you will repay the dues you owe your country by preparing your students to be good citizens.

Another learned Cretan monk of the same period is Joseph Philagris, who lived in southern Crete and is termed *διδάσκαλος τῆς Κρήτης* ('teacher of Crete'), presumably because of his teaching and preaching in the monasteries of that remote area. Private instructors also taught Latin to both Venetians and Greeks in the cities, for whom the opportunity for more systematic schooling existed in the Latin monasteries. A Uniate Greek, Peter Philargis, who after a brilliant career in Italy and a short spell in Oxford later became Pope Alexander V (1409–1410), received his basic education in the monastery of St Francis of Candia, while Lauro Querini, the Venetian humanist, spent most of his life on the island (1420–1438, 1452–1479).

From as early as the middle of the fourteenth century the conditions for studying Greek in Crete must have been quite satisfactory. It was at that time that a Greek of southern Italy came to Crete to study Greek: Leontios Pilatos, the Greek teacher of Petrarch and an acquaintance of Boccaccio. We also know that shortly before 1400 Joseph Philagris taught in southern Crete and compiled a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. Philagris was by no means the only Cretan scholar of the fourteenth century. A number of others are also known, such as Neilos Damilas, who was a theologian in the purest Byzantine vein. In parentheses, recent research indicates that the beginning of Cretan literature in vernacular Greek should be dated much earlier than thought, as far back indeed as the second half of the fourteenth century.

During the course of the fifteenth century, there was a conspicuous increase in scholarly activity in Crete, which is certainly related to an improvement in the quality of the education provided. It would seem that the education a gifted student received in both Latin and Greek was, all things considered, of a high order, or at any rate more than adequate. A group of scholars formed around the *protopapas* (Orthodox archpriest) of Candia, Ioannis Symeonakis, a scholar and a well-known

copyist (who died before 1452). Separately from (or perhaps in conjunction with) their teaching, his circle nurtured antiquarian and literary studies in the Byzantine tradition of the Palaiologan period and at the same time maintained close ties with persons related to the Italian Renaissance. A notable Italian scholar of the Renaissance, Rinuccio Aretino, who was a student of Symeonakis, praises his teacher in no uncertain terms: '*vir nostrae aetatis litteratissimus, cuius industria, opera et diligentia derivatum est quicquid graecarum litterarum ad nos effluxit*'. A one-time member of the Symeonakis circle was probably Georgios Trapezountios (erroneously called George of Trebizond) (1395–1472/3), a major scholar of the early Renaissance, who on his arrival in Italy in 1415, a young man little over twenty and already '*educatus*', held his own against no less a scholar than Guarino Veronese in a debate on Pindar and Greek metre, and demonstrated an excellent knowledge of Homer, Euripides, Plato, Herodotus and Plutarch. Symeonakis is also the author of a monody on the death of a teacher of Greek in Candia, Konstantinos Mylaios, whom he describes as a good mathematician, grammarian and rhetorician, an excellent instructor of children and a staunch defender of Orthodoxy. Another student of Symeonakis was probably the copyist Michael, writer of the first running commentary on Thucydides, and others. Thucydides must have been read and appreciated in Crete at that time, given the fact that an important branch of the textual tradition of his *Histories* derives from a copy that goes back to fifteenth-century Crete. The same can be said of the texts of other classical authors, such as Apollonius Rhodius.

The importance of the Cretan scriptoria has not yet been fully appreciated. In the words of J.E. Powell (though one might quibble with the accuracy of some of his views): 'During the second half of the fifteenth century, Crete was what it never had been before and never was to be again, a prime centre of Greek culture.' In the same context Powell stresses the importance of the role of Byzantine refugees, 'taking the classics with them not only direct to Italy but also to the Greek island of Crete . . . and there multiplying them at an astonishing rate to earn a living and satisfy the demands of their Italian patrons'. Although most fifteenth-century scholars and copyists were native-born Cretans, there can be little doubt of the role played by learned Byzantine refugees in Crete and of their contribution to the improvement of education and the diffusion of the arts and crafts in Crete. This is borne out by the impressive number of Cretan scholars and copyists who were active during the second half of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century in Crete and Italy. These scholars played a significant part in the dissemination of Greek culture in the West, particularly as teachers of Greek and as editors and printers of Greek texts, and some of them distinguished themselves as noteworthy figures of the Italian Renaissance. Here are some names: Dimitrios Damilas, who published in Milan the first book wholly in Greek in Europe (1474); Zacharias Kalliergis, printer and editor of the *Etymologicum Magnum*, one of the most exquisitely produced Renaissance books (1499), as well as other texts; Markos Mousouros, 'the most gifted classical scholar his nation ever produced', editor of

a host of *editiones principes* in the Aldine presses and teacher of some of the best-known Renaissance scholars, including perhaps Erasmus; Dimitrios Doukas, editor of the Greek text of the celebrated Complutensian Polyglot Bible; and Frangiskos Portos, one of the first Greek Protestants, professor of Greek at the University of Geneva and teacher of Carlo Sigonio and Isaac Casaubon. All these men had received their formative education in Crete.

Another facet of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Cretan culture that should not be overlooked is the extent of literacy. For instance, in the original notarial acts of an early sixteenth-century notary of Candia, who is also a well-known Renaissance scribe, Emmanuel Gregoropoulos, there are surprisingly few instances of witnesses who were unable to sign their own name. It should be noted that the majority of these people were middle class (mostly merchants), though some were small-time artisans: carpenters, coopers, tailors and so on. Some of the signatures have obviously been written with difficulty, others with ease, most of them in Greek, a few in Latin and still fewer in Hebrew. This would certainly indicate that at least a knowledge of reading and writing, which presuppose some schooling, was not uncommon, even among the less privileged classes of the urban society of Candia and presumably of the other two cities of the island as well.

In the years after the fall of Constantinople, when hopes for liberation and national restoration ceased to be realistic, the gap between the Greek and the Latin communities in Crete became progressively narrower and mutual distrust gradually gave way to greater understanding and cooperation. This development had the effect of multiplying and intensifying the various cultural contacts and exchanges between Crete and Venice. The Venetians, of course, continued to favour the Latin Church, and the Vatican continued to encourage the conversion of the Cretans to Catholicism, especially after the Council of Florence, whose edicts were never fully accepted in Crete. Doctrinal controversies, however, had by now lost their contentiousness. The urban society of late Renaissance Candia and of the other Cretan cities had by and large been freed from the narrow-minded medieval religious fanaticism of the preceding centuries.

By the sixteenth century a *modus vivendi* had been reached on doctrinal matters, the main cause of dispute. The official authorities and the Catholic Church in Crete were content in the belief that the Greeks of the island were abiding by the edicts of the Council of Florence, a belief that overlooked reality. On the other hand, the Orthodox accepted the Catholic bishops not as representatives of the Church of Rome but as religious agents of the Venetian state, and they acknowledged the spiritual jurisdiction of the Catholic hierarchy only on condition that they could appeal to the Venetian authorities against its decisions, which in any case had to conform with Orthodox canon law. In other words, there was a kind of political, and not ecclesiastical, recognition of the Catholic hierarchy by Orthodox Cretans, who in most other respects enjoyed ample freedom, guaranteed by Venice, to practise their religion without interference or hindrance, and also retained the significant right to have their priests ordained by Orthodox bishops outside Crete.

Noteworthy is the foundation of a school in Candia under the control of Greek Uniates, at the initiative of that remarkable Renaissance Greek, Cardinal Bessarion (1462). The teachers received their wages from the income of the Cretan estates belonging to the Latin Patriarchate of Constantinople (Bessarion was the *titularius* at the time). The first teacher was a well-known Byzantine scholar, Michael Apostolis (1420–1482), who appears to have been the first to have the idea of establishing the school, a 'museum' as he calls it, and had urged Bessarion to help him achieve this goal. Little, however, is known of how successful this school was. Bessarion's legacy would not be looked upon favourably by the Orthodox population, who would have resented its ties with Rome. It continued to function throughout the sixteenth century and several well-known Cretan scholars taught there. Tuition was free, but the school's goal – to make good Catholics of its students – must have caused many Orthodox parents to have second thoughts before sending their children there. Nevertheless this school served as a focal point of Cretan Uniates, some of them Greek scholars of considerable repute. Apart from Michael Apostolis, they included his son Aristoboulos (Arsenios) (1468/9–1535); the copyist Georgios Alexandrou, who became the Catholic bishop of Arcadia in Crete; his son Alexandros, who, in collaboration with Nikolaos Kavadatos, archpriest of Canea, established a Greek printing press in Venice prior to 1486 and published two books; Ioannis Rossos (1449–1497/8), one of the most prolific Greek copyists of his time; and Ioannis Plousiadinos, later metropolitan of Monembasia (1429–1500), a distinguished theologian and scholar.

The need for independent state schools supported by the Venetian state had become quite evident by the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1501 the nobility of Candia submitted a petition to this effect, requesting the appointment of a public teacher of Greek and Latin. The request was satisfied with the creation of a public teaching post (*officium publicae lectionis*), probably only for Latins. In general, Venetians do not seem to have been very supportive or generous as far as the education of their Cretan subjects was concerned, preferring to spend the money on military schemes and fortifications. There were also some sound political considerations behind this policy: the Venetians may have been wary of the prospect of an uncontrolled dissemination of education that could forge a strong Greek Orthodox intelligentsia potentially dangerous to their interests. However, it is puzzling that the issue of establishing a printing press in the island, whose geographical position was ideal for a profitable expansion of the Venetian book trade in the Christian and Muslim East, was never considered.

With the exception of the school endowed by Bessarion and the one established by the state, the educational needs of young Cretans continued to be met principally by private schools. Private teachers taught the offspring of the richer families as tutors in their homes, or opened their own schools in the cities, where the rudiments of Greek and Latin were taught to small groups of students. The notarial acts of the time contain a great number of references to teachers who taught the youth of Candia reading and writing, and also practical medicine and pharmacy, accounting

and other subjects. The school frequented by Theotokopoulos in Candia may have been such a school. Daniel Ecklin, a German traveller who lived in Rethymnon in 1552–1553, reports that he was employed as a tutor in the home of a noble, adding that in order to learn Greek he accompanied the noble's children to their Greek school so that he would be able to read the Bible in the original. Ten years later another visitor, Peter Villinger, a Catholic Swiss, reports that there were many schools in Candia and that there were hardly any young men who did not know Greek and Latin – though here he is surely exaggerating. He then adds a curious piece of information, namely, that in charge of one of the schools was an Italian from Lucca. He, and a friend of his, a Greek doctor, were Calvinists who wanted to attract the young students to the beliefs of the Reformation. This provoked the intervention of the Latin archbishop of Crete, who had their books burnt and the school closed. This is the first instance of the ideas of the Reformation penetrating Greek territory in the Latin East. Evidence discovered in Venice corroborates Villinger's story and throws light on this interesting episode. The Greek doctor in charge, Ioannis Kassimatis, a charismatic person, was an alumnus of the University of Ferrara and Portos's nephew. He was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Inquisition in Crete and ended his days in 1571 in the notorious Venetian prison of the Palazzo Ducale. Private schools functioned in other urban centres of Crete as well. The names of some teachers who taught in Canea, Rethymnon and Sitia in the sixteenth century are known.

The flowering of scholarship, literature, education and arts in sixteenth-century Crete, from the middle of that century onwards, is certainly related to a significant reversal in Venetian policy vis-à-vis their Cretan subjects. From this time onwards Venetian support of Catholic propaganda was to a great extent abandoned and a policy of almost unqualified tolerance in religious matters adopted. In doing this, the Venetians believed, not without good reason, that they would secure sympathy and support on the part of their subjects in a period crucial for the fate of their overseas dominions exposed to the Turkish threat. Furthermore, by now it had become quite clear that all attempts to convert the Orthodox population of Crete to Catholicism had failed. At the end of the sixteenth century Catholics amounted to only two per cent of the population of the island, a truly dismal figure after a missionary effort of nigh on four centuries. In fact, large numbers of former Catholics had converted to Orthodoxy rather than the other way round. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Cretan Meletios Pigas, patriarch of Alexandria and *locum tenens* of the Ecumenical Throne in Constantinople, succeeded in obtaining a decree from the Venetian government on behalf of the Orthodox in Crete, stating that 'the Greek nation should be completely rid of the machinations of the Pope, and our Greek subjects, being good Christians and loyal servants of our state, should be free to live as they have always lived, according to the beliefs and practices of the Eastern Church'. The distance between Crete and the centres of Catholicism greatly hindered the effective control of the representatives of the Latin Church in the island. Their comparative independence, which continued even after the

Council of Trent, in a period of general relaxation of moral standards, resulted in symptoms of decadence among the Latin clergy and in a serious weakening of their authority. The chronic problems of the Catholic Church of Crete, such as the absenteeism of the bishops and the neglect and dissipation of church property, remained unresolved, and contributed further to its decline.

Sixteenth-century Venice, although still adhering to a policy of administrative centralization, was in fact the metropolis of a federation. To all intents and purposes, Crete had become a province rather than a colony of the Venetian state. Colonial exploitation weakened considerably. With the Turks an ever-present danger, Venice spent far more on fortifications in Crete than Crete could possibly yield as a colony. Religious freedom and a measure of political tact, combined with a prolonged Venetian dispute with Rome, united all Cretans, both Orthodox and Catholic, on the side of Venice. All of them, in particular the urban population, formed a culturally and politically homogeneous entity from the middle of the sixteenth century until the Turkish conquest, characterized by the social cohesion forged by a shared culture and shared economic interests. They felt themselves to be, and indeed were, compatriots. The ties that bound them together were much stronger than any religious differences. This final rapprochement had quite significant consequences: it became the main factor in a creative and fruitful meeting of Byzantine Greek tradition and Italian culture, to the benefit of both Greeks and Latins. The effects of this meeting are eloquently exemplified in the masterpieces of Cretan literature and, of course, the paintings of Theotokopoulos.

The long symbiosis of Orthodox and Catholic under the same political and, to some extent, ecclesiastical regime, and the daily contact between the followers of the two faiths who, despite their religious differences, were often friends and relatives, naturally made both sides familiar with the liturgical practice of the 'rival' Church. In any case, it was a long-established custom for both Latin and Orthodox clergy and congregation to participate together in the official celebrations and in the processions and litanies that took place regularly in the Cretan towns. The spread of Italian and Latin education among the Greek Orthodox townspeople and their inclination to go to Italy to study, from the first half of the sixteenth century onwards, and on the other hand the prevalence of the Greek language, which had become the mother tongue even of the Catholics in Crete, were all factors that helped considerably to bring together the followers of the two creeds and created a climate of syncretism, leading to increased interaction between the two cultures. Orthodox Cretans began to visit Catholic churches and attend their services ever more frequently without attracting censure, while, of course, it was a common occurrence for Catholics to visit and attend services at Orthodox churches, especially in the countryside where Catholic clergy were scarce. There is even mention of the two faiths sharing a single church building. Under these conditions hostility between Orthodox and Catholic in Crete ceased to be an obstacle to cultural interchange, and this process now became easier and more effective. The literary and artistic flowering of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the

product of a harmonious blending of elements of Byzantine and Western culture, made possible precisely because of this new climate.

At this point it should perhaps be emphasised that after more than four centuries of Venetian rule, the Greek language had become predominant and replaced Italian, the official language of administration, even among the Venetian settlers, who used it in everyday speech just like the native inhabitants. The majority of Cretans, particularly the women and peasants, did not know Italian at all, whereas for the Veneto-Cretans in general Greek was their mother tongue (*sermo maternus*). Indeed, there were some Catholics who were totally ignorant of Italian, while some members of the Catholic clergy were ignorant of Latin. Public officials elected in Venice and sent to serve in Crete, as well as Latin bishops, were scandalised by this state of affairs. This process of linguistic hellenisation encompassed the Catholic ruling classes as well, including the patricians of Venetian origin, all fluent in Greek, a language which they even preferred as their literary medium. In the first half of the sixteenth century there are some curious cases of Latins of pure Venetian blood, Catholic clergy included, who call themselves Greeks, a phenomenon that should probably be attributed not to ethnic identification but rather to the elevation of ancient Greek in Renaissance culture.

However, while the Italian language failed to prevail, the same cannot be said of the Latin alphabet, which tended to replace the Greek, even in the writing of Greek. Works of Cretan literature, such as the *Erophile*, the *Sacrifice of Abraham*, *Fortunatus*, *Erotokritos* (the masterpiece of Cretan literature) and others have come down to us in manuscript copies written in Latin characters or in Greek manuscripts transcribed from such copies. This widespread use of the Latin alphabet must have been primarily due to the fact that the teaching of Latin and Italian from a specific period onwards became more systematic and more accessible compared with the teaching of Greek. In other words, while everyone knew Greek, few had been taught how to write it at school, and as a result used Latin characters instead.

There is very little concrete information regarding the teaching of Latin and Italian apart from the bare facts outlined above. Most probably these languages were taught privately by Catholic friars. In the 1530s a Dominican, Desiderio dal Legname, was teaching in Candia. The students included Orthodox Cretans, such as Antonios Kallergis, a scion of the only Greek family enjoying Venetian noble status and author of a still-unpublished history of Crete written in Italian, and also an outspoken opponent of the Roman Church. Generally, however, it does not seem to have been easy to find competent teachers of Italian – and one should not forget that Italian was the official language of the administration. For this reason, the better-educated soldiers serving in the garrisons of the Cretan cities were sometimes employed as teachers. These large, frequently renewed garrisons, in which a significant number of educated men (even poets and scholars) served, played an important, if unappreciated, role in the introduction of Italian culture in Crete.

Much has been written about the Greek school established in the monastery of Saint Catherine in Candia, a dependency of the Mount Sinai monastery of the same name. A legend has been created around this school, which is in many respects exaggerated. It seems that there was indeed a school at this monastery, but it most probably was not a school of higher education, as some have claimed, but simply a primary school similar to other monastic schools in Crete and elsewhere. It may owe its fame to its teachers, among whom were some well-known names, such as Ioannis Morezinos, the original owner of the Holkham manuscripts now in the Bodleian Library, and Joasaph Dorianos. The latter taught Greek to the famous Cretan scholar and Orthodox bishop of Kythera Maximos Margounios, whose teacher of Latin was none other than Gaspare Viviani, the Catholic bishop of Sitia and vicar of the archbishop of Crete. Apart from Margounios we know of other famous scholars who attended this school: the patriarchs Meletios Pigas and Cyril Loukaris, Meletios Vlastos, Meletios Syrigos, and others. The patriarch Cyril Loukaris endeavoured unsuccessfully to establish schools in Crete.

The good standing of Cretan schools became known outside the island. In 1583 a German scholar, David Chytraeus, reports that some teachers in Crete were teaching public courses at a higher level. It is not clear whether he means the school of Saint Catherine or the school endowed by Bessarion. It is possible that he means the schools of Candia in general and the quality of education available. From the middle of the sixteenth century on, there is also a noticeable flourishing of Orthodox monastic schools in the countryside. The monasteries of, among others, Angarathos, Apezanai, Vrondisi, Arkadi, Gonia, Agia Triada and Akrotiriani (Toplou), under well-educated abbots, offered free classes, where in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the young men of the neighbouring areas were perhaps able to acquire on occasion more than a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing.

At various times the idea of establishing a school of higher learning, after Italian models, was put forward. It was supported by Venetian officials and the Catholic clergy, who believed that such a school would attract members of the educated classes to Catholicism. In 1585 the Provveditore Generale Alvise Grimani, perhaps the last actively to pursue a policy of conversion, granted the Jesuits permission to establish a college in Candia. The Jesuit College opened its doors next to the ducal church of Saint Mark with the blessing of Pope Gregory XIII. After a few years the Venetian officials, realising that Jesuit propaganda scandalised the Greeks, closed down the school and expelled the Jesuits from the island, using the *Interdetto* as a pretext. The return of the Jesuits in 1620 provoked new protests, and the idea of a Greek public college for Greeks re-emerged for a time, only to be met with Jesuit opposition. Finally, the Venetians, in an effort not to alienate their Greek subjects – especially in view of the looming Turkish threat – permitted the establishment of an Orthodox college in Candia. This school, supported by private funds and legacies, functioned alongside the Jesuit College and continued to do so even during the siege of Candia.

Unfortunately not much is known about this Greek school, apart from the names of a few teachers, such as Gerasimos Vlachos and Michael Agapetos. At a later point, the former became metropolitan of Philadelphia, in Venice, and evolved into one of the most important Greek intellectuals of the seventeenth century. What is particularly remarkable about him is that he completed his studies in Candia, and never attended an Italian university. Vlachos remained and continued to teach in the besieged city from 1640 until approximately 1655; while there he wrote extensive commentaries on the *Physics* and the *Logic* of Aristotle and Porphyry, as well as a free translation of Aristotle's *Categories*, based, so it seems, on his own lectures and indicating an exceptionally high level of teaching. This alone would serve to justify Dimaras's hypothesis that 'the evidence shows that, even if there were no schools of higher education in Crete, higher education nevertheless existed'.

Naturally, systematic study of subjects such as medicine and law could only be pursued in Italy. The great wave of young Cretans who went to Italy to study is an important factor in the flowering of the Cretan Renaissance during the last two centuries of Venetian rule. The acquisition of a university education was an important step on the social ladder, especially for the middle and lower-middle classes, and was vigorously pursued. From the beginning of the sixteenth century hundreds of young students streamed across to Italy from Crete in pursuit of higher education in the universities of northern Italy, especially Padua, but also Bologna, Ferrara and Milan. A small number of students, mainly from the poorer classes, went to study at the College of Saint Athanasius in Rome, founded by Pope Gregory XIII in 1577 exclusively for Greek Orthodox students. From 1577 until the fall of Candia in 1669 approximately one-fifth of the students at the Greek College of Rome were Cretans. Many of its graduates became Catholics and embarked on careers in the Roman Church. Quite a few, however, remained Orthodox and returned to Crete. Much greater were the numbers of Cretan students at the University of Padua. The evidence we possess indicates that before the fall of Candia at least half the Greek students at Padua were Cretans. It is estimated that over one thousand Cretans studied at this famous university, one of the oldest in Europe, in the period between 1500 and 1700. The University of Padua became the *alma mater* not only of the Cretans but of all the other Greeks living in Venetian- or Turkish-occupied lands.

The importance of studies in Italy is emphasised by Francesco Barozzi, the original owner of the Codices Barocciani at Oxford, a Veneto-Cretan noble from Rethymnon, and a mathematician of European fame, who himself studied and taught at Padua. He says: 'God, pitying the misery of the Greeks, decided to give them back their lost intellectual superiority over other peoples. Thus', he continues, 'we see that in recent years the Greeks, inspired by God, send their children to study in Italy, so that they may acquire wisdom and then return, bearing spiritual illumination to their country. This', he goes on, 'is a phenomenon more

pronounced in Crete, perhaps', he speculates, in a fit of patriotism, 'because God loves Crete more, perhaps because Crete is the most blessed part of Greece.'

Rich Cretans often left endowments to help the poor who wished to study in Italy. Gerasimos Palaeocapas, the Cretan bishop of Kissamos, stipulated in his will that the income from his large estates should be used for scholarships to be given to twenty-five young men each year to study at the College of Saint Athanasius or the University of Padua – sixteen of these young men were to come from Crete. Many Cretans were also able to study on scholarships at the Flanginis School in Venice and the Cottunian Gymnasium in Padua, both founded by patriotic Greek benefactors of the Diaspora.

In Italy, Cretan students had the opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with Italian culture, and upon their return to Crete they were in a position to transplant and cultivate their acquired knowledge and tastes on the fertile soil of their homeland. Thus, in 1561, at the initiative of Francesco Barozzi, the first academy, the Academy of the Vivi, was founded in Rethymnon. This was the first society of *litterati* to be created in the Greek East after the fall of Constantinople, and one of the first of its kind in eastern Europe. In 1590 a similar society was founded in Candia, the Accademia dei Stravaganti, by a Veneto-Cretan noble Andrea Cornaro, who I believe was the brother of Vicenzo Cornaro, the poet of the *Erotokritos*. Forty years later a third society was founded in Chania, the Accademia dei Sterili. The aims of the societies were mainly literary. Their contribution to the development of Cretan Renaissance literature, which has only recently begun to be fully appreciated, must have been fundamental.

Many Cretans remained in Italy and pursued careers there as scholars and university professors, while many others established themselves in other European countries. 'For two centuries', writes Geanakoplos,

> Crete exported along with its choice wines and oils scores of intellectuals and artists, who wherever they went in western Europe held high positions of influence. We find Cretans from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, from the monasteries of Sinai and Athos to the peninsula of Spain and, in northern Europe, from England to as far east as Russia. They decorated chruches, created masterpices of painting, served as scribes, teachers, and advisers to western humanists and kings, founded printing presses for the publication of first editions . . .[1]

One should perhaps add that Pizarro's second-in-command in Peru was allegedly a Cretan: Pedro de Candia. And there is the case of a Cretan student in England, Nathanael Conopios, later bishop of Smyrna, whose main claim to fame is that he introduced coffee-drinking to Balliol College, Oxford.

These Cretan émigrés never really forgot Crete. The memory of, and nostalgia for, their homeland and a certain pride in their ancestry would last well into the second and third generation. This sort of patriotism is rather moving. One has only to remember Domenikos Theotokopoulos in far-off Spain, who continued to sign

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[1] D.J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Oxford: Blackwell 1966, 139.

his paintings in Greek *Κρής*, the Cretan. And perhaps another striking example should be mentioned: the cry of longing of the Cretan lawyer Thomas Trivizanos, who wrote in 1554 in Padua: 'Oh, my Crete, Oh, Crete my country, the mother of famous men. I shall never forsake Greece as long as Apollo sheds his light on me.' Trivizanos, who translated Ovid into Greek hexameters, was a Venetian Catholic noble who studied and lived for many years in Italy.

After the Turks landed in 1641, the flight of the urban population assumed the proportions of a true exodus. Thousands of refugees left for Italy. Some disembarked in the Ionian Islands and some in Turkish-occupied Greece, where they played an important role in the education of their new homelands and in the strengthening of ethnic consciousness. After a prolonged war, lasting from 1644 to 1669, Crete fell to the Turks. The Turkish conquest puts an abrupt end to every form of intellectual and educational activity, and what follows is a period of slavery and darkness. This marked the end of a magnificent era, which, to quote Stylianos Alexiou, 'vanished like a new Atlantis in the ocean of history'.

As Geanakoplos sums up:

> The basic contribution of Cretan intellectuals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the forging of connecting links between the Hellenism of the old Byzantine East and the rising, youthful Hellenism of the Renaissance West. In this way, the island of Crete, through the work of its distinguished sons, served as an important halfway point between East and West. And as such, Crete during the Renaissance played a significant, if still inadequately appreciated, role in the process of the diffusion of Greek letters, not only to Italy, but – especially from Venice – throughout other areas of the Western world.[2]

[2] D.J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330–1600)*, New Haven, CT 1976, 212.