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Just as Cretan archaeology has always been dominated —and rightly so— by the study of the great Minoan civilization, a study which has become a field in its own right and has attracted the attention of distinguished scholars, in the same way on the field of Cretan history, the era that has attracted great attention and whose study has somehow developed into a field in its own right, too, is the Venetian period. This is a particularly complex period, whose study requires the command of a rich variety of sources, Italian, Byzantine, and even Ottoman, ranging from official documents to popular poetry, a significant proportion of which is still unpublished. This is why, although the bibliography in the field is particularly rich, the general works, ie. those that attempt a wider synthesis, are relatively few, despite the fact that many distinguished scholars have turned to the study of this important period in Cretan history.

In recent years a number of studies by new scholars have seen the light, attempting this wider and more synthetic look into various aspects of Cretan history, be it its last Byzantine years, the Venetian centuries, or its first Ottoman years. Among these studies there are three which share a common characteristic, namely the attempt (explicit or implicit) to provide a picture of Crete different from the one provided by scholarship so far. These are: Sally McKee's *Uncommon Dominion. Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2000, xiii + 273 pp.; Molly Green's *A Shared World. Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Princeton University Press 2000; and Maria Georgopoulou's *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies. Architecture and Urbanism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. In principle, it is a good sign that new scholars, not only in Greece or Europe but also in the United States, turn to Venetian or Veneto-Cretan studies, because in that way the viability of this particular field is ensured. On the other hand, every attempt to reject

an accepted view or opinion and replace it with a new one should be examined more closely before this replacement takes its place in the scholarly world. In this article I intend to take such a closer look at the first of these three studies, Sally McKee's *Uncommon Dominion. Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity*, which is the one that in the most explicit way attempts to change our view of Venetian Crete.

This book is a partial reworking of the author's PhD thesis, entitled *Uncommon Dominion. The Latins and Greeks in 14th Century Crete* (University of Toronto, 1992). The change in the subtitle obviously reflects the author's intention to stress the central point of the book. The book consists of an Introduction (pp. 1-18), five Chapters (pp. 19-177), of which the fifth is the Conclusion, sub-titled "The Myth of Ethnic Homogeneity", two Appendices (pp. 179-188) and the Notes as endnotes (pp. 189-246), followed by the Bibliography (pp. 247-260), Index (pp. 261-272) and Acknowledgements (p. 273). The whole is preceded by "A Note on the Sources" (pp. vii-xiii).

McKee's *Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete 1312-1420*, 3 vols., Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington DC 1998, presented 790 testaments that are an important part of the archival material for this second book. From the outset McKee states her opinion that "Basic methodological problems plague the field of Venetian Cretan studies and Venetian studies" (p. vii). "Scholars of an earlier generation" are said to have "greater familiarity with Candiote society than they do with the sources they studied to gain that familiarity"; she observes "an evolving tacit concensus" so that "smaller and smaller samples [of sources] are being used to support broadly conceived generalizations" (*ibid.*) and a *manipulation* of "the data contained [in the surviving notarial archives] in an overly ambitious way" (p. ix). What we know as "the traditional view of Venetian Crete" has come about by "the particular way the sources have been manipulated by scholars" (p. 168).¹ So, "As a result, a skewed vision of the social relations prevalent in the colony currently prevails" (p. vii). McKee's intention is to correct these shortcomings and to provide a picture of 14th-century Venetian Crete that is more consistent with the sources.

1. Though not named, these scholars of "an earlier generation" are not unknown, so the reader has to conclude that McKee directs this accusation to, among others, Giuseppe Gerola, Ernst Gerland, Stephanos Xanthoudides, Eva Tea, Freddy Thiriet, Silvano Borsari, Nikos Panagiotakis, as well as probably Professors David Jacoby and Chryssa Maltezou, to name but a few.

METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

Despite her ambitions, McKee makes methodological errors of her own. Although the title suggests that the book refers to the whole of Crete, McKee states "I am not investigating the entire island, so much as I am focusing on the extremely important role of urban life in the colony's history" admitting that "the overwhelming majority of the material surviving from the Venetian colony of Crete comes from and concerns the principal city and capital Candia" (p. viii), a city with "a population of perhaps five to eight thousand" (p. ix).² This is not, strictly speaking, true, as the surviving archival material mostly concerns the *territory* of Candia, ie. the whole of central Crete. Despite her statement above, she actually writes about both the city and the island. Her bias is particularly apparent in her Conclusion, where she generalizes about the whole of Crete, based on situations prevailing in the city of Candia, where a tiny minority of the population lived. McKee's focus is, in fact, on "the interaction between Greeks and Latins, the latter of whom were found mostly in Candia" (p. viii), leaving aside the majority (around 97.5%) of the Greek population living in the countryside.

Her "Note on the Sources" contains some basic factual errors: the notarial sources do not "consist of over thirty-three files, or buste" (p. ix) but almost ten times that number;³ there is not "one land register" (p. viii) but four;⁴ the notarial archive does not have a "manageable size" (p. ix) but consists of tens of thousand (if not hundreds of thousand) of documents; and it is entirely incorrect that "Greeks tended to patronize Greek notaries, Latins went to Latin notaries, and Jews sought out notaries trained in Hebrew" (p. x). Leaving aside the fact that, to my knowledge, no Hebrew notarial register exists in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV),⁵ a simple survey of the notarial registers, either Latin or Greek, reveals that Greeks, Latins and Jews patronized Latin or Greek notaries indiscriminately.

2. As opposed to the population of the whole island, which at that time would be around 150,000 at a conservative estimate.

3. M. F. Tiepolo, «Note sul riordino degli archivi del Duca e dei notai di Candia nell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia», *Θησαυρίσματα* 10 (1973) 88-100; E. Moatsos, «Ανέκδοτος κατάλογος νοταρίων της Κρήτης», *Μνημόσυνον Σοφίας Αντωνιάδη*, Venice 1974, p. 298.

4. A.S.V., *Duca di Candia (DDC)*, b. 18, 19, 20, 21.

5. In p. 6 the author repeats that "Jews... like the Greeks of Candia, went to their own notaries, whose protocols have not survived".

Past studies have employed notarial documents for information of economic and social nature. McKee categorically denies that they have such a usefulness (pp. xi-xii) and believes, in contrast, that they provide useful information about ethnicity, though she admits that they are seldom put to such a use (p. xiii). McKee states that the picture that emerges from the notarial documents is at variance with the one provided by other official documents: "in discussions of ethnicity" notarial documents have an "underappreciated advantage" over government sources, chronicles and other literary works, as they "display a less obvious intentionality" and "the actual practice of living there", as opposed to the picture "from the diplomatic and literary sources". In practical terms, this means that if we study a large number of notarial acts concerning purchases of wine, hiring of labourers and letting of property (which is what the overwhelming majority of the notarial acts are about), we are going to learn much more about ethnic identities than from studying official records or chronicles.⁶

If we take the author's assertions at face value, we would expect her book to refer predominantly to notaries and notarial acts rather than to "government sources". A closer inspection, however, shows that this is not the case. The author states that from the 14th century, the period which she exclusively studies, the registers and fragments of registers of 57 notaries have survived (p. iii). But in her study she refers to only 26 notaries of the 14th century for acts other than testaments; and these notaries are quoted for a total of only 190 notarial acts. A more detailed inspection reveals that only six notaries are quoted for more than 10 acts: A. Bellamore⁷ (10 acts), N. Tonisto (14), N. da Milano (17), G. Similiante (20) and G. Gerardo (47). One notary is present with 9 acts, one with 6, two with 4 and the rest with 3, 2 and one act. Hence, we see that one quarter of the notarial acts that McKee quotes come from one notary, G. Gerardo, while three quarters of the total acts quoted come from seven notaries. More importantly, these 190 notarial acts from 26 notaries represent a tiny proportion of the total surviving acts. The surviving registers of only four *published* notaries

6. Testaments are more useful for this purpose than other notarial acts, but in order to profit from their information one has to be very familiar with the mentalities: see below.

7. Some of the notaries' names the author uses inconsistently: A. Bellamore and Andreas de Bello Amore; G. Similiante is mostly called G. Similante; F. de Cruce (or Croce) is given as F. della Croce.

of the 14th century, Franciscus de Cruce, Benvenuto de Brixano, Pietro Pizolo and Zaccaria de Fredo, contain a total of 2,408 acts.⁸ It seems, therefore, that despite her claims that notarial documents can be used to extract information about ethnic identities rather than about economy and relevant issues, and assuming that she actually went through the majority of the notarial registers, she could simply not find enough evidence from notaries to support her assertions.

More serious methodological questions, however, arise from the way McKee examines her main subject, Crete in the 14th century. First of all, if we ask why the 14th century was chosen for study, the answer we are given is culinary: "If the colony were a stew, then, by the fourteenth century, the ingredients would have had time to blend and intensify" (p. 5). Other factors are added, ranging from the commencement of the Turkish raids and the plague to the revolt of St Titus, none of which justify this focus. This is important, because the book concentrates exclusively on the 14th century with the result that Crete is isolated both from its previous and its subsequent history and from its neighbouring lands. This situation is made worse by her almost exclusive dependency on notarial sources. This method produces satisfactory results when one deals with specific situations that the sources describe, such as the composition and function of the local Councils, but it is not efficient for other purposes. The author's intention is, however, to argue "using the example of one society, that ethnic categories, which presuppose a cognitive ordering of human beings according to some implicit or explicit criteria, exist independently of and are shaped by forces other than people's daily, material life" (p. 3). In other words she has set herself the task to deal with the complex and broader matter of identities, and in particular, of ethnic identity, and not just in Crete, but through the Cretan paradigm to show "how being ruled by agents of a distant colonial power had a profound impact on concepts of ethnicity and race in the pre-modern era" (p. 7).

Let us for the moment leave aside the fact that in the first set of

8. Franciscus de Cruce: ed. Ch. Gasparis, *Franciscus de Cruce, Notάριος στον Χάνδακα 1338-1339*, Venice 1999 (471 acts); Benvenuto de Brixano: ed. R. Morozzo della Rocca, *Benvenuto de Brixano, Notaio in Candia, 1301-1302*, Venice 1950 (588 acts); Pietro Pizolo: ed. S. Carbone, *Pietro Pizolo, Notaio in Candia*, v. 1, 1300, Venice 1978, v. 2, 1304-1305, Venice 1985 (1218 acts); Zaccaria de Fredo: ed. A. Lombardo, *Zaccaria de Fredo, Notaio in Candia (1352-1357)*, Venice 1968 (131 acts). The author quotes only 4 acts from F. de Cruce, 4 from P. Pizolo, 1 from B. de Brixano and none from Z. de Fredo.

her aims the author sets herself the task of proving a self-evident truth, ie. that ethnic identities have nothing to do with people's daily, material life. Cultural identities do not come about at one particular moment, but are the product of long developments and complex historical circumstances. It is impossible, for example, to understand the identity of the Cretans in the 14th century if we ignore the great revolts of the 13th century in Crete, or the social, administrative and economic situations of the 10th-12th centuries. Furthermore, the task of understanding identities becomes well nigh impossible if we ignore the language and the mentality of the people whose identity we attempt to examine. This is particularly true if we deal with societies which are generally "conservative" and have displayed an astonishing degree of continuity in language, custom and mentality from ancient years to the present, as is the case of Crete. In such a case a knowledge of the previous and later history of this society, as well as a working knowledge of the language in order to have access to the Greek sources and bibliography are indispensable. Because McKee examines this society without these tools, she has misunderstood it and made several important errors. Nor does she justify her claim that Venetian Crete can be used as an example of early colonialism comparable to the cases of the Spanish colonies in the Canary Islands and Majorca and the English colonisation of Ireland. This comparison is questionable, so much so as the only thing they have in common with Venetian Crete is the direct rule of a distant possession by a central government. In any case, in view of the fact that the Venetian *Regno di Candia* predated all the other cases, it is absurd to speak (p. 5) about "the *unprecedented* intervention of the state in its direct governance" when there was no other precedent.

ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY, ETHNIC PURITY AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

McKee believes that, as far as ethnic identities as well as practices emanating from these identities are concerned, the government and diplomatic sources are misleading in that they show how governments attempted to impose identities and, as a result, divide the population and keep apart the governed (the Greeks) from the governing classes (the Venetians). These, she believes, were artificial divisions that the notarial acts and the wills, ie. the everyday practices of the people, show hardly existed. In 14th-century Crete there was not, she maintains, a division or conflict between Greek and Latin, Orthodox and Catholic. Instead, the author discovered that by that time the two main ethnic

communities, the Greeks and the Latins, had come near each other through intermarriage, adoption of the other's languages and customs, so that "visible signs of ethnic membership... became blurred" (p. 6). While Greeks and Latins still referred to themselves and the other as such, the main division and conflict now was between city and countryside. In other words, the Latins and Greeks still saw themselves as Latins and Greeks but, unknown to them, this was a self-image imposed on them from outside, from the Venetian government that wanted to keep the two communities apart.

The author, therefore, concerns herself to a considerable extent with the concepts of ethnicity and ethnic and national identity, although she admits that she does not understand these concepts very well.⁹ She does state, however, that ethnicity is in the heart of so many social ills which produce "the seemingly inexplicable [to whom?] ethnic conflicts" of our time (p. 3). To her "ethnic identity is a very slippery concept that depends on a pool of factors..." (p. 4), but, more importantly, she admits "to a moral stance" towards her subject, and considers that the aim of her book is to argue that "ethnic categories... exist independently of and are shaped and fueled by forces other than people's daily, material lives" (*ibid.*). These may be novel discoveries "...for American and European academics casting about for fresh, relatively untrammled fields of investigation" (p. 3), but, alas, the fields of Venetian Cretan studies and of ethnic or national identities in the region are neither fresh nor untrammled. The *moral stance* she admits to leads her to a moral condemnation of ethnicity, from the corrupting influences of which societies must be protected. "I believe that the more conscious we are of the unnatural character, literally, of ethnicity [sic], the more we can protect ourselves from its virulent forms" (p. 4). In other words societies outside America with a relatively high degree of homogeneity and a sense of ethnic identity are considered unnatural.¹⁰ Moralizing statements such

9. P. 4: "ethnic identity is a very slippery concept"; p. 177: "the concept of 'ethnic identity' ought [not] to be viewed... as a mysterious object of study which we humans imperfectly understand". And again in p. 2: "...'identity', a concept ill-defined and ill-understood by historians, including myself, if there ever was one", including other historians in this ill-understanding.

10. But even America, recently, the author believes should be protected from "the narcissistic self-study that today passes... for identity politics, or ethnic studies... American intellectuals owe it to our country to fight the coarse anti-intellectualism, bullying, injustice and provincialism that disfigure its career as the last superpower" in the words of Edward Said whom she quotes in p. 4, and to which she is "very

as these do not breed confidence when they serve as the ideological "basis" of a historical study.

McKee's misunderstanding of the concept of ethnic or national identity in an environment such as Crete leads to her belief that identities, and in particular ethnic identity, are merely scholarly constructions—hence she closes her book by exhorting the scholarly community to engage in the destruction of this concept: "what we [*sc.* the scholars] in fact should be engaged in is the dismantling, the deconstruction—literally—of the concept, 'ethnic identity', without a worry for its eventual reconstruction" (p. 177). More worrying is her statement that historians should ignore people stating their identity: "We [*sc.* the scholars] ought not, in fact, to take people at their word when they proclaim... in categorical terms their identity" (p. 175). In her last chapter she finishes with an attack on ethnic *identity*, although the chapter mostly refers to ethnic homogeneity in Crete, which is also seen as an "illusion". According to the author, not only in Venetian Crete (where the Latins, as she admits, were never more than 2,000 [p. 91], i.e. about 1.5% of the population), but also she claims in modern countries "that are traditionally perceived as ethnically homogeneous, such as Greece, Japan and even France" on close examination ethnic homogeneity has been discovered by the author to be a "myth" (p. 175).

What we have here is a serious problem of method. History is a discipline in the sense that it requires that rules, method and aims are stated clearly and that analysis has to be based on sources and follow these pre-stated rules. Through this method an historical hypothesis is tested whether true or not. On the contrary, the attempt to use a limited set of sources in order to "prove" an ideologically biased belief is not history. What is more, modern ideas are anachronistic when used as a criteria for judging past societies.¹¹ Ms McKee uses various terms such as: *ethnic*, *ethnicity*, *race*, *nation*, *ethnic identity*, *ethnic definition*, *ethnic background*, *ethnic homogeneity*, without defining these terms at all. Once ethnicity is considered to be "a fairly recent coinage" on whose meaning there is no consensus (p. 4) and in another occasion the "markers" that define the populations of Europe that most scholars of

sympathetic". Apparently all kinds of "affirmation of roots" which have been much encouraged so far, are starting to be considered as a threat to the American "melting pot". Hence ethnicity [*sic*] in 14th-century Crete is "unnatural".

11. For instance, Middle Age societies cannot be accused of not respecting what we today call human rights, a concept unknown to these societies.

the history of ethnicity agree upon are said to be «religion, language, customs, and a belief in a common descent» with her addition of "law" (p. 104). The ambiguity, according to the author, concerning the meaning of terms includes "ethnic identity", "race" and "nation" (p. 4). Taking into account the fact that these terms are pivotal to the author's arguments, the lack of any serious analysis of their meaning as they are used in the book render the "conclusions" entirely arbitrary.

McKee uses crucial terms for which she has no precise meaning. In fact "identities", whether "national" or "ethnic", are *cultural identities*, in the sense that very often they are independent of «race». The author, however, commits her most serious methodological error in confusing biological homogeneity, i.e. racial purity, with cultural identities. So she speaks of "ethnic homogeneity" and "ethnic purity" when in fact she means "racial purity", but without actually saying so. Here is an example of this confusion: On p. 99 McKee writes: "Therefore it was not, nor is it now [*sic*] possible to speak in terms of *biologically distinct* Latin and Greek populations. Far too much intermarriage occurred for either community, but especially the Latin one, to claim *ethnic homogeneity* (...)" Then she goes on to triumphantly disprove a theory that no-one ever put forward apart from herself,¹² namely to prove that 14th-century Crete was not "ethnically (i.e. racially) homogeneous". As this is the main theme in the book, it is obvious that it has missed its point and the author's conclusions are entirely wrong. In the meantime she labours on how identity is expressed and tries to describe its various "markers" as «visible signs», unaware of the fact that there are multiple levels of cultural identity, many of them quite subtle but no less significant, although invisible to an "outsider". Thus, if in her documents she cannot find mention of this or that concept, it follows that it does not exist. Let us take one example. "I have sought substantiation of the often-cited 'Greekness', resentment against Latins qua Latins, and so forth of the peasantry, but I find only assertions without substantiation" (p. 220, note 5). According to the author these are a priori assumptions which must be "jettisoned" when we examine the collective sentiments of the past. It is not clear to me why the author expected to find "substantiation" for this collective sentiment in testaments and in the notarial acts dealing with rents of houses or borrowing of money, which was Ms McKee's focus. Based on her sample, she concluded that this animosity is a myth. Had McKee consulted other historical sources, she

12. Unless McKee subscribes to the 19th-century theories of Ph. Fallmerayer.

would have found that the Greek peasantry in Crete took an active part in all the rebellions against the Venetians, that they resisted until the end to their conversion to the Roman Church,¹³ that they considered the Venetians as occupiers of their land, and until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 referred to the Byzantine emperor as "our pious Emperor" in church inscriptions.¹⁴ Additionally, the Venetians were a foreign occupying force who spoke a different language, and had a different creed that they tried to impose forcibly on the population. The author insists unconvincingly that none of these were reasons enough to create any "resentment" from the part of the Greek population against the Latins, simply because she cannot find it in notarial documents.

Multiple levels of identity, however, are present even though a foreign observer, coming from a different culture and unfamiliar with the language, cannot discern them by "visible markers". There are regional vs local identities, "we" vs "them", "our people" vs "foreigners", "our family" vs strangers, male vs female, orthodox vs catholic, to say nothing of the identities created by belonging to a particular social class. The fact, therefore, that a Greek and a Latin are present in a notarial act doing business together gives us virtually no clue about either their sense of identity or their mutual sentiments. This is quite obvious in the case of Jews: they are very much present in notarial acts doing business with both Greeks and Latins; these sources, however, tell us nothing of the realities of Jewish life under Venetian rule. And the expression *pacis tempore existente inter Latinos et Grecos*, which is frequently met in early notarial acts as a condition for the validity of the agreement, shows that everyone concerned knew how fragile the peace between Greeks and Latins was.

One more point. Notarial acts usually give a name without stating its cultural ties. Let us take one example. In a number of notarial documents of the second half of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century we find someone called Leonardo Delaporta, inhabitant of Can-

13. After four and a half centuries of Venetian rule a mere 1-2% of the Cretans had been converted to the Roman Church: N. Panagiotakis, «Η παιδεία κατά τη Βενετοκρατία», in N. Panagiotakis (ed.), *Κρήτη, Ιστορία και Πολιτισμός*, v. 2, Crete 1987, p. 186.

14. D. Tsougarakis, «La tradizione culturale bizantina nel primo periodo della dominazione veneziana a Creta. Alcune osservazioni in merito alla questione dell'identità culturale», *Venezia e Creta. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Iraklion-Chania, 30 settembre - 5 ottobre 1997*, Venice 1998 [Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti], pp. 509-522.

dia, who, either alone or with his brothers Hemanuel and Marco, conducts various business transactions or is a witness in various transactions.¹⁵ He is usually described as *Leonardus Delaporta, habitator Candide*, or *Leonardus Delaporta, principalis, habitator Candide* or *ser Leonardus Delaporta, habitator Candide*. What do these acts tell us about this person? Is he "Latin" or "Greek", Orthodox or Catholic? What is his "ethnicity" and his "identity"? None of these questions can be answered by these documents. As a result of her methodology McKee would find "no visible marker" about Delaporta's identity and would have been guided only by his Venetian name. But other sources, that McKee would not consult, namely Delaporta's own poems, written in Greek, tell us who he was, how he lived and what he thought of himself (see below).

Another component of "ethnicity" (*lege*: cultural identity) that McKee does not take into account is "the belief in a common descent". This is a crucial point because this belief in a common descent creates the sense of historical continuity through time among the members of a society and ultimately shapes their sense of identity. The Cretans' belief, together with their conviction that they were part of the Byzantine Empire,¹⁶ was so strong that it repeatedly manifested itself until the fall of Constantinople. McKee dismisses this belief in a common descent in five lines (p. 102), despite the fact that even the sources that she consulted suggested otherwise. For example, in the narration of Buondelmonti around 1415 about the Calergi family (p. 74, and in full pp. 201-210, n. 84), a simple monk speaks not only of the deep animosity of the people against the Latins, but also and more significantly of "our most holy emperor", ie. the emperor of Byzantium, and of how he perceived the people's Byzantine past, a testimony that should have given her precious insight. Equally, the incident of *papadia Rovithou* (pp. 176-177 [where she is incorrectly called *Rovithi*], and in full in p. 245, n. 18), is one more such example, as is the incident with the monk Milletus (ie. Meletius), cited by De Monacis (p. 163). Both examples show not only the animosity of the Greek population against the Venetians, but also a belief in their common Byzantine past. McKee, however, found "little direct evidence" for a collective sentiment among the peasantry, because "Significantly, only one Greek testator expresses a wish for his daughter

15. M. I. Manoussakas - A. F. van Gemert, «Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα (1324-1435) για τον κρητικό ποιητή Λεονάρδο Ντελλαπόρτα και την οικογένειά του», *Κρητικά Χρονικά* 27 (1987), 86-176.

16. See n. 14 above and n. 24 below.

to marry a Greek" (p. 102) in the notarial acts she examined. Instead, she claims, it was something else that actually differentiated Latins and Greeks: "Membership in one ethnic group or another [sc. Latin or Greek] was deeply conditioned by two factors, class and gender".¹⁷ This argument is simply a *non sequitur*.

SPECIFIC POINTS

p. 91: "...the feudatories and their families [in Candia: city or island?] never reached, much less surpassed, the figure of two thousand individuals"; p. 99: "«Therefore it was not, nor is it now [sic] possible to speak in terms of biologically distinct Latin and Greek populations. Far too much intermarriage occurred for either community, but especially the Latin one, to claim ethnic homogeneity (...): I am not aware of anyone who has spoken of "biologically distinct" communities in Crete, nor does the author cite any relevant bibliography. But even in her own words, it was the Latins, being a tiny proportion of the Cretan population, who could not claim ethnic ("biological", according to the author) homogeneity in the 14th century and later, since they were constantly in danger of being absorbed.

p. 99: "The ambiguity of the commoners' [p. 92: "between five and eight thousand persons at certain times"] ethnicity in the sources reveals a degree of acculturation in daily life that must have *made it impossible to distinguish reliably and consistently between Latins and Greeks by sight and sound*": The point is not whether Latins and Greeks could be distinguished "by sight and sound", but whether they had a different sense of identity. Even so, we must at least give the 14th-century Cretans credit of being able to immediately distinguish their fellow Cretans at a glance. McKee shows here a striking ignorance of even the most basic characteristics of the society she is trying to understand, in which everyone is categorized by even the slightest trace of accent or their physiognomy or their clothes, etc, etc. One of the most obvious examples is provided by the treaty between the Venetians and the rebel noble Alexios Calergis in 1299, where a list of different social classes is listed: *Item volumus quod omnes franchi... debeant esse franchi... Item volumus quod qui est feudatus sit feudatus et qui est arcondus sit arcondus et qui est arcondopolus debeat esse arcondopolus et qui est vasmulus debeat*

17. McKee does not elaborate on this point, but taken at face value it would imply that upper class/male signifies Latin, while lower class/female signifies Greek (!)

*esse vasmulus et qui est latinus debeat esse et haberi latinus... Item quod nullus agrafus possit accipi pro villano... Item volumus quod omnes rebelles et judei et fabri possint habitare ubicumque voluerint...*¹⁸ How were all these people distinguished, one may well wonder, if not "by sight and sound" — certainly not by carrying and displaying their credentials and family trees all the time. In the same treaty there are listed hundreds of names of simple peasants, priests and monks who took part in the rebellion and are being freed from the status of villein or their free status and their safety are guaranteed.

pp. 100-132. This is the chapter ("The Obligation of Our Blood") in which the author seeks "to broach the matter of ethnicity from a modern perspective" (p. 101) in order to discern Latins and Greeks. Her method to achieve this is to examine what she calls "ethnic markers": "Religion, language, customs and a belief in a common descent are the markers that most scholars... of ethnicity agree define the populations of Europe". Of these "markers" she examines "Religion as ethnic marker" (pp. 102-115) and "Language as ethnic marker" (pp. 115-132).

McKee avoids the obvious fact: that the Venetians in Crete were so small in numbers (around 2 per cent) compared to the Greek orthodox population, that they were always in danger of being entirely absorbed (and a large part of them were finally absorbed) ethnically, religiously and linguistically. Hence the continuous attempts of the Venetians in Venice to keep the two groups apart. It is strange that although in another context (e.g. p. 135) the author observes that "many of the Latin feudatories... were immersed in a culture [sc. the Greek-Cretan] that... was now more familiar to them than was the culture of Venice", she fails to see the implications and the importance of this point.

The description of the ecclesiastical/religious situation in Crete (pp. 106-107) is entirely incorrect: the papal document of 1368 discussed by J. Gill, [«Pope Urban V (1362-1370) and the Greeks of Crete», *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), 461-468]¹⁹ is misunderstood, as the

18. K. D. Mertziou, «Η συνθήκη Ενετών-Καλλέργη και οι συνοδεύοντες αυτήν κατ'όλογοι», *Κρητικά Χρονικά* 3 (1949), 270-272.

19. It is interesting that the title "Uncommon Dominion" of this book is taken from the following phrase in the same papal document: *...in insula Cretensis... dux et Commune venetiarum super Latinos et Grecos plenius solito dominantur*. Gill of course translated "plenius solito" as "more complete", all the more so as the Pope sent this letter immediately after the suppression of the revolt of St Titus, when Greeks and Latins in Crete had revolted against Venice. Ms McKee, on the other

author seems unaware of the difference between the Orthodox Greek rite and the Greek rite as modified according to Latin customs imposed by the Roman Church. So, e.g., she believes that “the population faithful to the Greek church” had only one restriction imposed on their worship, namely “the requirement that Greek priests be ordained on the island”, whereas the exact opposite was true: no Greek orthodox priest was allowed to be ordained in Crete and no one *could* be ordained as no Orthodox bishop was allowed by the Venetians to reside in Crete. (This assertion is repeated in p. 137, where the author insists that “Greek priests were ordained under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Latin church on the island”, ignoring that if they did, then they were not *Greek Orthodox* priests).²⁰ This practice eventually led to a shortage of priests in the countryside and forced the Latin feudatories—who faced problems in their villages—to press Venice to grant leaves to various villagers or monks to travel outside Crete in order to be ordained and then return. Misunderstanding this situation, she wonders why Latins supported these petitions for ordination of Greek priests (p. 107), ignoring the fact that since there were almost no Catholic churches and priests in the countryside, the Latin nobles who lived there most of the time rather than in the cities, used the Greek churches for their religious needs as well.

The attempt to discern a person’s ethnic identity by their testaments alone is futile in most cases because the cultural situation was far too complex. The case of Giorgio Zeno’s testament (p. 113) should have prevented her from coming to the conclusion that “the regime viewed religion as a Greek ethnic marker” (sic), which, she promises, is “a point that will become clear farther on” (p. 112). The same applies to her belief that one can usually discern between Latin and Greek clergy through the use of the terms *presbyter* and *papas* (for Latin and Greek priests respectively) or *monacha* and *calogrea* (for Latin and Greek nuns respectively, pp. 112-113). When it becomes obvious that this is impossible (as in the case of Giorgio Zeno’s testament, which she

hand, translated “*plenius solito*” as “uncommon dominion”, insisting at the same time that this is not in contradiction with Gill’s translation (p. 195, note 1).

20. Ms McKee refers to G. Fedalto’s, «Le sénat vénitienne et les églises chrétiennes de Crète au XIVème siècle», *Πεπραγμένα του Γ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*, v. 2, Athens 1974, pp. 100-101 as a corroboration of her views, but at this point Fedalto actually writes: “Le plus souvent les papates grecs qui ne voulaient pas être ordonnées par des évêques latins devaient l’être en dehors de l’île, ...à Coron et Modon...”.

considers as “rich with ethnic ambiguity”) then she blames the documents because they display “loose usage” which “falls short of perfect consistency”, hence “the field of inquiry is laid with mines”. This realization, however, does not prevent her from continuing the same line of inquiry. McKee does not seem to understand the situation of the women either, particularly of Greek Orthodox women married to Latin men, who continue to adhere to the Orthodox Church even after their marriage. She is constantly surprised of this and considers that it “needs explaining” (p. 111).

McKee’s discussion of the language “marker” is superficial because she lacks a thorough knowledge of Greek and of Greek sources. She gives a reference to M. I. Manoussakas’, *Λεονάρδου Ντελλαπόρτα ποιήματα (1403/1411)*, Athens 1995 and A. van Gemert’s «Ο Στέφανος Σαχλίκης και η εποχή του», *Θησαυρίσματα* 17 (1980), 36-130, but does not seem to have profited much from them, probably because of her problem with Greek.²¹ Otherwise she would have gained a lot from Dellaporta’s description of himself (Manoussakas, *op. cit.*, p. 252 v. 1200 ff), which she fails to discuss, though he speaks about various “markers” (to use the author’s favourite term), such as his *genea*, his country, his religion and his schooling. There he describes himself as “Orthodox Christian” and as “Cretan”, as a Candiote and a “child of noble people” who went to school from a young age and learnt “Frankish [= Latin] and Greek letters” and then became a lawyer. From this description and from his Greek poems one would assume, following the author’s method, that he was “Greek”. From his Venetian name alone and the notarial acts referring to him, one would assume that he was “Latin”. But he was a Greek- and Latin-speaking Orthodox of Venetian descent who served as a Cretan-Venetian diplomat.

The discussion (p. 124 ff) of religion and language as “ethnic markers”, therefore, is naive and comes to an anachronistic (not to say un-historical) argument: “I would argue that the Candiotes of yesterday would have had just as much trouble articulating why they defined themselves in whatever way they did as we have in defining them today” (!). How they defined themselves and why they did can be found in the sources, but apparently not in the sources McKee restricted herself to.

21. Indicative of this problem is the fact that the Greek words in the bibliographic references at the endnotes are constantly transliterated with misspellings. See “Typographical and other errors” below. The transliteration, too, is entirely idiosyncratic.

p. 116: "...an outsider visiting Crete would be unable to pinpoint where Greek culture left off and Latin culture began»: a) This would be true only for Candia in the 16th and 17th centuries. b) Historians of Venetian Crete, both Greek and non-Greek, have always talked about the convergence (συγκρητισμός) of cultures in Crete by the 16th cent.²² The author seems unaware of this or of the cultural, especially literary, products of this convergence.

p. 131: B. de Brixano's act (no. 503, 16-12-1301), in which a liberated slave is called "Romanus", is misunderstood and thought to be "not a long way from the concept of 'blood' to lock people into a juridically determined condition of slavery". In fact the act uses the term which the Greeks mostly used for themselves at the time ("Romaioi") in its latinized form since the act is in Latin, and the intention was to show that after his manumission the former slave would have the same rights as the rest of the "Romaioi". McKee seems to have misinterpreted this case.

pp. 133-167: In this chapter, which deals with the revolt of St Titus (1363-1365), McKee again reveals an ignorance of practices which were common and well-known,²³ and continues to unsuccessfully distinguish ethnicities and religious attachments by simple names in notarial acts, testaments or lists. For instance, when De Monacis provides a list of Greeks who became part of the feudatory group during the revolt, Ms McKee exclaims: "Oddly, these are not Greek cognomina" (!) (p. 164). On the other hand cultural situations whose meaning is fairly obvious fail to be understood for what they are. For example, the author wonders emphatically "Where indeed... is the ethnic strife that interested observers from the fifteenth century down to today have used to explain Candia's history?" (pp. 160-161). However, she remarks that "The peasantry [who were Greek] under the leadership of the some Greek archontes and Latin feudatories... are the ones who prolong the revolt literally for years", and she discovers through "governmental records" that the support for the revolt within Chandax (where a large percentage of non-Greeks lived) "dwindled, once a full-fledged peasants' revolt [who were Greek] threatened, led by portions of the Greek nobility" (p. 165); and

22. See e.g. N. Panagiotakis, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 165-195 (esp. pp. 186-194: "Αρμονική συναίρεση"), and numerous other works.

23. E.g. the fact that "Elena continued her devotion to the Greek church after her marriage to a Latin feudatory" (p. 149) is considered for some reason worth pointing out, although it was common practice.

a little before that (p. 163) she quoted De Monacis who presented one of the Greek rebels as justifying the execution of Andrea Corner by saying "I took an oath to bring us liberty and uproot you schismatics from this island, which is our patrimony", while in another instance a Greek woman hurls terrible curses at a Greek noble who joined the Venetians and at the Latins in general (p. 176 and 245 n. 18). These are all indications of real ethnic strife, which McKee does not recognize as such. And while she describes how "Ioannes Calergi carried before him the insignia of the Byzantine emperor of Constantinople, and, fighting for the faith and for freedom from Latin rule, attacked towns..." (p. 142), nevertheless she considers that the struggle of the Greek nobility, in general, "lacked the quality of a national or patriotic fight" (p. 135).²⁴

It is not surprising, therefore, that the analysis of the revolt in the last three pages of this chapter (pp. 165-167) is not credible, because the author lacks the methodological tools for this analysis, as she herself admits: "Here today's vocabulary fails most tellingly, for it is difficult to describe the significance of the 1363 revolt without recourse to modern, anachronistic terminology" (p. 166). Nevertheless McKee claims that the revolt of St Titus "sought to redefine the people of this colony as neither Greek nor Latin, but as Cretan". It apparently never crossed her mind that "Greek" and "Cretan" or "Latin" and "Cretan" were not mutually exclusive identities but could coexist and, in fact, did. Her attempt, finally, to relate the events of the revolt to the wider subject of colonization and draw more general conclusions (pp. 166-167) seems irrelevant.

pp. 168-177: In this small chapter ("Conclusion") the author recapitulates her arguments and attempts to draw the new picture of Venetian Crete according to her own findings.

What is interesting in this chapter is that the author suddenly realized that "ethnic identity" was the cause for the false traditional picture of Venetian Crete, because it was something politically contrived to artificially keep the two communities apart. In the process of evolving this absurd argument the author speaks about "racial and ethnic ter-

24. Ms McKee is not aware of N. Svoronos' article: «Η Ελληνική Ιδέα στη Βυζαντινή Αυτοκρατορία», *Ανάλεκτα Νεοελληνικής Ιστορίας και Ιστοριογραφίας*, Ξ. Γιαταγάνας ed., Athens (Themelio) (= *Πανεπιστήμιον Αθηνών, Επίσημοι Λόγοι εκφωνηθέντες κατά το έτος 1975-76*, τ. Κ'), pp. 145-161, and probably idem, «Το νόημα και η τυπολογία των κρητικών επαναστάσεων του 13ου αιώνα», *Σόμμεϊκτα* 8 (1989), 1-13 (this is cited in the Bibliography but I have not been able to locate it in the notes), which would have helped her better understand the meaning of the events she describes.

minology", "ethnic identity", "national identity" and "ethnic homogeneity" as one and the same thing. And having disposed in about a page of "ethnic homogeneity" as a "myth" (pp. 174-175), she then proceeds to dispose of "ethnic identity". She never mentions, however, "ethnic purity", which served as the sub-title of her book although it is obvious that she speaks mainly about racial purity. For instance, she thinks that a suitable parallel for the racial (which she calls "ethnic") diversity between Latins and Greeks in Crete is the American colonists and the Negroes (p. 174). It is also interesting that in this final chapter she writes almost exclusively about Candia city (Chandax) but at the same time generalizes about the whole of Crete without almost a shred of source material concerning the countryside.

The closing pages of this book are not historical conclusions but, literally, an expression of a political thesis, i.e. the "moral stance" of the author against the concept of "ethnic identity", which is condemned in the strongest terms.

These opinions, however, may be well-received in certain academic circles, but they do not represent a new historical approach. As a matter of fact, they have little connection with the history of Venetian Crete and its society.

SECONDARY POINTS

pp. 1-2: In her rapid reference to Cretan history the author committed some factual errors. For instance she thinks that the "Second Byzantine period had lasted for only one hundred and fifty years", whereas of course it lasted for about 250 years, from 961 to 1210/11 (the error is repeated "the one and a half centuries of later Byzantine rule" in pp. 1-2). She also thinks that the Muslims had captured Crete "in the mid-tenth century", whereas they started their conquest in c. 827, and also claims that Crete had experienced a "century of Muslim rule" (p. 2), whereas the Arabs kept Crete for over 130 years (827-961). Finally, she counted "three hundred and ninety years of Ottoman rule", while of course from the fall of Chandax in 1669 to the official union of Crete with Greece in 1912 are not 390 but 243 years.

p. 27: "Sithia and other towns in the eastern districts". There were no "other towns" in the district east of Chandax; even Seitia was usually described as a large village rather than a town.

p. 30: "...the [Venetian] colonists... did [not] rule the land they had conquered»: It was not the colonists themselves who conquered Crete

but the army that Venice sent against the Genoese Enrico Pescatore, the so-called "count of Malta". Hence the parallelism McKee makes with the Franks in the Morea is inappropriate.

p. 32: "The word 'feudatory' appears nowhere in the... thirteenth-century documents": This is not true: the term *feudatus* occurs in the 1299 treaty between the Venetians and Alexios Calergis (p. 271 l. 195 [see note 18 above]: *qui est feudatus sit feudatus...*; the word *feudum* appears, too, in this treaty, repeatedly).

p. 33: "The words "feudatory" and "fief" imply that Venice intended to impose some sort of feudal relations on the colony": This is a truism. There were no other relations that could be imposed on a rural society in 1210.

p. 42: "My impression is that... men of ambiguous social standing were gaining entrance into the Great Council": This is not the author's "impression". The sources express it in very strong terms.

p. 66: "...exported a large amount of wine": Actually one *caretellum* (p. 207), i.e. a small cart. The same cargo contained some much more interesting commodities, namely a thousand pounds of *thymiama* and two hundred pounds of linen, on which McKee fails to commend.

p. 82: "she felt an attachment to the Greek church in spite of her marriage to a Latin": this remark shows unfamiliarity of the author with the Cretan society of the time.

p. 83: "...whether they [= children born outside marriage] evoked an emotional [claim to their fathers] as well is, of course, difficult to determine". She is unaware of scores of examples showing the love of fathers (and even of their legal wives) towards their children, legal as well as illegal.

p. 93: "...Elisabeth Santschi compiled an extensive sample of 732 contracts... Her sample... is nevertheless small. (...) these numbers mirror trends that emerge from my smaller sample of documents...": These phrases contradict each other.

p. 96: "...like the monopoly on grain held by the [Cretan] government": That there was not exactly a monopoly of grain, see D. Tsougarakis, «Η σιτική πολιτική της Βενετίας στην Κρήτη τον 13ο-14ο αιώνα», *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά* 3 (1990), 333-385.

p. 104: The fact that after 1204 the seat of the Byzantine Empire was not Constantinople but Nicaea hardly justifies the view that "the Byzantine Empire disappeared from the political scene for approximately sixty years».

p. 198, n. 46: "Later in the fourteenth century, these divisions [sc.

the *sexteria*] were replaced by the older Byzantine system of dividing the island into four *turme*": This is incorrect: in the fourteenth century the Venetians divided Crete into four *territoria*, which were subdivided into *castellanie*, while the term *turma* continued to be used for smaller districts.

p. 238, n. 24: "It is interesting that the rebels [of St Titus] at this point did not think to turn to the Byzantine emperor". Unlike McKee, the rebels seem to have been aware of the international situation of their time and obviously knew that such a move would have been futile, in view of the fact that the Byzantine emperor had to save his own territory from the Sultan Murad I, who was then ravaging Thrace.

Finally it should be noted that McKee has not used an important book for 14th-century Crete, Z. Tsirpanlis' "*Κατάστιχο εκκλησιών και Μοναστηρίων του Κοινοῦ*" (1248-1548) [*"Catasticum ecclesiarum et monasteriorum comunis"* (1248-1548)], Ioannina 1985.

TYPOGRAPHICAL AND OTHER ERRORS

p. 29: "the see of Chiron": there was no such see. The bishopric was called "episcopatus Chironensis", which was a corruption of the Greek "ἐπισκοπή Χερρονήσου".

p. 73: *papas Nichiforas*, instead of the correct: *Nichiforos*.

p. 77: "the village of Calandatea": this is the village of Kalandarea in the region of Mylopotamos (West central Crete); *Andre Corner*: instead of the correct: *Andrea*.

p. 80: Giacomo Corner is called once *Cornaraki* (p. 80) and then *Corneraki* (p. 82 and p. 214 n. 131).

p. 81: *Maria Scordili Capsalivi*, instead of the correct: *Capsocalivi*.

p. 83: *γασμούλοι*, instead of the correct: *γασμουλοι* of the text.

p. 112: *calogera*, instead of the correct: *calogrea* (also p. 226, n. 60).

p. 129: *Avogadori di Comuni*, instead of the correct: *Avogadori di Comune*.

p. 143: *Anapolis*, instead of the correct: *Anopolis*.

p. 152: *Skordilakis*, instead of the correct: *Skordilis*.

p. 155: *da Raguseo*, instead of the correct: *Raguseo*.

p. 184 and passim: *yperpera in cretensia currentia*, instead of the correct: *yperpera in Creta currentia*.

p. 186: *intrascriptam*, instead of the correct: *infrascriptam*.

p. 189, n. 6: *avtiparathese*, instead of the correct *antiparathese*; *13os-os ai.*, instead of the correct: *13os-15os ai.*

p. 196, n. 15: *Diethnou*, instead of the correct: *Diethnous*; *Center*, instead of the correct: *Congress*; n. 29: *Apophasis*, instead of the correct: *Apophaseis* (and *passim*).

p. 197, n. 33: *approbatum*, instead of the correct: *approbatam*; n. 38: the latin text lacks the year at the end and becomes garbled. *Bartholomeus de Hengelardi* in this text (and in p. 229, n. 80) is called *Bartholomeo de Hengelardis* in p. 29 and *Bartholomeus de Hengelardis* in p. 228, n. 74 and p. 229, n. 81.

p. 198, n. 54: *colonial*, instead of the correct: *coloniale*.

p. 204, n. 18: *filium*, instead of the correct: *filius*; *iudium*, instead of the correct: *iudicum*. Some sentences of this text seem not to be transcribed correctly.

p. 207, n. 45: *illa*, instead of the correct: *illas*. The text *Tu vero pro meo nabulo... galeota* has been transcribed incorrectly (it lacks the sentence with the price).

p. 207, n. 46: *Thebas, Thebis*: it is highly unlikely that the town of Thebes in central Greece was meant in this notarial act (as the author believes in p. 66), since it would be impossible for a ship to sail to this inland town.

p. 210, n. 89: *Ernest Gerland, «L'Histoire...»*, instead of the correct: *Ernst Gerland, «Histoire...»*.

p. 211, n. 104: *tales*, instead of the correct: *talem*; *venturos*, instead of the correct: *venturum*.

p. 214, n. 130: *Suvedpriou*, instead of the correct: *Synedriou*.

p. 216, n. 165: *Charalmabos Gasparis*, instead of the correct: *Charalambos Gasparis*.

p. 224, n. 48: *principale*, instead of the correct: *principalis*.

p. 225, n. 52: *...apud dictam ecclesiam apoxilu (?) in antea usque ad dictum tempus* cannot be a correct reading.

p. 231, n. 116: *Kallergopouloas*, instead of the correct: *Kallergopoulos* (and p. 256); n. 118: *gastaldus*, instead of the correct: *gastaldum*.

p. 233, n. 131: *quos*, instead of the correct: *quod*; *consiliarum*, instead of the correct: *consiliarium*; *certi*, instead of the correct: *ceteri*.

p. 237, n. 9: *prokalesa*, instead of the correct: *prokalesasa*; *Imerolion*, instead of the correct: *Imerologion*; *apokleimo*, instead of the correct: *apokleismo*.

p. 240, n. 60: *kretike*, instead of the correct: *kretika*; *Ekdidomena tou*, instead of the correct: *Ekdidomena ek tou*.

p. 259: "*Some Remarks on the of Cristoforo Buondelmonti*", instead of the correct: "*Some Remarks on the 'Cretica' of Cristoforo Buondelmonti*".

CONCLUSIONS

Identities, whether "ethnic" or otherwise, are matters of considerable complexity and display many different levels; as such they should always be examined through a variety of sources and by scholars who are familiar with the particular culture and the relevant mentalities. McKees's book could be a useful study on the administrative organization of 14th-century Crete. As it is, it is deeply flawed by a) the author's unfamiliarity with Cretan history, the Greek language and Greek sources; b) by her research methodology; and c) by her ideological bias. I would not recommend this book to unsuspecting readers, while specialist scholars should use it with great caution. I would not think that this study will change the view of Venetian Crete which has been provided by scholarship so far.

ΔΗΜΗΤΡΗΣ ΤΣΟΥΓΚΑΡΑΚΗΣ, *Ἡ Κρήτη ἐπὶ βενετοκρατίας καὶ ὁ μύθος τῶν πρωτότυπων ἰδεῶν* (σ. 43-64).

Οἱ γενικὲς θεωρήσεις τῆς Βενετοκρατίας στὴν Κρήτη πρέπει νὰ διατυπώνονται μὲ περισκεψὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντοτε μὲ χρῆση μιᾶς μεγάλῃς ποικιλίας πηγῶν, λόγῳ τῶν παρερμηνειῶν ποὺ εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ ἐπιφέρει ἡ στήριξη σὲ μιὰ μόνο κατηγορία πηγῶν, μεγάλο μέρος τῶν ὁποίων μάλιστα παραμένει ἀνέκδοτο. Αὐτὸ ἰσχύει ἀκόμη περισσότερο ὅταν ἐξετάζονται θέματα ποὺ ἐπιδέχονται πολυπλοκὰς ἐρμηνεῖες, ὅπως οἱ νοοτροπίες, ἢ ζητήματα τῶν ὁποίων ἡ ἔρευνα ἐντείνεται ἀπὸ κάποια «μύδα», ὅπως οἱ ταυτότητες — πολιτισμικὲς καὶ ἄλλες.

Τὸ βιβλίον τῆς κας Sally McKee, *Uncommon Dominion. Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity* ἀποπειρᾶται, μεταξὺ ἄλλων, νὰ ἐξετάσει τὸ ζήτημα τῶν «ταυτοτήτων» στὴν Κρήτη τοῦ 14ου αἰ. καὶ νὰ ἀνατρέψει τὸ «μύθος» τόσο τῆς ἐχθρότητας τῶν δύο κοινοτήτων — Ἑλλήνων καὶ Λατίνων, ὀρθοδόξων καὶ καθολικῶν — ὅσο καὶ τῆς «ἐθνοτικῆς» ἢ «πολιτιστικῆς» διαφορικότητας. Γιὰ τὸ μὲν πρῶτο ἡ συγγραφέας θεωρεῖ ὅτι οἱ πηγὲς καταδεικνύουν τὴν ἀντίθεση ὄχι Ἑλλήνων-Λατίνων, ὀρθοδόξων-καθολικῶν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀντίθεση πόλης-ὑπαίθρου, ἐνῶ γιὰ τὸ δεύτερο θεωρεῖ ὅτι ἡ ἔννοια τῆς διαφορικτικῆς «ταυτοτήτας» Ἑλλήνων-Λατίνων συντηροῦνταν σκόπιμα ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξουσία προκειμένου νὰ διατηρηθεῖ τὸ καθεστῶς, ἐνῶ στὴν πραγματικότητα οἱ δύο ὁμάδες εἶχαν σημαντικὰ συγκλίνει. Ὡστόσο τὰ συμπεράσματα τῆς συγγραφέως δὲν προέρχονται ἀπὸ μιὰ ὑπόθεση ἐργασίας ποὺ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ἀπὸ τίς πηγές, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἐκ τῶν προτέρων πεποιθήσῃ της, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ δαιμονοποιεῖται ἡ ἐθνικὴ ταυτότητα ἢ ἡ ἐθνικὴ συνείδηση, οἱ ὁποῖες καὶ καταδικάζονται ἠθικὰ ὡς κακοποιὰ μικρόβια τῶν κοινωνιῶν.

Μολονότι τὸ βιβλίον αὐτὸ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι ἕνα χρήσιμον ἐργαλεῖο κυρίως γιὰ τὴ διοικητικὴ ὀργάνωση τοῦ Regno di Candia τὸ 14ο αἰ., τελικῶς καταλήγει ὡς μιὰ προσπάθεια «νέας» ἐρμηνείας ζητημάτων ἰδιαίτερα πολυπλοκῶν, ὅπως οἱ συλλογικὲς νοοτροπίες καὶ οἱ πολιτιστικὲς ταυτότητες, ἐρμηνεῖες γιὰ τίς ὁποῖες ἡ συγγραφέας δὲ φαίνεται νὰ διαθέτει τὴν ἀνάλογη σφαιρικὴ ἀντίληψη τοῦ συγκεκριμένου χώρου. Ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα ἔχουμε μιὰ εἰκόνα γιὰ τὴν κρητικὴ κοινωνία τοῦ 14ου αἰ. μὲ πολλὰ κενὰ καὶ ἀκόμη περισσότερες παρερμηνεῖες.