

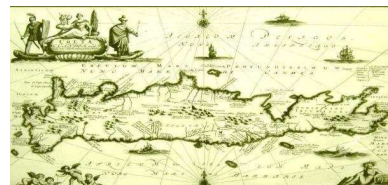


**Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**

## Crete in Greek mythology (1)

(*Zeus, Europe, Heracles* und their connection to Crete)

An article from our NLUK board member *Michael Bloechinger Daeumling*, Mainz



**Preface:** Fairy tales, legends, sagas and myths – already since earliest childhood fascinated of it, it was inevitably to come across the „Greek “stories. “Greek” is set in quotation marks because most of the “stories” date from a time when the country as well as the population as we know them today, still did not exist. Unfortunately there are no written documents since the events happened up to 5.000 years and more in the past. The oldest received texts are *Homer’s epics* and the *Theogony of Hesiod*, which were already rated as significant for the Greek Gods myth by *Herodotus* (antique Greek historian - 484 BC – 425 BC). I was unable to find exact dates about *Homer* during my investigations. The epoch, to which he may has lived, is still discussed. *Herodotus*, who was born around 480 BC, estimated that *Homer* was born approx 400 years before himself. Other sources again „argue“ that *Homer* has lived at the time of the Trojan war, thus approx. 1.200 BC. By all means, *Homer* spoke not about the „Greeks“ but about “Argives”, “Danaer” and “Achaier”. *Herodotus* than used the term “Hellenes”. „The Greeks “were mentioned for the first time by *Aristotle*, whereby this referred to the inhabitants of the central Epirus and not to the whole of the population living in „Greece “. But I get off the point, as “**Crete in Greek mythology**” should be the contents of this leaflet. Regardless of this I must refer to a further circumstance, which made my investigations substantially more difficult. Indeed the fact that stories in times before *Homer*, *Hesiod* and *Herodot* were only partly written down but continued to give „from mouth to mouth “. We all know this simple children’s game – Chinese whispers. Something totally different comes out at the end than was brought in at the beginning. Thus it also behaves with „the legends of the classical antiquity“. The may be are similar in the contents - nevertheless you will be able to determine substantial discrepancies depending upon translator and/or author. That won’t be Therefore please understand if one or the other story is not known to you the way written below – a proper reference is given at the end of this leaflet. Please keep in mind that I only have German literature (some internet links are available in English as well) and therefore need to translate the texts on my best knowledge.

Last but not least:

- The connoisseurs of Greece, Crete and „the legends of the classical antiquity“ will not experience something new and would like to forgive, if I once in a while get off the point / run off the track. Nevertheless, it is surely interesting, how often and at which opportunities the island Crete was mentioned in the stories.
- The sequence „of stories“ is not intended to be exhaustive and/or chronological accuracy.
- You know further examples? Please send me a note with reference to the source at:  
[NLUK@gmx.net](mailto:NLUK@gmx.net)

Many thanks in advance.

In the beginning was *Chaos* [Χάος]

*Chaos* was alone, around him infinite emptiness and deep darkness. After thousands of years of isolation he was weary of it and created (or bore) the earth goddess *Gaia* [Γαία]. Followed by *Tartaros*\* [Τάρταρος – the underworld], *Erebos* [Ερεβος – God of darkness in the underworld], *Nyx* [Νύξ – Goddess of darkness, the Night] und *Eros* [Ερος – God of Love]. (\**here we have the first „problem“ - in another version, Tartaros is not the brother of the Gaia but one of her sons!*)



Gaia. Detail of the gigantomachia: attic-red-figure bowl, 410-400 v. Chr.

*Gaia* herself bore *Uranos* [Ουρανός – Heaven], *Pontos* [Πόντος – the Sea] and *Ourea* [Ορεα – the Mountains]. Those her sons became also her husband's (!) with those she “brought out” further gods. Together with *Pontos* the gods of Seas and with *Uranos* the 12 Titans and other giants (Cyclopes, Hekatonchires, Gigants,...). Further on we will elaborate on two of them: *Rhea* [Ρέα] and *Cronus* [Κρόνος]

*Rhea* and *Cronus*, although siblings, “married”. After *Cronus*, with *Gaia*'s assistance, overturned his father *Uranus* from his Throne, he was cursed by him “that his children return what he did to his father!” For fear about that he bade *Rhea* to bring him every child that she would get. Thus he devoured the first five bore by *Rhea* (*Demeter*, *Hera*, *Hades*, *Hestia* und *Poseidon*).

When *Rhea* again expected a child, she was in a desperate way, and therefore consults her parents, *Uranus* and *Gaia*. These advised her to give birth at the island of *Crete* and to give *Cronus* a stone instead. So it happened and *Rhea* gave birth to her son *Zeus* [Ζεύς Ζεύς bzw. Δίας] at *Crete* in a cave near *Lyktos* [Λύκτος / Λύττος] (Cave of *Psychro* [Ψυχρό], also known as *Zeus-Cave* or *Diktaian cave*; therefore see also our leaflet [No. 035-04/E - Excursion to the Psychro-Cave](#)).



Raised by the nymphs of forest, *Adrasteia* and *Ide*, fed by the goat *Amaltheia* and protected by the *Curetes* he grew up, still on *Crete*, in the *Idaean Cave* (therefore see our leaflet [No. 017-04/E - Excursion to the Idaean Cave](#)) (again, opinions differ; according to *Hesiod*, *Zeus* was born and raised near *Lyktos* at *Crete* while according to *Polybios* and *Pausanias* *Lykaion* in *Arcadia* was the place of birth and *Rhea* hereafter brought *Zeus* to *Crete*).

**Fig.:** Rhea brings a stone wound in diapers to Cronus

First of all let's remain with *Zeus*, who, according to *Hesiod*, grew up fast and got his father *Cronus* to disgorge the stone together with his five siblings with a trick. Following the tradition of his „ancestors“, he then married his sister *Hera* [Ἥρα] and they had several offspring's (*Hebe*, *Ilithyia*, *Arge*; according to *Homer* also *Hephaistos*, according to *Hesiod* also *Ares*) Nevertheless, *Zeus* was a real “philanderer“ and womanized dozens of other women (Goddess's as well as rank and file). His wife *Hera* observed this very jealous prompting *Zeus* to change his shape very often to chase his “beloved” in all sorts of animal and human figures. For example, he transformed himself into a bull to court the beautiful *Europa*, daughter of the Phoenician king *Agenor* and his wife *Telephasse*, and kidnap her as such to *Crete*. In *Gustav Schwab*'s book it reads the following way (I only have a German version of this book and therefore need to translate at my best knowledge):

>>„ In the land of *Tyre* and *Sidon* the maiden *Europe* grew up, the daughter of King *Agenor*, in the deep seclusion of her father's palace.“

„*Zeus* the *Kronide*, was hit by the bullets of the goddess of love, which alone was able to defeat the invictus God father, and moved by the beauty of young *Europe*.

But because he fears the wrath of the jealous *Hera* and also could not hope to indulge the innocent sense of the virgin, the wily god thought of a new list. He transformed his shape and became a bull. But what a bull!“ ...

„More and more attractive the wonderful bull seemed to the virgin, she dared it and pressed a kiss on his shining forehead. Yet the animal let hear a joyful roaring, a roar not like other common bulls, but it sounded like the sound of a Lydian flute, which through-resounds a mountain valley. Then he cowered down to the feet of the beautiful princess, looked yearningly at her, turned his neck towards her and showed his broad backs.“

„ ... she then swung herself smiling on his back, while her friends watched lagging and indecisive. The bull however, robbed this one, which he had wanted, jumped up from the soil. In the beginning he went very gently with the virgin, but in a way that her companions could not keep pace with his walk. When he had the meadows in his back and the bold beach in his front, he doubled his walk and did not equal anymore a trotting bull, but a flying steed. And before Europe could deliberate herself, he jumped in a single bound in the sea and swam with his booty thither.“

„Finally, near evening they reached a far bank. The bull swung ashore, let the virgin slide gently from his back below a arched tree and disappeared from her view. In his place trod a wonderful, godlike man, who explained to her, that he is the dominator of the island of Crete and that he will patronize her, if he will be delighted by her. Europe, in her hopeless loneliness, handed him her hand as a sign of her compliance, and Zeus had achieved the goal of his desires. Also he disappeared as he had come.“<<



Europe and the bull,  
Attic red figure Krater, ~ 490 BC. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese, Italien, Inv RC7456

Afterwards Europe purged first into rage, then into mourning and last but not least into self hate. She vehement beg to meet the bull again to mangle him, to wrest his horns out of his head. After that she troubled with suicide thoughts and plan to quite her life by a jump from the cliffs but however had not the courage to do so. Thus it happened until the goddess Aphrodite appeared.

„Console yourself, Europe! Zeus is it, who robbed you; you are the earthly wife of the invincible God; your name will become immortally; because the foreign world part, which accepted you, from now on is called Europe!“

She bore Zeus 3 sons: *Minos*, *Rhadamanthys* and *Sarpedon* and married the true sovereign of **Crete**, King *Asterios*, who then adopted the 3 “God sons”.

So far the probably most known and most common tradition of „Europe“. Hans Georg Wunderlich wrote: >> *A less known and less romantic tradition can be found with Herodot (I, 2): Afterwards, so they say (the Persian), some Hellenes, whose exact origin is not know, arrived in Tyros in Phoinikien and robbed the kings daughter Europe. They probably were from Crete.“*

*This Asiatic version, seen from the point of view of the defeated and robbed ones, seems to have resisted the pretty >propaganda fairy tale< of the Hellenes for many centuries. Anyhow, it is found in the sixth after-christian century within the Byzantine world chronicle of Johannes Malalas. There is written, that long after this >unfortunate evening< people in Tyrus remembered this in annual funeral services, than Agenor lost his daughter Europe and our Continent got its ancestress by a Cretan commando operation..“<<*

I could now continue with Europe’s son *Minos*, his story and his descendant, however, first I would like to report about another descendant of Zeus.

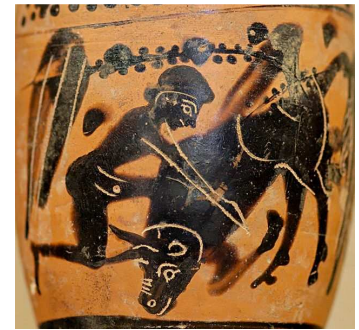
**H**eracles, son of Zeus and *Alcmene*.

Zeus fell in love with *Alcmene* and appeared in the shape of her husband *Amphitryon*. Fooled this way she abandon herself to Zeus and thereafter bore *Heracles*. *Hera* in her jealousy hated *Heracles* exceedingly and pursued him lifelong. Thus she moved him, among other things, in insanity, whereupon *Heracles* killed his wife and his 3 sons. To make atonement for this act *Heracles* should step into service of King *Eurystheus* and manage 12 tasks for him. The 7th Task – catching the *Cretan bull* – brought him to **Crete**.

The life and work of *Heracles* is verbosely represented in many different books. In Gustav Schwabs Book „Die schönsten Sagen des klassischen Altertums“, the Story covers nearly 50 Pages. The Brothers Stefa-

nides dedicated a whole book to him. However, all have got in common that the 7th task, the task which led him to **Crete**, has only a few lines. Here I would like to quote again extracts from Gustav Schwab:

>> *The king Minos in Crete had promised the God Poseidon to sacrifice him what would emerge first from the sea; because Minos had stated that he did not possess an animal, which is worthy, to serve for a such high victim.. Therefore the God let an exceptionally beautiful bull ascend from the sea; however, the wonderful shape of the bull, which presents his view, hoodwinks Minos to put the same secretly under his herds and to foist Poseidon another sacrifice. Enraged about this, as a punishment the sea god let the bull become in a rage and this arranged now large devastation on the island. To restrain this bull and to bring it to Eurystheus was the 7th task of Heracles. When he came to Crete and to Minos with this request, Minos was not little pleased about the sight to become loose of the spoiler of the island, quite the opposite he helped him to catch the furious animal and the strength of the Heracles restrained the racing bull so thoroughly that, in order to bring the bull over to the Peloponnese he could be carried from it the whole way to the sea.*



Herakles mit dem Kretischen Stier, attische Vase ca. 480–470 v. Chr., Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Eurystheus was satisfied with this work, but after he regard it with favor for a short while, he released the animal soon after. When the bull was not anymore under the spell of the Heracles, its old rage returned; it stray through all Laconia and Arcadian, scoured over the Isthmus towards Marathon in Attica and devastated here the country like heretofore on the island **Crete**. Only Theseus later on succeeded to become master over the bull.<<*

But this is a different story.

Herewith I want to finish the first leaflet of the series „Crete in Greek mythology”.

#### **Literature- and bibliography / further information (for this and all following leaflets):**

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