

Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

About the history of the architectural culture of Crete



The so-called pre-Hellenic cultures followed the old-Greek culture on Crete and the close-by located islands. The most important of these cultures was the one of the island Crete. The culture history of Crete is divided generally into 3 large sections, which are called after the legendary King Minos Early Minoan, Middle Minoan and Late Minoan epochs; therefore see also our info-leaflets: “Eras of cultural development of Crete (I & II)” at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/032-04E.pdf] and [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/033-04E.pdf]. Further information can be found also at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minoan_civilization]

In the Neolithic humans took possession of the island, and approximately in the same period the individual groups of people came with one another into connection. Up to the middle of the second century before our time calculation no strange peoples appeared on the island, so that the culture of the island inhabitants up to this time developed without substantially strange influence. Accordingly the economic development level, the company form of Crete was the primal community.

In the Middle Minoan epoch, i.e. in the first half of the second century before our time, the use of bronze contributed exceedingly to the development. The tools made of bronze also brought an upswing in the architecture of Crete with it. Palaces were established, and when Knossos (see **fig.** below **left** and our leaflet at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/152-06E.pdf]) after a two hundred year lasting rivalry acquired the hegemony, a protected road between Knossos and Phaistos (see **fig.** below **right** and our leaflet, Page 2 at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/074-05E.pdf]) was build across the island. The coming of earthenware vessels by use of pottery wheel falls into this time; also the Cretan tin-glazed earthenware arose.



This all accelerated the breakdown of the primal community and led in the large settlements to the increase of the arisen differences in the property distribution and thus to the development of the early, based on slavery, class society.

The Late Minoan epoch includes not only the development and highest bloom of the Cretan culture, but also their downfall. As primary consequences of the material upswing can probably be rate the increasing splendour in the architecture of the palaces, the development of a road system and least but not least the development of the seafaring (trader and pirate ships). In the Late Minoan epoch trade relations as well as political and cultural relations were established, particularly to Mycenae, but also to Egypt and Syria.

In the course of the fifteenth century before our time Crete became conquered by a Greek tribe, the Achaean. Here the breakdown of the Cretan culture began. It found its end in the time between the twelfth and eleventh century before our time, when another Greek tribe, the Dorian, occupied the island. More about the History of Crete and its Archaeology can be found on the NLUK Web pages in the form of contributions and info leaflets at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/en/geschichte_en.htm].

Buildings with rectangular groundplan were build on Crete already at the end of the fourth century before our time and were at the time of the ancient community common property. Large, multi-level houses and palaces from stone were established already within the early Minoan epoch. These palaces formed the centres of the extensive settlements. A design of a uniform type of houses came neither now nor in late Minoan times.

The architecture of Crete shows courses, which remind of certain characteristics of oldest Egyptian and Mesopotamian architecture. The palace form, where rooms are grouped around a closed yard or the form of the flat loam roof can originate from here as well as from there. The buildings of Crete are specific styles of specific living conditions.

For the buildings of Crete the multi-storey building method is characteristic. The different height of individual parts of the respective overall complex aimed at one hand the lighting of the interiors; on the other hand it finds its explanation in the differences in height of the terrain. The horizontal running upper border of the front based on the flat roofs resulted in conformity with the different building heights a staged silhouette.



The columns used in Cretan architecture were manufactured from wood. At the most half columns were made of stone. Stone columns with rectangular cross section and wood columns were arranged in a line. The order of columns was first undeveloped, later it usually found usage inside the building. Apart from a little scarcement of the upper border of the fronts, only the doors and windows as well as the portico gave a certain arrangement; in architecture a colonnade or a columned hall with straight roof beam is referred to as portico (see fig.).

The Cretan architecture used from rosettes and half-rosette composed cornice as well as colourful vitreous mosaic as ornamentation decoration. The floors and walls were coloured blue, white or red. For the colouring of columns also black and ochre.

It is extremely hard to give a recapitulatory characteristic of Cretan architecture on the basis of the so far of uncovered remnants. Therefore it is not possible to determine exactly, to which extend and with which means these have contributed to the general development of architecture. Actually the Cretan architecture knew already numerous kinds of the composition, shaping and ornamental art, as they are to be found later in the Greek architecture, to which they were probably conveyed on the way over contemporary Mycenaean architecture.

Source: MATE MAJOR, Geschichte der Architektur, Bd. 1: 276 – 291; übersetzt aus dem Ungarischen, 3. Aufl., Akademiai Kiado, Budapest 1974. **References (Internet):** „Zur ländlichen Architektur Kretas“ see at:

[<http://www.schwarztaufweiss.de/kreta/architektur.htm>] and „Die Architektur des kretischen Hauses“ at: [<http://www.cretanethnologymuseum.gr/imke/html/de/50300.html>] German language only!