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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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REVIEW BY ATHANASIA KANTA

H. G. WUNDERLICH. The Secret of Crete: A Controversial Account of archaeological detection. Souvenir Press, 1975.

New Zealand retail price: \$10.40

At a time when publication is extremely expensive, H. G. Wunderlich's book comes as a surprise - not because a Professor of Geology and Palaeontology produced a controversial account of his archaeological detection, but because a reputable publisher spent time and money that could have been more usefully employed elsewhere.

In this book Wunderlich argues that the Minoan palaces, villas and big stone houses of Crete were in reality the burial places of the dead, and that even the fortified citadels of the Mycenaean mainland and Troy served the same function (passim and pp. 255, 311, 312). Such a proposition might be understandable in an area lacking in excavated tombs but, where cemeteries and graves containing the skeletons, bones and personal effects of people - kings to paupers - have been found and dug by the thousand, the theory is not convincing.

One obvious query: where did people live if all the big stone houses, villas and palaces belonged to the dead? Wunderlich assumes that the Cretans, like the Mesopotamians and Egyptians, used mud brick. Unfortunately for this theory, while Egypt and Mesopotamia are littered with the remains of mud brick buildings, none has yet been found in Crete. The most plentiful building material in Crete is stone, which has been used from the neolithic to the present for palaces and huts alike. As for large settlements such as Palaikastro, Gournia and Chondros Viannou - to mention just a few - these are ignored completely in this unravelling of Crete's secrets.

However, the main problem for the theory is the lack of human bones in all the palaces, villas and houses that Wunderlich considers as necropoleis. This shortcoming in the evidence is explained by presuming a very thorough pillaging of the buildings. Such argument from a scientist is surprising, but no less absurd for that. It is, indeed, precisely because no traces of burials have been found in the buildings, as opposed to the excavated tombs elsewhere in Crete, that

Wunderlich's theories are untenable. As any field archaeologist can testify, some evidence can almost always be found to indicate that a tomb really is a tomb, no matter how and to what degree it has been pillaged by robbers.

Abundant traces of function, however, have been found in all palaces and villas. They were obviously habitation places. The hearths, the rough cooking utensils, the objects of everyday life, all tell their story.

Since many of the palaces of Crete were excavated early in the century when excavation techniques and recording were not as exacting as they are today, non-specialists might wonder whether these traces of human bones and sarcophagi were there, but were not observed and recorded. This doubt is dispelled by the evidence from the palace of Zakro, discovered unlooted several years ago. All the precious objects and furnishings, all the household utensils and pots were found, but no human remains occurred anywhere in the palace.

H. G. Wunderlich's lack of archaeological training explains, perhaps, the formulation of theories where objections are all too obvious.

When the basis of the book is entirely untenable there is little point in mentioning the many minor inaccuracies and errors.

The reviewer cannot recommend the book to any library or individual buyer. As a scientific account it is based on erroneous theories and fantasies, not on solid facts. As a piece of "detective" fiction, it is too expensive.