CATASTICA FEUDORUM CRETE:
LAND OWNERSHIP AND POLITICAL CHANGES IN
MEDIEVAL CRETE (13TH–15TH CENTURIES)

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The Catastica Feudorum Crete: as public documents or collections of public
documents, like any other historical source, contain much more information
than just that referring to their main subject, i.e. the registration
of the land and its owners, called feudatories (feudatarii). We will begin
by focusing on the structure of the catastica and their models, if there
were any, and we will continue by examining certain examples from the
catastica reflecting the political situation in Crete from the first quarter
of the thirteenth until the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The

catastica constitute the most important documents—apart from those
of the organized settlement of colonists—revealing the new political
situation in Crete after 1204 and the deep changes which took place
during the next centuries in the society and economy of the island.1

The Catastica Feudorum Crete are parchment codices preserved in four files
in the series of Duca di Candia of the State Archives of Venice.2 Three
of them contain catastica which cover the geographic area of territorio di
Candia (almost corresponding to the modern prefecture of Herakleion)
divided into six zones called sexteria, whereas the fourth file includes the
so-called Catasticum of Chania for the area in the west of the island.
The catastica feudorum of the area of the city of Candia (present-day Herakleion) display structural homogeneity and cover the period from

1 On the history of Crete during the 13th and 14th century, see S. Borsari, Il dominio
veneziano a Creta nel XIII secolo (Naples, 1963); F. Thiriet, La Romanie vénitienne au Moyen
Age, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1975); Ch. A. Maltezou, “Η Κρήτη κατά τη διάρκεια της περιόδου
της Βενετοκρατίας (1211–1669),” in Κρήτη. Ιστορία και Πολιτισμός 2 (Crete, 1988),
and Society in Renaissance Crete (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 17–47; Ch. Gasparis, “Κοινωνία
και οικονομία στην Κρήτη, 13ος–15ος αι.: τα χρόνια πριν από την ακμή,” Cretan Studies

2 Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter cited as ASV), Duca di Candia, b. 18, 19,
20, 21. For a first description of all the Catastica Feudorum Crete, see M. Chereti, “Τα
παλαιότερα κατάστατα του αρχείου του Δούκα της Κρήτης ως ιστορικά πηγά,” Κρητικά
1222 to 1435, with the exception of a register referring to the same region, not yet studied at all, that covers a great part of the sixteenth century.\(^3\) On the contrary, the catalisticum of Chania covers the period 1314–1396 and its form is different, simpler than the others.\(^4\) From all of the above, only the catalisticum feudorum of the sexteria of Dorsoduro is preserved almost in its entirety.\(^5\) The catalisticum of Chania also seems to be preserved without important losses, whereas the others, covering the sexteria of the Santi Apostoli, San Marco, San Polo and Santa Croce, always in the territorio di Candia, are fragmentary and preserved in a poor or very bad condition.\(^6\)

Let us begin with a brief survey of the catastica, first that of Chania, as the simplest case. This is the one that was preserved in the Central Chancellery of Candia, which is why it is still extant, and not that of the responsible Chancellery of the rector of Chania, although the two catastica must not have been very different, at least not in their basic components. It contains the decisions of the duke of Crete, by which all the transactions of land involving new owners (sales, auctions, inheritances, paternal or dowry concessions) were approved. From the structural point of view it is not of much interest, since it includes acts that are completely uniform, with only small internal differences during the course of decades, which reflect changes at a political level or in the bureaucracy that occurred during the fourteenth century. On the other hand, the process of information and communication between the local administration of Chania and the central government of Candia is more interesting, as well as the actual contents regarding the land market and the registration of landowners in a region of Crete for which very few sources are extant.

The catastica feudorum referring to the sexteria of Candia, because of the long period they cover and their structure, offer us information not only concerning the registration of the land and its subsequent changes of owners, but also about the organization of the distribution

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\(^3\) The register of the 16th century is preserved in ASV, Duca di Candia, b. 20.
\(^4\) ASV, Duca di Candia, b. 21. The Catasticum Canei is being edited by the author at the Institute of Byzantine Research, National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens.
\(^6\) Fragments of the catastica of these four sexteria are preserved in ASV, Duca di Candia, b. 19, 20.