

The Minoans, Myceneans, and Archaic Greece

Essential Question:
How did the Minoans and Myceneans establish the basic foundations of Classical Greek Civilization?

Western Civ.
Mr. Cegielski

Ancient Greece

Understanding Goal:
People and place influence culture.

Investigative Question:
How did the location of Ancient Greece affect the development of its culture?

Explore: Point out Greece on the map. How do you think the economic development of Greece was affected by its geography?

Connect: Greece made major contributions in the areas of art, architecture, science, math, and philosophy. How do you think the importance of the individual was reflected in each of these areas?

Learn: Go to LOC.gov to find examples of images that represent Greek contributions in the areas of art, architecture, science, math, and philosophy, such as those in Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library & Renaissance Culture.

Geographic Background

- In ancient times, Greece was not a united country. It was a collection of separate lands where Greek-speaking people lived.
- By 2000 BCE, the **Minoans** lived on the large Greek island of **Crete**. The Minoans created an elegant civilization that had great power in the Mediterranean world.
- At the same time, Indo-European peoples migrated from the plains along the Black Sea and Anatolia. The Indo-Europeans settled in mainland Greece. Seaborne commercial networks spread ideas as well as resources throughout the eastern Mediterranean.
- Ancient Greece consisted mainly of a **mountainous peninsula** — surrounded by water on three sides-- jutting out into the **Mediterranean Sea**. It also included approximately **1,400 islands** in the **Aegean and Ionian seas**. Lands on the western coast of Anatolia were also part of ancient Greece. The region's physical geography directly shaped Greek traditions and customs.

Q. Can you name the seas, islands, cities and countries?

THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN
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THE SEA:

- The sea shaped Greek civilization just as rivers shaped the ancient civilizations of Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, India, and China. In one sense, the Greeks did not live on a land but AROUND a sea. Greeks rarely traveled more than 85 miles to reach the coastline.
- The **Aegean Sea, the Ionian Sea, and the neighboring Black Sea** were important transportation routes for the Greek people. These liquid highways linked most parts of Greece.
- As the Greeks became skilled sailors, sea travel also connected Greece with other societies. Sea travel and trade were also important because Greece itself was poor in natural resources. Greece lacked timber, precious metals, and usable farmland.

THE LAND:

- Rugged mountains covered about three-fourths of ancient Greece. Mountains divided the land into different regions.
- The mountain chains ran mainly from northwest to southeast along the Balkan peninsula. They influenced Greek political life.
- Unlike the Egyptians or the Chinese, it was difficult to unite the ancient Greeks under a single government. Greece developed small, independent communities within each little valley and its surrounding mountains. Most Greeks gave their loyalty to these local communities.
- In ancient times, the uneven terrain also made land transportation difficult. Early Greek roads were dirt paths.

— For example, the city-state of Sparta was only about 60 miles from Olympia, the site of the Olympic Games. Yet it took Spartans almost seven days to travel that distance.



THE LAND continued...

- The land was stony and only a small part of it—approximately 20 percent—was **arable**, or suitable for farming. Tiny but fertile valleys covered about one-fourth of Greece. The small streams that watered these valleys were not suitable for large-scale irrigation projects.
- With little fertile farmland or fresh water, Greece was never able to support a large population. It is estimated that no more than a few million people lived in ancient Greece at any given time. Even this small population couldn't expect the land to support a life of luxury.
- The Greeks based their diet on basic staple crops such as grains, grapes, and olives. A desire for more living space, grassland for raising livestock, and adequate farmland may have been factors that motivated the Greeks to seek new sites for colonies.

THE CLIMATE:

- Climate was the third important environmental influence on Greek civilization. Greece has a varied climate with temperatures averaging 48 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter and 80 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer.
- In ancient times, these moderate temperatures supported an outdoor life for many Greek citizens. Men spent much of their leisure time at outdoor public events. They met often to discuss public issues, exchange news, and take an active part in civic life.



The Minoans

2000 - 1400 BCE



Introduction

- The island of **Crete** was the center of Minoan civilization, which spread to the Aegean Islands, the coast of Asia Minor, and mainland Greece.
- It is called **Minoan** after the legendary Cretan **King Minos**.



The Minoan World: mid-



Knossos



- **Knossos** became the dominant city in Crete after 1700 B.C.
- This "**Palace of Minos**," built of brick, limestone and wood, was at least three stories high and covered nearly six acres.
- It featured a maze of royal apartments, storerooms, corridors, open courtyards, and broad stairways.

Sir Arthur Evans, 1851-

1941



Arthur Evans was the archaeologist who excavated the famous palace at the city of Knossos on Crete in order to reconstruct their way of life.

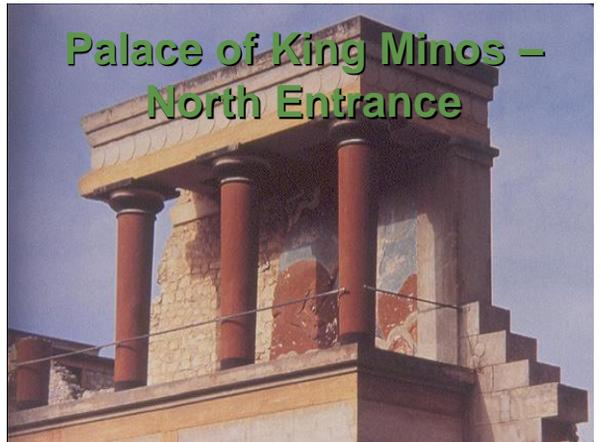
Artist's Recreation of



Aerial View of Knossos



Palace of King Minos – North Entrance



Interior of the Palace

- Furnished with running water, the palace had a sanitation system.
- Walls were painted with elaborate frescoes in which the Minoans appear as a happy, peaceful people with a passion for dancing, festivals, and athletic contests.



Palace of King Minos -



Myths of Crete: The Minotaur

Part 1: The Foundation of the Story

The island of Crete is shrouded in mystery. It is also full of legends.

Tradition tells us that the Minoan Civilization, one of the earliest known civilizations, flourished on Crete before ancient Greece really got going and then maintained its strength through much of Greece's early history.

The story of Crete brings with it two enduring legends: the minotaur and the wings of wax. The latter will be examined in [another column](#). The former is examined below.

King Minos was master of all he surveyed, on his island of Crete and beyond, to the Greek mainland. He was a strong ruler of a strong people. He was also jealous of other men's intentions toward his daughter, Ariadne. Our story begins with Ariadne in love with Theseus, an early hero of Greece. The two of them, it seemed, couldn't be without each other. So, Minos invited the young hero to the Palace of Knossos as the king's guest. Minos then threw Theseus into the labyrinth, which housed the fearsome beast known as the Minotaur.



The Minotaur was said to be the offspring of a goddess and a bull. As such, it had the body of a man and the head of a bull. It also wielded a double-bladed axe. The Minotaur waited at the center of the labyrinth. Anyone thrown into the labyrinth would have a difficult time finding his way out because the passages all looked the same and sometimes went on for a very long time before turning.

Also, those unlucky enough to be thrown into the labyrinth were stripped of their weapons and other possessions. They would have to use their bare hands against the Minotaur, which was wielding that axe.

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Graphics courtesy of ArtToday

Myths of Crete: The Minotaur

Part 2: The Rest of the Story

But Theseus had a crafty woman on his side. Ariadne gave him a handful of string, which he was to unwind as he went, thereby letting him know which way he had come. He crept into the center of the maze, killed the Minotaur with his bare hands, and followed his string trail back out to the arms of his beloved.

They somehow managed to elude the grasp of Minos and fled the island altogether.

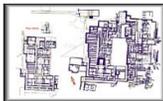
This is all well and good as a story, but is it true? Well, as with many myths, it probably has a basis in truth.

Recent excavations at Knossos have turned evidence of seismic activity underneath the palace, where the labyrinth was supposed to have been. A rather convincing theory has been advanced that the underground chambers were built over an area that was prone to earthquakes. Such rumblings in the earth and their consequent noises might have sounded very much like a giant bull. This is one possible explanation for the story of the Minotaur. The person thrown into the labyrinth wouldn't come back, of course, because the earthquake would have killed him.

The idea of the maze itself might very well come from the confusing building pattern that the Palace of Knossos had. Sculptures and paintings of the palace show it to be a sprawling construction, with many passages appearing to lead nowhere. Other paths take the long way around to get somewhere. The story of the labyrinth could very well have been a Greek attempt to disparage the greatness of the Palace.

The Greeks were very much interested in mythology and stories that taught lessons. The story of Theseus's defeating the Minotaur could very well have been a metaphor for the Greeks' eclipsing of the once proud Minoan Civilization. Take one part confusing building pattern (the labyrinth), one part natural phenomenon (the earthquakes that sounded like a bull), add a Greek hero (Theseus), and you have a uniquely Greek story that everyone thinks is fanciful but which everyone understands.

To us today, it seems like a fantasy. It may very well have had its roots in reality.



Myths from Crete: Icarus

Part 1: Background

In the story of the Minotaur, we have seen how Theseus slew the Minotaur and escaped with Ariadne, daughter of King Minos, who threw Theseus into the labyrinth. This story also yields another famous figure in Greek mythology: Daedalus.

Daedalus it was who designed the labyrinth for Minos. Daedalus was a great architect. He may have even had a hand in designing the Palace of Knossos, Minos's famed seat of power. He alone knew the secret of the labyrinth. In a moment of weakness, he revealed the secret to Ariadne, Minos's daughter and Theseus's lover.

It was all so simple, really: Just take a handful of string into the maze with you, unravel it as you go, and then follow your trail back out to escape. Of course, you'd have to kill the Minotaur to escape, but that was a minor detail. The real mystery was how to escape. Daedalus gave to Ariadne the answer.

Well, you might imagine that Minos was angry after Theseus killed his man-beast and then escaped with his daughter. He threw Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in the labyrinth. Daedalus feared for his life, and rightfully so. But he was a builder, and he was smart. (Here's where the legend takes over.)



He built a pair of wings for himself and his son. The idea was that even the all-powerful Minos, who had command of land and sea, couldn't command the air. If Daedalus and Icarus could fly away, they could escape. They were warned that Minos would stop at nothing to track them down and kill them for what Daedalus had done.

So Daedalus built the wings. They were made of wax.

They worked.

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• [Greek Mythology Link](#)

• [Bullfinch's Tale of Daedalus and Icarus](#)

Part 2: The Sad End of Icarus

Daedalus flew to safety. Icarus flew to the Sun. He was so impressed with the power and strength of his wings that he flew ever higher in the sky, out into space, and even to the Sun itself. The wings, being made of feathers and wax, melted in the Sun's heat, and Icarus plummeted to his death.



Daedalus continued his flight, landing in Athens first and then ending up in Syria, ever fearful of retribution. Minos never caught up with him, but Daedalus mourned his son for the rest of his days.

What are we to make of this tale? It's as simple as the adage, "Pride goes before a fall." We could also term it, "Listen to your parents." Icarus was so proud of his new wings and his newly found flying ability that he wanted to show off. He ignored his father's warning not to fly too high, setting off for as high as he could reach. The result was his death.

This story was probably used as an object lesson to prove the adages in the previous paragraph. Icarus did not listen to his father; he died because of it. Icarus was too proud; the result was his death.



- Women are shown enjoying great freedom.
 - They are not secluded in the home but are seen sitting with men and taking an equal part in public festivities - even as toreadors in a form of bull fighting.
 - Their dresses are very elaborate, with colorful patterns, pleats, puffed sleeves, and flounces.
 - Bodices are open in front to the waist
 - Hair is elaborately fashioned with ringlets over the forehead and about the ears.

Minoan Ladies



Minoan Religion

- There were no great temples, powerful priesthoods, or large cult statues of the gods.
- The main deity was the **Mother Goddess**; her importance reflected the important position held by women in Cretan society.
- A number of recovered statuettes show her dressed like a fashionable Cretan woman with flounced skirts, a tightly laced, low-cut bodice, and an elaborate coiffure.
- She was probably the prototype of such later Greek goddesses as Athena, Demeter, and Aphrodite.

Minoan Culture - Religion

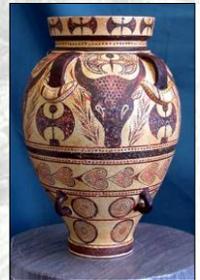


Minoan Priest



Minoan Snake Goddess

Bull Cult



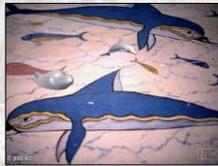
Bull Jumping Fresco



Minoan Art

- The glory of Minoan culture was its art, spontaneous and full of rhythmic motion.
- Art was an essential part of everyday life.

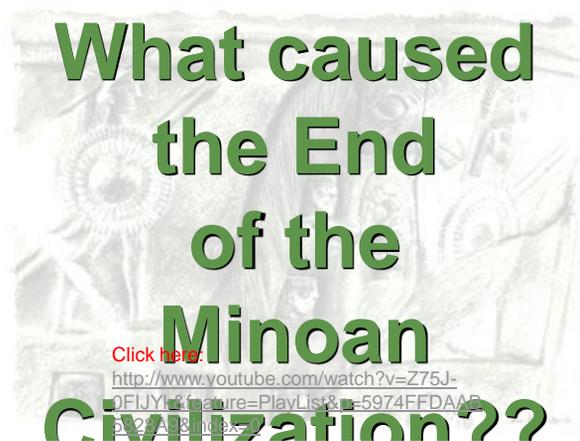
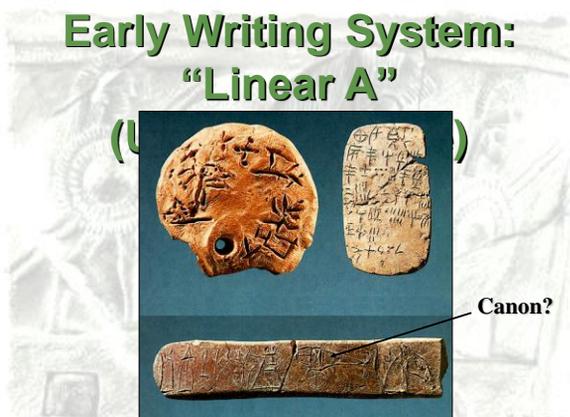
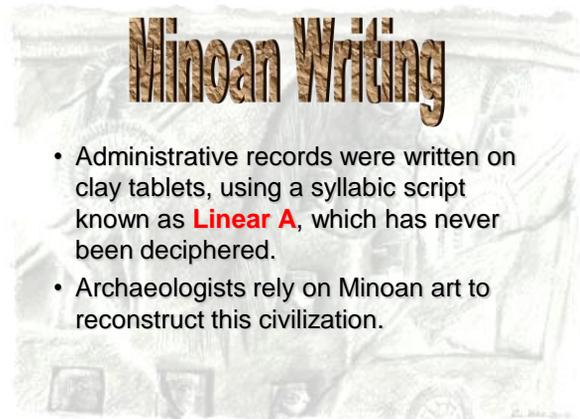
Minoan Artistic “Motifs”

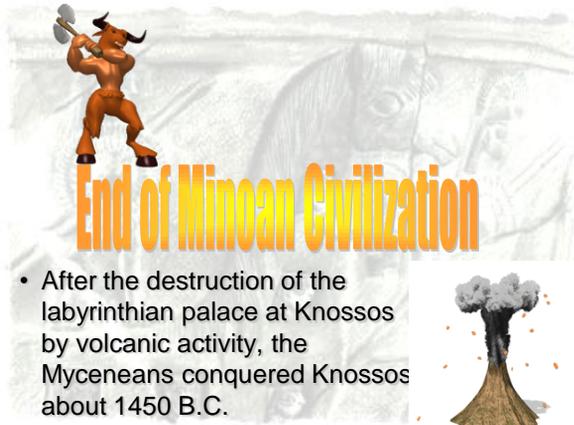


Minoan Economy-Trade

- Large-scale trade ranged from Sicily, Greece, and Asia Minor to Syria and Egypt.
- Minoans ships were capable of long voyages over the open sea.
- Chief exports were olive oil, wine, metalware, and pottery.

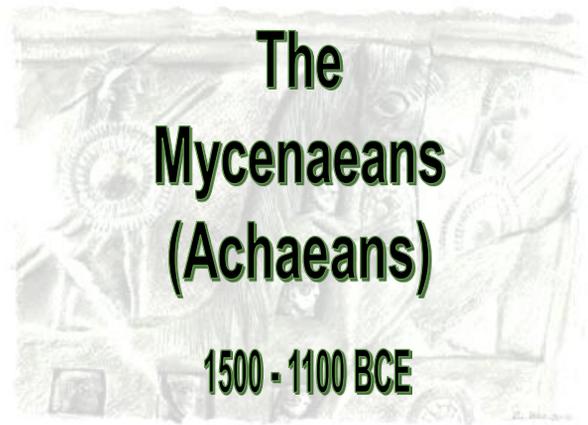






End of Minoan Civilization

- After the destruction of the labyrinthian palace at Knossos by volcanic activity, the Mycenaeans conquered Knossos about 1450 B.C.



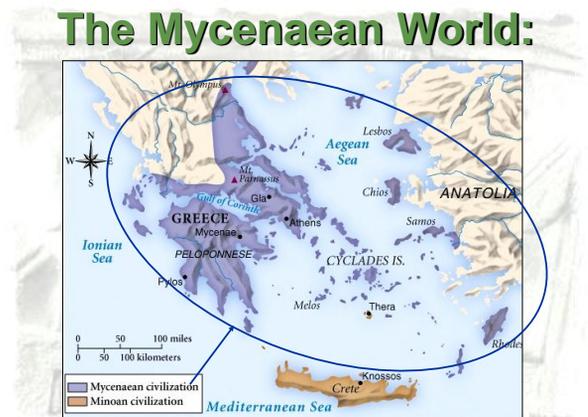
The Mycenaeans (Achaean)

1500 - 1100 BCE



The Mycenaeans

- About 2000 B.C., an Indo-European Greek tribe, called the **Achaean**, entered Greece where they absorbed the earlier settlers and ruled Mycenae, Pylos, Athens, and other sites.
- By 1600 B.C. the Achaean – also called the **Mycenaeans**, had adopted much of the advanced culture of the Minoans.
- They planted colonies in the eastern Mediterranean.



The Mycenaean World:

The map illustrates the Mycenaean World, showing the Aegean Sea, Ionian Sea, and Mediterranean Sea. Key locations include Greece (Mycenae, Pylos, Athens), Anatolia, and the Cyclades Islands (Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Melos, Thera, Rhodes). A legend indicates Mycenaean civilization (purple) and Minoan civilization (orange). A scale bar shows 0, 50, and 100 miles and kilometers. A compass rose is also present.

Heinrich Schliemann



- In 1876 archaeologist **Heinrich Schliemann** (left) unearthed the wealth accumulated by the kings of Mycenae - the greatest single hoard of gold, silver, and ivory objects.



View of Mycenae

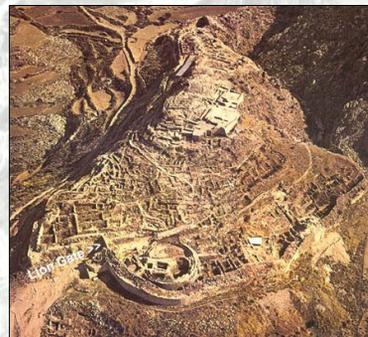


Mycenean Government Mycenean Government and Economy

- Mycenean kings ruled from fortified palaces and cities, called **citadels**, and administrative centers.
- Most of the population lived in scattered villages where they worked the land.
- The nobles were controlled by the kings.
- The most important trade item was olive oil, which was controlled by a royal monopoly.

Mycenae: Lion's Gate (undated drawing)

Aerial View of Mycenae



Mycenae Citadel & Construction



Approach to the Lion's



Lion's Gate Entrance to



Mycenaean Writing System: "Linear B"



- Mycenaean scribes kept records, using **Linear B**.
- These clay tablets provide details about grain, the use of wine as wages, and the collection of taxes.