# The Early Period: The Mycenaeans

The **Mycenaeans** arrived in Greece about 2000 B.C. and lived on the mainland. Their civilization actually began around 1650 B.C., but they did not become dominant in the area until about 1450 B.C. Their supremacy lasted only approximately 200 years. In about 1200 B.C., they were attacked and their palaces were destroyed. We do not know who conquered the Mycenaeans.


The city of Mycenae was protected by huge stone walls.

## Mycenaean Cities Prepared for War

The best-known city of this civilization was **Mycenae**. The Mycenaeans traded heavily with the Minoans on Crete and were strongly influenced by their culture. In 1450 B.C. when the Mycenaeans conquered the Minoans, they adopted much of the Minoan culture. One major difference between the Minoans and the Mycenaeans was their architecture. While the Minoan cities and palaces were unfortified, Mycenaean cities were heavily **fortified** and protected by huge stone walls. Invaders were common in Greece, and there were many wars.

## Trade

Mycenaeans became rich by trading. The excess food they produced was traded on various islands and in cities on the mainland around the Mediterranean. In return, the Mycenaeans imported copper, tin, gold, and other items. They were so ambitious that they traded as far away as Mesopotamia and Western Europe. There is even evidence their trade may have extended as far away as Scandinavia and Russia. In addition to traders, they were warriors and mercenaries.

## Homer's Epic Poems

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are long poems called **epic poems** written by **Homer**, the blind Greek poet who lived in about 800 B.C. These poems are about Mycenaean heroes. The Greeks believed these stories had actually happened. While there may have been some truth in the stories, it is likely that each generation added to the stories to make them more interesting and heroic. Homer was the first to write down the stories because there had been no alphabet before the Greeks learned the Phoenician alphabet.


Mask of Agamemnon

### The *Iliad*

The *Iliad* tells of King Agamemnon of Mycenae and how he and a group of Greek heroes went to war with Troy, a city on the coast of what is now Turkey. Legend says the war was fought over the kidnapping of Helen, the beautiful queen and wife of Menelaus. He was Agamemnon's brother and the King of Sparta. Historians believe the war was probably fought over land. The Trojan War lasted for ten years. Finally, the Greeks tricked the Trojans into bringing a wooden horse into the city. Greek soldiers hidden in the horse opened the gates to the city, and the Greek army entered the city and defeated the Trojans.

### The *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus and his long journey home after the Trojan War. During his journey, which lasted ten years, he had many adventures that involved gods, goddesses, and mortals.

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**MYCENAEAN CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE**
**WHERE:** On the mainland of Greece
**WHEN:** 1650 B.C.–1200 B.C.
**ACHIEVEMENTS:**
- Their leaders, warriors, and wars serve as the basis for much of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
- The first Greek-speaking people
- Excellent traders and craftsmen

Name: _____ Date: _____

# Knowledge Check

## Matching

_____ 1. Mycenaeans

_____ 2. Mycenae

_____ 3. fortified

_____ 4. epic poem

_____ 5. Homer

_____ 6. *Iliad*

_____ 7. *Odyssey*

a. people who arrived on the mainland of Greece about 2000 B.C. and became dominant about 1450 B.C.

b. blind Greek poet who wrote epic poems about Mycenaean heroes

c. the story of a Mycenaean soldier's journey home after the Trojan War

d. protected by huge stone walls

e. the best-known city of the Mycenaean Civilization

f. the story of the war between Greece and Troy

g. long poem that tells a story

## Multiple Choice

8. What made the Mycenaeans rich?

   a. trading
        b. writing

   c. going to war
     d. mining

9. Where did the Greeks get the alphabet they began to use for their writing?

   a. the Minoans
     b. the Phoenicians

   c. the Egyptians
    d. the Persians

10. In the *Iliad*, what was the legendary cause of the Trojan War?

   a. a fight over land
     b. an argument over trade

   c. the trick of the wooden horse
    d. the kidnapping of Helen

## Critical Thinking

11. Why do you think the stories that Homer wrote were so different from what actually happened? Use details from the reading selection to help support your answer.

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