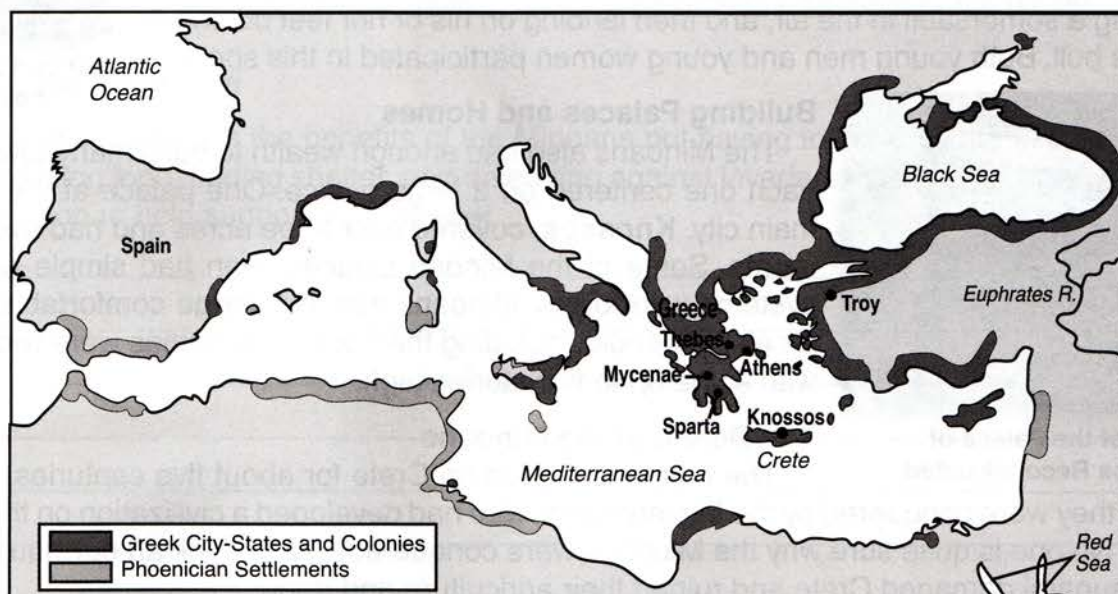


# The Aegean Civilizations

## Greece and the Aegean Sea

The civilizations that developed around Greece and the islands in the Aegean Sea are often called the **Aegean Civilizations**. While there is evidence that humans lived in Greece over 8,000 years ago, it wasn't until about 3000 B.C. that the earliest signs of civilization actually began. Greek civilization can be divided into three distinct periods.

1. The **Early Period** is sometimes called the Bronze Age. This period lasted from 3000 B.C. to 1150 B.C. Many of the legends written by Homer were stories that supposedly happened in this period.
  - The **Minoan** culture thrived on the island of Crete from sometime before 2000 B.C. to 1450 B.C.
  - The **Mycenaean** culture developed on the Greek mainland and reached its height about 1600 B.C. It lasted for about 400 years.
2. The **Middle Period** is sometimes called the Dark Ages. It lasted from about 1100 B.C. until about 800 B.C. During the Middle Period, the culture declined. The people living in what we call Greece organized themselves not into one great nation, but rather into several city-states. Each city-state was a separate unit that governed itself.
3. The **Classical Period** began about 800 B.C. and lasted until 323 B.C. This is the period that includes the Golden Age of Greece when democracy, drama, philosophy, science, literature, and other accomplishments of this great culture reached their peaks. The city-states of Athens and Sparta, which represented two very different ideals, thrived during the Classical Period. The period ended with the death of Alexander the Great, who had conquered Persia and spread the Greek culture from Egypt to India. Eventually, the Romans conquered all of the land that had belonged to Greece.



# The Early Period: The Minoans

Named after their king Minos, the **Minoan Civilization** was the first civilization in Europe. It was located on the island of Crete and other islands in the Aegean Sea from sometime before 2000 B.C. to 1450 B.C. Since Crete is an island and is relatively isolated from the rest of the world, the Minoan Civilization was not too concerned with invasion. They did not have to spend their time and resources developing armies and weapons. They were free to concentrate on economic growth. This made it possible for the Minoans to grow enough food so that not everyone had to farm or hunt. Some were free to create art, fashion jewelry, or to make items that people used. Still others became merchants trading food and items with those living on other Aegean islands and those living on the continent. Minoans **exported** oil, wine, jewelry, and crafts. They **imported** many raw materials.

## MINOAN CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE

**WHERE:** Crete, a large island between Asia Minor and Greece

**WHEN:** 2000 B.C.—1450 B.C.

### ACHIEVEMENTS:

- The first civilization in Europe
- One of the first social cultures with social equality
- Built elaborate palaces and large homes for its citizens
- Women were treated more fairly than in other cultures of the time

## Social Equality

The wealth produced by trade had two effects, which were very unusual in the ancient world. The first was **social equality**. In most ancient civilizations, there were distinct classes, such as the nobility, the priests, and the poor. On Crete, while some were wealthier than others, most people prospered enough to have enough food and live in fairly large homes. Even women seemed to be treated well, which was rare in the ancient world.

## Leisure Time

The second benefit of wealth was that the Minoans had **leisure time** to devote to activities not directly related to survival. Free from the worries of finding food and shelter, many Minoans became interested in other activities and sports, such as boxing and bull-jumping. **Bull-jumping** involved a jumper taking a charging bull by the horns and either jumping onto the bull's back or leaping over the bull, turning a somersault in the air, and then landing on his or her feet behind or beside the bull. Both young men and young women participated in this sport.



Minoan children boxing



Part of the Palace of Knossos Reconstructed

## Building Palaces and Homes

The Minoans also had enough wealth to build many towns, with each one centered on a large palace. One palace at the island's main city, **Knossos**, covered over three acres and had over 1,000 rooms. Some of the Minoan palaces even had simple plumbing systems with toilets. Minoans also built large comfortable homes for all the people, including the poor. Most homes were two stories with some up to five stories high.

## The Defeat of the Minoans

The Minoans thrived on Crete for about five centuries. Then in 1450 B.C., they were conquered by the Mycenaeans, who had developed a civilization on the Greek mainland. No one is quite sure why the Minoans were conquered. Some think an earthquake, volcano, or tsunami damaged Crete and ruined their agriculture and trade.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Knowledge Check

### Matching

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Minoan Civilization | a. brought into a country   |
| _____ 2. exported            | b. activities not directly related to survival  |
| _____ 3. imported            | c. sent out of a country  |
| _____ 4. social equality     | d. the main city of Crete that had a huge palace  |
| _____ 5. leisure time        | e. the first civilization in Europe; on the island of Crete and other islands in the Aegean Sea |
| _____ 6. bull-jumping        | f. grabbing a bull by the horns, flipping over it, and landing on one's feet on the ground      |
| _____ 7. Knossos             | g. when all people in a society are treated the same  |

### Multiple Choice

8. Since the Minoans lived on islands, they did not have to worry as much about developing what?
- |                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| a. trade       | b. armies |
| c. agriculture | d. art    |
9. Who was the king of the Minoan Civilization for whom it was named?
- |             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| a. Menelaus | b. Agamemnon |
| c. Theseus  | d. Minos     |
10. What was unusual about Crete's social structure?
- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| a. Women were treated well.        | b. It was divided into distinct classes. |
| c. The poor were cast out of town. | d. The nobles had most of the wealth.    |

### Constructed Response

11. What were some of the benefits of the Minoans not having to concentrate all their efforts on producing food, finding shelter, and defending against invaders? Use details from the reading selection to help support your answer.

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