

ANCIENT CRETE 3000-1450 B.C.

The earliest European civilization began on the island of Crete about 4,500 years ago. It is called the Minoan civilization after the legendary King Minos.

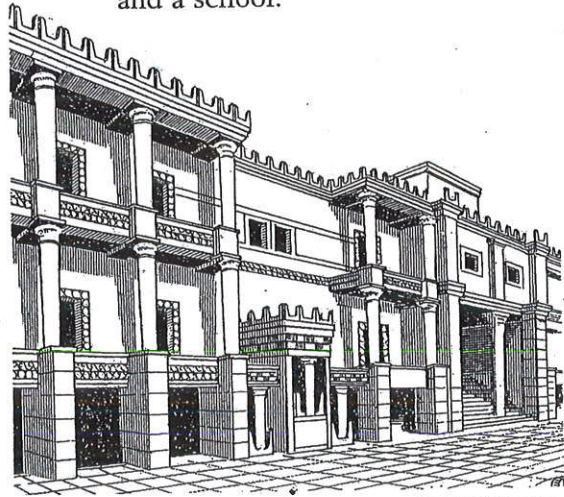


This figure was found at Knossos. It combines the snake cult of Crete and worship of the mother-goddess. The figure itself wears the typical clothing of a Minoan woman.

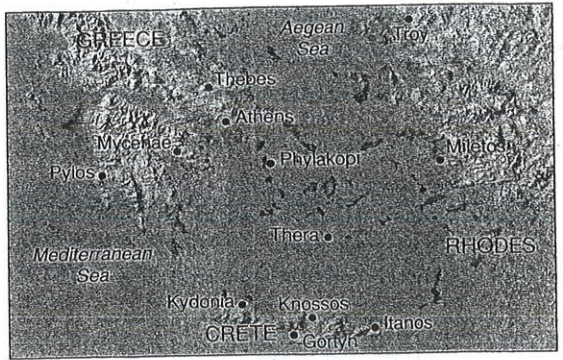
Stories say that Minos built a labyrinth (maze) in which he kept a Minotaur, a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man. The Minoan civilization was at its height from 2200 to 1450 B.C. The Minoans owed their prosperity to their abilities as seafarers and traders.

MINOAN CITIES

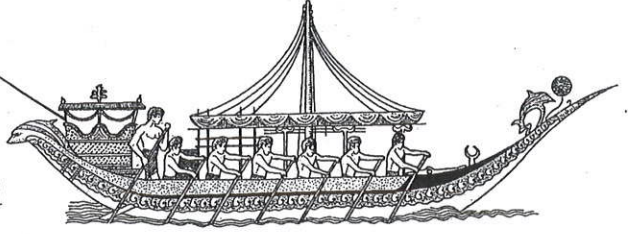
The Minoans built several large cities connected by paved roads, each of them a small city-state. At the heart of each city was a palace with a water supply, decorations, windows, and stone seats. Minoan craftsmen were renowned as potters and builders. They also made beautiful silver and gold jewelry. The capital, Knossos, had the grandest palace. It had splendid royal apartments, rooms for religious ceremonies, workshops, and a school.



The massive royal palace at Knossos, 500 ft. sq. (150m sq.), was several stories high and built from wood, stone, and clay. A large courtyard, was in the center. Royal apartments were on the east of the court, on the first floor.



Crete was well placed for trading with and influencing other areas. In the end, this was the Minoans' undoing, since the Mycenaeans envied their civilization and eventually invaded.



Minoans were expert shipbuilders. They traveled around the Aegean Sea and to Egypt in boats like this, carrying their pottery and other craftworks far and wide.

The internal walls of the palace were plastered and decorated with large, magnificently painted pictures.

DOWNFALL OF A CIVILIZATION

Advanced Minoan civilization came to a sudden and mysterious end in about 1450 B.C. A volcanic eruption on the nearby island of Thera had already been a major disaster, overwhelming much of Crete. The end came when Knossos was invaded by the Mycenaeans who greatly admired the Minoans and took their ideas to the European mainland. In Crete lay the roots of the later Greek classical civilization.

The walls of the state rooms at Knossos were elaborately decorated. The wall painting shows the sport of bull leaping. The bull was a sacred symbol of power, and the ability to vault over its horns symbolized the mastering of its strength.

