

**ANCIENT GREECE:
MINOAN CIVILIZATION
ON CRETE**



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Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain theories behind the Minoan civilization found on Crete and the legends linked to the Palace of Knossos. Using this knowledge, students will then theorize as to what might have happened to the Minoans.

Subjects

World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- [Palace of Knossos, Crete](#)
- [Heraklion Archaeological Museum](#)

Essential Questions

- Who were the Minoans?
- What do we know about the Minoans?
- What happened to the Minoan Civilizations?
- What legends might be associated with the Minoan civilization?

Academic Summary

Minos, according to tradition, went to Sicania, or Sicily, as it is now called, in search of Daidolos, and there perished by a violent death....Men of various nations now flocked to Crete, which was stripped of its inhabitants; but none came in such numbers as the Hellenes. Three generations after the death of Minos the Trojan War took place; and the Cretans were not the least distinguished among the helpers of Menelaos. But on this account, when they came back from Troy, famine and pestilence fell upon them, and destroyed both the men and the cattle. Crete was a second time stripped of its inhabitants, a remnant only being left; who form, together with fresh settlers, the third Cretan people by whom the island has been inhabited.

Herodotos, The History, 5th century BCE

Little is known for certain about any ancient civilizations on Crete. An island of obvious importance militarily and economically in the ancient Mediterranean world due largely to its strategic location, archeological remains show that Crete was inhabited by at least 6000 BCE, although there is some evidence for human settlement going back even further into history. Sometime around 3000 BCE, an organized civilization arose on the north shore of the island. It lasted around 1500 years, and then suddenly declined in the 15th century BCE, when it was eventually absorbed into the expanding Mycenaean civilization originating from the Greek mainland. For centuries, knowledge of the ancient Cretans passed into myth and legend, but archaeologists and historians rediscovered the civilization in the early years of the 20th century. One of those archaeologists, Sir Arthur Evans of Great Britain, named the ancient civilization after the ancient Cretan king Minos. That's why it's now called Minoan.

From the ruins, artifacts and frescoes unearthed at what became known as the "Palace of Knossos" by Evans and others between 1900 and 1903, archaeologists and historians were able to piece together at least an incomplete picture of the ancient Minoans. Frescoes show a seafaring people engaged in trade throughout the Mediterranean from Egypt and the Arab world to Phoenicia and Anatolia (Turkey) to Greece, Sicily and the Italian peninsula, a fact not all that surprising considering Crete's location. Controlling this vast trading network ultimately brought the Minoans a great deal of wealth, prestige and power in the region. Excavations at the site by the British School of Archaeology, interrupted only during the world wars of the 20th century, continue to this day.

Among the most significant discoveries at Knossos was the recovery of about 3000 shards and tablets containing writings in scripts unknown at the time. "Linear B" (as the younger one came to be known) was actually a precursor to Ancient Greek, and was probably the writing used by the Mycenaeans after 1400 BCE (similar writing has been found on the Greek mainland). Its link to the Greek writing system and alphabet of later centuries is now unquestioned. Tablets and pottery shards from the collection at Knossos with this script have been deciphered, revealing business records, literary stories and even personal notes. "Linear A" (as the older one came to be known), on the other hand, has yet to be deciphered, although most scientists agree by looking at

its symbols that it is an obvious precursor to Linear B.

One of the most interesting and longest lasting legends from the Minoan civilization that has come down to the present day concerns a structure called the “Labyrinth” and the story of the “Minotaur” that lived within it. According to Classical Greek (4th/5th century BCE) writings, the Minotaur was a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man who lived within a great maze under the palace. Said to have had a connection to Zeus, the beast protected the city, but at a price. Once a year, human sacrifices had to be made to the Minotaur. One can only imagine how this legend took hold and how ancient priests might have used the story for their own purposes.

The Minoan civilization lost its grip on Crete sometime in the 14th or 15th century BCE. No one is sure why. Theories range from an ecological disaster created by the Minoans themselves to an earthquake to the volcanic eruption of Thera (now called Santorini) which occurred sometime between 1600 BCE and 1300 BCE and would have undoubtedly caused a huge tsunami that raced towards Crete before slamming into the island. This last theory and an interpretation of some of the site’s frescoes have led some to link Plato’s legend of Atlantis with the Minoans. No one knows for sure.

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain theories behind the Minoan civilization found on Crete and the legends linked to the Palace of Knossos. Using this knowledge, students will then theorize as to what might have happened to the Minoans.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the theories behind the Minoan civilization found on Crete.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the legends linked to the Palace of Knossos on Crete.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to theorize as to what might have happened to the Minoan civilization.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How do archaeology and history work together to tell the story of a civilization? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Minoan Civilization (25 min)
- Video – The Western Tradition: Greek Thought (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Minoan Civilization, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Suggestion: Advanced/AP students should read primary sources from Evans.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Minoan civilization and its legends (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail theories behind the Minoan civilization found on Crete and the legends linked to the Palace of Knossos. Using this knowledge, students will then theorize as to what might have happened to the Minoans.

Extension

On tour: Palace of Knossos, Crete

While on tour, students traveling to Crete can visit the Palace of Knossos, where they can see for themselves where the Minoan civilization flourished. Scientists, historians and scholars debate as to whether Knossos was King Minos' capital city, but there seems little discussion as to whether the site was a Minoan stronghold. Touring the palace itself, students can see the frescoes and artifacts found by archaeologists since Evans first started digging over 100 years ago.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- <http://archive.org/stream/journalofhelleni32sociuoft#page/276/mode/2up/search/Minoan>
The Minoan and Mycenaean Element in Hellenic Life (primary source) – article published by Arthur Evans in 1912
- www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/minos1.asp
Reports of Minos and Knossos (primary sources) – from the Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- www.ancient-greece.org/history/minoan.html
History of Minoan Crete (website). Great overview of the Minoan civilization and theories as to why it collapsed. Highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- www.minoancrete.com/
Minoan Crete: A Bronze Age Civilization (website)
- www.ou.edu/finearts/art/ahi4913/aegeanhtml/minoan.html
Minoan Art (website) – from the Weitzenhoffer Family College of Art School of Art and Art History at the University of Oklahoma
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22527821
DNA reveals origin of Greece's ancient Minoan culture (web article) – from the BBC. Good article that discusses the latest science behind the identity of the Minoans.
- www.athenapub.com/11evans.htm
Sir Arthur Evans and the Excavation of the Palace Knossos (website)
- www.mitchellteachers.org/WorldHistory/AncientGreece/PDFs/MinoanArtifacts.pdf
Student Handout: Minoan Artifacts (worksheet PDF). Worksheets designed mainly for middle school or lower high school students from Ted Mitchell, Curriculum Coordinator for Social Studies at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School in Coventry, RI.
- www.hsc.csu.edu.au/ancient_history/societies/greece/2497/minoan_evidence.html
Minoan Society: Archaeological and Written Evidence (website) – from VG Callender, Associate Lecturer at Macquarie University (Australia) for the online distance learning collaboration at Charles Sturt University (Australia). Outstanding site with links to many primary and secondary sources. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students and teachers.
- www.minoancivilization.net/
Minoan Civilization (website). Great website on the Minoans and their culture that gives basic information easy enough for all students to understand. Highly recommended as a starting point.
- www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HIST101-2.3.2-MinoanCrete-FINAL1.pdf
History of Minoan Crete (PDF worksheet) – from the Saylor Foundation
- <http://campus.lakeforest.edu/academics/greece/BrzMin.html>

Minoan Crete (class notes). Outstanding detailed class notes from the Program in Greece and Turkey at Lake Forest College (IL).

- www.slideshare.net/apetitedelight/minoan-civilization-13204885
Minoan Civilization (PowerPoint)
- www.slideshare.net/pchshum/the-pregreek-world
The Pre-Greek World (PowerPoint) – from Amanda Waterhouse, Art teacher at Platte Canyon HS (CO)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pk1EyMTSBP8
Minoans (video) – 10 minute video on the Minoan civilization that is appropriate for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=ev-WeyQjCWk
The Minoans Ancient Civilization of Crete (video) – From Bettany Hughes, noted historian, author and broadcaster for the BBC. This video is over 100 minutes long, and so is probably too long for most in-class showings, but is highly recommended for students and teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_CNHUz2HUQ
Mystery of the Minoans (video) – 6-minute video that links the decline/destruction of the Minoan civilization to the legend of Atlantis.

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minoan_civilization
Minoan civilization – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minos
Minos – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minotaur
Minotaur – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/greece/country_profile
On the Road: Greece – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-iliad
Ancient Greece – Homer's Iliad
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-odyssey
Ancient Greece – Homer's Odyssey
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-minoan-civilization
Ancient Greece – Minoan Civilization on Crete
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-alexander-the-great
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Alexander the Great

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-sparta
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Sparta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-athens-democracy
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Athens
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-marathon
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Marathon 490 BCE
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-thermopylae
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Thermopylae: Leonidas and the 300
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-allegory-of-the-cave
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Allegory of the Cave
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-plato-euthyphro
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Euthyphro
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-republic-philosopher-kings
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Philosopher Kings and the Republic
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-socrates
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Socrates: Father of Western Philosophy

Key Terms

- Ancient Greece
- Knossos
- Labyrinth
- Minoans
- King Minos
- Mycenaeans
- Minotaur

