

# Crete

**In this unit you will learn about:**

- Ø Europa and Zeus
- Ø Knossos
- Ø Minoan life
- Ø Mycenaean life

## **1. Read about where the name of our continent Europe comes from.**

The name of the continent Europe comes from ancient Greek mythology – a story about a Greek princess called **Europa**, who was carried away by the most important God in Ancient Greece – Zeus.

The king of Tyros was called **Agenor**. **Tyros or Tyrus** is in modern Lebanon. He had a very pretty daughter called Europa. Zeus, the most important God in Ancient Greece, watched Europa and the other girls of Tyros playing on the beach beside the sea. He wanted to carry Europa away. Zeus always carried beautiful young women away. But how could he carry away Europa? He thought about it. Then Zeus had a wonderful idea. He changed himself into a pure white bull with soft fur. Then he came out of the sea towards the girls and they all ran away except Europa. She was not afraid of the bull. She loved its soft and trustful eyes. First of all she touched the bull's horns then Europa sat on the wonderful bull's back. The bull – Zeus – headed back in to the sea and took Europa with him. The young girls never saw Europa again. She had to swim with Zeus through the Mediterranean Sea to Crete.

Greek mythology says that Zeus and Europa had three sons. One of them was called **Minos**. **He became the king of Crete.**

## **2. Complete the sentences below.**

Zeus was one of the most powerful \_\_\_\_\_ in ancient Greece.

Who was Europa's father? \_\_\_\_\_

Zeus changed himself into a \_\_\_\_\_ and went to \_\_\_\_\_

Was Europa afraid of the bull? \_\_\_\_\_

What about the other girls? Were they afraid? \_\_\_\_\_

How was the bull able to carry Europa away? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the bull take the girl? \_\_\_\_\_



**3. Look at the map below and complete the sentences**



- Crete is situated in the ..... Sea
- Crete is the .....island
- The circle of islands in the Aegean Sea is called .....
- The main places on Crete are .....

**4. Look at the blank map and find:**

**Peloponnese      Crete      Rhodes      Cyclades Islands**



## 5. Read the story of Knossos

Greek mythology says that **King Minos** lived in a wonderful palace in **Knossos** built by the Athenian **Daidalos** on the island of Crete. **The palace had 1300 rooms**. He was the king of the Minoans. He wanted to be a very powerful king so one day he asked the gods to help him. **Poseidon** (the god of the sea) sent him a wonderful strong white bull. He wanted Minos to kill the bull and make a sacrifice to the gods. But Minos liked the bull so much that he sacrificed another one - a brown one. This made Poseidon very angry. His wife, Pasiphae, became pregnant and when her baby was born it was half man and half bull. The parents were horrified. They hid this monster, called the “**Minotaur**”, in a huge maze under their palace.



Sir **Arthur Evans**, an English archaeologist, went to Crete to look at some ancient walls and other remains which had been dug from at Knossos. Evan’s team of workers uncovered the remains of **a large palace - labyrinth** containing many passages and tunnels as well as a complicated underground drainage system. In the store – rooms huge jars were found, for keeping **olive –oil, wine and grain**. Other rooms were full of precious stones and one contained **a throne**. The walls were covered with brightly **coloured paintings called frescoes**. The size of the palace suggests that **a population of at least 40 000 once lived at Knossos**. Evan’s discoveries showed that **Cretan civilization** had flourished since at least 3 000 BC. Because some of its kings were named Minos, he called this civilisation **Minoan**.



*Knossos*



*Throne room*

6. Write out what Sir Arthur Evans had discovered at Knossos.

## 7. Who were?

*Minos*

*Minotaur*

*Daidalos*

*Poseidon*

*Arthur Evans*

## 8. Read about the Minoan life

The Minoans were mainly **fishermen** and **sailors** who lived by trading or piracy. The island had large forests which supplied wood for shipbuilding. No traces of their ships have been discovered but as there are no forts on land it seems they relied mainly on a fleet for defence. **Crete stood** on ancient trade routes between **Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor and Greece**. The possible **trade articles** were **olive oil, vine and grain**.

The Minoans were the first Europeans known to have been civilised. They grew corn and fruit and made articles from gold, silver, cooper and tin. Their pots and jugs were decorated. They also made tiny statues from ivory and wood.

Many religious objects have been found, but our exact knowledge of Minoan religion is incomplete. The leading deity was **the Mother Goddess**, especially associated with **snakes**. She was worshipped in woodland shrines and offered fruit, poppies. **Bulls were sacred**, probably to the deity of the underworld. **Double – bladed axes** were clearly of religious significance.



While digging at Knossos, Evans found thousands of clay tablets with symbols and signs carved on them. There were **two different kinds of writing called Linear A and B**. Each seemed to have developed from an earlier **picture writing**. **Linear A remains a mystery** even though examples of it have been found all over Crete. **In 1953 and Michael Ventris deciphered Linear B writing**. There is no Minoan literature known to us.



## 9. Test yourself

1. Which countries did the Minoans trade with?
2. Which articles did the Minoans export?
3. What was their leading deity?
4. What kind of animal was sacred?
5. What was the meaning of the double-bladed axes?
6. What types of writings did they develop?
7. Who deciphered their writing?

## 10. Read about the fall of Crete

The details and causes of the fall of the brilliant Minoan civilization are still **incomplete**.

**In about 1450 BC** the majority of the palaces in Crete were destroyed, either from natural causes or by human violence. It is very tempting to link this destruction with **the enormous volcanic eruption on the island of Thera about 128 kilometres north of Crete**.

Another reasonable interpretation is that **around 1450 BC Mycenaean Greeks**, growing steadily more powerful, took over Knossos and eliminated rival palaces in Crete seriously weakened by damage from the Thera eruption.

## 11. How do historians explain the fall of the Minoan civilization?

# Mycenae

## 1. Read about the Mycenaean life

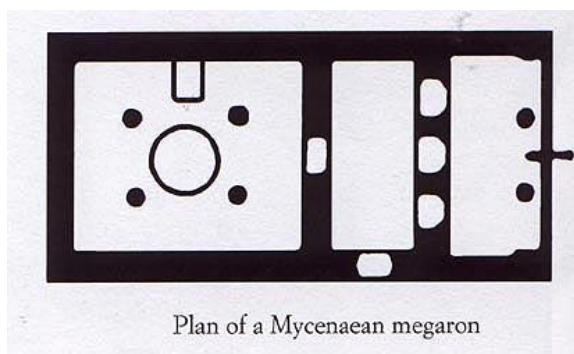
**The Mycenaeans were different to the Minoans.** They were not the first inhabitants of Greece, but exactly where and when they came from is still a mystery. **They might have arrived in Greece around 2000 BC.** The main area of the civilization was on the **Peloponnese** where the most important towns were **Mycenae, Athens and Thebes.**

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC the Mycenaeans, through trade and piracy, became steadily more wealthy and powerful. It is probable that these people first brought the domesticated horse into Greece. They also cultivated vines and made wine sweetened by honey. The Mycenaeans were **more warlike** than the Minoans. They  **painted war scenes on their palace walls**, not beautiful women as the Minoans. Mycenaean soldiers were well armed with **bronze swords** and **spears** and **large shields** which protected them from head to foot.

The kingdoms were **very highly organized** and kept careful records of taxes, palace stores, slaves and animals owned, land – holdings, offerings to gods and military equipment. The palaces were smaller than the Minoan ones. They used **the same writing** as the Minoans.

The core of the building was **the central hall or megaron.** The main feature of the megaron was the large circle in the centre around which there were four pillars supporting the roof with a hole to allow the smoke to escape.

Mycenaean religion shared with the Minoan the Mother Goddess. Mycenaean merchant ships sailed all over the eastern Mediterranean, to Syria, Palestine and Egypt. They took over many of the Minoan trading posts in the Mediterranean. They interested in Cyprus, which was rich in copper needed to make bronze.



**In about 1150 BC** the Mycenaeans fought a long trade war with **Troy**, a city in Asia Minor. A story from this so – called **Trojan War** was made famous by **Homer** in his long poem, **the Iliad** – meaning the story of **Ilium**, another name for **Troy**.

## 2. Complete the following sentences.

- The Mycenaeans had arrived in Greece around the year.....
- The main area of that civilization was.....with the most important towns as.....
- The Mycenaean civilization is named after.....

## 3. Answer the following questions.

1. Where and when did the Mycenaeans come from?
2. Which scenes dominated in their paintings? Why?

3. What was the main deity they worshipped?
4. How were their kingdoms organized?
5. What was the basis of their palaces?
6. What happened to them around 1150 BC?
7. What was Ilium?
8. Who wrote the Iliad?

#### 4. Read about the discoveries of Heinrich Schliemann

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a German called **Heinrich Schliemann** decided to follow up the clues in the Iliad in the hope of finding the lost city of Troy. After teaching himself Greek and other languages to help him in his search, Schliemann went to Turkey and organised an archaeological expedition that ended up with the success. **Troy was found.**

He also **led expeditions to Mycenae**. Homer, in his poem, tells how **Agamemnon**, the Greek leader, had been murdered on his return from the capture of Troy. His body and the bodies of some of his nobles were said to have been buried **by the Lion Gate**. Schliemann dug near the gate and found six graves containing 19 bodies. The Mycenaean king was buried with gold belts, weapons, precious rings and necklaces. His face was covered with a gold mask.



#### 5. What were the following men famous for?

*Arthur Evans*



*Heinrich Schliemann*



*Michael Ventris*



*Homer*



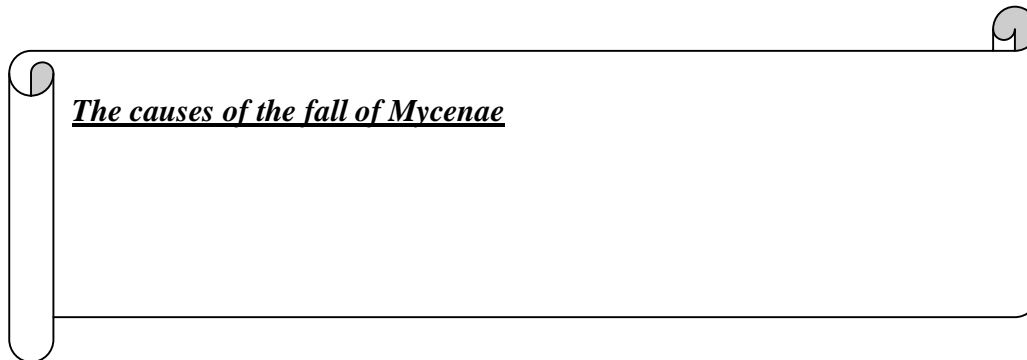
## 6. Read about the fall of Mycenae.

In the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC **Mycenae extended defensive walls**. Asia Minor during the Mycenaean period had been dominated by the Hittite Empire. **Around 1200 BC**, however, **the Hittite Empire fell down**. At the same time Egyptian records referred to **the Sea Raiders**. **The date of the Trojan War**, made famous by Homer, must also be placed during this unsettled time.

**The Mycenaeans themselves did not long survive the fall of Troy. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC the Mycenaean world collapsed dramatically.**

Traditionally this was said to be the work of **the Dorians**, a people who seem to have arrived in Greece **from the north**. The Dorians, a mountain people, were armed with iron weapons which might have been a possible reason to win over the Mycenaeans. Many Mycenaeans fled to **Attica** to escape them. These people are known as **Ionians** and their most important city became **Athens**. The Dorian main city became **Sparta**. Dorians and Ionians became the most famous Greek tribes. The Mycenaeans may even have destroyed themselves by bitter **civil wars**.

## 7. List the causes of the fall of Mycenae



*The causes of the fall of Mycenae*

## 8. How do historians explain the fall of Mycenae?

## 9. What is a civil war?



## 10. Individual work

Compare and Contrast the Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations.

	Crete	Mycenae
<b>Main cities</b>		
<b>The standard of living</b>		
<b>The famous kings</b>		
<b>The famous stories or legends</b>		
<b>Type of writing</b>		
<b>Type of architecture</b>		
<b>Type of religion, the main deities</b>		
<b>Archeologists who traced the civilisation</b>		
<b>Trading</b>		
<b>The legacy of the civilisation</b>		
<b>The fall of the civilisation</b>		