

Minoan and Mycenaean Civilization comparison

Goals/Objectives

Students will be able to compare and describe similarities and differences in the ways various cultures define individual rights and responsibilities.

Standards

B.12.3 Recall, select, and analyze significant historical periods and the relationships among them

E.12.3 Compare and describe similarities and differences in the ways various cultures define individual rights and responsibilities, including the use of rules, folkways, mores, and taboos

Procedures

1. Students will ask any questions they have from the quizzes from the exploration of the chapter assignment.
2. Groups will then share and discuss the original questions they wrote with the class or other groups.
3. Groups will begin to analyze the Minoan and Mycenaean Civilizations from the island of Crete.

Groups will be responsible for a question writer, a recorder, and a sharer.

Materials

Minoan Civilization handout

Mycenaean Civilization handout

Discussion T-Chart on whiteboard

Minoans	Mycenaean
Strong Navy Lack of Warrior Class Created opportunity for Strong Women Polytheism –Earth Goddess and Bull most important Art important Lack of Fortifications Heavy Traders	Strong Army Strong Fortifications (Cyclopean Walls) Very Wealthy Class Weak Women Adopted Minoan Religion and Art Skilled Metal Workers Heavy Traders

The Minoan Civilization

The Minoan civilization flourished in the middle Bronze Age on the Mediterranean island of Crete from ca. 2000 BCE until ca. 1500 BCE and, with their unique art and architecture, the Minoans made a significant contribution to the development of Western European civilization as it is known today.

The archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans was first alerted to the possible presence of an ancient civilization on Crete by surviving carved seal stones worn as charms by native Cretans in the early 20th century CE. Excavating at Knossos from 1900 to 1905 CE, Evans discovered extensive ruins which confirmed the ancient accounts, both literary and mythological, of a sophisticated Cretan culture and possible site of the legendary labyrinth and palace of King Minos. It was Evans who coined the term Minoan in reference to this legendary Bronze Age King.

Minoan settlements, tombs and cemeteries have been found all over Crete but the four principle palace sites (in order of size) were at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia and Zakros. At each of these sites, large, complex palace structures of two or three stories and covering several thousand square metres seem to have acted as local administrative, trade, religious and possibly political centres. The relationship between the palaces and the power structure within them or over the island as a whole is not clear due to a lack of archaeological and literary evidence. It is clear, however, that the palaces exerted some kind of localised control, in particular, in the gathering and storage of materials - wine, oil, grain, precious metals and ceramics. The absence of fortifications in the settlements suggests a relatively peaceful co-existence between the different communities. However, the presence of weapons such as swords, daggers and arrow-heads and defensive equipment such as armour and helmets would also suggest that peace may not always have been enjoyed.

The palaces themselves covered two periods: The first were constructed around 2000 BC and following destructive earthquakes and fires, re-built again ca. 1700 BCE. These second palaces survived until their final destruction between 1500 BCE and 1450 BCE, once again by either earthquake, fire, or possibly invasion (or a combination of all three). The palaces were well-appointed, monumental structures with large courts, colonnades, staircases, religious crypts, light-wells, drainage systems, extensive storage magazines and even 'theatre' areas for public spectacles. The complexity of these palaces, the sport of bull-leaping, the worship of bulls as indicated by the presence throughout of sacred bulls' horns and depictions of double axes (or labrys) in stone and fresco may all have combined to give birth to the legend of Theseus and the labyrinth-dwelling Minotaur so popular in classical Greek mythology.

The sophistication of the Minoan culture and its trading capacity is evidenced by the presence of writing - firstly hieroglyphic and then Linear A scripts (both, as yet, undeciphered), predominantly found on

various types of administrative clay tablets. A further example of the culture's high degree of development is the variety and quality of the art forms practised by the Minoans. Pottery finds reveal a wide range of vessels from wafer-thin cups to large storage jars (pithoi). Ceramics were initially hand-turned but then increasingly made on the potter's wheel. In decoration, there was a progression from flowing geometric designs in Kamares ware to vibrant naturalistic depictions of flowers, plants and sea life in the later Floral and Marine styles. Magnificent frescoes from the walls and floors of the palaces also reveal the Minoans' love of the sea and nature and give insights into religious, communal and funeral practices. Metal, stone, ivory and faience work also reveal a high degree of craftsmanship, examples range from fine alabaster jars to dynamic ivory sculpture in the round to minutely carved gold rings and seals.

The Minoans, as a sea-faring culture, were also in contact with foreign peoples throughout the Aegean, as is evidenced by the Near East and Egyptian influences in their early art but also in later export trade, notably the exchange of pottery and foodstuffs such as oil and wine in return for precious objects and materials such as copper from Cyprus and ivory from Egypt.

The reasons for the demise of the Minoan civilization continue to be debated. The rise of the Mycenaean civilization in the mid-2nd millennium BC on the Greek mainland and the evidence of their cultural influence on Minoan art and trade make them the most likely cause. However, other suggestions include earthquakes and volcanic activity with consequent tsunamis. The eruption of Thera (the present day island of Santorini) may have been particularly significant, although, the exact date of this cataclysmic eruption is disputed and therefore its connection with the end of the Minoan period remains unclear.

The Mycenaean Civilization

The Mycenaean civilization flourished in the late Bronze Age, from the 15th to the 13th century BCE and extended its influence not only throughout the Peloponnese in Greece but also across the Aegean, in particular, on Crete and the Cycladic islands.

The Mycenaean civilization was influenced by the earlier Minoan civilization (2000-1450 BCE) which had spread from its origins at Knossos, Crete to include the wider Aegean. Architecture, art and religious practices were assimilated and adapted to better express the perhaps more militaristic and austere Mycenaean culture.

Major Mycenaean centres included Mycenae (traditional home of Agamemnon), Tiryns (perhaps the oldest centre), Pylos (traditional home of Nestor), Thebes, Midea, Gla, Orchomenos, Argos, Sparta, Nichoria and probably Athens. Beyond trading relations, the exact political relationship between these centres is not clear. However, there were many shared cultural features such as architecture, frescoes, pottery, jewellery, weaponry, and of course, the Greek language and writing in the form of Linear B (an adaptation of the Minoan Linear A).

A large palace complex has been found at most of the Mycenaean centres. These complexes, whilst displaying some site-unique developments, also display important architectural features in common. The complexes were built around a large rectangular central hall or Megaron. The Mycenaean Megaron was the precursor for later Archaic and Classical temples of the Greek world and consisted of an entrance porch, a vestibule and the hall itself. This was the heart of the palace and contained a large circular hearth (usually more than 3m in diameter) with four wooden columns supporting a holed ceiling or light-well. It was also the throne room of the ruler or *wanax*. There is usually a second, smaller hall (Queen's Megaron), many private apartments and areas set aside for administration, storage and manufacturing. Rooms were richly decorated with fresco paintings on the walls and plaster painted floors. Regarding materials, rooms in the palace were constructed with rubble fill and cross-beamed walls covered in plaster inside and limestone blocks outside. Columns and ceilings were usually of painted wood, sometimes with bronze additions.

The whole palace complex was surrounded by a fortification wall of large unworked blocks (termed Cyclopean as it was believed that only the Cyclopes could have moved such massive stones). Such walls could reach 13m in height and be as much as 8m thick. Corbel galleries - arched corridors created by progressively overlapping stone blocks, circular stone tombs with corbelled roofs, and monumental doorways with massive stone lintels with relieving triangles are also common features of Mycenaean

sites. Other Mycenaean architectural structures include dams for flood management, particularly at Tiryns, and bridges built from large roughly-hewn stone blocks.

That the Mycenaean civilization had trading contact with other Aegean cultures is evidenced by the presence of foreign goods in Mycenaean settlements such as gold, ivory, copper and glass and by the discovery of Mycenaean goods such as pottery in places as far afield as Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia, Sicily and Cyprus. No doubt perishable goods such as oil and wine were also significant Mycenaean exports.

In art as expressed in fresco, pottery and jewellery, the Minoan love of natural forms and flowing design was likewise adopted by the Mycenaean artisans but with a tendency to more schematic and less life-like representation. This new style would become the dominant one throughout the Mediterranean. Geometric designs were popular, as were decorative motifs such as spirals and rosettes. Pottery shapes are much like the Minoan with the notable additions of the goblet and the alabastron (squat jar) with a definite preference for large jars. Terracotta figurines of animals and especially standing female figures were popular, as were small sculptures in ivory, carved stone vessels and intricate gold jewellery. Frescoes depicted plants, griffins, lions, bull-leaping, battle scenes, warriors, chariots, figure-of-eight shields and boar hunts, a particularly popular Mycenaean activity.

Little is known for certain regarding Mycenaean religious practices beyond the importance given to animal sacrifice, communal feasting, pouring of libations and offerings of foodstuffs. The presence of double axe carvings and horns of consecration in art and architecture suggest strong links with the Minoan religion, although these symbols may have been adopted because of their political resonance. Architectural features such as sunken basins and fresco depictions of altars hint that the Megaron may have had a religious function. Many centres also had specific sanctuary sites for worship, usually close to the palace complex. It is clear that burial was an important ritual as evidenced by the presence of monumental tholos tombs, prominent grave sites and the quantity of precious objects which were buried with the dead - golden masks, diadems, jewellery and ceremonial swords and daggers.

With the mysterious end of the Mycenaean civilization during the Bronze Age Collapse around 1200 BCE (possibly through earthquake, invasion or in-fighting) came the so-called Dark Ages and it would be many centuries before Greek culture would finally regain the heights of the late Bronze Age.