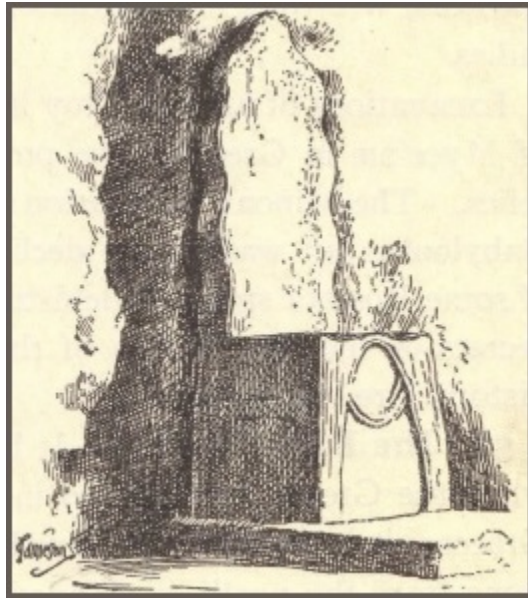


Ancient Crete: Minoan Civilization



WORLD HISTORY
WORKBOOK FOR
HIGH SCHOOL

What famous archaeologist began excavating Knossos in 1900? _____

Define the term *synonymous*. You should be able to guess its meaning based on how it is used in the previous paragraph. _____

Natural Resources

The island of Crete is located in the Mediterranean Sea. It has many natural resources, including copper, fertile soil, gold, good harbors, lead, and silver. Because of the island’s location in the Mediterranean, the Minoans were able to trade extensively with their neighbors, including the ancient Egyptians of northern Africa and the people living in what are now Israel and Lebanon.

Compare ancient Crete to your own country. What natural resources allow your country to participate in international trade? Does your country share any of the same natural resources as ancient Crete? _____

The Cretan empire included not only the island of Crete itself. It included parts of Asia and the Greek peninsula (the Greek peninsula is called the Peloponnesus), along with several islands in the Aegean Sea. Its major cities were Knossos (also spelled *Cnossus*) and Phaestus.



Above is a map of modern Greece, which includes the island of Crete. Answer the following questions based on this map and your knowledge of social studies.

What is the capital city of Greece? _____

Early History

The Cretan empire can roughly be dated to between 3000 and 1400 B.C.E. (“B.C.E.” is an acronym for “Before the Common Era” or “Before the Christian Era,” and is synonymous with “B.C.,” or “Before Christ”).

Name three other islands that are located in the Aegean Sea. _____

Apart from Greece, what other country borders the Aegean Sea? _____

What body of water lies directly west of modern Greece? _____

Economy

The Minoans were the Mediterranean’s leading sailors and traders until the arrival of the Phoenicians. In fact, many historians believe that the Phoenicians may have descended from the Minoans. The Minoans traded metal goods, pottery, and textiles with Egyptians, Syrians, and others.

The Minoans’ reliance on trade led them to create a strong navy. This powerful navy allowed Crete to exact tribute from its neighbors. The navy also protected Crete’s merchant marine.

Give an example of a modern country that has both a strong navy and a strong merchant marine. _____

Decline and Fall

Cretan civilization declined, and ultimately fell, in the fourteenth century B.C.E. The Cretans were conquered by barbarian tribes from central and eastern Europe, the Hellenes. The Hellenes attacked and destroyed Crete.

The Cretans, however, did not disappear entirely. Over time, they intermarried with the Hellenes. This mixture of Cretan and Hellene became the ancient Greeks.

Do you know what years are contained in the fourteenth century? If you do not know, do not feel bad. Many people find the numbering of years a little bit confusing. In the Western world, the years are counted backward and forward from the year 1, when medieval historians believed Jesus of Nazareth was born. (Modern scholars believe these medieval mathematicians were wrong, and that Jesus of Nazareth was actually born in the year we know as 4 or 6 B.C.E.)

Everything before 1 C.E. (also called A.D. 1; “A.D.” stands for “Anno Domini,” Latin for “in the year of our lord”) is B.C. (“Before the Common Era” or “Before the Christian Era”), and is numbered backward. There is no year zero.

Whether you are talking about the years C.E. or B.C.E., the term “first century” refers to the years 1-100. (There are a hundred years in each century.) The “second century” refers to the years 101-200, and so forth. The “fourteenth century” roughly refers to the 1300s, or, more precisely, the years 1301-1400. We live in the twenty-first century, the years 2001-2100.



An easy way to remember how to place a year within a century is to look at the next hundred-year mark from the precise year in question. It is a bit like rounding up in math. The next 100-year mark after 1776 is 1800. Look at how many hundreds are in 1800. There are 18 hundreds in 1800. Therefore, the year 1776 belongs to the eighteenth century.

Name the century for each of the following years:

2450 B.C.E. _____

44 B.C.E. _____

476 C.E. _____

1066 C.E. _____

2000 C.E. _____

Between what years did Cretan civilization decline and fall? _____

Culture and Legacy

The ancient Cretans (or Minoans) provide a link, both geographically and culturally, between ancient Egypt and classical Greece.

Cretan culture stressed athleticism, a trait that was inherited by the ancient Greeks. Boxing, dancing, and running were very popular. Wall paintings (known as *frescoes*) depict a bull-jumping event that may have been a sport or part of a religious ritual. Interestingly, Cretan women enjoyed a level of equality with men,

and seem to have taken part in athletic contests and games.

The principal Cretan deity was a goddess. Minoan art illustrates this goddess, along with religious festivals and rituals.

Minoan palaces had baths, drains, and plumbing. Unfortunately, Sir Arthur Evans went a bit, many have said, overboard at Knossos. He sought to not only excavate Knossos, but to restore it. In doing so, he poured tons of concrete and applied much paint. His additions make it very difficult for today's archaeologists to truly see what the ancient Minoans did and did not have. Certainly, traces of ancient paint seen and copied by Evans showed that Knossos was a colorful place, but no one will ever know for certain how accurate Evans' restoration is.

Name three sports enjoyed by the ancient Cretans. _____

Define the term *fresco*. _____

From the perspective of a casual tourist, do you believe that an imaginative restoration is better than half-ruined artifacts? How might your opinion change as a professional archaeologist? Explain your answer. _____



than an object, it is called a letter. All of the letters used in a written language are called an alphabet.

A great example of this is the ancient Phoenician letter Δ. This symbol was called “daleth” by the Phoenicians, their word for “door.” (The Phoenicians had borrowed the symbol from the Egyptians, who used it for a different word.) As you can see, Δ looks like a primitive door. Over time, this symbol came to represent simply the sound “deh,” the first sound in “daleth.” The letter Δ was born.

Language and Writing

Historians and archaeologists believe that writing first developed among agricultural cultures because of the need to record information about harvests, taxes, and trade. One can easily imagine a Bronze Age Minoan civil servant recording that such-and-such farmer has given the king a share of his crop. Most of the earliest known writing deals with agricultural inventory of this nature.

The earliest writing symbols tended to be pictographs. A pictograph is a symbol, or “abbreviated picture,” that represents an object. For example, one might draw this:

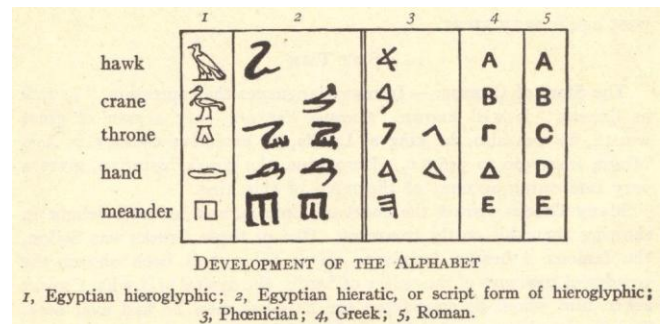


to illustrate a hill or mountain.

Over many, many years, most cultures found that having a separate pictograph for each object presented a lot of problems, least of which was remembering all of them. The answer to the problem of pictographs was to use a sound from the word, and to use this sound as the meaning for the pictograph. When a symbol represents a sound, rather

The ancient Greeks borrowed this letter from the Phoenicians, but called it “delta.” It is still written as Δ by the Greeks, as well as by those using a Cyrillic alphabet (such as the Russians).

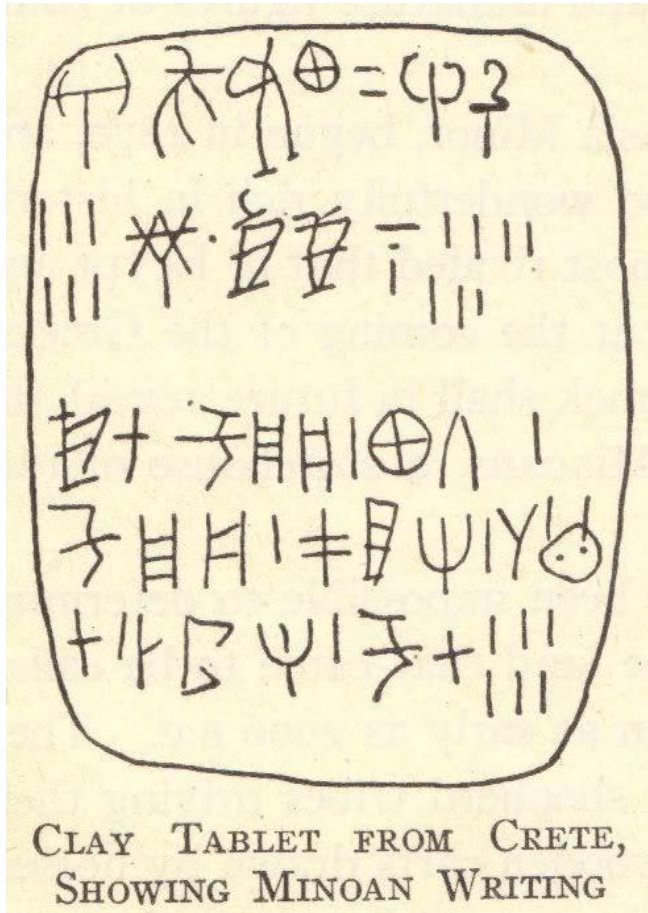
The Δ was in turn borrowed by the ancient Romans from the Greeks. The Romans wrote Δ as “D.” The Romans’ Latin alphabet is used to write the English language today. This is why Δ looks so much like the English “D” and represents the same sound. It explains how, in a convoluted way, this workbook is written in the Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek, and Latin alphabets.



Ancient Cretan writing remains largely undeciphered. Looking at the illustration below, select three symbols. These symbols might be letters or pictographs—no one yet

knows. Copy each of your three selected symbols. Based on what you have learned about the history and development of alphabets, conjecture the meaning of each of your chosen symbols. Give at least two logical reasons (per symbol) why you believe that your educated guesses are correct.

3



1
2

Myths

7

The most famous myth related to ancient Crete is that of the minotaur which allegedly lived at the center of a labyrinth belonging to King Minos. (A labyrinth is a complicated maze.)

According to legend, Poseidon, the god of the sea, sent a bull to King Minos. Minos was supposed to sacrifice this bull in honor of Poseidon. But, because the bull was such a fine specimen, Minos kept it for himself.

Poseidon grew very angry. In retaliation, the goddess Aphrodite contrived for Minos' wife, Pasiphae, to engage in a romantic relationship with a bull from the sea. The result of their union was the minotaur, called Asterion.

The ancient stories say that a man named Daedalus and his son, Icarus, built the labyrinth for King Minos in order to house the minotaur. This minotaur—a ferocious half-man, half-bull creature that craved human flesh as meat—lived at the center of the labyrinth.

King Minos defeated the Athenians in a war. As a penalty, every nine years, lots were drawn, and seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls were sent into the labyrinth to be eaten by the minotaur. Thus, Minos was able to appease the gods.

A young Athenian man named Theseus, son of King Aegeus, volunteered for the third such sacrifice. Theseus promised his father that, on his return voyage, he would put up a white sail to indicate his success.

Once on the island of Crete, a daughter of Minos, Ariadne, fell in love with Theseus. Ariadne gave Theseus a ball of thread so that, after killing the minotaur, Theseus could find his way out of the labyrinth. The plan worked. Theseus killed the minotaur, then followed the thread back to the entrance of the labyrinth.

Successful, Theseus returned home. However, he forgot to put up a white sail on his boat. Seeing a black sail, King Aegeus killed himself by leaping into the sea. The sea was thenceforth called the Aegean in his honor.

Who built the labyrinth? _____

How did Theseus escape the labyrinth? _____

How did the Aegean Sea get its name? _____

As interesting as the legend of the minotaur

might be, common sense says that it is fiction. However, historians and archaeologists are often able to glean historical truths from such mythical legends. At the very least, it is clear from the story that bulls were held in some esteem among the ancient Cretans. You already learned that the Minoans participated in a bull-jumping event that may have formed part of a religious ritual.

Many ancient peoples gave ritualistic (or religious) significance to objects and creatures that played important roles in their daily lives. For example, a culture of fisherfolk can be expected to have myths about magical talking fish.

Based on what you know about the Minoan economy, as well as your knowledge of what bulls (and cows) are used for by humans, why do you think that bulls were such an important part of Minoan rituals and stories? What do artistic depictions and myths containing bulls allow us to infer about the ancient Minoans? _

