

Minoans & Myceneans

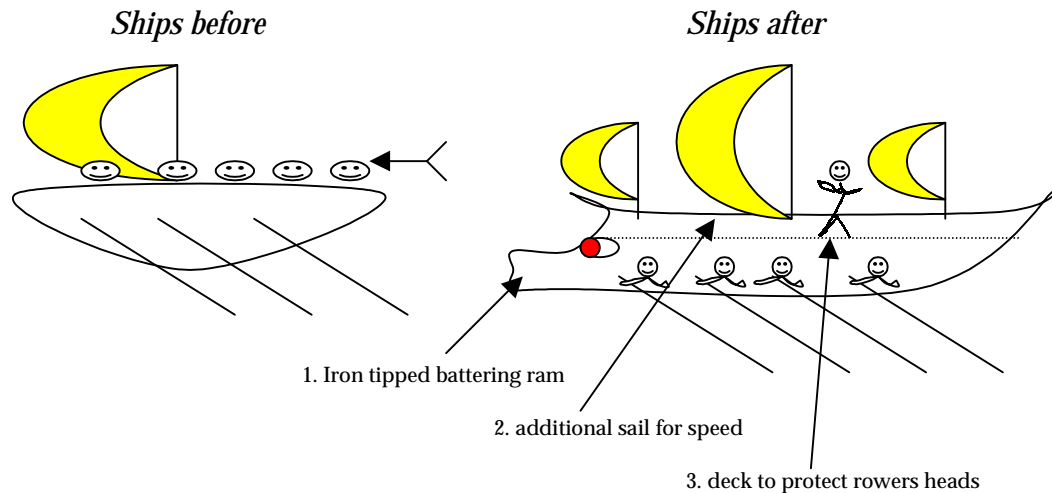
Remember the earliest civilizations all began in river valleys around 5,000 years ago in 3,000 B.C.E. The Hebrews and Phoenicians are a little later in 1,500 B.C.E. Joining them in this rough time frame are the Minoans and Myceneans. They are two small separate civilizations, that we'll cover together. To cover these two civilizations we'll be moving out of the Fertile Crescent, west of Canaan out into the Mediterranean Sea.



The Minoans were a civilization on the island of Crete while the Myceneans were located on the Balkan peninsula in a land most commonly known as Greece. The two civilizations traded and probably even raided each other, but we'll talk about each separately☺

Minoans: civilization on the island of Crete - great sailors and traders.

Being an island, it made sense the Minoans would take to the sea. Although not as accomplished perhaps as the Phoenicians the Minoans were probably for a time their main competition for trade goods. The Minoans early on had problems with their ships being attacked and their goods raided by pirates. These problems with pirates (not the ones from Pittsburgh, no one has trouble with them) led the Minoans to alter their ship's design.



Triremes: ancient Mediterranean warships with sails and oarsman armed with a battering ram.

The new ships were great. Maybe too great. Soon after the Minoans altered their ships so did everyone else in the Mediterranean including the pirates. These ships were so successful that for the next 3,000 years, they were the warships of the Mediterranean until the age of gunpowder.

I. Minoan cities - The Minoans had a number of cities but their capital was called

Knossos: largest city of the Minoans on Crete.

Within the city was the palace for the Minoan royal family. The Minoans we believe were ruled by kings, and the ruins of the palace are massive. Even more massive perhaps were the basement and cellars underneath the Minoan palace. These cellars stored incredible amounts grain and caskets of wine. They were so huge that we think servants sometimes became lost within them from time to time. The cellars, we think, helped inspire a later legend, but in the legend the basement was known as the

Labyrinth: huge complicated maze.

We'll talk about the legend later.

II. Bull-leaping The Minoans were also great admirers of sport. They built what seem to be the world's first known sporting arenas. Within these arenas the Minoans enjoyed what was undoubtedly a quite vicious sport called

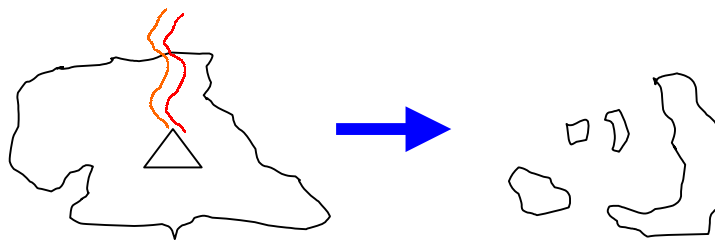
Bull-leaping: Minoan sport perhaps with religious significance. Two people, usually a man and a woman, take turns somersaulting over a charging bull.

Pretty darn crazy eh? Well so is modern day bullfighting and if you want to see some real loons check out the yearly "Running of the Bulls" in Pamplona, Spain. Myself, I'm scared to death of my grandfather's one bull, and I'm usually carrying a 2' by 4' around him.

III. Minoan destruction? The Island of Thera?

Ok remember that the Minoans were a culture from over 3,500 years ago, and the problem with history that is so old, is that it has gaps and things we can't figure out. Not only could we not read the Harappan's writing but we still cannot tell what happened to them for sure. The Minoans are a similar case. Around 1,500 B.C.E. or so they are gone. Their cities were destroyed and their ships ceased to cruise the Mediterranean. We can't totally be sure what happened to them but there is a theory that I like and makes sense to a lot of other historians. The theory is that the Minoans were destroyed by one of the most violent, volcanic eruptions ever!

Island of Thera: island north of Crete, home to 9,000 and the volcano Santorini, which blew its top in 1,450 B.C.E.



Artist's rendition of the island before the eruption

Rendition of Thera as it looks today

What Happened?

- 32 square miles of the island were vaporized or blown away.
- It is estimated that the shock wave from the blast flattened buildings over 100 miles away.
- After the shockwave, nearby islands, including Crete, would have been greeted with a 300 foot high tsunami! (Not salami, that's something far deadlier.)
- Guesstimated that the blast would have kicked up so much ash, soot and rock that sunlight in the Eastern Mediterranean would have been choked off for days.

Historians believe this eruption probably spelled doom to the Minoans who never recovered from this cataclysmic eruption. Interestingly the eruption roughly coincides with the Hebrews fleeing Egypt. Hmmm, fire hail, walls of water, darkness, hmmm.

IV. Theseus & the Minotaur

So the Minoans are done and washed away, but before we leave them, let's speak of a quick legend. Now remember legends have truth it's just a matter of finding it. We believe that this legend was inspired by the Minoan sport of bull-leaping and the massive cellars underneath the palace at Knossos. From these two facts grew a tale called Theseus and the Minotaur.

A. King Aegeus visits Troezen

King Aegeus was King in the Greek city-state of Athens. While visiting Troezen he had a night of passion with the Princess Aethra. Upon leaving the city, Aegeus placed a sword and a pair of sandals under an immense rock and told the princess that if she gave birth to a son, that when he was of age, and if the boy could retrieve the sword and sandals from under the stone, that she was to send the boy to him in Athens and he would be the next king. The princess agreed, and indeed she was with child, but the boy she gave birth to was actually not the son of Aegeus, but the son of the god Poseidon. That's a little secret so don't tell anybody! The boy's name was Theseus.

B. Theseus travels to see Aegeus

Theseus grew up powerful and strong. When he came of age his mother had him move the rock and retrieve the sword and sandals. She then told him his father was the great King Aegeus of Athens, and if he traveled there he would be Athens's next king. Well Theseus could have taken a comfortable sea journey to his father, but instead, he traveled the Isthmus road which was notorious for criminals, villains, and other nasty sort. Confident in his abilities Theseus successfully travels the road fighting off and killing numerous evil-doers.

Among them was Sinus who was so strong he bent down pine trees which tore his victims in two, and Procrustus, a mad man who insisted that guests fit his bed. He shortened them with an ax if they were too long and lengthened them with ropes if they were too short, oftentimes tearing them to pieces. Never fear as Theseus took care of both of these savages and many more.

C. Aegeus welcomes Theseus, well sort of.

Theseus arrives in Athens and explains to Aegeus who he is. Aegeus, however, can't remember, and in the meantime he's married another woman by the name of Medea and had a son. Medea knows that Theseus is telling the truth, but fearful that her son will lose his chance to rule, she convinces her husband that Theseus is just a criminal looking to steal a throne. Aegeus agrees to allow Medea to poison Theseus and kill him. She hands Theseus a cup of poisoned wine and as he lifts the chalice to his lips, Aegeus suddenly recognizes his long forgotten sword and knocks the cup from Theseus' lips. Medea flees with her son and there is joy until...

D. 7 boys and 7 girls for the Minotaur

Soon after their reunion a tribute ship from Crete arrives demanding the annual tribute of 7 boys and 7 girls to be fed to the monster the **Minotaur**: head of a bull, body of a man. Eats flesh. The son of the King of Crete had died suspiciously on a visit to Athens and this was the price King Minos of Crete demanded for the death of his son. Theseus insisted on going despite the pleas of Aegeus. Theseus promised his father that he would slay the Minotaur and return and he would know of his return by changing the ship's sails from black to white.

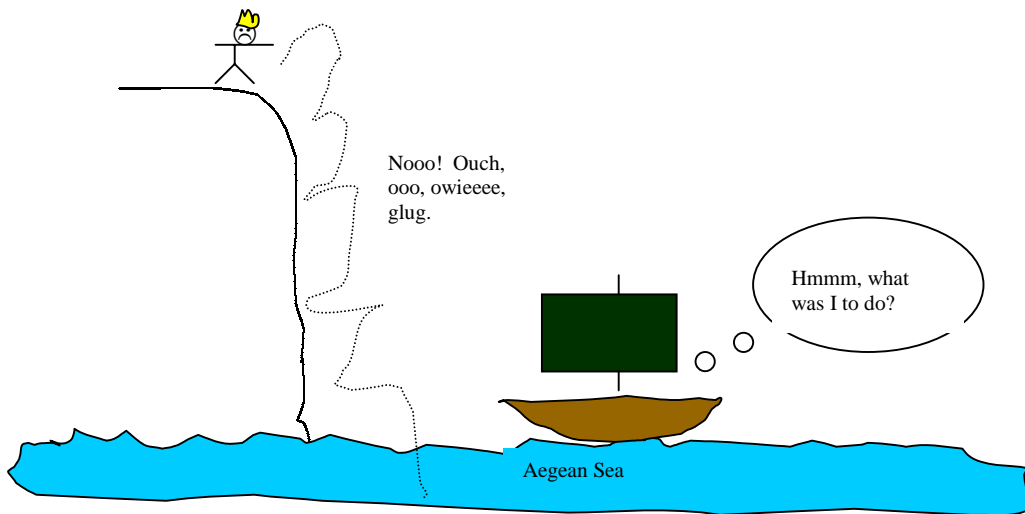
E. The Labyrinth and the Minotaur

Upon reaching Crete, the Minoan king's daughter, Ariadne, becomes smitten with Theseus. As Theseus enters the labyrinth she gives him a ball of string and a small sword. Using these Theseus kills the Minotaur and escapes the labyrinth. Grabbing Princess Ariadne, Theseus escapes the island of Crete and heads for home. On the way back they put in at a small island and Theseus inexplicably abandons Ariadne there.

F. The sails boy, change the sails

The rest of Theseus' voyage home is uneventful and he returns home with the black sails. Black sails wait a minute. Theseus remembers too late. You see his father, King Aegeus, every day climbed the cliffs overlooking the sea hoping to sight the ship that would bring his son back home. He saw the ship, but he also saw the black sails. Thinking his son dead, Aegeus in his grief throws himself from the cliffs into the sea where his body is never found. Theseus becomes king and goes on to further adventures against the Amazons and in Hades, but he never forgets the

tragic death of his father. In memory of his father the sea is named the Aegean Sea and it is still named that today.



V. The Myceneans: The Trojan War - The Myceneans existed in the same time period as the Minoans, and undoubtedly traded with them. While Crete was united behind a king, the Myceneans were divided into separate city-states. These city-states often fell to raiding and fighting one another. Also referred to as the Achaeans, I mention the Mycenean civilization because of their part in a great, legendary war; a war that became one of our greatest epic stories.

The Trojan War: legendary war between the Myceneans and the city of Troy passed down to us by the poet Homer.

Homer: blind poet wrote the legend of the Trojan War in two books - *Illiad* and *Odyssey*.

Now this war did take place, but the story I tell you is a legend. Remember there is some truth in them you just have to look really hard. Hang on and enjoy the story!

A. The beauty pageant

According to Homer the war began not because of the affairs of men, but because of the interference of the gods. The goddesses Athena, Aphrodite and Hera were having an argument over who was the most beautiful of

the goddesses. To settle the issue they decided to have a contest, a beauty pageant. However, they needed to find an unbiased judge for the contest. Surely they couldn't pick one of the other gods to judge. Instead they looked to the earth and found just the mortal to judge the contest.

Paris: prince of Troy, foolish mortal chosen to judge the goddesses' beauty pageant.

Mortal: human, can and will die eventually.

Immortal: god-like, cannot die and will live forever.

So Paris is to judge the contest, but each of the goddesses wants to win so badly that they each come to Paris offering a bribe if he'll pick them as the winner. They offer the following:

Athena: goddess of war and wisdom offers wisdom

Hera: queen of the gods, goddess of the hearth, offers power

Aphrodite: goddess of love, offers the most beautiful woman in the world.

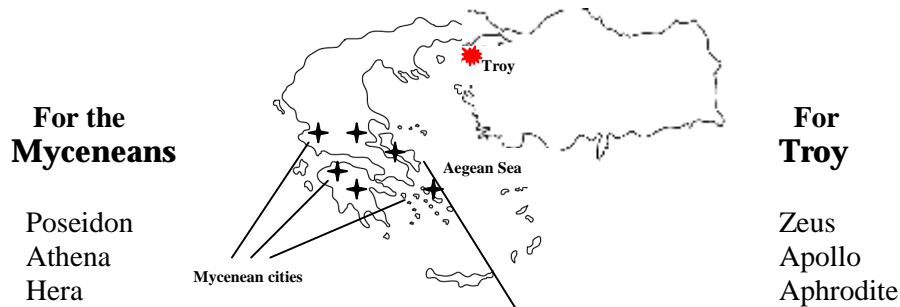
Paris looks over the bribes carefully and chooses Aphrodite and claims his prize of the most beautiful woman in the world. You see everyone knows who the most beautiful woman is, she's famous from Mesopotamia to Spain, from Egypt to the shores of southern Russia. Her name is

Helen: "face that launched a thousand ships" Most beautiful woman in the world *married to a Mycenaean king*. Paris steals her away to Troy.

The poor Mycenaean king named Menelaus is heartbroken and he goes to all of the other Mycenaean city-states and their kings and tells his tale of woe. How the evil Trojans had stolen away his famous wife leaving him heartbroken. Angered at the abduction of Helen the Mycenaean as one rose up to free her and punish Troy for its foolishness.

FREE HELEN

B. A War of Gods and Men!



Achilles: invincible warrior. As a babe dipped in the underworld river Styx making him invulnerable. All except his heels.

Hector: greatest warrior of Troy.

Despite initial problems as told to the right, the Myceneans land at Troy and attack the city. The war goes on and on and on. Year after year passes because the gods have chosen sides in this war. Just when it looks like one side might break through and win the war, one of the gods intervenes. Therefore much of the war is a stalemate, until 10 years into the war Homer picks up the story of how the war ends in the *Illiad*.

On the shores of Aulis

So all the Myceneans gather at Aulis to sail for Troy. Hundreds and hundreds of ships await in the harbor, but there is a problem. There is no wind. The Myceneans can't go anywhere. They wait for months. Finally in frustration, one of the Mycenaean kings, Agamemnon, asks a seer what he has to do to bring the winds. She tells him to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. Without checking with his wife, Agamemnon does this and the winds immediately rise and they sail for Troy. Pretty cruel huh? Don't worry when Agamemnon returns, his wife, Clytemnestra, murders him.

C. Achilles hangs it up

The war gets interesting when Achilles decides he's had enough and prepares to sail for home. The Mycenaean king, Agamemnon, took one of Achilles' servant girls without his permission. Achilles is enraged and insulted. He decides these kings can fight their own stupid war. No amount of reasoning or apologizing can change Achilles' stubborn mind. Now without Achilles, the Myceneans are in trouble. He is an army all by himself, and his absence will only help Troy. Through their spies, the Trojans hear that Achilles will no longer fight and they immediately open their gates and launch an attack on the Myceneans. The Trojans are trying to burn the Mycenaean ships through which they are being supplied. If

they do the war is over and they win. They've almost made it to the ships when.

D. Patrocles borrows the Achilles' armor

Patrocles: Achilles best friend has been begging Achilles to leave his ship and fight the onrushing Trojans. Achilles will not, so in desperation Patrocles begs to borrow Achilles' golden armor so that he may wear it and the Trojans will think that he is Achilles. Achilles allows this, but he warns Patrocles not to try and take the city. He is only to push the Trojans back but no more, for Achilles had a dream in which Zeus told him that the city would not fall on this day. Half-listening Patrocles dons the armor and races out after the Trojans. The disguise works, as seeing the golden armor the Trojans suddenly stop and about face racing back to the safety of their city. Patrocles chases them to the walls of the city, and forgets Achilles warning. Patrocles is about to storm the gates of the city, when he slips. He rises to face the greatest warrior of Troy, Hector stands before him.

E. The Deaths of Heroes

Patrocles faces Hector but Patrocles is no Achilles. Hector slays him on the battlefield, but is prevented from removing the armor by the onrushing Myceneans. In shock, the Myceneans carry the dead Patrocles back to Achilles. Seeing the body of his dead friend, Achilles goes berserk. Grabbing his spear he races onto the field shouting over and over for Hector, for blood, for vengeance. Achilles finds Hector and Hector does what any true man would do in this horrific situation. He runs away. Achilles chases him. Hector keeps running, Achilles keeps chasing. Finally Hector realizes he cannot continue to try and escape his fate. He stops turns...and Achilles puts a spear through his head. Achilles, however, is still angry. REALLY ANGRY! So he ties Hector up by his ankles, mounts his chariot and drags Hector's dead body around the city of Troy for all to see, screaming at the Trojans to come and look at their fallen hero. In anguish Troy looks upon the grisly scene, when Paris (remember him?) fires an arrow at Achilles. Under orders from Zeus, Apollo takes hold of that arrow's flight and guides it straight into Achilles heel. Achilles shrugs off the wound, but as the weeks pass, the wound becomes infected and a suffering, feverish Achilles also dies.

F. Odysseus: "If we built a large wooden badger!"

With both Hector and Achilles dead, the war once more grinds into a stalemate. The war must end. Perhaps the gods have wearied of it as much as the humans have. In the night the Mycenaean, Odysseus, who himself is the king of Ithaca, dreams of a way to end the war. He convinces the other Mycenaean kings to go along with his plan. They build a massive wooden horse, hollow on the inside with room for a small group of soldiers, and by ship sail from Troy, leaving the horse on the beach. The people of Troy, seeing the Myceneans leave, open their gates and storm out to the beaches in relief and celebration. But in the midst of their happiness, they notice the horse. Immediately a discussion ensues about what the purpose of this horse could be and what to do with it. Many want to burn the horse to the ground. Then several ragged Myceneans are found who claim they were left behind and abandoned. (They were left behind for this purpose;) They tell the Trojans that the horse was an offering to the gods, and, furthermore, that there was a prophecy that if the Trojans took the horse into the city, then Troy would never fall. The Trojans liked that, but weren't convinced. One person thought they could even hear voices from the horse. The overwhelming sentiment was to burn the horse. One man, by the name of Laocoon was extremely insistent that the Trojans burn the horse. So insistent, that Poseidon got annoyed with him and sent a three headed sea serpent to devour him. After watching Laocoon be devoured, the Trojans decided to take the horse into the city.

G. The End of Troy

That night, the Trojans celebrate heartily. Ten years of war over, at least, so they thought. Late in the night, the Myceneans slipped out of the wooden horse. They dispatched the drunk and sleeping guards, and opened the city gates. Also in the night the Mycenaean ships had sailed back and with the gates thrown open, they stormed the city. Words cannot speak for the atrocities of that night. The once brilliant city of Troy was burned to the ground, its people put to the sword, and Helen was retrieved by her husband Menelaus. All this for a pretty face. After much pillage and plunder, the Myceneans sail for home ending the war and ending the *Illiad*.

The end right, well there is the *Odyssey*

Not all the Myceneans have a happy voyage home. Agamemnon for instance is killed by his wife when he returns. Odysseus has a difficult voyage. The voyage should take about a month, but instead takes him fourteen years. He has the misfortune of running into an island of Cyclops, he angers Poseidon, his men open up a bag of winds that blows him off course, his men are turned into pigs, he uses some holy moley, and his men are eaten by the monsters Scylla and Charybdis. Finally he returns home to find his house has been overrun by rude and arrogant suitors to his wife who believe Odysseus dead. Disguised as an old man, Odysseus returns, and with the help of his son, slaughters the suitors feeding their remains to the dogs. This is the book the *Odyssey*, the better of Homer's two books, and today the word *odyssey* is for one who has made a long journey. Hopefully a journey not as long as Odysseus's.

<http://www.wmoen.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/naoutl.htm>