

# Bronze Age civilizations

Two impressive civilizations dominated the Greek world during the Bronze Age. On the island of Crete, south of mainland Greece, the vast palace at Knossos was discovered in the early 20th century. This was the center of the Minoan civilization. A more warlike society developed later on the mainland around the city of Mycenae.

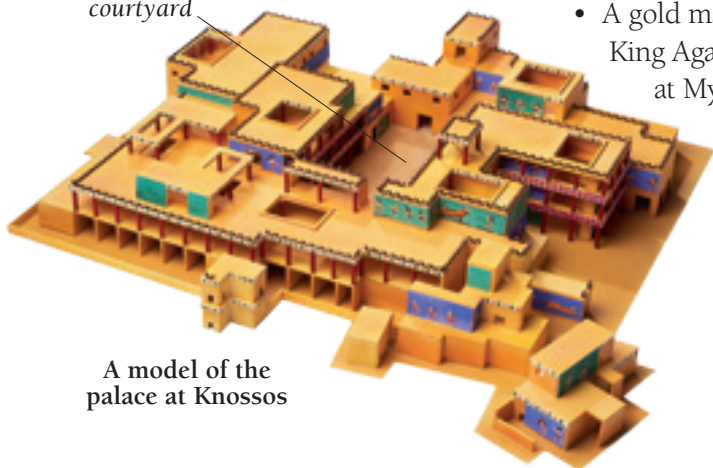
## The Minoans

The Minoans settled on Crete from around 3000 BCE, reaching the height of their powers between 2000 and 1500 BCE. They were not Greeks, but had a big influence on early Greek life.

### Key facts

- The civilization is called Minoan after the legendary King Minos, who ruled at the city of Knossos.
- The Minoans traded with the Greeks, who copied their art and their writing system.
- The vast palace at Knossos was excavated by the English archeologist Sir Arthur Evans. It had workshops, warehouses, and a sophisticated drainage system.
- By 1450 BCE, Knossos seems to have lost its power and Greeks took over the island of Crete.

Central courtyard



A model of the palace at Knossos

## The Mycenaeans

During the Bronze Age, the Greeks on the mainland lived in small kingdoms centered on palaces, such as those at Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, and Thebes.



The so-called mask of Agamemnon

### Key facts

- Mycenaean palaces were smaller than the palace at Knossos but were heavily fortified.
- Mycenaean kings were very wealthy and were buried with lots of gold.
- A gold mask named for legendary King Agamemnon was discovered at Mycenae in 1876 by the German archeologist Heinrich Schliemann.
  - The Mycenaeans' civilization reached its peak around 1600 BCE. By 1100 BCE its strongholds fell and the Dark Ages began.

## Troy: fact or fiction?



The Greeks trick the Trojans with their wooden horse

Stories of the great Mycenaean civilization survived the Dark Ages and were told and retold from one generation to the next. Two stories in particular, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were made famous by the Greek poet Homer in his epic poems written in the eighth century BCE. Homer told of the rivalry between the two cities of Mycenae and Troy. But how much of it is true?

### Key facts

- In Homer's *Iliad*, Helen was the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, who was brother of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae. Helen was captured and taken to Troy by Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy. This led to the Trojan war.
- Historians believe that it is possible the two cities fought, but over the ownership of land and crops rather than a woman.
- Homer's *Odyssey* is the story of the warrior Odysseus's return home to Ithaca after the Trojan war, with many adventures along the way.
- In 1870, German archeologist Heinrich Schliemann discovered the site of ancient Troy—the city had been rebuilt nine times.