

## Minoan Civilization on Crete

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The Minoans were a pre-Hellenic Bronze Age civilization in Crete in the Aegean Sea, flourishing from approximately 2700 to 1450 BC when their culture was superseded by the Mycenaean culture, which drew upon the Minoans. Based on depictions in Minoan art, Minoan culture is often characterized as a matrilinear society centered on goddess worship.

The term "Minoan" was coined by the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans after the mythic "king" Minos, associated with the labyrinth, which Evans identified as the site at Knossos. It is possible, though unsure, that Minos was indeed a term used to identify a specific Minoan ruler. It could also have been used to describe the current ruler of the Minoan civilization. What the Minoans called themselves is unknown, although the Egyptian place name "Keftiu" and the Semitic "Kaftor" or "Caphtor" and "Kaptara" in the Mari archives, both evidently referring to Minoan Crete, are suggestive.

Rather than give calendar dates for the Minoan period, archaeologists use two systems of relative chronology. The first, created by Evans and modified by later archaeologists, is based on pottery styles. It divides the Minoan period into three main eras—Early Minoan (EM), Middle Minoan (MM), and Late Minoan (LM). These eras are further subdivided, e.g. Early Minoan I, II, III (EMI, EMII, EMIII).

Another system, proposed by the Greek archaeologist Nicolas Platon, is based on the development of the architectural complexes known as "palaces" at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, and Kato Zakros, and divides the Minoan period into Prepalatial, Protopalatial, Neopalatial and Post-palatial periods. The relationship between these systems is given in the accompanying table, with approximate calendar dates drawn from Warren and Hankey (1989).

All calendar dates given in this article are approximate, and the subject of ongoing debate.

The Thera eruption occurred during a mature phase of the LM IA period. The calendar date of the eruption is extremely controversial; see the article on Thera eruption for discussion.

The oldest signs of inhabitants on Crete are ceramic Neolithic remains that date to approximately 7000 BC. See History of Crete for details.

The beginning of its Bronze Age, around 2600 BC, was a period of great unrest in Crete, and also marks the beginning of Crete as an important center of civilization.

At the end of the MMII period (1700 BC) there was a large disturbance in Crete, probably an earthquake, or possibly an invasion from Anatolia. The Palaces at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, and Kato Zakros were destroyed. But with the start of the Neopalatial period, population increased again, the palaces were rebuilt on a larger scale and new settlements were built all over the island. This period (the 17th and 16th centuries, MM III / Neopalatial) represents the apex of the Minoan civilization. The Thera eruption occurred during LMIA (and LHI).

On the Greek mainland, LHIIIB began during LMIB, showing independence from Minoan influence. At the end of the LMIB period, the Minoan palace culture failed catastrophically. All palaces were destroyed, and only Knossos was immediately restored - although other palaces sprang up later in LMIIIA (like Chania).

LMIB ware has been found in Egypt under the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III. Either the LMIB/LMII catastrophe occurred after this time, or else it was so bad that the Egyptians then had to import LHIIIB instead. A short time after the LMIB/LMII catastrophe, around 1420 BC, the island was conquered by the Mycenaeans, who adapted Linear A Minoan script as Linear B for their Mycenaean language, a form of Greek. The first such archive anywhere is in the LMII-era "Room of the Chariot Tablets". Later Cretan archives date to LMIIIA (contemporary with LHIIIA) but no later than that.

During LMIIIA:1, Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hatan took note of k-f-t-w (Kaftor) as one of the "Secret Lands of the North of Asia". Also mentioned are Cretan cities such as i-'m-n-y-s3/i-m-ni-s3 (Amnisos), b3-y-s3-?-y (Phaistos), k3-t-w-n3-y (Kydonia) and k3-in-yw-s (Knossos) and some toponyms reconstructed as Cyclades and Greek. If the values of these Egyptian names are accurate, then this pharaoh did not privilege LMIII Knossos above the other states in the region.

After about a century of partial recovery, most Cretan cities and palaces went into decline in the 13th century (LHIIIB; we should not speak of an independent "LMIIIB").

Knossos remained an administrative center until 1200 BC; the last of the Minoan sites was the defensive mountain site of Karfi.