

MYCENAE

Homer, the first known Greek poet, who lived about 700 B.C., wrote of another civilization that arose after the fall of the Minoan civilization. It was called the Mycenaean civilization. In his epic, the *Iliad*, Homer described the wealthy palaces where heroic kings, such as Agamemnon of Mycenae, lived. These kings waged war against the people of Troy, a walled city located on the coast of northern Turkey, on the east side of the Aegean. According to the story, the Mycenaeans defeated the Trojans in a battle inside the city walls after hiding inside a large, wooden horse (the Trojan Horse), which the Trojans were tricked into bringing inside the city gates.



The Lion Gate at Mycenae

This civilization was named after an important palace, Mycenae, located in the Peloponnese on mainland Greece (the southern region of Greece connected to the rest of the country by the Isthmus of Corinth). (See map on page 87.) It was discovered by a famous German archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, in A.D. 1876. The Mycenaeans were Greeks who came to the Greek mainland about 2000 B.C. By about 1500 B.C., there emerged a civilization as prosperous and wealthy as that of Minoan Crete.

The archaeological remains in the Peloponnese consist of large palaces that served the same purposes as those found on Crete. Unlike the Minoans, however, the Mycenaeans were a warlike people. The palaces were surrounded by well-built walls for defense. The frescoes on the walls show many scenes of hunting and warfare. Bronze weapons and body armor and helmets made of ivory tusks were also found among the artifacts. For survival in case of siege, the Mycenaeans built underground tunnels leading to a water well outside the palace gates. Like the Minoans, the Mycenaeans cultivated olives and grapes and traded jars of oil and wine, as well as painted pottery, throughout the Mediterranean region.

Mycenaeans buried their dead in monumental family tombs. The burial chamber of the tomb was dug into a hillside and was approached by a long tunnel-like entrance (called a *dromos*). The dead were buried with their belongings (painted pottery, gold jewelry and cups, and weapons) on the floor or in a pit of the chamber.

The Mycenaeans had a written language, which was written on rectangular clay tablets. The script is called "Linear B" because its characters consisted of lines. The tablets contain lists of food and other products made, stored, and distributed by the palace officials. They contain no historical information that can tell us of any wars or the reason for the end of this civilization. Disaster struck the palaces between about 1200 and 1100 B.C. They were destroyed by fire, and the people abandoned their homes. Many causes could have contributed to the fall of this civilization: drought, civil war, or outside invaders from the north called the Dorians. There is no evidence, however, to tell us exactly what happened.

Name _____ Date _____

CHALLENGES

1. Who were the Mycenaeans?

2. How did the Mycenaeans capture Troy?

3. Who wrote the epic of the *Iliad*?

4. Who discovered the Mycenaean civilization?

5. Where was the Mycenaean civilization located?

6. What written language did the Mycenaeans have?

7. What may have caused the end of the Mycenaean civilization?

8. What kind of food products did the Mycenaeans cultivate?

9. What type of artifacts did the Mycenaeans produce?

10. What did the Mycenaeans build to survive a siege?

11. Describe a Mycenaean tomb.
