“The Palace of Knossos”
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Map of the Palace of Knossos

http://www.odysseyadventures.ca/articles/knossos/articleKnossos02.palace.html.
The Palace of Knossos is the largest and most important archaeological treasure located on the modern day island of Crete.² Around 1900BC the Minoans built the Palace of Knossos.³ Sir Arthur Evans, a well-known English archeologist⁴, discovered the huge complex in 1900AD and called it the “Palace of Minos” after Minos, Homer’s mythical king of Knossos. The work Sir Arthur Evans accomplished at Knossos contributed to a revolution in Greek history, pushing the known beginning of Greek history back 40,000 years and revealed a much different image of ancient history Greek culture.⁵ The question is what insight does the study of Knossos grants into Minoan life, which thrived here thousands of years ago.⁶

The Palace of Knossos when first built in 1900BC was large, made up of many rooms and had a central courtyard (as shown on the cover page image). The palace would have been capable of holding several thousand inhabitants at the time. Crete’s location on the Mediterranean Sea allows it to be a major shipping crossroad for numerous trade routes on the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, the island has many natural harbors, which further incentivized traders to dock. Therefore the ability for Knossos to endure and succeed can be largely be attributed to the sea.⁷

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The palace was destroyed around 1700BC. Sir Arthur Evans credited the destruction to an earthquake. However likely this may be, it is very difficult to prove the damage Sir Arthur Evans encountered came from an earthquake.8 The palace was rebuilt shortly after; this newer palace is what is viewable today. The reconstructed palace included at maze of rooms. These rooms served a number of purposes such as, residential quarters, workshops or storerooms. The population that lived in Knossos’s magnificent palace at the civilization's height is estimated at 17,000.9 The grand scale of the palace makes it safe to assume the complex served as the political, economic and religious center for Minoan society. The residents of the palace likely consisted of a ruler and a number of essential subordinates.10 The palace was further damaged in 1600BC; signs show that the cause was likely due to yet another earthquake. However, detailed investigation of the site shows that the damages were more isolated within Knossos than throughout Crete, suggesting that the causation came from multiple smaller earthquakes than one catastrophic event.11 The damages were repaired soon after the disaster plus additional buildings were added as well. The palace did not grow much after this point in history. 12

The palace’s economy was based around storing imports and then redistributing the goods. The products stored in the palace came from either the palace’s land or from private farms. Items such as olive oil and grain came in from private farms were required as payment for taxes. This system both sustained the palace and the villagers who received wages and rations from the palace. Excess reserves that accumulated in the palace were used for commerce with Mediterranean traders and for famine relief when needed.  

The wealthy Minoan society developed brilliant art and architecture. The palace’s design and decor was largely based on the civilization of the Near East, particularly Egypt. Knossos was not a mirror image of Egypt by any means however; Minoans developed their own distinct style. The buildings were built of stone and mud brick and consisted of numerous floors to include basements. The exterior and interior was painted brightly and often featured artwork. Styling consisted of columns, balconies or terraces. The interior of the palace included light wells, which brought fresh air and light into the buildings. Many rooms even had running water and drainage systems.  

The complexity of Knossos’s economy created a need for a writing system. Thus a system arose comprised of specific symbols that likely stood for sounds from spoken word. The original writing system is known as Linear A. Many clay tablets have been found in the palace yet they remain un-translated. Though un-translated, it does seem that their main purpose was for keeping records of economic and

14 Ibid, 24-25
administrative details.\textsuperscript{15} Linear A served as a foundation for the development of Linear B. Linear B was a writing system the Mycenaean’s developed to fit the Greek phonology after they invaded and conquered all of Minoan society.\textsuperscript{16} This downfall of Minoan society came in the Late Bronze Age.\textsuperscript{17}

The Mycenaean invaded Crete in approximately 1400BC, which lead to the end of Minoan civilization. Knossos was likely already weakened when the Mycenaeans invaded due to the effects of a suspected massive volcanic eruption. This eruption is thought to have happened off the coast of Crete on the island of Thera. The eruption would have created large waves that could have destroyed the seaports and ships supporting Knossos. Additionally, the eruption possibly created climate change affecting crops for years. Economic downfall likely resulted from the combination of these disasters. The Minoans were a weak foe for the Mycenaeans.\textsuperscript{18}

Discoveries made in Knossos have revealed that the Minoans are responsible for a lasting impact on Greek civilization. Greek civilizations adopted the many developments of the Minoan state such as art, architecture and writing styles. Minoan culture lived on well past the end of Minoan civilization due to the influence


\textsuperscript{17}Pomeroy, Sarah B. \textit{A Brief History of Ancient Greece: Politics, Society, and Culture}. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 25

their way of life had on outside civilizations. This is why Knossos one of the most important artifacts of ancient Greek history.
Bibliography


