

The Mycenaeans



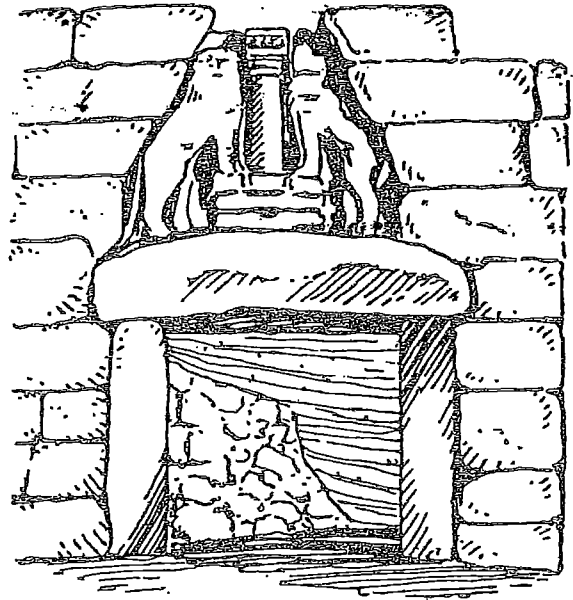
This packet will serve as your "textbook" for the Mycenaean section. Please bring it to class with you each day!

Name _____

Section _____

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.

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.

The Mycenaeans

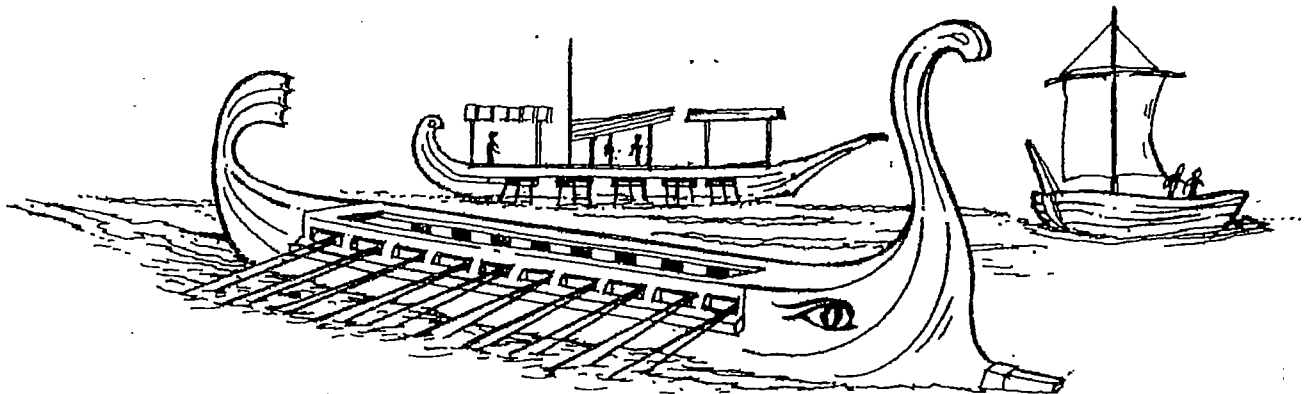
On the mainland of Greece, in an area known as the Peloponnesus Peninsula, a group of people called the Mycenaeans were growing ever stronger. These people were developing culture and expanding at the very time that the Minoans were becoming weaker. The Mycenaeans had learned much from trading with the Minoans. They built their palaces in the Minoan style of architecture and adopted their form of writing. They had also built a strong fleet of ships able to capture trade routes and help them establish flourishing colonies. The Mycenaeans invaded and conquered Crete in 1450 B.C. and soon became the dominant civilization in the Aegean Sea region.

These people were named after Mycenae, the city they came from which sat high on a hill overlooking the vast plains of Argos. Unlike the Minoans, who had ample farmlands and fishing, living in this hilly region meant few natural resources, so the Mycenaeans became traders. Their position on the mainland enabled them to become distributors of products from other countries. The Mycenaeans were also fine craftsmen of weapons, jewelry, and other artifacts made from imported raw materials. They were especially famous for their bronze work. Bronze is a metal made from smelting copper and tin together.

The Mycenaeans were much more warlike than the Minoans. Their lack of resources and need to acquire goods from other lands may have led them to a life of invasion and conquest. It is possible that their warlike nature caused fighting amongst their own colonies and perhaps even the collapse of their own civilization. By 1150 B.C. the Mycenaean culture was weak and left them a prime target for the Dorians to invade from the north.

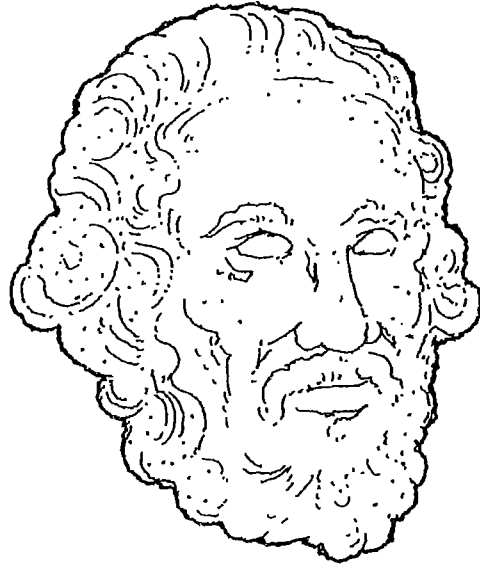
All of the Mycenaean cities fell to Dorian rule except for Athens. Historians believe its salvation was a secret underground supply of water in the Acropolis. When a city was under siege, the invaders would cut off its supply of water, and the people could not survive. Athens was able to maintain its culture as a haven and refuge for many others while isolated from the rest of the world during the Dorian rule.

The Dorians were uncivilized people possessing none of the skills and craftsmanship of the Minoans or the Mycenaeans. They were farmers rather than traders, so trade during their rule came to a standstill. The Dorians had no written language. Since most Mycenaeans had fled the area, soon all written language disappeared. Greece entered a period of decline called the Dark Age, which lasted from about 1100 B.C. to 800 B.C.



The Mycenaeans (cont.)

The oral tradition of the Greeks allowed much of the history and heritage to be passed down from one generation to another. Tales of the Mycenaean period were kept alive through songs and stories that were repeated during religious festivals or feasts. Around 800 B.C. many people from the Ionia region in central Greece built cities and ports to expand trade once again. These people had migrated from Athens, which had survived the Dorian attacks. A new written language soon developed based on the Ionic dialect and the Phoenician alphabet. It was from this region that the first works of Greek literature came. The famous poet Homer wrote stories and epic poems based on the songs and tales about the Mycenaeans.



For the Greeks, Homer was the ultimate symbol of poetry and eloquence. According to Greek tradition, Homer was a blind bard, a wandering storyteller with an unmatched ability to dramatize a narrative. He wrote two epic poems, or long poetic tales, that celebrated the battle deeds and travels of heroes and the influence of the gods. The *Iliad* recounts the story of the Mycenaeans during the Trojan War. Historians are still unsure whether the war actually occurred, but excavations in present-day Turkey have uncovered the remains of a city believed to be Troy. Furthermore, investigation indicates that a siege may have occurred during the Mycenaean period, so many believe that Homer's tale was based on fact. Homer's second tale, the *Odyssey*, describes Odysseus's perilous journey home from the Trojan War and his amazing encounters in foreign lands.

This new development in writing and culture marked the end of the Dark Age and the dawn of a new age of expansion called the Archaic Period.

Mycenaean Mysteries

Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What were some contributions of the Mycenaeans to Greek culture? _____

2. How were the Mycenaeans different from the Minoans? _____

3. What happened to the Mycenaean civilization? _____

4. What was the Dark Age? _____

5. How did culture and trade return to Greece? _____

When the Greeks began to learn how to read and write, one of them decided to write down the old Greek stories that had been told out loud around Greek fires for years and years. His name was Homer, and he was the first great Greek writer. Tradition tells us that Homer was blind—so he listened to the stories he heard, and then wrote them down using the Greek alphabet.

Homer wrote the story of a famous war—the Greek attack on the city of Troy. This war was called the "Trojan War," and Homer tells about it in his long poem, the *Iliad*. After he finished the *Iliad*, he wrote another story, called the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* was about Odysseus, a Greek warrior who fought in the Trojan War. When Odysseus started to sail back home, he ran into all kinds of trouble! Here is one of the stories from the *Odyssey*:

Odysseus and his men sailed away from Troy, looking forward to their return home. They praised all the gods of Greece for keeping them alive through the war. And they thanked the gods for their victory.

But they forgot to thank Poseidon, the god of the sea. Poseidon was furious at being left out. He sent a strong wind to blow the ships off course, so that Odysseus would have a hard time getting home.

NI

O = Odysseus

C = Cyclops

OM = Odysseus men

NI = Neighbors/Neighbors

NI - NI = Narrator

Odysseus and his men got lost, out there on the sea. After many days of sailing, Odysseus and his tired, hungry sailors saw a beautiful island. It was cool and shady, full of wheat and grapevines and wild goats that could be killed for food. So they landed their ships on the beach, got out their bows and arrows, and hunted. When they had killed enough meat, they lit fires, roasted the goats, and feasted. And the next morning, when the dawn lit the sky red, they got up to explore.

Around the other side of the island, Odysseus and his men found a huge cave, carved into a cliff. Laurel trees grew all around it. In front of the cave was a pen, walled with stone and filled with hundreds of sheep and goats.

"Who lives here?" Odysseus asked. "Let's go in and find out." He took with him his twelve strongest men, along with a jug of sweet wine for a present. The rest of his men he sent back to the ships.

Odysseus and his twelve companions came up to the cave and peered in—but they could see no one. Carefully, they crept in. There they found pens of lambs and baby goats. The walls were lined with racks of cheeses, each cheese bigger than a man's head. Beneath them sat the bowls into which the cave's owner milked his goats, each bowl large enough for a man to lie down in.

When they saw this, Odysseus's men were terrified. "A giant lives here!" they said. "Let's take some cheese and some of the lambs, and get back to the ship before he returns!"

But Odysseus refused to run away. "We'll wait here and greet him when he returns!" he said. So the men cut up some cheese and ate it for their dinners, after offering some of it to the gods as a sacrifice. And they waited. Dark fell over the island. And when it was completely dark, they heard footsteps, each one shaking the ground.

In through the door came the cave's owner. He was a giant, as tall as three men standing on each other's shoulders. He had only one eye, right in the center of his forehead. He was a Cyclops!

four trees that he had pulled up for firewood. He flung them onto the floor of the cave with such noise that Odysseus and his men hid themselves in fright. When all the sheep were inside the cave, the Cyclops rolled a huge stone across the cave's entrance—a stone so heavy that twenty men couldn't have shifted it aside. He milked his sheep and goats and got up to light his fire.

When the flames roared up, the Cyclops saw Odysseus and his men, hiding at the far end of the cave. "Well," he roared, "what do we have here? Robbers? Have you crept into my cave to take my sheep and my cheese?"

"No," Odysseus said, his voice shaking with fright. "We are merely travelers on our way home. Please, show us some kindness and hospitality—we are hungry and cold!"



Odysseus and the Cyclops

"If you are travelers," the Cyclops said, "where is your ship?"

But Odysseus was afraid that the Cyclops might want to find the ship and destroy it. So he lied: "We were shipwrecked on your island," he said, "and our ship is destroyed."

The Cyclops didn't answer. Instead, he snatched up two of Odysseus's men and ate them on the spot. And then he washed down his horrible meal with goat's milk, lay down on the floor, and went to sleep.

"Let's kill him while he sleeps!" Odysseus's men urged him. But Odysseus refused. "If we kill him," he said, "who will let us out of the cave? That stone is too heavy for us to move. We would die in here."

So Odys. and his men spent the night huddled at the back of the cave, listening to the Cyclops snore as loud as thunder.

The Cyclops slept all night. When the red dawn came, he woke up, lit his fire, milked the goats, and grabbed two more of Odysseus's men for breakfast. After he ate them and drank some more milk, he pushed the stone away from the entrance to the cave and drove the sheep out. But before Odysseus and his men could dash out of the cave, the Cyclops rolled the stone back again, as easy as putting a lid on a jar.

Odysseus's men were terrified, moaning and crying. But Odysseus paced up and down the cave and thought, hard. Finally he went to the pile of trees that the Cyclops had brought in for firewood. Several of them still lay beside the sheep-pen, where the Cyclops had dropped them. One of the trees there was tall and green.

"Come on," Odysseus said to his men. "Be brave! Do what I say, and we'll escape. Let's cut a long piece off the end of this tree, about as long as a man is tall, and sharpen it. Don't ask why; just do what I say."

The men cut the tree and sharpened it, and then Odysseus burned the sharp point in the coals of the fire until it was hard and black. He hid it underneath a pile of straw. And then he and his men waited, all day long, for the Cyclops to come back.

When the monster came back into the cave that evening, he drove his sheep and goats in, and again sealed up the door with the huge stone. Then he grabbed two more of the men and ate them, washing

them down with goat's milk. And then Odysseus took his courage in both hands and went forward.

"Cyclops!" he said. "You've eaten so many of my men that you must be thirsty. Milk won't help that thirst! Here, I've got a jug of the best sweet wine you've ever tasted."

He held up the jug of wine that he had brought into the cave, and the Cyclops sniffed at it. It smelled so good that he drank a mouthful, and then another, and then another. Soon the whole jug of wine was gone. And the Cyclops was very sleepy.

"What's your name?" he growled. "V-ing me this wonderful stuff to drink?"

"My name is Noman," Odysseus said.

"Noman, I'm pleased with your wine," the Cyclops answered. "So I'll eat you last!" And with that he sprawled over and went to sleep, right there on the ground.

Then Odysseus and four of his men dragged out the sharpened log they had hidden in the straw, and drove it right into the Cyclops's single eye.

The Cyclops leaped up and roared with pain. He stumbled all around his cave, grabbing blindly for Odysseus and his men. But they got easily away from him, because he could no longer see them.

Soon, Odysseus and his men heard other footsteps outside the cave. The Cyclops' friends and neighbors had come to find out what all the noise was about. "Why are you making so much noise?" they called to the Cyclops. "You're keeping us from sleeping! Is someone attacking you?"

"Noman" the Cyclops yelled. "Noman is trying to kill me!"

"Noman?" the other monsters answered. "Well, then, go back to sleep!" And they all went away.

The Cyclops, groaning with pain, lay down until morning. Then he got up, feeling his way around with his hands, and rolled the stone away. He started to herd his sheep and goats out of the cave. But he reached down and patted the back of every animal that went past him, so that neither Odysseus nor his men could sneak out with the sheep and goats.

So Odysseus caught three fat sheep for every one of his men, and tied the sheep together in groups of three. He told each one of his men to hold on to the stomach fleece of the sheep in the middle of each group, and to let the sheep carry them out past the Cyclops. The Cyclops put his hands right on the sheep's backs—but he couldn't find the men who were holding on underneath.

When Odysseus and his men had gotten out past the Cyclops, they ran for their ships. The rest of the men saw them coming. Odysseus started to yell, "Pull for the seal! Pull for the seal!" And as soon as they had scrambled aboard, the oarsmen rowed the ships out into the water, safely away from the island of the Cyclops.

Then Odysseus began to shout, "Cyclops! Cyclops! See what happens to you when you eat guests who come to your house? You should have known better than to fall for my tricks!"

The blind Cyclops heard his jeers. In fury, he wrenched a huge boulder off the side of the cliff and threw it towards Odysseus's voice. Waves pushed the ship around, but Odysseus shouted again, "Cyclops, if anyone asks you who put out your eye and spoiled your beauty, tell them that it was Odysseus!"

"Curses on you!" the Cyclops yelled back. "I'm the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea. And I will ask him to send waves and wind that will sink your ship so that you'll never reach home alive!"

Odysseus ignored the Cyclops' threat. He told his men to row for the open water. As soon as they were far away from the island, their sails caught the wind and they headed for home.

But Poseidon heard the Cyclops' request. He sent winds to blow Odysseus off course, and waves to batter his ship into pieces. It took ten long years and many dangerous adventures before Odysseus finally reached his home.

