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## Ancient Greece - How Did It All Begin?

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Greece has a very long and interesting history. Over the course of thousands of years, people there made many groundbreaking discoveries that would later profoundly reshape other cultures. For example, Archimedes figured out the law of buoyancy in the 3rd century B.C. Aristarchus was the first in the world to claim that the Earth rotates and revolves around the sun. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were three great philosophers whose schools of thought laid the foundation of Western philosophy. And, of course, there was the famous Alexander the Great. This mighty Macedonian king defeated Egypt and eradicated the Persian Empire. He even invaded and controlled a portion of the Indian subcontinent.

Everybody mentioned here is an iconic figure that helps to define what a magnificent civilization ancient Greece once had. But before those people came along, Greece was already bustling with all sorts of advanced developments, dating as far back as 3000 B.C. At the time, a group of people called the Minoans settled on the island of Crete in the Aegean Sea. Their culture, termed the Minoan civilization, lasted nearly 2,000 years.

The Minoans, by all accounts, were fond of doing overseas business. Most of their commercial activities revolved around making trades with other countries, such as Egypt. Since very early on, they had discovered a way to cast bronze (an alloy traditionally composed of copper and tin) and applied that knowledge to make metal tools and weapons. The Minoans had their own languages and sophisticated art. They loved building palaces and enjoyed decorating them with lively frescoes. Those vibrant wall paintings told tales about what life was like back then. Because of them, we know that "bull jumping" was one of the most popular sports at the time. We know, too, that the Minoans had their own beliefs and practiced various religious rituals.

The Minoan civilization reached its peak around 1600 B.C. But by the middle of the 15th century B.C., it had declined so much that it was suffering an agonizingly slow death. For years, historians have debated why this once powerful civilization simply ceased to exist. Some said it was due to a violent volcanic eruption on a nearby island called Thera. The eruption unleashed toxic gas, ash clouds, and quite possibly massive tsunamis that reached Crete in no time. If that theory is correct, then any or all three of the post-disaster traumas might have played a crucial role in the downfall of the Minoan civilization. Whatever actually happened, we will never know. The only thing we can say with any certainty is that the Minoan civilization eventually collapsed and was replaced by the Mycenaean civilization.

The Mycenaean civilization flourished between 1600 B.C. and 1100 B.C. Unlike its predecessor, this thriving culture had its focus on mainland Greece. Its most famous, defining event was, undoubtedly, the Trojan War. That conflict, according to Homer, was a battle between the Greeks and the Trojans over a beautiful woman named Helen. After a decade of fighting, the Greeks finally won and sacked the city of Troy.

Around the 12th century B.C., the Dorians, a tribe from northern Greece, began to flex their muscles and advance southward. Their military aggression brought the Mycenaean civilization to its knees. The invasion marked the

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

official end of the Bronze Age. For the next 300 years or so, the so-called Dark Ages clouded over Greece, but details about that bleak period would be the topic of a different story.

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## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following about the Minoans is true?
  - A. Their civilization replaced the Mycenaean civilization.
  - B. Their civilization reached its peak between 1600 B.C. and 1100 B.C.
  - C. Their civilization was a bustling culture found on the island of Crete.
  - D. They were the first people in ancient Greece to use iron.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What type of metals did the Minoans use to make tools and weapons?
  - A. Gold
  - B. Silver
  - C. Bronze
  - D. Iron
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who brought ancient Greece into the Dark Ages?
  - A. The Trojans
  - B. The Mycenaeans
  - C. The Dorians
  - D. The Minoans
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Which of the following about the Trojan War is correct?
  - A. Homer said it was a war over a woman named Helen.
  - B. The Trojans won the war and sacked the city of Mycenae.
  - C. It was a war between the Minoans and the Mycenaeans.
  - D. It was triggered by the Dorian invasion.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which of the following statements about the Mycenaean civilization is correct?
  - A. It marked the beginning of Greece's Dark Ages.
  - B. It reached its peak around 3000 B.C.
  - C. It was destroyed by a volcanic eruption.
  - D. It was the last phase of Greece's Bronze Age.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What was a popular sport among the Minoans?
  - A. Ice skating
  - B. Swimming
  - C. Bull jumping
  - D. Marathon
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Which of the following was NOT a Greek philosopher?
  - A. Plato
  - B. Socrates
  - C. Aristotle
  - D. Aristarchus

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which island's volcanic eruption was the possible cause of the fall of the Minoan civilization?
- A. Sicily
  - B. Thera
  - C. Rhodes
  - D. Simi
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. In which sea can we find Crete?
- A. The Aegean Sea
  - B. The Baltic Sea
  - C. The Caspian Sea
  - D. The Black Sea
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What did the Minoans use to decorate their palaces?
- A. Golden leaves
  - B. Marble statues
  - C. Ceramic tiles
  - D. Wall paintings

