

CHAPTER

4

SECTION 1

Section Summary

EARLY PEOPLE OF THE AEGEAN

The island of Crete, located on the Aegean Sea, was home to a successful trading civilization known as the Minoan civilization. Minoan rulers lived in a vast palace at **Knossos**. This palace housed rooms for the royal family, banquet halls, and work areas for artisans. It also included religious **shrines**, areas dedicated to the honor of gods and goddesses. The walls were covered with colorful **frescoes**—watercolor paintings done on wet plaster. The frescoes revealed much about Minoan culture by illustrating scenes from daily life.

By about 1400 B.C., the Minoan civilization vanished. The reasons are unclear, but it is certain that invaders played some role in its destruction. These invaders were the Mycenaeans.

The Mycenaeans ruled the Aegean world from about 1400 B.C. to 1200 B.C. They were also sea traders whose civilization reached as far as Sicily, Italy, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. The Mycenaeans learned skills from the Minoans, such as writing. They also absorbed Egyptian and Mesopotamian customs, which they passed on to later Greeks.

The Mycenaeans are remembered for their part in the **Trojan War**, which began about 1250 B.C. The conflict may have started because of economic rivalry between Mycenae and Troy, a rich trading city that controlled the vital **straits**, or narrow water passages, connecting the Mediterranean and Black seas. According to Greek legend, the war erupted when the Mycenaeans, or Greeks, sailed to Troy to rescue the kidnapped wife of the king. The war lasted 10 years, until the Mycenaeans finally burned Troy to the ground.

Much of what we know about the Trojan War and life during this period comes from two epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These works are credited to the poet **Homer**, who probably lived about 750 B.C. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reveal much about the values of the ancient Greeks. The poems' heroes display honor, courage, and eloquence.

In about 1100 B.C., invaders from the north known as the Dorians conquered the Mycenaeans. After the Dorian invasions, Greece passed several centuries in obscurity. Over time, a new Greek civilization emerged that would extend its influence across the Western world.

Review Questions

1. What was revealed by the frescoes found at Knossos?

2. What information about Greek culture can be found in Homer's epic poems?

READING CHECK

According to legend, why did the Trojan War begin?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *eloquence* mean in the underlined sentence? The word *eloquence* comes from the Latin word *eloqui*, meaning "to speak out." Based on that information, what do you think *eloquence* means?

READING SKILL

Identify Main Ideas Explain how Mycenaean culture spread.
