

NOTES ON QUIZ 3

1 Who were the Minoans (where did they live, and when)? What are some of the reasons we know so little about them?

The Minoans were the inhabitants of early Crete from around 2500 BCE onward. Their society was organized around urban centers called palaces, but they built no urban temples and worshiped in wild places like caves and mountaintops. They are of unknown origin and spoke a language unconnected with other known languages and used a writing system, Linear A, that has not been deciphered; we don't even know what they called themselves. Their culture was consumed and replaced by the Mycenaeans, leaving few traces.

2 What kinds of things did the Mycenaean Greeks learn from the Minoans? What was the end result for these two cultures?

The Mycenaeans were an Indo-European people who migrated into the Aegean world early in the second millennium, and gained power over the Minoans from around 1500 BCE, taking over the Minoan palaces and economy and supplanting the Minoan elite. They assimilated much of the Minoan society, including culture, religion, and writing system, and especially their palace-based economy. Though their domination was not necessarily accomplished primarily by conquest, their expertise with wheels, axles, and horses gave the Mycenaeans advantage militarily (the chariot). The Mycenaeans were early Greek-speakers, unlike the Minoans, and can thus be called the first "Greeks".

3 Who were the Phoenicians (where did they live, and when)? Why were they so successful? How did they affect other Mediterranean societies?

The Phoenicians were the Semitic inhabitants of several cities in the coastal north of Canaan (modern-day Lebanon). They were ideally located to import raw materials from inland and then engage in trade around the Mediterranean coast in both directions. They developed a lucrative extensive Mediterranean trade route based on luxury goods that they manufactured from imported materials like raw textiles and marble and from their two most important local commodities—cedar wood and *murex*, the purple dye they converted into a coveted status symbol throughout the Mediterranean world.

Also their invention of the phonetic alphabet was spread throughout their trading network, introducing literacy to the Dark Age Greeks, the Etruscans, and the Latins.

EC1 Linear A was:

(b) The still-undeciphered writing system of the Minoans

EC2 What's different about iron, compared to bronze? How did the shift to iron change things?

Iron weapons are not significantly harder or stronger than bronze. Iron ore is very common and easy to procure and control in large quantities. This meant that iron-holding societies were stronger militarily and had a higher standard of living, because they could make many more weapons and many more tools.

This contrasts with bronze because bronze required two components, copper and tin, and controlling sources of both was difficult; bronze was also difficult to produce. As a result, bronze was a luxury good, reserved for the elite, and bronze agricultural tools and weapons were produced only for the wealthy few.

The mass production of iron tools and weapons helps shift the center of gravity from the few to the many, as well as bringing about improved health (increased birth rate, reduced death rate), greater distribution of resources, and mass armies capable of more ambitious conquest and occupation of conquered territories.