The Minoans

The Middle Bronze Age belongs to the Minoans!

-The Early Bronze Age is mostly about the Cyclades

-The Minoans are on Crete

Delta:

* 4th letter of the Greek alphabet
* Makes a “D” sound
* Daidalos (Daedalus): An inventor who accidentally killed a family member (had to go to another kingdom to be purified from this blood guilt; he went to Crete, and King Minos was supposed to purify him; Minos almost kept him a prisoner because he liked his work; Daidalos made wings so that he and his son could fly away from Crete; the two set out, but Icarus started to fool around and ended up drowning)

Sir Arthur Evans (1851-1941):

-Excavated Knossos

-Looked for something to make Europe look as great as Egypt was (Egypt was being excavated a lot at the time)

-Evans went to Oxford and graduated with first-class honours in history (decided he was most interested in linguistics)

-In 1895, Crete was still part of the Ottoman Empire (about to fight a war of independence; Evans got on the Ottoman side because Britain had diplomatic relations with them; Crete eventually won and the Ottoman Turks were expelled)

\*In 1900, Evans got a permit

\*Colleagues: Duncan Mackenzie (excavation supervisor) and Theodore Fyfe (architect)

-Went to Minoan Crete, 1894-1899:

\*Knossos was close to the Cycladic Islands and was near the coast (good for trading with other civilizations)

-Evans was interested in seals (started to dig seal stones, looking for an ancient language, at the site of Kephala Hill)

\*Found a large palace (the largest in Crete, the Palace of Minos)

Knossos – The Palace of Minos:

* Minos was the son of Zeus, chief of the gods
* Minos became the king of Crete
* His right to be king was challenged (called upon Poseidon, asking for a white bull to show him a sign; after the bull comes out of the sea, Minos comes to love it and not sacrifice it)
* Poseidon gets upset that Minos wants to sacrifice another cow (Poseidon goes after Minos’s wife; Poseidon makes her fall in love with the white bull; she goes to Daedalus and asks him to make her a cow costume so that she can seduce the bull; she ends up getting pregnant by the bull and produces a half-man/half-bull child, the Minotaur)
* Minos decides to let the bull live, but he hides it (he goes to Daidalos and asks him for a maze, or a labyrinth; the idea is that the monster will be placed in this maze and not be able to find its way out)
* Minos’s son goes to Athens to compete in the Panathenaic games and wins a lot (he gets killed; Minos gets very angry and forces Athens to send 7 young men and 7 young virgins from the most prominent families to be fed to the Minotaur; each year, these people are sent in payment for the murder of Minos’s son)
* In Athens, Theseus decides to go to Crete to kill the monster (when he arrives, he’s brought into the palace; Minos’s daughter, Ariadne, falls in love with him; she gives Theseus a sword and ball of string; Theseus goes into the maze, kills the monster with the sword, and follows the string out; he takes Ariadne, who wants to marry him, to Naxos, but he abandons her)
* The god of wine, Dionysus, decides to marry her instead (she becomes immortal and happy; Theseus forgets to change the sail, which is supposed to be white, and his father commits suicide, thinking his son didn’t succeed; Theseus becomes the next king)

Home of the Minotaur?

* The many corridors of the palace reminded Evans of the myth
* Bull imagery everywhere supported the association between the Minoans and bulls

Evans published a volume of work:

-He places Crete in the Mediterranean world

-Not just an isolated speck (makes many great comparisons)

Exotica and Egyptianizing Styles:

-Ostrich eggs (probably from Egypt; they were turned into vessels)

-Stone vessels (made out of stone like alabaster; common in Egypt, where cups and vases were made)

-African acrobat in Minoan kilt (there’s a curly-haired acrobat on the item, who probably came from Africa to perform in Crete)

Evans’s Work:

* He had accurate plans (for what was on the ground and how he wanted to build it up)
* Employed artists to produce excellent drawings
* One of the first archeologists to use photography to report findings
* While digging, Evans realized the importance of preservation (wanted future generations to experience his findings)

Reconstructing Knossos (Evans’s Fantasy):

* He wanted to rebuild the architecture (we usually consolidate it now and leave it as it is)
  + He wanted people to come and see what it probably looked like years before
  + Foundations were on the ground (knew how large and wide things were)
  + Used wall paintings of architecture as a guide (but they were probably based on another place or mythology)
  + He has this idea of what a palace should look like (many fantasies in his head – i.e., he built two throne rooms)
* Deterioration of Evans’s reconstruction (used reinforced concrete, which has steel rods; these bars started to corrode and made the concrete burst)
  + You can’t take it apart because it’s part of everything now (other important things will be endangered)
  + His work is irreversible (he is now an example of what not to do during excavations)

Putting the Puzzle Together:

* Wall paintings were found in tiny crumbles (someone had to put the pieces together)
* Evans employed artists to make them into a picture
  + The Blue Boy was wrong (it wasn’t a boy; it was a monkey!)
* Gilleron and his son were artists (reconstructed pots using broken pieces)
  + They faked antiquities (these went to many museums)

The First Writing in Greece:

* Found hundreds of clay tablets with writing on them (the Cretan Hieroglyphics are probably the oldest, made up of little pictures)
* He knew that Linear B derived from Linear A (Linear B is Greek, from the Mycenaean mainland)
* He wanted to decipher them all
* It took many years before we could read Linear B (we still can’t read Cretan Hieroglyphics and Linear A)

Minoan Palaces (Their Function in Society):

* Three main palaces: Knossos (the best preserved and largest), Phaistos, and Malia
* Large courts were being used
  + All palaces have two courts: a central one and a western one
  + The palaces were built around these central courts
  + People could walk along the western courts to town
  + Evans called these places palaces (the term is “court-centered building” now)
* All three palaces have their central courts aligned with a cave or peak sanctuary
  + In Phaistos, Mount Ida and Kamares Cave are not far behind the palace
  + Elite and ordinary people went up to these places to worship
* The centre of activity:
  + There are ritual and residential areas
  + The west wing was for storage and administration
  + The palace is arranged around the central court
* The West Façade appears to be the religious and ceremonial heart of the palaces (has a tripartite shrine, throne room, grand staircase, and archives)
* Administrative centers:
  + Mostly up above, near the reception room
  + Sealings and tablets have been found in the storage rooms
* Storage for agricultural surplus (coming from farms):
  + Wool, wheat, barley, and other products
* Kouloures:
  + Large, circular pits
  + Their use is unknown, but some scholars speculate that they were used for storage (they date from the earliest time of the palaces)
* Storage magazines:
  + Gigantic pots (storage pithoi) were filled with storage items, such as olives
  + Brought agricultural surplus in and supposedly distributed them to the public