

Linear A and Linear B

script

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Linear A and **Linear B**, linear forms of [writing](#) used by certain [Aegean civilizations](#) during the 2nd [millennium](#) BC.

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Linear A is attested in Crete and on some Aegean islands from approximately 1850 BC to 1400 BC. Its relation to the so-called hieroglyphic Minoan script is uncertain. It is a syllabic script written from left to right. The approximate phonetic values of most syllabic signs used in Linear A are known from Linear B, but the [language](#) written in Linear A remains unknown. It must have been a pre-Hellenic language of Minoan Crete. Its eventual relation with the Eteocretan language of the 1st millennium BC is also unknown.

Linear B is an adapted form of Linear A, which was borrowed from the Minoans by the [Mycenaean Greeks](#), probably about 1600 BC. Its language is the Mycenaean Greek [dialect](#). Linear B script is attested on clay tablets and on some vases, both dating from about 1400 BC to roughly 1200 BC. The script was exclusively used for the economic administration of the Mycenaean palaces, such as those at Knossos and Khaniá in Crete, and Mycenae, Pylos, Thebes, and Tiryns in continental Greece. Linear B's 90 syllabic signs express open syllables (*i.e.*, syllables ending in a vowel), generally beginning without a consonant or with only one consonant; because of this, the script is unable to represent groups of consonants or final consonants clearly. For instance, *sperma* 'seed' is spelled *pe-ma*, and *stathmos* 'stable' is spelled *ta-to-mo*.

The Linear B texts are extremely important for Greek [linguistics](#). They represent the oldest known Greek dialect, elements of which survived in Homer's language as a result of a long [oral tradition](#) of epic poetry. Linear B was deciphered as Greek in 1952 by [Michael Ventris](#).

World History > The Ancient World

Minoan civilization

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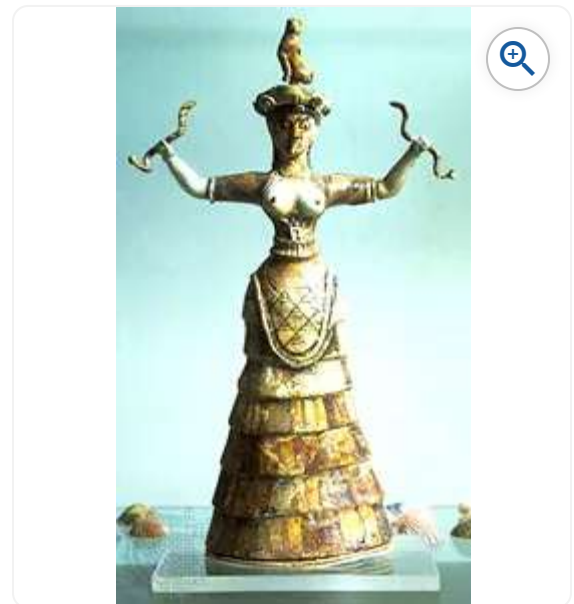
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Minoan civilization, [Bronze Age](#) civilization of [Crete](#) that flourished from about 3000 BCE to about 1100 BCE. Its name derives from [Minos](#), either a dynastic title or the name of a particular ruler of Crete who has a place in Greek [legend](#).

A brief treatment of Minoan civilization follows. For full treatment, see [Aegean civilizations](#).

[Crete](#) became the foremost site of Bronze Age [culture](#) in the [Aegean Sea](#), and in fact it was the first centre of high civilization in that area, beginning at the end of the 3rd millennium BCE. Reaching its peak about 1600 BCE and the later 15th century, Minoan civilization was remarkable for its great cities and palaces, its extended trade throughout the [Levant](#) and beyond, and its use of writing. Its



Snake Goddess Snake Goddess, faience statuette from the temple depository of Knossos, c. 1600 BCE; in the Herakl...[\(more\)](#)



Minoan civilization: Toreador Fresco Toreador Fresco, Late Minoan painting from Knossos, Crete, depicting...[\(more\)](#)

sophisticated art included elaborate seals, [pottery](#) (especially the famous [Kamáres ware](#) with its light-on-dark style of decoration), and, above all, delicate, vibrant [frescoes](#) found on [palace](#) walls. These frescoes display both [secular](#) and religious scenes, such as magical gardens, monkeys, and wild goats or fancifully dressed goddesses that testify to the Minoans' predominantly matriarchal religion. Among the most familiar motifs of [Minoan](#) art are the snake, symbol of the goddess, and the bull; the ritual of bull-leaping, found, for example, on cult vases, seems to have had a religious or magical basis.



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By about 1580 BCE Minoan civilization began to spread across the Aegean to neighbouring islands and to the mainland of [Greece](#). Minoan cultural influence was reflected in the Mycenaean culture of the mainland, which began to spread throughout the Aegean about 1500 BCE.

By the middle of the 15th century the palace culture on Crete was destroyed by conquerors from the mainland. They established a new order on Crete, with centres at [Knossos](#) and [Phaistos](#). Following the conquest, the island experienced a wonderful fusion of Cretan and mainland skills. The Late Minoan period (c. 1400–c. 1100 BCE), however, was a time of marked decline in both economic power and [aesthetic](#) achievement.



Minoan civilization Bridge-spouted jar decorated in polychrome, Late Minoan period (c. 1400–c. 1100 BCE); in the... [...\(more\)](#)

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*This article was most recently revised and updated by
[Michael Ray](#).*

Mycenaean

ancient people

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Mycenaean, Any member of a group of warlike Indo-European peoples who entered [Greece](#) from the north starting c. 1900 BC and established a [Bronze Age culture](#) on the mainland and nearby islands. Their culture was dependent on that of the [Minoans](#) of [Crete](#), who for a time politically dominated them. They threw off Minoan control c. 1400 and were dominant in the Aegean until they themselves were overwhelmed by the next wave of invaders c. 1150. [Mycenae](#) continued to exist as a city-state into the period of Greek dominance, but by the 2nd century AD it was in ruins. Mycenaean [myths](#) and [legends](#) lived on through oral transmission into later stages of Greek civilization and form the basis of Homeric epic and Greek tragedy. Their language is believed to be the most ancient form of Greek.

This article was most recently revised and updated by [Kathleen Kuiper](#).

Greek language

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Greek language, Indo-European [language](#) spoken primarily in [Greece](#). It has a long and well-documented history—the longest of any [Indo-European language](#)—spanning 34 centuries. There is an Ancient phase, subdivided into a [Mycenaean](#) period (texts in syllabic script attested from the 14th to the 13th century BCE) and [Archaic](#) and Classical periods (beginning with the adoption of the alphabet, from the 8th to the 4th century BCE); a Hellenistic and Roman phase (4th century BCE to 4th century CE); a [Byzantine](#) phase (5th to 15th century CE); and a Modern phase.

Separate transliteration tables for [Classical](#) and [Modern](#) Greek accompany this article. Some differences in transliteration result from changes in pronunciation of the Greek language; others reflect convention, as for example the χ (*chi* or *khi*), which was transliterated by the Romans as *ch* (because they lacked the letter *k* in their usual alphabet). In Modern Greek, however, the standard transliteration for χ is *kh*. Another difference is the representation of β (*bēta* or *vīta*); in Classical Greek it is transliterated as *b* in every instance, and in Modern Greek as *v*. The pronunciation of Ancient Greek [vowels](#) is indicated by the transliteration used by the Romans. *Y* (*upsilon*) was written as *y* by the Romans, indicating that the sound was not identical to the sound of their letter *i*. Modern Greek *v* (*ipsilon*) is transliterated as *i*, indicating that the sound used today differs from that of the ancient *v*.

General considerations



Indo-European languages in contemporary Eurasia Approximate locations of Indo-European languages...(more)

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While it is possible that speakers of Hellenic or pre-Hellenic arrived earlier, there is no linguistic evidence of Hellenic prior to the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE on what is now the Greek peninsula, where the language brought by the relevant people(s) developed into Greek. Later, Greek-speaking people occupied most of the islands of the Aegean and, about 1000 BCE, the west coast of [Anatolia](#). With few exceptions that is still the area occupied by the Greek language today. In the second quarter of the 1st [millennium](#) BCE, a vast “colonial” movement took place, resulting in establishments founded by various Greek cities all around the Mediterranean and the [Black Sea](#), especially in southern [Italy](#) and Sicily. This extension of the linguistic area of Greek lasted only a few centuries; in the Roman period, Latin, more or less rapidly, took the place of Greek in most of these ancient colonies. After the conquest of Asia Minor, [Syria](#), and [Egypt](#) by [Alexander the Great](#), Greek was the standard language of the rulers in the new urban centres of these countries until the invasions of the Arabs and the Turks. “Colonial” Greek survived longest at [Byzantium](#), as the official language of the Eastern Empire.

Relationship of Greek to Indo-European

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Table 1: Widely Shared Indo-European Terms*

	Hittite	Sanskrit	Greek	Latin	English
‘I’	uk	ahám	egṓ	ego	I
‘me’	ammuk	mām	emé	mē	me
‘thou’	zik	tuvám	sú, tú	tū	thou
‘thee’	tuk	tvám	sé	tē	thee
‘who?’	kuiš	kás	tís	quis	who?
‘what?’	kuit	kím	tí	quid	what?
‘that’		tát	tó		that
‘water’	wātar	udakám	húdōr		water
‘fire’	pahhur		pūr	Umbr. pir	fire
‘father’		pitár-	patēr	pater	father
‘mother’		mātár	mētēr	māter	mother
‘brother’		bhrátar-	phrātēr	frāter	brother
			‘kinsman’		
‘sister’		svásār		soror	sister
‘daughter’	Hier. Luw. tuwatra-	duhitár	thugátēr-	Osc. futír	daughter
‘son’		sūnús	huiós		son
‘sheep’	Luw. ḫawi-	ávis	ó(w)is	ovis	ewe
‘cow’	Hier. Luw. wawi-	gáv-	boūs	bōs	cow
‘horse’	Hier. Luw. asuwa-	ásvas	híppos	equus	OE eoh
‘pig’		sūkarás	hūs	sūs	sow
‘dog’	Hier. Luw. šuwana-	śván-	kúōn	canis	hound
‘wheel’		cakráṃ	kúklos		wheel
‘heart’	kart-	hrdayam	kardíā	oord-	heart
‘knee’	gēnu	jānu	gónu	genū	knee
‘tree, wood’	tāru	dāru	dóru	truncus ‘tree trunk’	tree
‘foot’	pat(a)-	pád-	pód-	ped-	foot
‘long’	dalukiš	dīrghás	dolikhós	longus	long
‘new’	newas	návas	ne(w)os	novus	new
‘goes’	pa-izzi	éti	eīsi	it	
‘is’	ēšzi	ásti	estí	est	is
‘eats’	ēzz(a)zzi	átti	édei	ēst	eats
‘carries’		bhárati	phérei	fert	bears
‘knows’		véda	(w)oi̯de		wot
‘one’		ékas	oi̯(w)os ‘alone’	ūnus	one
‘two’	dā-	duvā	dúo	duo	two
‘three’	teri-	tráyas	treīs	trēs	three
‘four’		catvāras	téttares	quattuor	four

'five'		páñca	pénte	quīnque	five
'six'		śát	hék	sex	six
'seven'	śiptam-	saptá	heptá	septem	seven
'eight'		astá	októ	octō	eight
'nine'		náva	enné(w)a	novem	nine
'ten'		dása	déka	decem	ten
'one hundred'		śatám	he-katón	centum	hundred
'not'	natta	ná		ne-	not

*Words lacking in the language named at the top of the column but found in a closely related language are in italics.
 OE = Old English; Latv. = Latvian; OCS = Old Church Slavonic; Umbr. = Umbrian; Osc. = Oscan; OL =

[Ancient Greek](#) is, next to [Hittite](#), the Indo-European language with documents going furthest back into the past. By the time it emerged in the second half of the 2nd millennium BCE, it had already [acquired](#) a completely distinct character from the parent Indo-European language. Its linguistic features place it in a central region on the [dialect](#) map that can be reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European; the ancient languages with which it has the most features in common are little-known ones such as [Phrygian](#). In the study of Indo-European dialectology, phonetic data are the most readily available and provide the most information. In this respect the position of Ancient Greek is as follows. The vowels of *a* and *o* quality, both short and long, remain distinct, whereas they are completely or partially confused in Hittite, Indo-Iranian, Baltic, Slavic, and Germanic. Greek is the only language that distinguishes by three different qualities (*ě*, *ǣ*, *ō*) the secondary short vowels resulting in certain positions from the three laryngeal sounds, **H₁*, **H₂*, **H₃*, of Indo-European. (An asterisk preceding a sound or word indicates that it is not an attested, but a reconstructed, [hypothetical](#) form. For a discussion of these laryngeal sounds, see [Indo-European languages](#).) Greek keeps the distinction between the original voiced stops and voiced aspirated stops of Indo-European (e.g., Indo-European **d* becomes Greek *d*, and Indo-European **dh* becomes Greek *th*), whereas Iranian, Slavic, Baltic, and Celtic confuse them. (Some linguists, however, assume that Greek *th* continues Indo-European *th* and that Greek *d* goes back to an Indo-European glottalized [stop](#).) Greek avoids the general shifts of stop consonants that are displayed, independently, by Armenian and Germanic, as well as the change of palatal stops (*k*, etc.) into affricates (*ts*, etc.) or spirants (*s*, etc.) in Indo-Iranian, Armenian, Baltic, and Slavic. In these respects Ancient Greek is [conservative](#), as are, generally speaking, the

western Indo-European languages (Italic and Celtic). On the other hand, it does show [innovations](#). One of these, the devoicing of the original voiced aspirated stops, is shared with Italic, although it is realized in different ways (**dh-* yields Greek *th-*, Latin *f-*, Osco-Umbrian *f-*), but others are foreign to Italic. The latter include, for example, the weakening of spirants and semivowels at the beginning of words before a [vowel](#), the evolution of **s-* to *h-* (pre-Mycenaean), and **y-* to *h-* (contemporary with Mycenaean).

Morphological [criteria](#) must, of course, be taken into account in defining the position of a language. It should be noted that there are few grammatical innovations shared by Greek and Italic, apart from the extension to nouns of the pronominal ending of the genitive feminine plural **-āsōm* (Greek *-āōn*; Latin *-ārum*, Umbrian *-aru*, Oscan *-azum*) and of the pronominal ending of the nominative masculine plural **-oi* (Greek *-oi*; Latin *-ī*). The last [innovation](#), however, is not shared with Osco-Umbrian but is found instead in Germanic (in the strong declension of adjectives) and partly in Celtic. The dialectal individuality of Greek is very clearly marked in the organization of the verb, which is without parallel except for an approximation in Indo-Iranian.



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Greek [syllabaries](#)

Starting from a foreign script known as [Linear A](#) (used in Crete to record a native language known as Minoan), the Greeks devised, toward 1500 BCE at the latest, a syllabic script to record their own language. Known as [Linear B](#), this script was deciphered in 1952 by the British architect [Michael Ventris](#) and the British classicist and linguist John Chadwick. At present more than 100 very short Linear B inscriptions painted on vases have been found in Crete and in continental Greece (e.g., Thebes), where they were imported from Crete. The major source of Linear B inscriptions are some 4,500 unbaked clay tablets found at Knossos (1400–1350 BCE—this date has been questioned) and at Thebes, Tiryns, Mycenae, Pylos, and Chania (1250–1200 BCE). There are no literary texts and hardly any [continuous](#) texts (only a small number of complete sentences exist); the tablets contain accounts of the great

Mycenaean palaces and their dependencies, written in the Greek language, in a very concise style.

The Linear B [syllabary](#) consists of about 90 signs. In principle, each sign represents a syllable beginning with one consonant and ending with a vowel. Thus, there are five different signs for *ta*, *te*, *ti*, *to*, *tu*, but there is no sign for the consonant *t* without a following vowel. As an initial syllable may be formed by just a vowel, there are also signs for *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*. The script does not distinguish *r* and *l*, unvoiced and voiced consonants (except for /d-/), and nonaspirated and aspirated consonants, so the sign *pa* can be read in Greek as *pa*, *ba*, or *pha*. Final consonants are omitted, and consonants followed by other consonants are either omitted or expressed by means of the sign corresponding to the next vowel (e.g., *pe-ma* for *sperma*, *ta-to-mo* for *stathmos*). Consequently, the spellings are often [ambiguous](#), such as *pa-te* for *pantes* and *patēr*, *pa-si* for *pansi* and *phāsi*. This inconvenient script and the nature of the documents make Mycenaean inscriptions harder to exploit and less rich in data than the later alphabetic inscriptions, but the information that can be gathered on the state of Greek five centuries before [Homer](#), incomplete as it may be, is of capital importance.



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Another syllabary, distantly related to Linear B, was in use in [Cyprus](#). From the 11th to the 3rd century BCE it was used to record a native language of the island (Eteocypriot) as well as Greek.