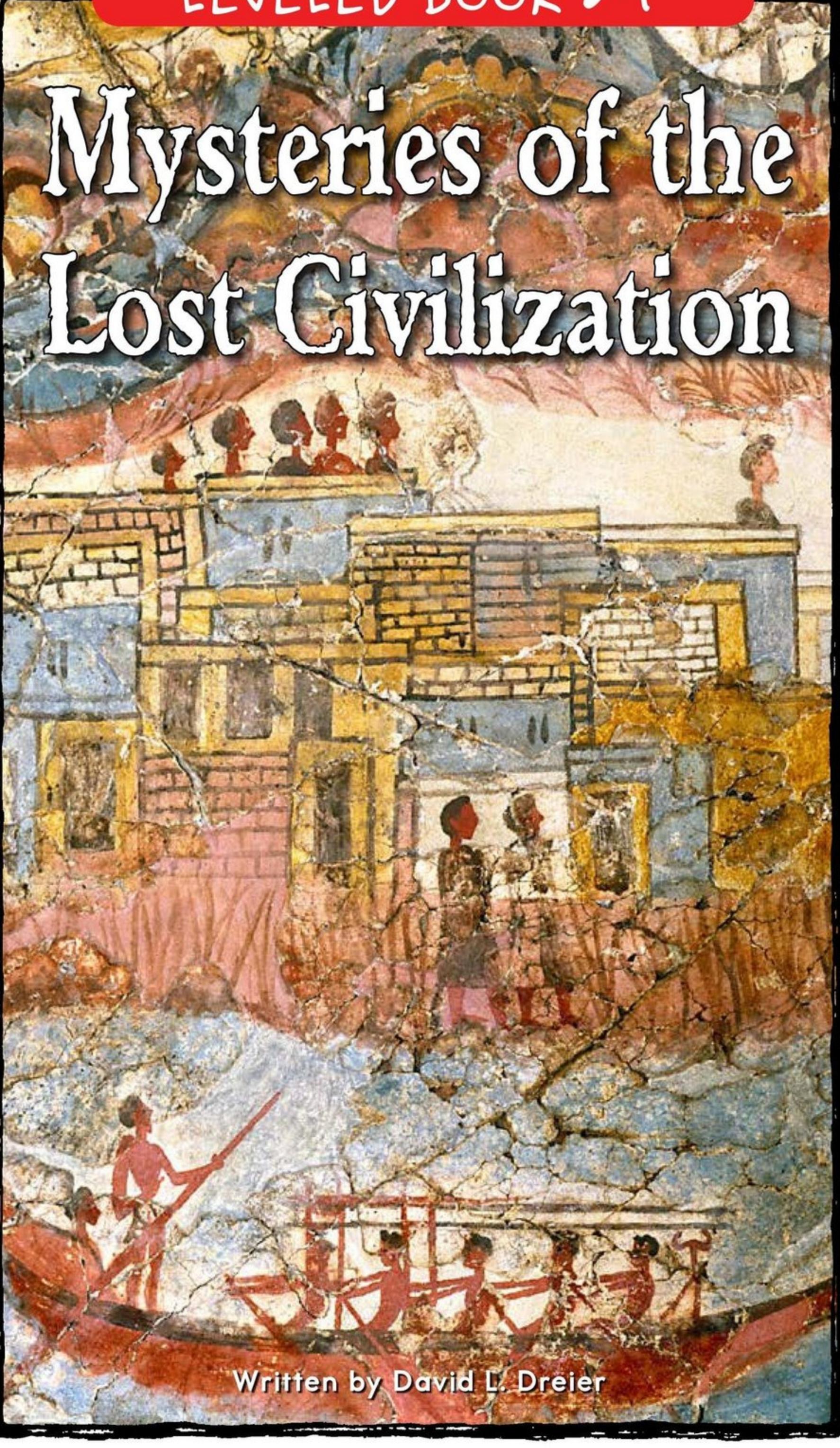


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Mysteries of the Lost Civilization



Written by David L. Dreier

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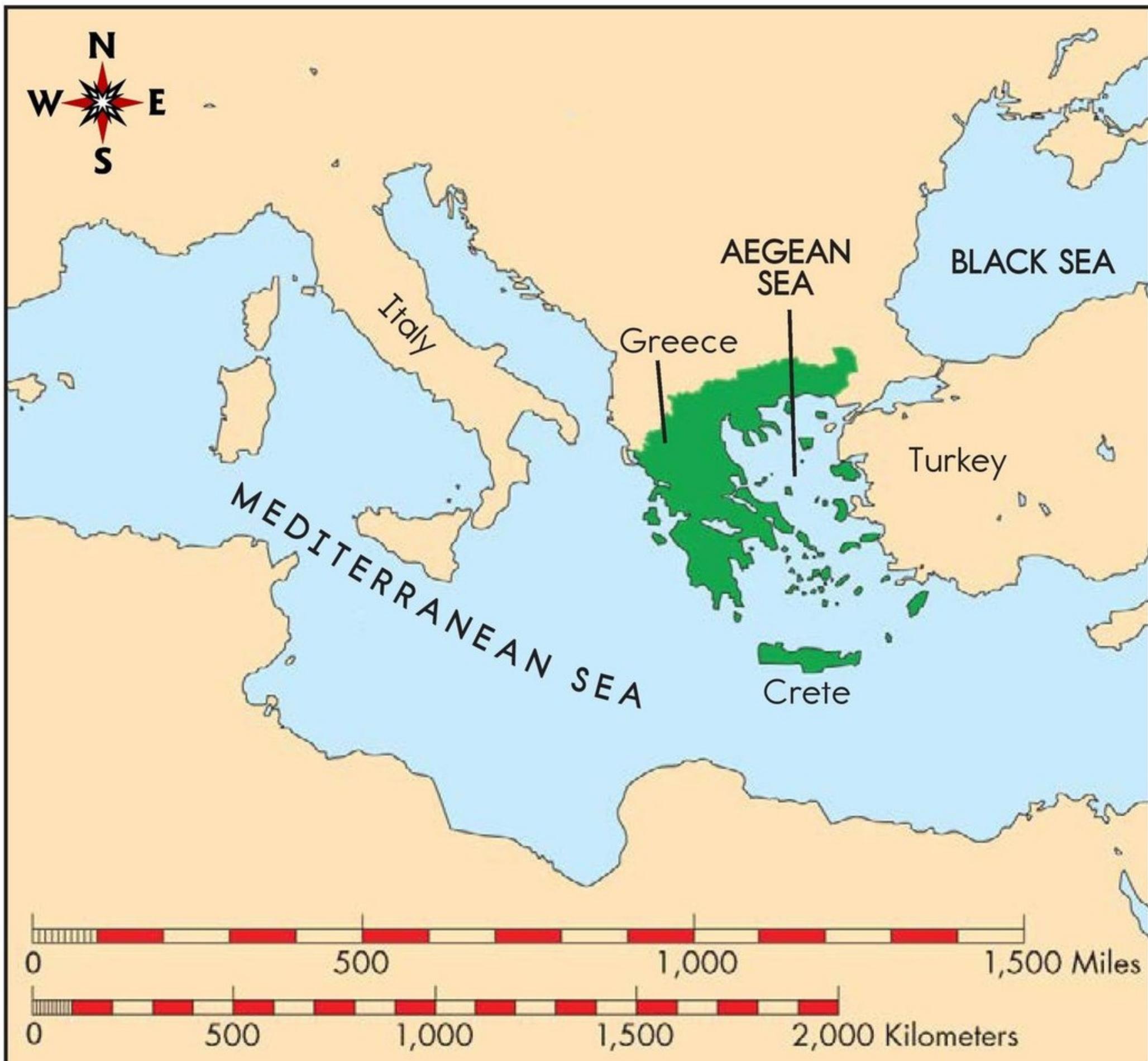


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The Island of Crete

South of Greece there is a large island called *Crete*. The island has many mountains. It is in a beautiful part of the Mediterranean Sea called the Aegean (ih-JEE-uhn) Sea. Today, Crete is a part of the country of Greece, but long ago, Crete was its own nation. It was home to a great group of people and culture known as the Minoan civilization.

Between the years of about 2600 BC and 1450 BC, the Minoan civilization prospered on Crete. Hundreds of years of trading with other countries around the Mediterranean Sea had made the Minoans rich. Then it seemed as though the Minoan civilization disappeared overnight. A **mystery** was born. How could a rich nation that was a leader among other nations suddenly disappear?

Someone You Should Know

In Greek mythology, Minos was the son of the Greek god Zeus and ruled the island of Crete from his palace at Knossos. The word *Minoan* means “of Minos.” One of the first people to study the ancient civilization on Crete named it “Minoan” after King Minos. Some research suggests there might be some truth in stories from Greek mythology. Some researchers think Minos was a title given to all rulers of Crete during the time period from about 3000 BC to 1000 BC known as the Bronze Age.



The throne room of King Minos in the palace at Knossos

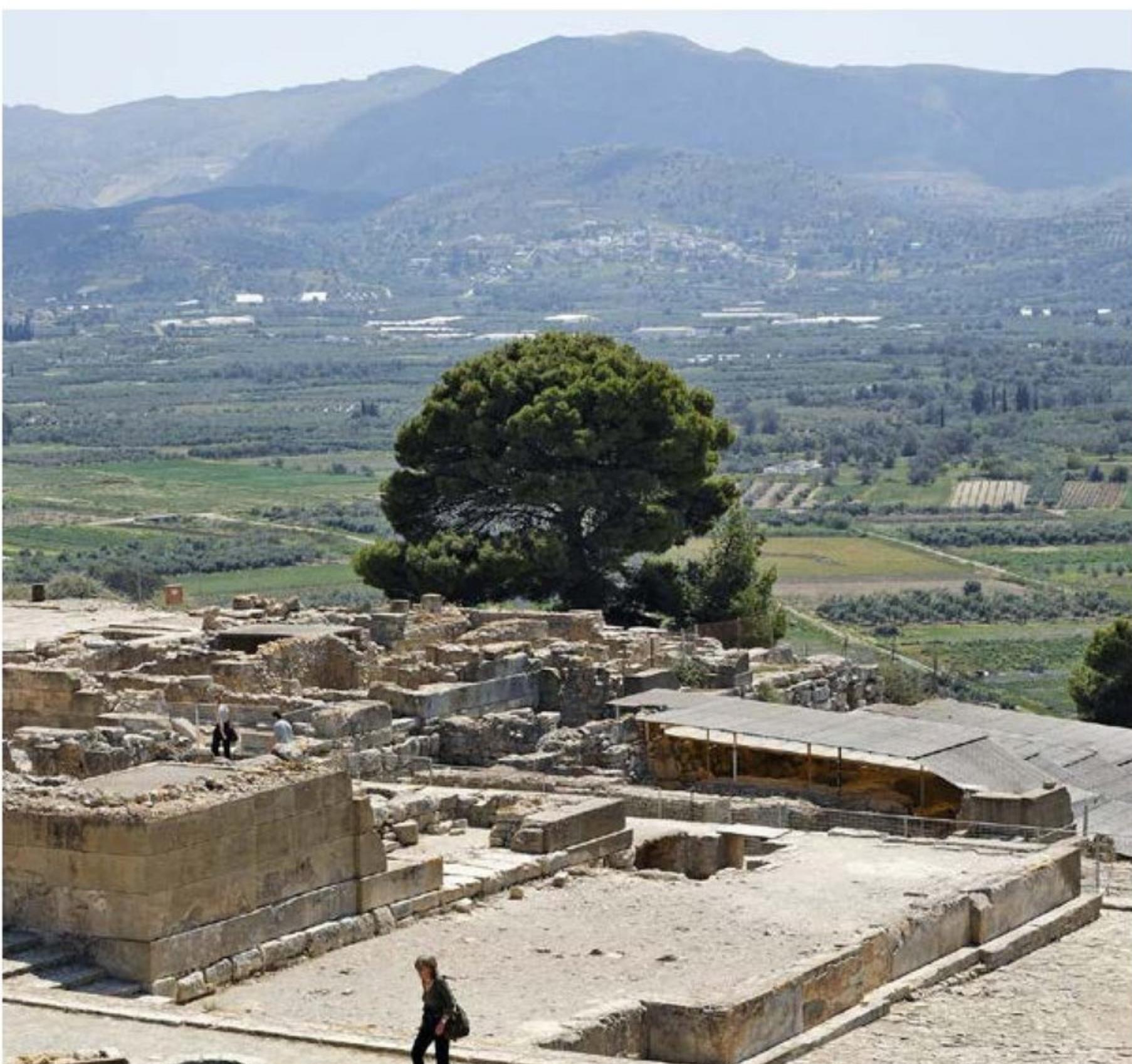


Minoan art shows what kind of ships the people of Crete used.

The First People in Crete

The first people on Crete probably settled on the island about 8,000 years ago. **Researchers** believe they came from the area known today as Turkey. Since Crete is an island, people had to use ships to settle there. These people would have brought their knowledge of farming and of the sea.

Researchers have learned that the soil on Crete was good for growing food. The Minoans raised sheep and grew olives and grapes. As the people's ability to create goods (such as olive oil, wine, and wool) grew, so did their civilization. The island's forests were full of trees that were cut down for wood. The Minoans used the wood to build ships. They used the ships to carry goods to trade with other nations.



Crete's farmland is still great for growing food.

The Minoan Culture

By about 3000 BC, the Minoans had become great traders. The Minoans traded their goods with their Mediterranean neighbors for gemstones, ivory, silver, gold, and copper. These things were not found on Crete so the people valued them. The Minoans grew rich through trade.

The Minoan civilization became more advanced over time. They had a system of writing and created many fine works of art, such as **frescoes**, pottery, and jewelry. They built more towns and connected the towns with paved roads. They built storehouses to keep the goods to be traded. They built fine houses and large palaces. The palaces became the centers of society.



Minoan ring

Much of what we know about the Minoan civilization is a **theory**. A theory is an idea or a group of ideas based on **evidence**. Examples of evidence are objects such as buildings or art that can be studied by researchers.

Researchers looked at the type of gems used in Minoan jewelry and then found the mountains from which the gems were mined. Researchers also studied the type of clay used in the pottery. Frescoes and pottery are important pieces of evidence that often show how people lived. Many Minoan works of art show scenes of daily life.

Minoan frescoes and pottery show the people farming, sailing, and celebrating. They show how Minoans dressed and wore their hair. Another important piece to understanding the Minoans is that their frescoes and pottery show few scenes of battles. This tells researchers that the Minoan people were mostly peaceful and had few enemies who challenged their power.

This drinking vessel shows scenes of boxing, bull-leaping, and wrestling.





Researchers have studied the palace ruins at Malia to learn about Minoan culture.

The Minoan civilization reached its peak in the years after about 1700 BC. Then, beginning in about 1450 BC, the civilization **collapsed**. There is evidence that many of its cities and palaces burned. By about 1100 BC, the Minoan civilization no longer existed.

Researchers have tried to solve the mystery of what happened to the Minoans by studying the evidence. For a long time, many historians thought a volcano was the cause.

The Explosion of Thera

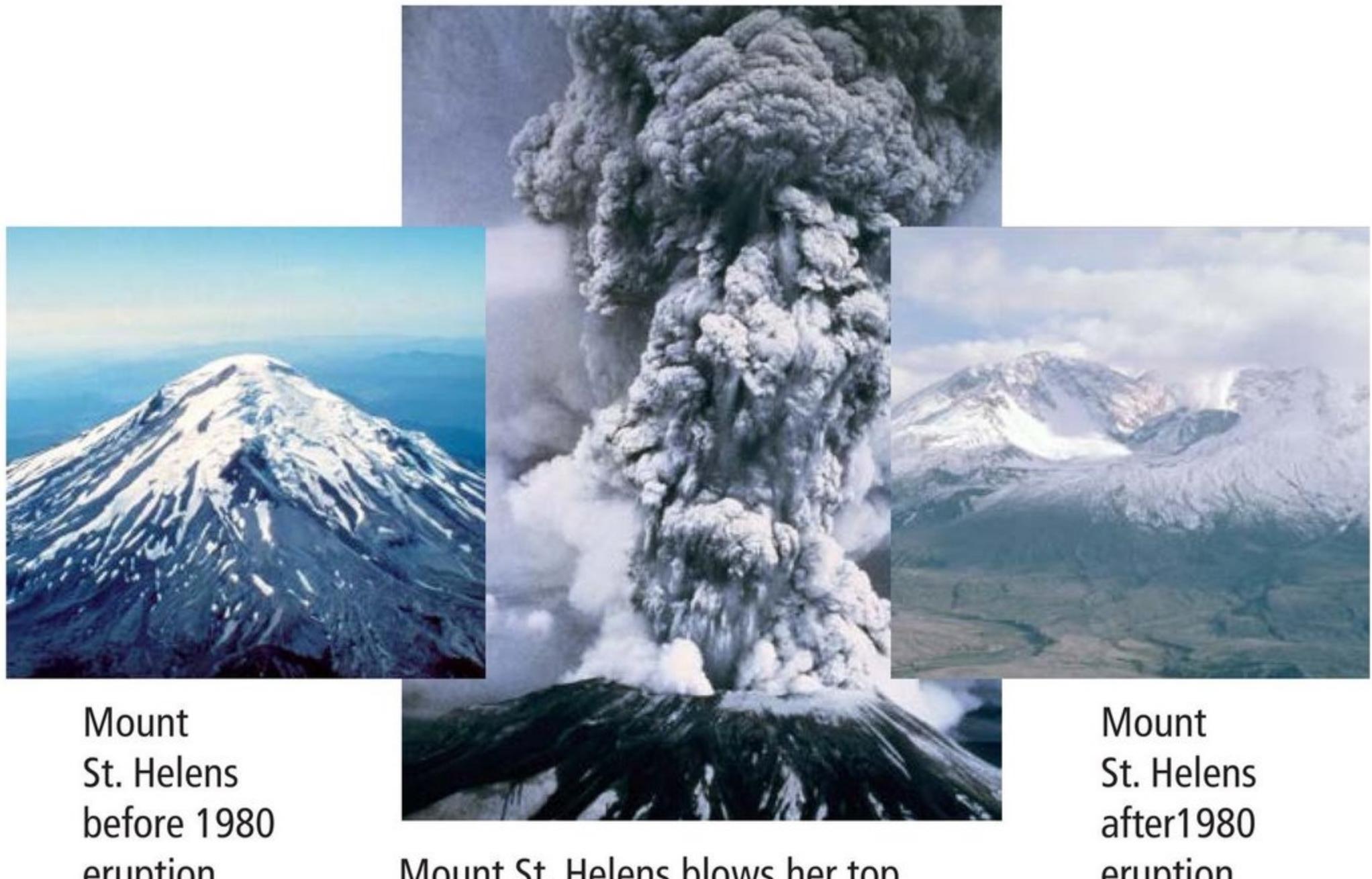
The Minoans lived near an island called *Thera* (now called Santorini). The island was about 70 miles (40 km) north of Crete. The island of Thera had been an active volcano off and on for many thousands of years. But then the volcano became quiet long enough for people to think the island was safe, so people built cities there.

However, a large amount of magma was building deep beneath the island. (Magma is melted rock mixed with hot gases.) The build-up of magma caused great **pressure** within the mountain island. The pressure caused the land to shake, causing earthquakes. Then one day, after several earthquakes, Thera blew its top!



Statue from Thera



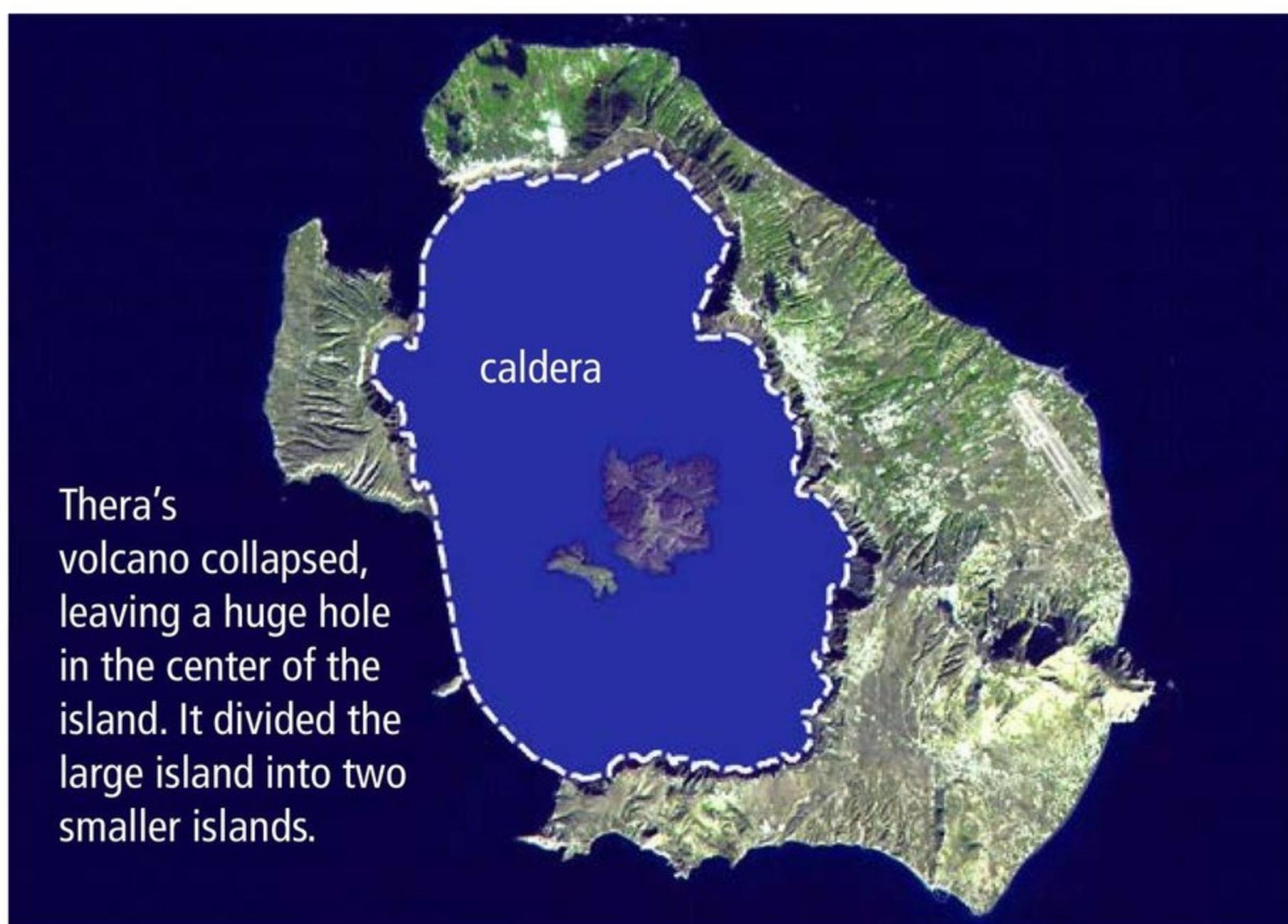


The **eruption** of Thera was one of the most powerful eruptions in history. You may have seen pictures of Mount Saint Helens, the volcano that erupted in Washington State in 1980. That was a big eruption, but it was tiny compared to Thera.

The eruption of Thera was about twelve times bigger than the eruption of Mount Saint Helens. Large amounts of rock, hot gases, and ashes were blown from inside the volcano into the skies above it. Rocks and ash fell onto the islands throughout the Aegean Sea. Small rocks, gases, and ash formed a gigantic dark cloud.

Thera's eruption was so large it caused a large sea wave called a *tsunami* (tsoo-NOM-ee). The wave may have been 100 feet high, or even higher. The tsunami crashed into shores around the Mediterranean. The land on many islands was covered with water. Farms and even whole cities were lost.

After the eruption, all that was left of the middle of the island of Thera was a large hole. A large hole caused by the collapse of a volcano is called a *caldera* (call-DARE-uh). The caldera filled up with water from the sea. The island of Thera became the shape of a crescent.



Did Thera Destroy the Minoans?

For a long time, researchers thought that the eruption of Thera caused the disappearance of the Minoans on Crete. They believed the two events happened at the same time. However, later evidence showed that the volcano on Thera erupted about 180 years before the Minoans disappeared. So did that make researchers think the volcano theory was wrong? Well, not exactly.

Some researchers now think that the eruption of Thera may have played a part in the Minoans' disappearance. Thera's eruption may have weakened the Minoans. The tsunami would have destroyed many of the Minoan ships and ports along Crete's shores and ruined crops as well. This would have left the Minoans with few goods to trade and few trading ships. The earthquakes before the eruption could have destroyed Crete's cities as well. All these losses would have made the people who survived very sad. They would have had to find lots of money and energy to rebuild Crete. These losses made Crete open to enemies as it had never been before.

The Greek Invasion

Beginning in about 1450 BC, Crete was invaded by people from Greece. They were called the *Mycenaeans* (my-suh-NEE-unz). It was probably the Mycenaeans who struck the final blow that ended the Minoan civilization. The Minoans were weakened by the eruption of Thera. They could not gather the strength they needed to keep themselves safe from the Mycenaeans.

The Mycenaeans were fighters. They took over cities. Researchers know this because tales of their fights were written down. These writings can be read today.

This Mycenaean vase decorated with warriors shows spears and an early kind of armor.



Many people know about the Mycenaeans through a tale written by a man named Homer. Some researchers think that Homer lived around 1200 BC. Homer wrote about a city named Troy and the Mycenaeans' fight to win back a woman named Helen. Homer's tale was believed to be **fictional** until researchers discovered a very old city in Turkey that seemed to match the city of Troy that Homer described.



Ruins in Turkey, above, helped suggest Homer's writings about Troy were true.

Was Crete Atlantis?

Many people are beginning to think that Homer's tales are real stories. They think the tales tell about real cities and real people who lived a very long time ago. They think that if Homer's stories have some truth, then perhaps other ancient writers' tales are also true.

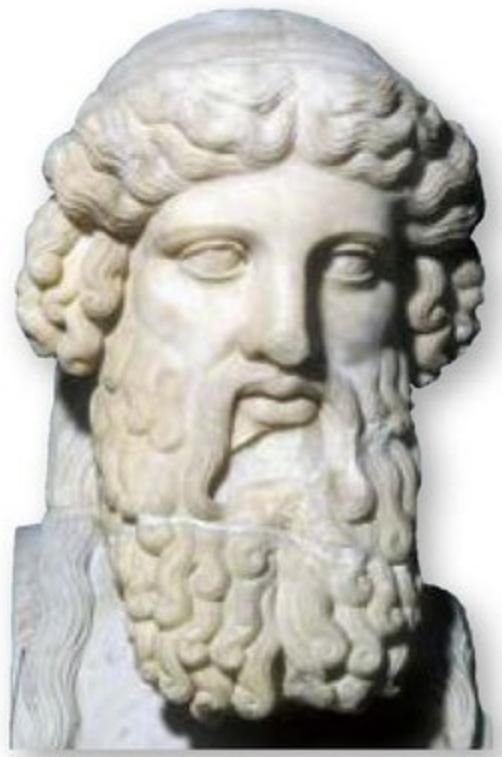
An old Greek **philosopher** (deep thinker) named Plato told a very interesting story. He said there was once a great island country that disappeared. He called the country *Atlantis*.

Plato said Atlantis had been destroyed by a terrible **disaster**. The disaster caused the country to sink under the sea, never to be seen again.

Plato's Atlantis

Plato wrote about Atlantis twice about a decade or so before his death in 348 BC. He wrote of an ideal civilization that existed millions of years before the time of his writing.

According to Plato, Atlantis was larger than Libya and Asia combined (larger than the continental United States). He wrote that Atlantis's kings, who were **descended** from the sea and earthquake god Poseidon, had power over the entire known world.



Plato

Because of the greatness of Minoan Crete and the fact that it seemed to disappear, some people think it may be Plato's Atlantis. Some people think that by studying Plato's stories about Atlantis, they can learn

more about the collapse of the Minoan civilization.

Whether or not Crete was Atlantis, many people are **intrigued** by both mysteries. They like finding a way to solve them. Researchers study evidence in hopes that they might put a piece of the puzzle of Atlantis and the disappearance of Minoan Crete in place.

Maybe there will not be an answer to what really happened, but one thing is sure—the search for answers will continue.

Timaeus, one of
Plato's writings
about Atlantis



Glossary

civilization	a culture that has developed forms of government, religion, sciences, language, art, and learning (p. 4)
collapsed	fell apart (p. 10)
descended	connected by blood from an ancestor (p. 17)
disaster	a sudden, terrible event (p. 17)
eruption	the sudden forcing of material from a volcano (p. 12)
evidence	something that proves something to be real or true (p. 8)
fictional	made up, not true (p. 16)
frescoes	paintings on walls or ceilings made of plaster (p. 8)
intrigued	made someone greatly curious (p. 18)
invaded	entered another country to take over or to make war (p. 15)
mystery	something that is unknown or difficult to understand (p. 5)
philosopher	a person who wants to understand and explain all parts of life (p. 17)
pressure	the force created by something pushing firmly on something else; a build-up of energy (p. 12)

researchers	people who carefully study topics to find facts and discover truth (p. 6)
theory	an idea or ideas that explain events based on evidence (p. 8)

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