**Comparative Civilizations 12**

Timeline: ca. 7000 BCE- 479BCE

**The Minoans**: People of ancient Crete. 3200-1100BCE Minoans became first Europeans to acquire some facets of civilization. They developed a form of writing, social organization ruled by royalty, advanced metal-working skills and sophisticated artistic expression.

Bronze (an alloy of 9 parts copper and 1 part tin) was used to make better tools and weapons. Copper was ideal for producing sharp knives, spear points, touch saws, hard chisels and many other types of implements.

Surplus food or linen production was traded for bronze. Sailors, traders, merchants and metal workers reaped profits which lead to increase in population, increased productivity in agriculture. Olive oil became a staple in Mediterranean life.

During the Middle Minoan period (ca. 2100BCE), life on Crete flourished. Foreign trade with the Near East increased. Increased immigration, growth and prosperity lead to an increase in higher levels of artisanship, a system of writing, new burial customs ( sanctuaries built on hilltops) and the emergence of wealthy upper class who build impressive palaces, houses and temples. To keep track of their wealth, this group developed a method of marking ownership with seals. Eventually, the Minoans developed a script called Linear A.

Most important palaces on Crete were at Knossos. This was one of the centers of power. This is thought to be the home of the most powerful monarch on the island. Power was exercised by controlling certain goods and products. The Kingships controlled this economy. Buildings were sophisticated and elaborate and showed examples of fine craftsmanship. Buildings had designated rooms for administration and living, central courts, art forms depicting scenes form nature, fine carved vases and Linear A script.

Thera: Volcano which erupted twice and destroyed the palaces on this island north of Crete.

It is believed that the Minoans were overthrown by the early Greek-speaking Mycenaeans. Eventually the great Palace at Knossos was destroyed by fire and the island reverted to a simpler past.

Myth of Minotaur.

The wife of King Minos of Knossos gave birth to a Minotaur (half man, half bull). It was imprisoned in the Labyrinth. Each year, 14 youth were chosen for sacrifice. Theseus, (along with King Mino’s daughter, Adriadne) killed the Minotaur and saved the youth of Athens.

**The Mycenaeans**: mainland Greece developed in the same way that Crete did. Early Helladic period saw a series of destruction and depopulation. During 1700-1500BCE, powerful and wealthy Feudal chiefdoms sprang up and consolidated control of the small farming villages. The Mycenaeans, as they were know, build burial palaces called tholos tombs, developed a writing system to keep records, had well defined states ruled by kings and ran state institutions including a state religion. Independent city states (polis) were developed. The mountains hindered communication and transportation between city-states. The sea, however, was a great transportation highway and the Greeks became expert sailors, traders and navigators.

The Legend of the Trojan War

1200BCE Homer wrote epic poems called the Iliad and the Odyssey. These two poems describe adventures of Greek heroes who fought in the Trojan War. The Trojan War, is a vague event but has long been romanticized. It was perhaps a dispute over fishing rights or control over shipping and not the great conflict of West vs. East, as suggested.

Minoan influence on Mycenae: Both left clay figurines that represented worshippers and human shaped gods in their sanctuaries. Both cultures practiced animal sacrifice and the pouring of libations (wine), and both kept cult areas within the palace. Mycenaeans were strongly influenced by Minoans and this is reflected in their wall paintings, style of dress, seal carving, religious ideas and vases. Mycenaean gods were similar to the Classical Age Gods, including Poseidon, Athena, Dionysos and Zeus.