# In Search of the Classical World

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## *An Introduction to the Ancient Aegean*

By

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# PREFACE

One of the reasons I have written this book is because I recall, albeit many years ago, studying Ancient Greek History and Literature for the first time, at school. I was told to read a translation of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* and Homer's *Iliad.* I was not immediately spellbound by either tome. Despite both being in English translation, for all the sense they made, they may as well have been in their original Greek.

On those balmy summer school days of youth, my idle gaze would wander, enhanced within a dream, from the leaded classroom window, across the quadrangle, over the headmaster's lawn, pausing at length, to admire the serenity of the gothic revival chapel, only to return, half consciously, to the confounding poetry of Homer or histories of Thucydides. What were they talking (or in Homer's case, singing) about?

Several years later, whilst laid up in hospital, I decided to have another go at Thucydides and, with an older mind, I began to make some sense of him. Then, when I eventually went to university, as a very mature (in age rather than in mind) student, I was reacquainted with my old friend, Homer, and progressed considerably better than when I had first encountered him at school.

In Thucydides, I discovered the classical era of the ancient Spartans and Athenians and the ardent struggles between them. This was history – a written record of what had transpired in the fifth century BC. Homer's Trojan War was prehistory of the thirteenth century BC and based on myth. I was duly fascinated by it all and this led me to a further study of the classical civilisation of Greece, both historically and archaeologically.

So, in searching for the Classical World of Greece we must go back to the Bronze Age. It is where it all started. Homer was waxing lyrical of a period of time in the Bronze Age around 1250 BC, some 500 years before his own time. His tales are the foundations of the history and drama of the fifth century BC Classical Greece which had a dedicated belief in their truth. Revealed to me were the intrigues of the Aegean and I was enlightened by the antics of the Bronze Mycenaeans and their shameful treatment of the Trojans. But was it all true? As prehistory (no historical writing) we only have archaeology to assist us in interpreting what was going on during the period. Accordingly, I set off on my own adventure into the study of archaeology and thereafter, the specific world of Minoan

Crete, Mycenae on mainland Greece and Troy on the northwest coast of Turkey.

What I have produced in this book is what I have discovered over the years and my hope is that it will inspire others to follow a similar route – or destiny, as the Homeric gods would have us believe. If nothing else, you may be better 'equipped' than I was, all those years ago, to tackle Homer's *Iliad*, Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, and the study of the Classical World.

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# INTRODUCTION

This is the story of ancient Greek history; a story of tyrants and war. It is merely an introduction to give the reader a taste of life and strife in the heydays of power and political struggles.

Dates are all referred to as BC (Before Christ). Although there is some 'modern' day inclination to use BCE (Before Common Era), I cannot change the habit of a lifetime. I should mention that throughout my researches I found various discrepancies with dates and opinions as to certain details. Two and a half thousand years ago Greek thought was very different to present day thinking and it is very difficult to be emphatic about exactly what was going on, particularly when we are reliant upon differing translations (and medieval copying) of ancient scripts. In fact, neither of the two foremost Greek historians, Herodotus (484-424 BC) and Thucydides (471-399 BC), were able to agree on all the exact facts and they were writing shortly after, if not at the time of, the events were actually happening. Herodotus commented:

> My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it - and that may be taken to apply to this book [*The Histories*] as a whole. (bk. 7.152)

On referring to this quote, Kenneth Dover added:

> We, his readers, are under no obligation to believe or disbelieve, but only (if we are historians) to consider which, among all the data which he offers us, combine with independent evidence to make coherent historical hypotheses. Naturally, within a complex of traditions relating to a period for which archaeological and archival documentation is scanty, only a small fraction of the detail enters into such combinations. (Dover, 1980)

Bearing this in mind, it is understandable that historians may differ with certain facts and figures.

***Part One*** looks at the prehistory of the Aegean. It is called 'prehistory' because there are no written texts telling us what had been going on (Linear A and B are not historical texts). The Aegean is the eastern Mediterranean - of which 'Greece' is a part. I put Greece in inverted

commas because it was not known as Greece in those days – 'those days' being the Bronze Age, *c*3000 BC-1100 BC. The Aegean also incorporates the islands around Greece (including Crete) and the western coast of Anatolia (Turkey) where Troy was situated (on the north western coast of Turkey at the entrance to the Hellespont leading to the Black Sea).

The Minoans of Crete (*c*1900-1450 BC) were the first European civilisation and were taken over by the Mycenaeans of mainland 'Greece' (the Peloponnese) around 1450 BC. Thereafter, according to Homer, the Mycenaeans and their allies were responsible for the destruction of Troy around 1250 BC. The Mycenaeans themselves came to an abrupt end around 1100 BC - bringing the Bronze Age to an end. It is therefore necessary to consider these three 'powers' when looking at the prehistory of the Aegean.

Chapter one takes a very brief look at the relevant myths of the Aegean – of Theseus and the Minotaur of Minoan Crete and of Troy and the Trojan War. Then, before embarking on aspects of Minoan Crete, chapter two deals with the chronology of this prehistorical civilisation. Having thereafter considered the emergence of this civilisation into a palace society in chapters three to six, I then review the Aegean power that took over from the Minoans - the Mycenaeans (chapters seven to ten). Finally in this part, I look at Troy in chapters eleven and twelve.

***Part Two*** deals with the 'history' of ancient Greece. Its 'history' began on the introduction of writing in 776 BC with the first recording of the Olympic Games. The leading roles of this history belong to the Spartans and the Athenians (chapter thirteen), with various intrusions by the Persians, the Thebans and, finally, the Macedonians. The plot is based around the power struggles between Sparta and Athens, during the Classical Age (fifth and fourth centuries BC), leading to their ultimate defeat by the Macedonians at Chaeronea in 338 BC and the beginning of the Hellenistic Age from 336 BC. Our story ends with the death of the Great Macedonian himself, Alexander, in 323 BC.

Chapter fourteen sees the failing of the might of Persia against the hopelessly outnumbered Athenians, Spartans and allies (other Greeks). In both Persian invasions the odds are stacked against the Greeks but by superior manoeuvring, both at sea and on land, they manage to defeat the immense armies of Darius and Xerxes, the kings of Persia. Athens took advantage of its involvement and the destruction of its city in this Persian conflict and in chapter fifteen, initiated by the League set up by Athens, the Athenian empire takes its shape under the likes of Themistocles and Pericles. This power is challenged by the Spartans and, in chapter sixteen,

we enter into the Peloponnesian War, a conflict between Greek and Greek, Dorian and Ionian; the Peloponnesian states, headed by Sparta against Athens and its Ionian allies. It is, in effect, a political conflict between the Peloponnesian oligarchs (aristocratic rulers) and the Athenian democrats which leads to the downfall of the Athenian empire. Thebes is able to take advantage of a weakened Sparta and a defeated Athens which results in a Theban predominance in chapter seventeen. Unfortunately, Thebes does not have the manpower or consistent leadership to hold on to this power and chapter eighteen makes way for the rise of the Macedon kings, Philip and his son, Alexander. The latter is able to spread Greek culture into Asia but brings about his own downfall by attempting to spread Asian culture into Greece.

***Part Three*** considers the literature and philosophy of the ancient Greeks:

Homer's *Iliad* (if, indeed, it is his – but that is another story) is perhaps one of the greatest epic poems of all time. It is certainly one of the most influential of the western tradition. In chapter nineteen, I look at the work and discuss the virtues of the characters involved. Virtue was a prime motivator of the 'mythical' Greeks and, therefore, an important part of their lives. As a result, it was a base topic for the Homeric epic and I have, therefore, dealt with it in some detail. Chapter twenty, still with the *Iliad*, compares the gods with the god-like heroes of the poem.

Homer's other great work was the *Odyssey* which tells of Odysseus' ten year homecoming after the Trojan War and his escapades during that period. These escapades have a fairy-tale nature about them and it is this aspect of the poem that I consider in chapter twenty-one. Finally on Homer, in chapter twenty-two, I compare some of the archaeology with his two poems to see if there could be any truth in them.

In chapter twenty-three, I have touched upon the main and most influential philosophers of the era, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It is important to try to understand their thinking as it may give an insight into how and why the ancient Greek politicians and generals acted in the way that they did. It is, however, a vast and complex subject of its own and I have just scratched the surface with my understanding of the basic concept of the philosophy of virtue, again, as an introduction and not as a critical analysis. Virtue, in various forms, was a very important part of Greek life (and not limited to Homer's heroes) and was the basis of Spartan law.

Likewise, in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five, I comment briefly on the drama of the fifth century BC. As with the philosophers, I have also considered the three major poets/playwrights of the period, Aeschylus,

Sophocles and Euripides, and have discussed only one piece of their work simply to give the reader an idea of the dramatic world of Greek tragedy. With regard to Sophocles, I have picked him out for a comment on virtue, in particular, *dike* (justice) as a comparison of Homer's ideals in chapter nineteen. The next chapter takes a brief look at the comedies of Aristophanes and Menander

This account begins in the preface, with reference to the ancient historian, Thucydides, and concludes with him in chapter twenty-six.


Greece and part of Persia (to the east) (courtesy of Bernard Suzanne).

# PART ONE

# PREHISTORY

# CHAPTER ONE

# MYTH AND THE AEGEAN

Greek (Aegean) mythology must not be confused with history. Quite simply, history relates to the facts as we know them or believe them to be as evidenced from surviving documentation and archaeological finds. 'History' obviously existed in the periods referred to in mythology but information as to exactly what occurred prior to the eighth century BC (the first recording of facts by the Greeks) in Greece, is very scant. This is known as pre-history – or prehistoric - since no written records have been left. Mythology is the imaginary happenings of earlier periods of Greek life. A myth was, perhaps, a form of folk-tale and a way of explaining the inexplicable. It was the ancient Greeks' answer to the unknown past.

It is from the myths that we hear of the Olympian gods (Zeus, Apollo, Ares, Poseidon, Hermes, Dionysus, Hephaestos,) and goddesses (Hera, Aphrodite, Athena, Demeter, Artemis, Hestia). It has been presumed that belief in these Olympian gods probably originated during the Dark Age (*c*1100-750 BC – following the Bronze Age of *c*3000-1100 BC). Two issues here: first of all we have to be careful with the phrase 'Dark Age' as much more is being revealed about it and so it is not so 'Dark'. Secondly, some of the above gods appear in Mycenaean Linear B (*c*1450 BC) and so earlier than this 'Dark Age'.

Myths also require the semi-divine (folk) heroes, such as Heracles (Hercules), Theseus, Perseus (who slew the Gorgon, Medusa), Jason (of the Argonauts) and much of our knowledge of this mythology comes from paintings on ancient Greek earthenware. It is difficult to date these heroes of mythology, but Theseus, had he existed, must have lived around the beginning of the Minoan period at, perhaps, the height of its power (*c*1700 BC – but this is sheer speculation) having been responsible for the killing of King Minos' Minotaur. Heracles, supposedly the great grandson of Perseus, was a contemporary of Theseus and one of Jason's Argonauts.

According to the eighth century Greek poet, Hesiod, in the beginning there was Chaos (vast and dark open space), then followed Gaea (deep-breasted earth) and finally, Eros (the formation of beings and things). From Chaos came Erebus and Night who, in turn, gave birth to Ether and Hemera, the day. Gaea gave birth to Uranus (the sky and stars) thus

creating the universe. Gaea and, her son, Uranus, then produced the first race, the Titans, of which there were 12 (6 male and 6 female). Two of these Titans were Cronus and Rhea, father and mother of the Olympian god, Zeus.

As far as the Aegean (the ancient name for mainland Greece and its surrounding islands), mythology was rampant. Crete had King Minos and the infamous Minotaur; mainland Mycenae had Agamemnon who led the expedition to Troy; and Troy itself (on the northwest coast of Turkey) had, of course, its war. First, it is worth looking briefly at these myths.

## King Minos and the Minotaur

So was it King Minos who colonised Crete and built up a supreme navy, clearing the Aegean of pirates? Most unlikely but as we have no evidence to say he did, we have no evidence to say that he did not. As the tale goes, he built a labyrinth (although *labrys*, in Greek, means double-axe; *labyrinth* is house of the double axe), and deposited in it the Minotaur (the off-spring of his wife's [Pasiphae] dalliance with a bull). Each year seven girls and seven boys, on reaching maturity, were sent to Minos, from Athens, as 'blood tributes' (for the death of King Minos' son, Androgeos, killed in Athens during the games) and they were thrown into the labyrinth to be savaged by the Minotaur.

Theseus, son of the King Aegeus of Athens, was one such sacrificial offering. But when he arrived, Minos' daughter, Ariadne, fell in love with him, gave him a sword and some string to tie to the entrance to find his way out of the labyrinth. He duly slayed the Minotaur and escaped with Ariadne.

Daedalus, the architect who built the labyrinth and had given Ariadne the idea of the string, was in trouble with Minos. So he and his son, Icarus, escaped by making wings of feathers stuck together with wax. Unfortunately, contrary to his father's advice, Icarus flew too close to the sun and his wax melted and he fell to his death. Daedalus did get away but Minos pursued him. He found him by setting a task for whoever he visited, believing only Daedalus would resolve it. He produced a shell and challenged anyone to work out how to get a spider through the middle of it. On arriving at Camikos in Sicily, where Daedalus was hiding under the protection of its king, Cokalos, the shell was given to the architect who threaded a piece of cotton through a hole in the centre of the shell and covered it in honey – off went the spider through the hole. However, the daughters of the Cokalos favoured Daedalus and his tricks and so killed Minos by pouring boiling water over him whilst he was in his bath.

Theseus sailed home to Athens but unceremoniously dumped Ariadne off at Naxos, an island just north of Crete. She overcame her grief and later took up with the god, Dionysus (some tales say she was already married to him before meeting Theseus). On approaching Athens, Theseus forgot to change his sail from black to white which should have been the sign to his father, King Aegeus, that he still lived. His father, seeing the black sail, assumed his son had died and threw himself off a cliff (into the Aegean – hence its name), to his death.

## The Curse of the House of Atreus

The family of Atreus had always had its problems. Atreus' grandfather was Tantalus. He fed his son to the gods as a token of his loyalty to them. They were not amused and sentenced him to an eternity in Hades, without food or water - each was just out of his reach (hence the word 'tantalising'). His son (Atreus' father) was Pelops who wanted to marry Hippodamia but her father was against the union – 'over his dead body' he had inferred. So Pelops caused his death in a chariot 'accident' and so was free to marry Hippodamia.

Atreus' brother, Thyestes, was having an affair with Atreus' wife, Aerope. So Atreus invited his brother to dinner and fed him his (Thyestes') children. Thyestes cursed Atreus and the former was told that vengeance would be sought by the offspring of his liaison with his own daughter, Pelopia. This was Aegisthus and, indeed, he slayed Atreus.

Atreus had two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaos (see below). The curse continued with Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter, Iphigenia, for fair winds to Troy, resulting in his wife, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus, conspiring successfully to kill him. They were both despatched by Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, before the curse was finally removed by Apollo and Athene (see chapter twenty-four).

## Troy and the Trojan War

Homer's world of the heroes involved a city of Troy, an invading force from the mainland of 'Greece' (the Achaeans – also known as Danaans or Argives – they were not known as Greeks at this time) and destruction.

The tale, in short: the goddesses, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite contested as to whom was the most beautiful at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (later to be parents of Achilles) with the Trojan prince, Paris, acting as judge. All three participants attempted to bribe Paris, but Aphrodite won the day by offering him the most beautiful girl in the world as his

wife. Following *the judgement of Paris*, Aphrodite was obliged to assist in the abduction of the girl in question, Helen. Unfortunately, she was the wife of the Spartan king, Menelaos. Paris carried her off to his homeland, Troy, in Asia Minor which was under the protection of his father, King Priam. He was pursued by Menelaos and an army of Greeks (otherwise referred to as Achaeans by Homer), led by the Spartan king's brother, Agamemnon, King of Argos/Mycenae. This Greek/Achaean army boasted such heroes as Achilles, Aias (Ajax), Diomedes and Odysseus. There followed a ten year siege of Troy by the Greeks prior to its eventual destruction and the return of Helen to Menelaos. As legend has it, the 'wooden horse', which was the alleged cause of the downfall of the Trojans, was the brain-child of Odysseus.

## Pre-history and Troy

We then move on to a confusion of history and mythology, particularly with the Trojan War of *c*1250 BC. There is confusion because a war of some description almost certainly took place at Troy at around that time, and a city was destroyed, but how and why, and whether it was Homer's Troy, still remains a mystery. It is unlikely that it had anything to do with anyone called Helen and there is no archaeological or historical evidence that any of the Homeric participants of the conflict, or the wooden horse, actually existed.

As for Homer's time, Herodotus, in the fifth century BC, tells us that Homer lived about four hundred years before his own time (Herodotus' *Histories*) – putting him in the ninth or possibly the eighth century BC.

The Trojan War ended the period of the Mycenaean civilisation, which had lasted, at its most powerful, since about 1400 BC. This era superseded the Minoan civilisation, which had been at its height since about 1700 BC. Knossos, in Crete, was a beautiful, peaceful, undefended city during the Minoan period, but its destruction, possibly by earthquake, in about 1450 BC, may have led to the invasion of the war-mongering Mycenaeans from Argolis (in the Peloponnese of mainland Greece). Although this new age was of warriors, it was also of writing and clay tablets were preserved due to their baking from the burning of many palaces. The 'writing' refers to Linear A and B tablets which were in fact only administrative records of the time.

The 'Dark Age' (or not so 'Dark' these days) followed the destruction of Troy and Mycenae. There appears to have been a fall in the population, a loss of skills, wealth and luxury and no trade outside the Aegean. By the eighth century BC, this had been reversed and we enter into the Archaic

Age (*c*750-480 BC) and hear of the poetry of Homer and Hesiod (both around 750-650 BC) which gives us an insight into this period and before. 776 BC saw the first writing (as such) and recording of the winners of the Olympic Games, which took place every four years, at Olympus, in the Peloponnese. This writing takes us from pre-history into history (even though, as referred to in the Introduction, the history is not really recorded until Herodotus and Thucydides).

By 700 BC, battles were more organised and no longer reliant upon loose grappling or an excuse for heroic deeds turned on single combat (if it ever was, as depicted in Homer's *Iliad*); hoplites were fighting together, as a team, in phalanxes and generals were working on strategy. There was also a population increase resulting in further colonies being established and hence a revival in trade and skills – a development of what was to become the *polis* (organised state) of Classical Greece.

## Archaeology

It is only in the last 130 years or so that the past of Greece has been found to be considerably longer than previously imagined. Prior to the work and excavations of such as Heinrich Schliemann, Sir Arthur Evans, Carl Blegen and Alan Wace, the 'history of Greece' began with the First Olympiad in 776 B.C. Now, perhaps at least some of the events of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations portrayed by poets such as Homer actually did take place. However, it must be remembered that Archaeological discovery may throw light upon the legends, but legends must not be used for the interpretation of material records. Care must therefore be taken not to try to make the archaeology fit the legend - but rather to assess the site in its own right, while, as far as possible, avoid being influenced by the legends, hard though this may be. Careful assessment must also be made of any archaeological interpretation and reports that may be in existence.

Archaeological excavation has brought to light many monuments and buildings of the civilisations that dwelled in the Aegean earlier than 1000 BC. These peoples were known to the ancient historians, such as Herodotus and Thucydides, as a mixture of legend and fact. Combining the ancient views with the myths that have come down to us, such as the massed forces of the Greeks being sent under the leadership of Agamemnon of Mycenae to besiege Troy, it is little wonder that early antiquarians (the likes of Schliemann) were lured by such tales, wanting to prove the existence of Homer's world.

Of particular interest, and indeed of much debate, are the relationships and interrelationships that existed between the inhabitants of Crete and those on the Greek mainland – known to us now as Minoans and Mycenaeans respectively. There have been various schools of thought on these relationships: two contrasting ones, for example, are that the Mycenaeans invaded and occupied Crete, set against there being a 'Minoan Empire' whereby the Minoans conquered and civilised mainland Greece. This latter perspective was Sir Arthur Evans' but the former is believed by most archaeologists to be the correct sequence of events (see Wace, 1949).

In addition to the questions concerning which civilisation superseded which, there is also much speculation as to the means and method of any transfer of power. Although prehistoric, both of these societies have left a legacy behind in their domestic buildings, cemeteries and material possessions.

Excavations at Mycenae have shown that dynastic rulers appeared there, burying their dead in circles of shaft graves, accompanied by objects of great wealth and that there was gradually a shift on the mainland to the use of tholos tombs. This may be contemporary with the fall of the palaces on Crete. The term 'Mycenaeans' referring to a particular group of people is not found in the writings of Classical authors. As mentioned above, Homer, for example, referred to his Greek ancestors variously as Achaeans, Danaans and Argives. However, one of the centres of the legends he wrote about was Mycenae, city of Agamemnon, who was the most powerful of the Greek leaders in Homer's *Iliad*, leading the expeditionary force against Troy.

We will now have a look at what archaeology tells us about these three powers.

# CHAPTER TWO

# MINOAN TERMINOLOGY AND CHRONOLOGY

Given that the only written records so far discovered are on objects inscribed with what has become known as Linear A (undeciphered) and Linear B (deciphered by Michael Ventris in 1952), the Aegean Bronze Age is essentially prehistoric and only accessible to us through the methods of archaeology. This can be defined as the scientific study of the material remains of past cultures or man's past. However, it is worth remembering that archaeology, like any science, is merely a body of arguments advanced to make sense of observations about the world. Consideration must always be given to the fact that there is often more than one acceptable way of interpreting archaeological finds and sites – something which is even more important when there are no contemporary written records to collaborate the evidence which is therefore subject entirely to the interpretation of the excavator. Subsequent re-examination of excavation reports may produce a different interpretation from that initially proposed.

The two great civilisations that prospered in the Bronze Age were both named after either a single site or legendary person. Sir Arthur Evans, who excavated the palace at Knossos in Crete, coined the term 'Minoan' after the legendary King Minos. It must be remembered, however, that whilst this name has become completely familiar to us, we do not know what the 'Minoans' called themselves (although it is believed, from tomb paintings, that the Egyptians called them 'Keftiu') and care must be taken not to assume too much from labels that are given to ancient peoples by modern man. Similarly, Heinrich Schliemann's finds at Mycenae were so impressive that the term 'Mycenaean' came to be used to describe the material from many other Aegean sites and not just those at Mycenae itself.

It was Evans who first used the pottery styles found at Knossos to divide the post Neolithic Minoan civilisation into three phases – Early, Middle and Late Minoan (EM, MM, LM). Evans' tripartite system is drawn from, and has parallels in, both biological science and art history. The system introduced by Evans was expanded to include the Bronze Age

cultures within the central and western Aegean islands, as well as those on the mainland. These too, have been divided, in terms of *relative* chronology, into Early, Middle and Late phases.

The basic tripartite scheme was further subdivided, based on pottery styles and stratigraphy, such that each of the three periods contained three or more divisions (EM I, II, III). These were then further subdivided into units indicated by letters of the alphabet (for example, LM IB).

The actual dates for these sub-divisions tend to vary depending on which book you read. Below is a rough guide:

| ***Dates*** | | *circa* BC |
|---|---|---|
| EM I | Early Minoan I | 3000-2900 |
| EM II | Early Minoan IIA | 2900-2500 |
| EM IIB | Early Minoan IIB | 2500-2300 |
| EM III | Early Minoan III | 2300-2100 |
| MM IA | Middle Minoan IA | 2100-1900 |
| MM IB | Middle Minoan IB ) | |
| MM IIA | Middle Minoan IIA) | 1900-1700 |
| MM IIB | Middle Minoan IIB) | |
| MM III | Middle Minoan III | 1700-1600 |
| LM IA | Late Minoan IA | 1600-1480 |
| LM IB | Late Minoan IB | 1480-1425 |
| LM II | Late Minoan II | 1425-1390 |
| LM IIIA1 | Late Minoan IIIA | 1390-1370 |
| LM IIIA2 | Late Minoan IIIA2 | 1370-1340 |
| LM IIIB | Late Minoan IIIB | 1340-1190 |
| LM IIIC | Late Minoan IIIC | 1190-1070 |

As additional excavations and studies have been undertaken, this system has come under criticism for being too inflexible and partly inaccurate. A system that seems less confusing and better reflects cultural developments, revolves around the building and destruction of the major architectural complexes, referred to as ‘palaces’, at Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia and Zakro. This system also has a tripartite division, into pre-Palatial (3000-1900 BC), Palatial (1900-1450 BC) and post-Palatial (1450-1190 BC), with the Palatial period being subdivided into Proto (Old, 1900-1700 BC) and Neo (New, 1700-1450 BC). The divisions are based on the belief that most of the palaces suffered major damages (possibly from earthquakes) and were then rebuilt in a more magnificent style. The chronological sequence is still uncertain. Nonetheless, it is useful to

classify the phases architecturally, although the original Early, Middle and Late classifications are often still used when speaking of pottery styles.

The quest for an accurate chronology of the Aegean Bronze Age has centred both on the use of Egyptian and Mesopotamian chronologies and on the scientific methods of radio-carbon dating and dendrochronology (*absolute* chronology). However, absolute dates are not yet completely reliable and different sets of dates are often in use for one and the same phase or period. In recent years, doubts have been cast on the value or significance of the use of the historical chronologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia, while radiocarbon dating has also proved not to be as reliable as once thought due to difficulties with correlation and various climatic changes that may affect calibration. However, recent developments in dendrochronology may ultimately help to resolve the various issues, and of particular interest is the 'Aegean Dendrochronology Project' whose long-range goal is to build long multi-millennial scale tree-ring chronologies for the Aegean and Near East that will extend from the present to the early Holocene (10,000 years ago).

Similar dating refers to the Mycenae (mainland 'Greece') except it was labelled 'Helladic' – EH, MH, LH (and thereafter subdivided as with the Minoan). So, quite simply, LH II is the equivalent to LM II in dating. For the chapters on the Minoans and the Mycenaeans this form of dating will be used.

# CHAPTER THREE

# PRE-PALATIAL MINOANS

The Early Minoan (EM) period was a time of transition from a community of farmers (which followed pre-Neolithic hunter gatherers) into the 'city state' palace period beginning the Middle Minoan. But how did these descendants of the Neolithic 'cave dwellers' turn their communities into well-organised areas of 'civilisation' with palaces?

We need to look back at these cave dwellers to see where the need to develop arose. Living in a cave on the upper slopes of hills was problematic to any advancement to a civilised society. These caves were not only too remote for a society to evolve but also a problem for crop cultivation on the lower flat ground. For the care required to grow crops successfully, to extend to larger areas of cultivation and to protect them from intruders, the farmer needed to live close to them. Accordingly, it was necessary to come down from the hills and build houses and seek a more practical and comfortable environment. So stone built open settlements began to be established during the late Neolithic period

Initially, farmers grew only enough to keep the immediate family alive from year to year (which may assume some surplus to ensure survival) and the family produced crafts (pots, utensils, etc.) for their own use, but this was to extend to luxury goods. As farms increased in size (both in acreage and population), so too did the community and distribution of excess produce and these 'luxury goods' (not essential to the economy) must have led to wealth. This may be considered only a natural progression.

Crete's position in the Mediterranean meant that it must have had some contact with seafarers from Asia, Africa and Europe, and there is evidence of trade connections with other countries during this period. There must be a close link between social and commercial progress: trade in various products with other countries brought in new ideas, which, in turn, led to more trade, both within Crete and outside, which led to an increase in wealth for the traders. The finding of seals on some sites indicates the need for security, identification, control and movement of goods in a developing land – and seven seals, dating to EM III and MM IA, found at the cemetery at Phourni, bear the 'Cretan hieroglyphic' (the 'Archanes

script'). Such development would require employment of both labourers and craftsmen to keep up with the volume of demand. Larger houses were then built to accommodate the wealthy.

There can, therefore, be no doubt about the high level of technical ability of the craftsmen of Crete and this ability would also apply to the development of architecture.

## Architecture

The EM II site of Fournou Korifi at Myrtos, on the southeast coast of Crete, began as a single family settlement but ended (in the Late EM II period) as large enough for a family of five or six. It appeared to function as a large self-contained community without separately defined houses implying a development of a once single farming site into an expanding family unit, containing all the necessary crafts to survive in some form of comfort - including storage facilities, quern stones, different styles of pottery (some imported), cooking and craft production areas.

The Early Minoan house-on-the-hill at Vasiliki (just south of Gournia) appeared to be a large house, but later excavations of 1980/90s made it out to be a group of houses, albeit impressive and of more than average wealth (in particular, the 'Red House').

Along with Fournou Korifi and Vasiliki, there were Phaistos, Tylissos and Palaikastro which all have features of the later palaces of the Middle Minoan period (see below). If this is so, then even if not all features are found in each of the buildings (whether specifically mansions or just a group of houses), one can see where the palaces are coming from.

## The 'central authority'

Martin Sinclair Hood, in 1983, referred to the 'Country House' at Fournou Korifi – "its position and relative splendour surely indicate that it was the residence of a local chief." But who were these chiefs? Perhaps they were groups of clans, in different parts of Crete, united into small independent states – each clan being represented by a 'chief'.

It is likely that this 'local chief' (someone of wealth and good standing, perhaps) would be the 'central authority' of the community. The only problem with this is that conflict between clan and community must have grown as the complexity of communal life expanded. Such persons with this central authority would be an 'elite' and would necessarily have to discourage self-sufficiency in order to maximise their profit over the