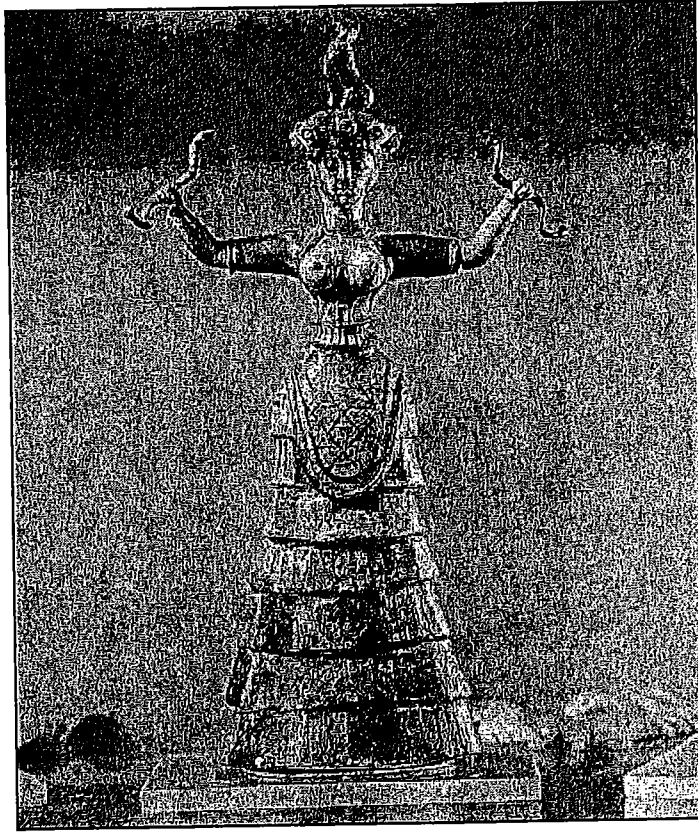


Religious Practices



(fold)

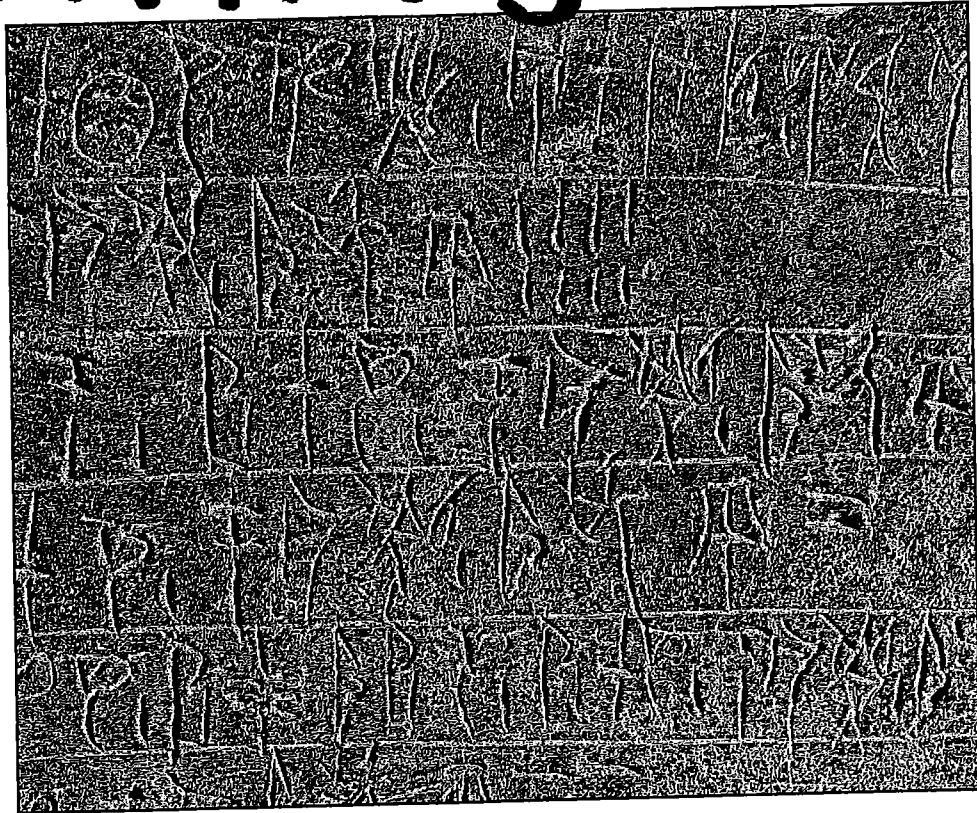
Early Mycenaean (pronounced my-sih-NEE-inz) conducted religious rituals outdoors, in caves or near waterfalls. They worshipped one supreme Earth Goddess, who was the guardian of animals, birds, and fish. The Earth Goddess also looked after warriors in battle. Over time, as Mycenaean developed communities and built palaces, kings and nobles set up small altars indoors and worshipped a number of Goddesses. Mycenaean artists sculpted small figurines of these Goddesses from wood and clay. These figurines were usually lined up on low benches in special religious rooms, or *sanctuaries*, in the palace. Mycenaean men and women were the priests and priestesses who tended these sanctuaries. Worshipping the Goddesses involved ritual bathing, burning grasses and oil, and prayer. The two Goddess figurines from Mycenae shown here are holding their arms up in a gesture of religious power and blessing. Details of their clothing and facial expressions are painted in simple lines and shapes. As Mycenaean culture developed, other Goddesses and Gods were added to the Mycenaean religious rituals. Some of them were early forms of the famous Olympians—such as Zeus, Hera, Athena, Hermes, and Poseidon—that would influence ancient Greek religion for the next 1,500 years.



(fold)

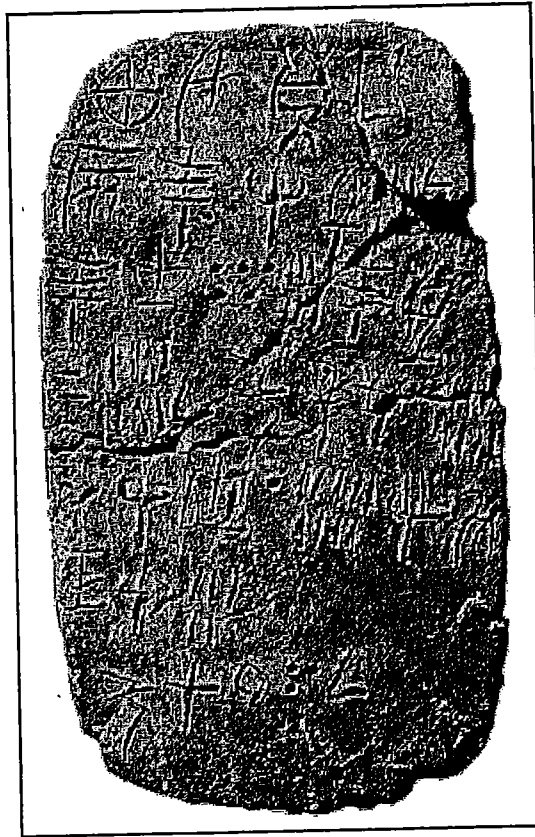
Early Minoans looked to nature for religious inspiration. They did not build magnificent temples, but worshipped outside in natural caves or at small altars set up in their homes. No life-size statues were ever excavated from Minoan sites. Instead, Minoan statues and figurines were small, so they could be carried easily. During musical religious festivals, the Minoans worshipped their peaceful Mother Goddess, and may have carried figurines of her image in processions through their palaces. Minoans believed that the Mother Goddess was the guardian of animals, birds, and fish. They believed she provided the seasonal harvests of produce, and that in her presence plants would flower and trees would bear fruit. Her sacred symbols were the lion, representing strength; the bull, representing the creation of life; and the snake, representing rebirth when it shed its skin. This image shows a detailed figurine of the Mother Goddess holding two snakes in her hands. On her headdress is a figure of a lion. The apron on the front of her gown is in the shape of a bull's horns.

Writing



(fold)

The written language of Mycenae (pronounced my-SEE-nee) was named “Linear B” by archeologists, because it is written in a *linear* arrangement, or in straight lines. It has been translated, and is the earliest known form of the Greek language. Linear B is a written language that is made up of a mixture of simple symbols, or *characters*, that resemble letters of the Greek alphabet, and simple illustrations, or *ideograms*, that are used to represent complex ideas. Details of the daily life of the Mycenaeans and their interactions with other cultures are recorded in Linear B on clay tablets and on an ancient form of paper called *papyrus* (pronounced puh-PY-russ). These details include Mycenaean religious rituals; military training records; lists of trade goods sent to Egypt, Africa, and Asia Minor; government expense accounts; and literary works. These documents were kept in wicker baskets and wooden boxes in special storage rooms in Mycenaean palaces. Many stories of famous heroes and battles by ancient Greek writers such as Homer were based on the literature of the Mycenaeans.



(fold)

Four types of writing existed in ancient Crete. One of these, the oldest script, was named "Linear A" by archeologists, because it is seemingly written in *linear* arrangement, or in straight lines. Linear A has not yet been translated. It is a written language that is made up of simple drawings, or *pictographs*, used to represent words or simple ideas. Linear A may be the ancient written language of the Minoan priest-kings, and may have been used in religious ceremonies. Linear A tablets have been found at sites of Cretan altars, next to Goddess figurines and carvings of the sacred Minoan bull. The tablets bear a carved symbol, or *inscription*, in Linear A that is similar to the Hittite word for "Goddess." Until this written language of the early Minoans is deciphered, scholars can only wonder if these tablets explain the mysteries of the Minoan religion and culture.

Metal Working

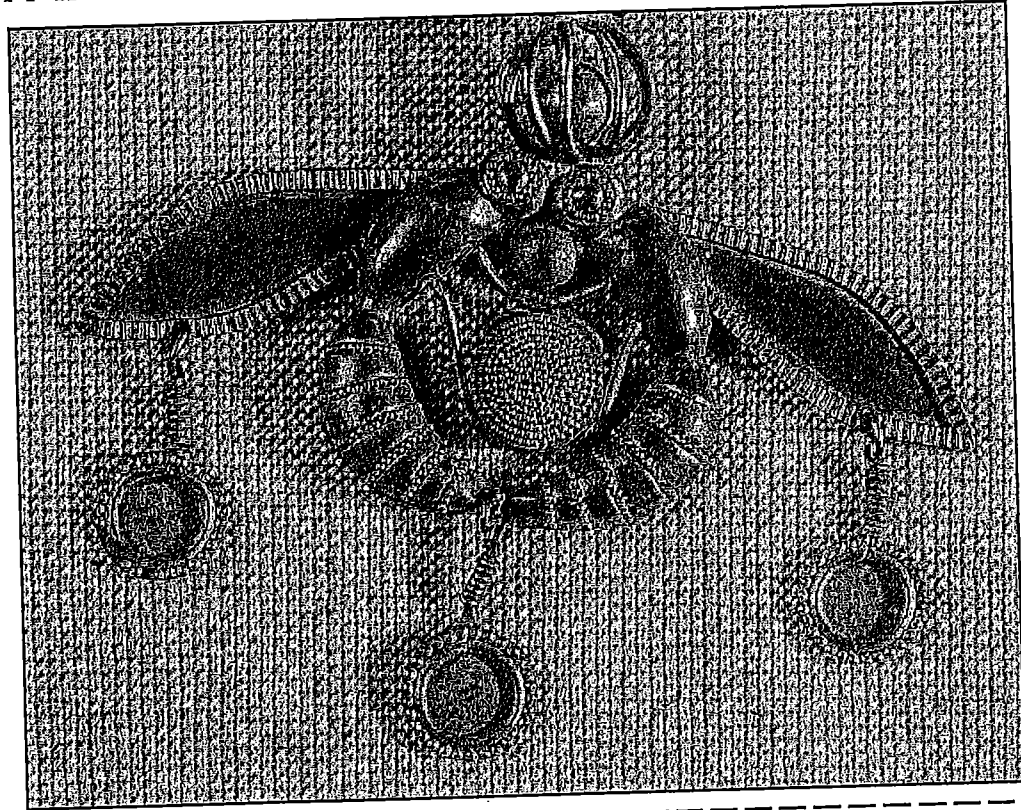
Mycenaean Artifacts



(fold)

The Mycenaeans (pronounced my-sih-NEE-inz) valued military strength and fine weapons for warfare. Many of these weapons were made of *bronze*, a mixture of copper and tin. Craftspeople who worked in bronze, or *bronzesmiths*, created splendid bronze daggers, swords, shields, and helmets for the Mycenaean army. Bronzesmiths also made chest, arm, and leg guards (called *chain mail*) for soldiers, and bronze fittings for their horses. Kings and high-ranking soldiers had bronze wheels made for their chariots, instead of the usual wooden ones. In addition to military equipment, bronzesmiths made small cooking pots and larger pots, called *cauldrons*. Mycenaean craftspeople also worked with gold. *Goldsmiths* fashioned gold into exquisite rings, earrings, necklaces, seals for documents, cups, bowls, and artwork. Gold objects were made only for kings and nobles, and were buried with them with they died. The object shown here is a gold funeral mask, which was placed over the face of a dead king or noble at his burial.

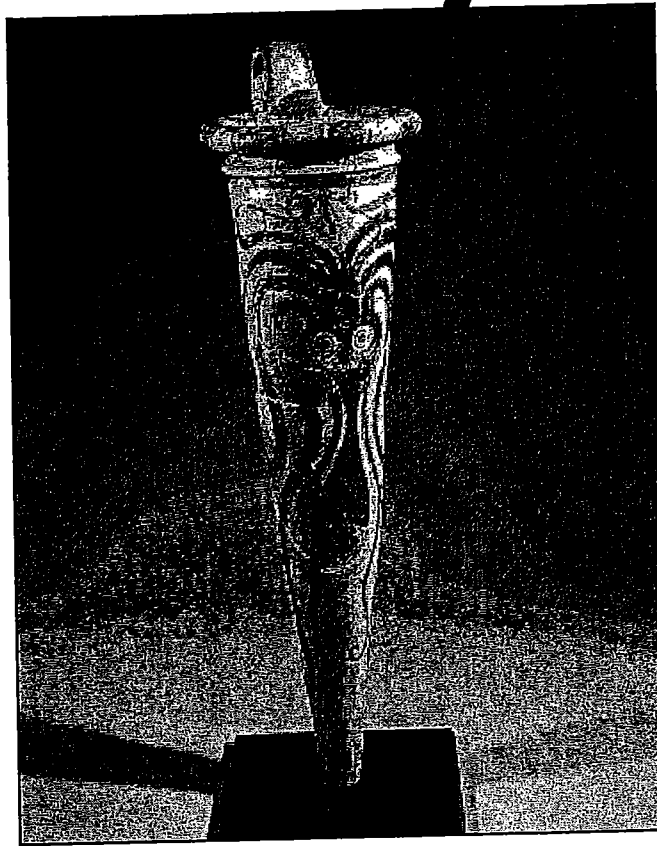
Minoan Artifacts



(fold)

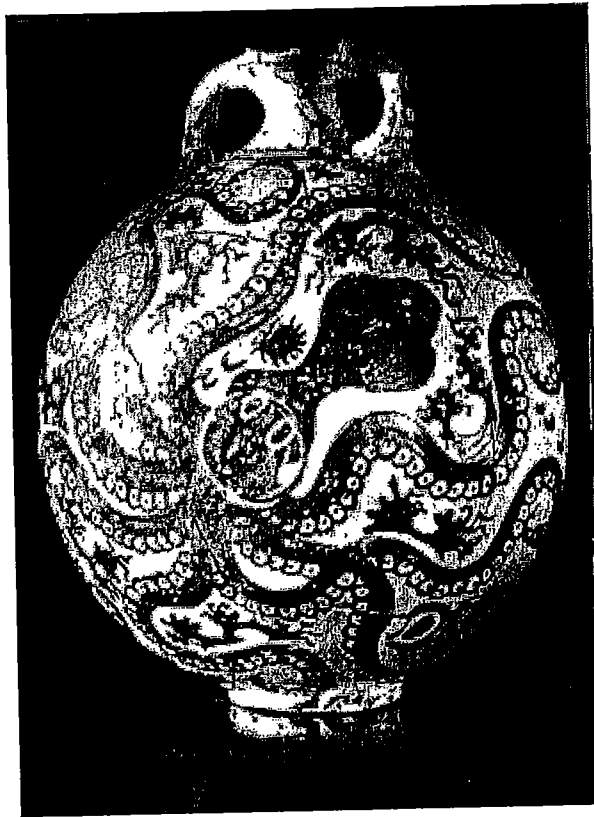
According to legend, the ancient architect Daedalus (pronounced DEH-dah-luss), who built part of the Minoan Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs), once crafted a perfect honeycomb out of gold. He presented it to the Goddess Aphrodite (pronounced AFF-roh-DY-tee) as an offering, and it delighted her. Metalworkers at the palace on Crete were as talented as Daedalus and used a variety of metals. The tools they created for farmers, carpenters, gem-cutters, and shipbuilders were made of *bronze*, a mixture of copper and tin. They also fashioned fish-hooks made of copper for fishing poles. Their most delicate and beautiful work was done with gold. Minoan metalworkers made golden seals for documents and golden jewelry for the Minoan nobles. The gold pendant pictured here was made to be worn on a necklace chain, or as a decoration in a Minoan noblewoman's hair. It depicts two bees holding a honeycomb between them, and sharing a drop of its honey. It was said that honey was often used in offerings to the Gods at Knossos, in honor of Aphrodite and Daedalus.

Pottery



(fold)

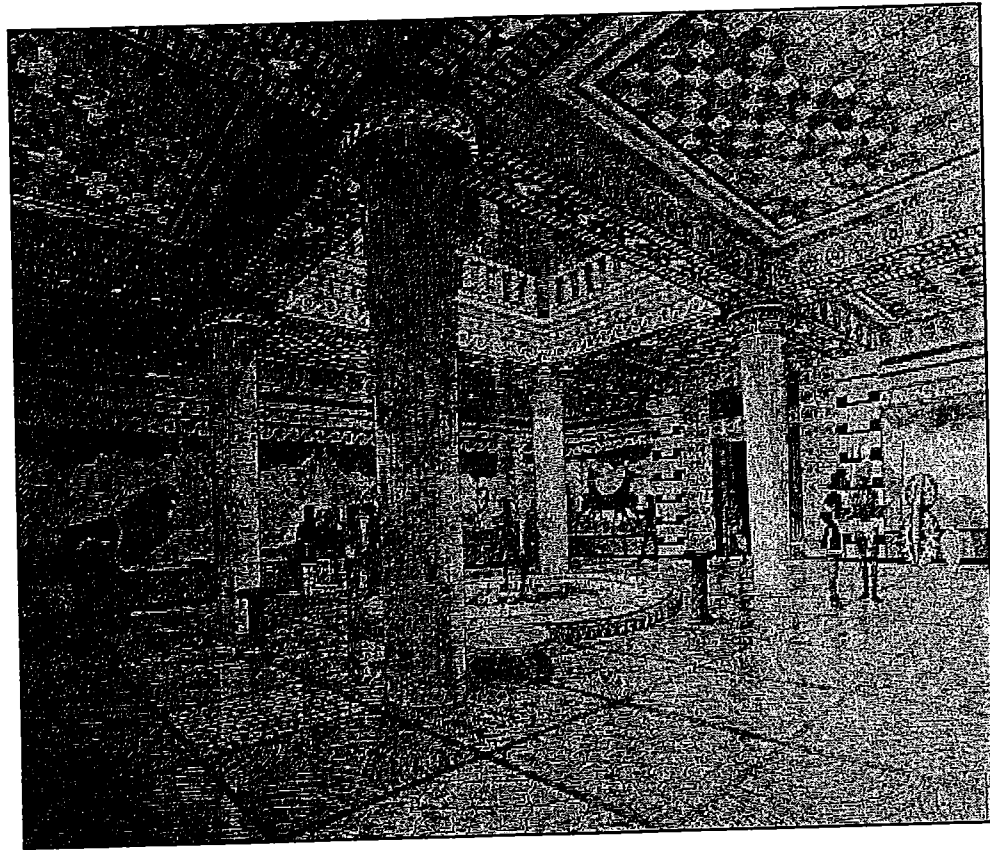
Early Mycenaean (pronounced my-sih-NEE-in) pottery was made of unpainted baked clay and formed by hand. Potters created simple shallow bowl and cup shapes without handles. Later, potters designed narrow, upright vases and jugs that were deeper. They painted them with white paint over dark glazes, or with fine red or black lines on white glazes. Later still, Mycenaean potters designed more sophisticated vases with deep, rounded shapes and handles. These were colored with red, yellow, and green glazes. The Mycenaean also developed the *goblet*, a cup attached to a stem, used for important celebrations and religious rituals. Among the ruins of Mycenae, archeologists have excavated large, unpainted clay pots that were used for storing olive oil and grains. They have also found cups, jugs, and other vessels painted with scenes of sea creatures, people picking grapes, and heroic soldiers fighting battles. The drinking vessel, or *rhyton* (pronounced RY-tun), pictured here is illustrated with a simplified, or *stylized*, octopus surrounded by his eight swirling legs, or *tentacles*. It was excavated in the Middle East and may have been a Mycenaean trade item. This rhyton dates from 2000–1000 B.C.E. and was probably used to hold wine or water.



(fold)

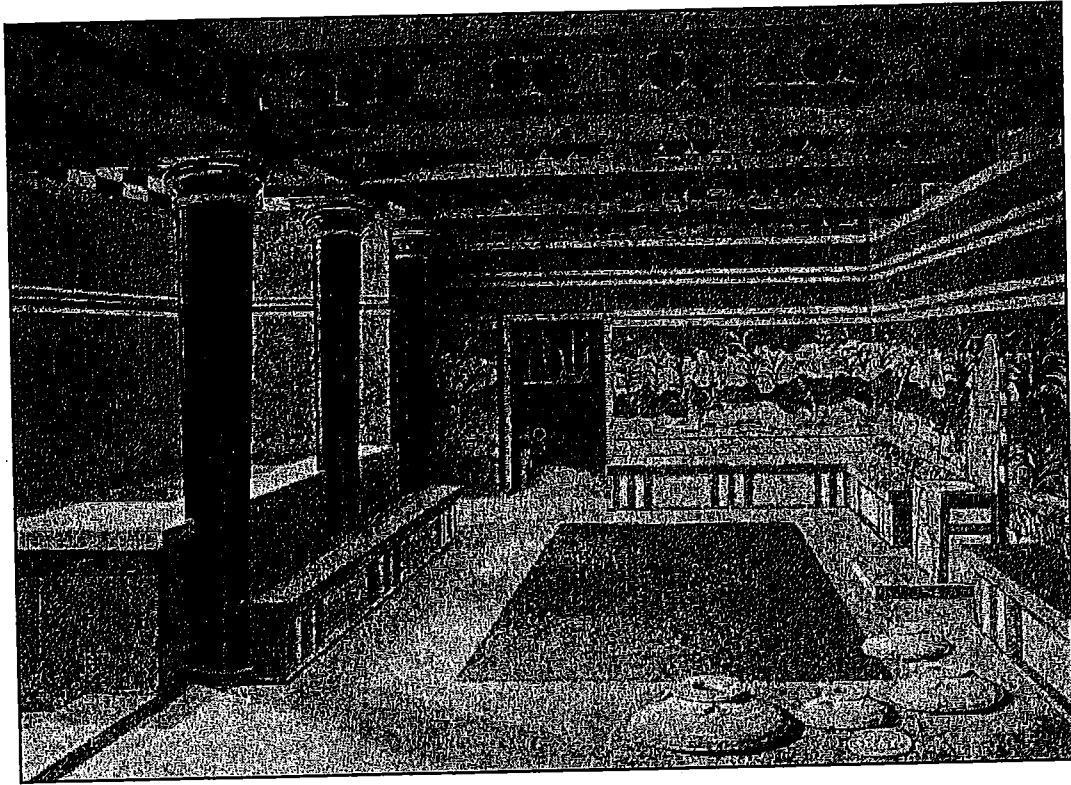
Minoan artists created pottery of many shapes and sizes. Potters formed vases, bowls, cups, and other objects by hand or on a potter's wheel. Storage vessels were made of baked clay but were not painted. They were kept in underground storerooms, on the lowest level of the Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs). Enormous unpainted clay pots have been excavated from the storerooms at Knossos—still filled with olive oil and grains! The Minoans created other clay vessels decorated with colors and designs. Early pots were colored with red or white glazes, but later potters used other vibrant colors, such as yellow and green. Minoan potters also carefully copied plants, animals, and fish from the natural world onto their pottery. Archeologists have found Minoan clay pots, bowls, cups, and large two-handled jugs painted with starfish, seashells, and seahorses among the ruins of Crete. Similarly decorated pieces have been excavated in Spain and Egypt, suggesting that the Minoans traded their wares far from their island home. The vase pictured here is illustrated with a large-eyed octopus, surrounded by his eight swirling legs, or *tentacles*. Sea plants and jellyfish can be seen around the octopus. The vase was excavated among the ruins of a palace on the eastern tip of Crete and dates from 1500 B.C.E. It was probably used to transport wine, or water from near by rivers.

Palaces



(fold)

Palaces in Mycenae (pronounced my-SEE-nee) were centers of government administration and defense. They were surrounded by high stone walls 23 feet thick and 60 feet high, and were guarded by Mycenaean soldiers day and night. Outside the high walls, in the countryside, Mycenaean farmers and shepherds lived in small homes made of wood or mud-brick. Craftspeople such as carpenters and metalworkers had workshops closer to the palace. Non-royal Mycenaeans were not allowed inside the palace grounds unless the city was under attack by enemy forces. All Mycenaean palaces had similar layouts. There was one central entrance gate decorated with stately statues of lions or other fierce creatures. This gate led to a small courtyard, and then a rectangular hall, or *megaron* (pronounced MEH-ger-on), where the throne room was located. Apartments for the royal family, cooking rooms, and storage rooms were arranged in orderly rows on either side of the megaron. Rooms were painted with colorful scenes from nature, as well as battle scenes and boar hunts. Between the palace and the high walls outside, the royal dead were buried in circular tombs underground. Pictured here is the throne room of the Palace of Pylos (pronounced PEE-lohs), located on the southwestern part of the Peloponnesus (pronounced peh-loh-puh-NEE-suss). The walls and ceilings are painted with colorful designs and murals of wild animals and plants. Large, downward-tapering pillars can be seen in the throne room. The king's throne is in the center of the far wall. In front of the king's throne is a circular pit where ritual oils and grasses were burned.



(fold)

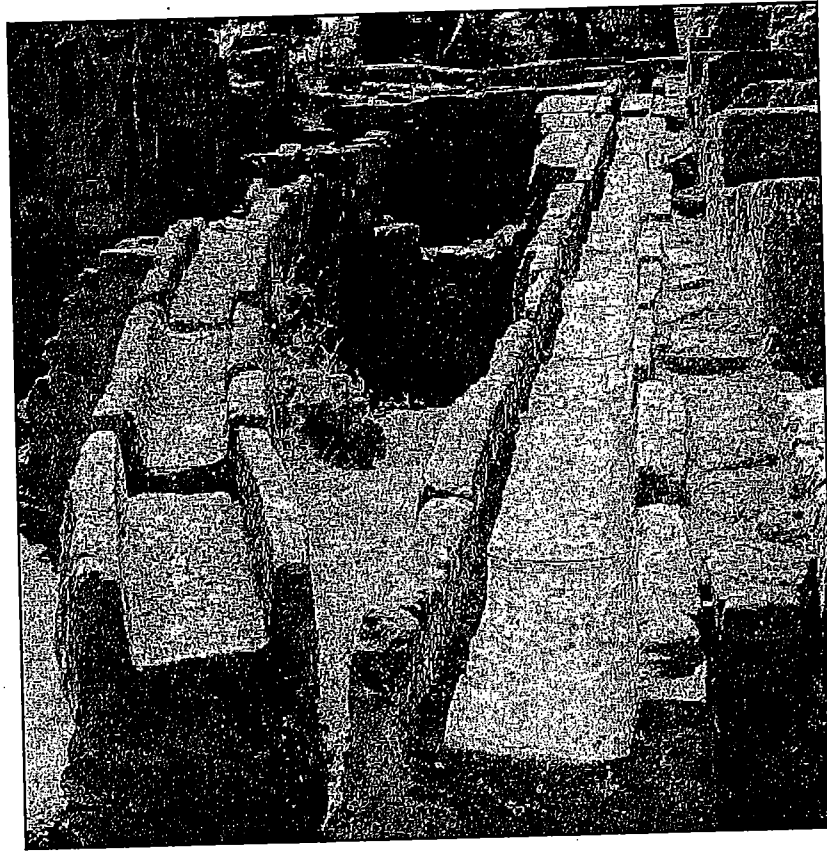
Palaces on ancient Crete were accessible to all members of Minoan society. The Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs), located on the north coast of Crete, was a large, rambling collection of rooms. It was made of stone and had wooden roofs. Besides housing the royal family, Knossos contained religious sanctuaries, a theater, and workshops for craftspeople such as jewelers, leatherworkers, metalworkers, painters, potters, sculptors, and shipbuilders. Non-royal Minoans lived in 2- and 3-story mud-brick and stone houses that lined the roads leading to the palace. Enormous storerooms in the palace were stocked with grains, oil, and wine for the whole community. The cooking rooms held hundreds of clay pots filled with foods including olives, lemons, and a particular kind of juicy cactus that the Minoans loved to eat. Palace rooms and stairways contained downward-tapering pillars, a design the Minoans seem to have originated. There is no evidence that the Minoans ever prepared their palaces for warfare. Minoan palace doors did not have locks or bolts, and the outside of the palaces did not have high, protective walls, gates, or battlements. The room pictured here, like all of the rooms at Knossos, was painted with colorful murals of animals and plants and had decorative borders around the windows and doors. It is considered the throne room, and may have been used by an ancient priest-king for religious rituals. Oil burners and figurines believed to be sacred symbols were excavated here. There is also evidence of a sunken pit in this room that may have been used for ritual baths.

Water Management



(fold)

The Mycenaean Palace of Pylos (pronounced PEE-lohs) had at least three rooms for bathing. Two were attached to the king's and queen's private chambers. The third was placed close to the central hall, or *megaron* (pronounced MEH-ger-on), and may have been used for the ritual bathing of palace guests. Inside the rooms were bathtubs that were set into the walls and fixed to the floors. These tubs were made of clay or stone, were deep, and were contoured to fit the body comfortably. Bathers stepped up and into the bath by standing on a small stone step at the foot of the tub. There was a small shelf inside the tub, where the bathers could conveniently place a sponge or a small vessel of oil. Mycenaean bathers used water and olive oil to cleanse themselves. Servants may have heated both water and oil before using clay vessels to pour the mixture over the bather. After bathing, the water was baled out of the tub and poured into a large drainpipe in the wall. The bathroom floor was tilted to allow excess water to run to a smaller drainpipe set in the floor. The drainpipes ran under the palace and let out into the grounds outside the palace walls. The Mycenaean bathtub shown here is from the Palace of Pylos in the southwestern part of the Peloponnesus. It was made of baked clay, or *terra cotta*, and was covered in white plaster. Patterns of swirling circles decorate the tub.



(fold)

Modern archeologists are amazed by the sophisticated Minoan water-management systems. Minoan farmers, stone masons, and plumbers worked together to build many stone and clay drains that carried water to and from the Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs) on Crete. Many of these drain pipes, like the two pictured here, ran alongside the roads leading from the palace, which were the first paved roads in the western world. There is evidence that the rooms for preparing food had running water, like faucets in modern kitchens. Rooms for religious rituals were supplied with basins of water. Bedrooms often contained small fountains in the corners to keep the rooms cool. The Palace of Knossos also had several bathrooms. All of them had lavishly tiled floors, with lively murals of dolphins and other sea creatures painted on the walls. Bathrooms also had deep bathtubs, which were decorated in colorful tiles and gemstones. Bathers would heat jugs of water over a fire and then fill the tubs. After their baths, bathers tipped the tubs to empty the water through a drainpipe in the floor. Minoan bathtubs were contoured to fit the body comfortably, and could be moved from room to room. Another extraordinary find in Minoan bathrooms was evidence of flushing toilets—over 3,000 years before they were developed in Europe!