

WORKSHEETS ONE& TWO: ANSWER KEYS

INTRODUCTION

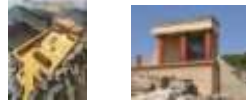
The ancient Minoan palaces were decorated by a lot of wall paintings. These paintings help modern people learn a lot of things not only about the Minoans' everyday life but also about the role of religion in their society. The different pots and figurines found at different archaeological sites in Crete have also helped us learn some things about the Minoans' deities and religious practices.

MINOAN DEITIES



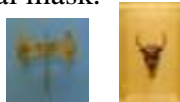
In the Minoan civilization goddesses were more important than gods. The Great Mother or Goddess of Fertility is probably the 'head' of the Minoan pantheon. She often holds snakes or is represented by snakes. She is found in many different forms making us doubt whether she is one or many. Among others, she is depicted as the Mother of the Mountains, the Hunting Goddess and the Snake Goddess. In war scenes, she is found having a sword and a shield.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES



The Minoans worshipped their deities in caves and on mountain tops and possibly even in palaces. Again, priestesses were probably more important than priests. During the religious ceremonies, the Minoans offered wine or food to their goddesses and gods. Their priestesses and priests probably wore animal hides while the head of the ceremony may have worn an animal mask.

SACRED SYMBOLS



The Minoans had a lot of sacred symbols in their religion, like many major religions today. The most important of them were the bull and the double-headed axe (labrys). Both of them can be seen decorating not only vessels and figurines but also palaces. Images of bull's horns were found all over the area of Knossos palace.

BULL- LEAPING



The Minoans seem to have had a strange custom which is depicted on a Knossos palace wall painting as well as on figurines and pots. This involved young athletes, either boys or girls, leaping over a bull's back. We are still not sure if this bull leaping custom (or taurokathapsia in Greek) was a dangerous sport or a religious ritual, but since the bull was a sacred animal for the Minoans, the second seems more probable.

BURIAL HABITS AND LIFE AFTER DEATH



The Minoans believed in life after death. That's why they buried their dead with food and their favorite belongings to use in the afterlife. In later years they used clay sarcophagi (called larnakes) to put the dead bodies. These larnakes were sometimes beautifully decorated with geometric designs or scenes from a funerary ceremony.