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# Seafaring Traders

**MAIN IDEA**

**ECONOMICS** Trading societies extended the development of civilizations beyond the Fertile Crescent region.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW**

Traders spread knowledge of reading and writing, including an ancient form of the alphabet that we use today.

**TERMS & NAMES**

- Minoans
- Aegean Sea
- Knossos
- King Minos
- Phoenicians

**SETTING THE STAGE** Buddhism spread to Southeast Asia and to East Asia mainly through Buddhist traders. In the Mediterranean, the same process took place: traders in the region carried many new ideas from one society to another. They carried new ways of writing, of governing, and of worshiping their gods.

**TAKING NOTES**

**Comparing** Identify accomplishments that were Minoan and those that were Phoenician in the following chart.

Minoan	Phoenician
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

## Minoans Trade in the Mediterranean

A powerful seafaring people, the **Minoans** (mih•NOH•uhnz) dominated trade in the eastern Mediterranean from about 2000 to 1400 B.C. They lived on Crete, a large island on the southern edge of the **Aegean Sea** (ee•JEE•uhn). The Minoans produced some of the finest painted pottery of the time. They traded that pottery, along with swords, figurines, and vessels of precious metals, over a large area.

Along with their goods, Minoans also exported their art and culture. These included a unique architecture, burial customs, and religious ritual. Minoan culture had a major influence on Greece, for example. Trading turned Crete into a “stepping stone” for cultural exchange throughout the Mediterranean world.

**Unearthing a Brilliant Civilization**

Archaeologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries excavated **Knossos**, the Minoan capital city. There, they found the remains of an advanced and thriving culture. It must have been a peaceful one as well, since Minoan cities did not seem to need fortifications to protect them. The archaeologists named the civilization they found in Crete *Minoa* after **King Minos** (MY•nuhs). According to legend, Minos was a king who owned a half-human, half-bull monster, called the Minotaur (MIHN•uh•TAWR). He kept the monster locked inside a labyrinth, a complicated maze from which no one could escape.



The excavation of Knossos and its painted walls produced much information about Minoans. The wall paintings, as well as the official seals and vases, show the Minoans as graceful, athletic people who loved nature and beautiful objects. They also enjoyed sports such as boxing, wrestling, and bull leaping.

Many Minoan artworks depict women and their role in religious ceremonies. The art suggests that women held a higher rank than in most neighboring cultures. A great Mother Earth Goddess seems to have ruled over the other gods of Crete. Also, priestesses took charge of some shrines, aided by male assistants.

## Social History

### Bull Leapers of Knossos

The wall painting to the right captures the death-defying jump of a Minoan bull leaper in mid-flight. Many works of Minoan art show young men performing incredible acrobatic leaps over the horns of angry bulls. In one case, the gymnast jumps over the bull's horns, makes a somersault off its back, and lands behind its tail.

In another gymnastic feat, some team members hang on to the horns of a bull, using their bodies to cushion its horns and to force its head low, while another team member jumps over its back.

What was the reason for this bull leaping? Was it a sport? Just a "fun" activity? An initiation for young warriors? Or a religious ritual? Most likely it was all of these things.



The Minoans sacrificed bulls and other animals to their gods. In at least one case, a young man was sacrificed. Excavation of a mountain temple revealed the bones of a 17-year-old boy on an altar, along with the skeletons of three priests. The positions of the skeletons suggest that the priests carried out the human sacrifice just before the building collapsed.

**Minoan Culture's Mysterious End** The Minoan civilization finally ended about 1200 B.C. The reasons for its end are unclear. Could it have been the result of some natural disaster? Did the island become overpopulated? Or was it overrun by invaders?

The civilization had withstood previous disasters. In about 1700 B.C., a great disaster, perhaps an earthquake, destroyed most Minoan towns and cities. The Minoans rebuilt the cities with equal richness. Then in 1470 B.C. a series of earthquakes rocked Crete. The quakes were followed by a violent volcanic eruption on the neighboring island of Thera. Imagine the shaking of the earth, the fiery volcanic blast, then a huge tidal wave, and finally a rain of white volcanic ash.

The disaster of 1470 B.C. was a blow from which the Minoans never fully recovered. This time, the Minoans had trouble rebuilding their cities. Nonetheless, Minoan civilization did linger on for almost 300 years. After that, invaders from Greece may have taken advantage of their weakened condition to destroy them. Some Minoans fled to the mountains to escape the ruin of the kingdom. Crete's influence as a major sea power and cultural force was over. **A**

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**A** What adjectives might describe Minoan civilization?

## Phoenicians Spread Trade and Civilization

About 1100 B.C., after Crete's decline, the most powerful traders along the Mediterranean were the **Phoenicians** (fih•NIHSH•uhnzh). Phoenicia was mainly the area now known as Lebanon. Phoenicians never united into a country. Instead, they founded a number of wealthy city-states around the Mediterranean that sometimes competed with one another. The first cities in Phoenicia, such as Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon, were important trading centers.



The Phoenicians were remarkable shipbuilders and seafarers. They were the first Mediterranean people to venture beyond the Strait of Gibraltar. Some scholars believe that the Phoenicians traded for tin with inhabitants of the southern coast of Britain. Some evidence exists for an even more remarkable feat—sailing around the continent of Africa by way of the Red Sea and back through the Strait of Gibraltar. Such a trip was not repeated again for 2,000 years. The Greek historian Herodotus (hĭh•RAHD•uh•tuhs) relates the feat:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

The Phoenicians set out from the Red Sea and sailed the southern sea [the Indian Ocean]; whenever autumn came they would put in and sow the land, to whatever part of Libya [Africa] they might come, and there await the harvest; then, having gathered in the crop, they sailed on, so that after two years had passed, it was in the third that they rounded the Pillars of Heracles [Strait of Gibraltar] and came to Egypt. There they said (what some may believe, though I do not) that in sailing round Libya they had the sun on their right hand [in reverse position].

HERODOTUS, in *History*, Book IV (5th century B.C.)

#### Commercial Outposts Around the Mediterranean

The Phoenicians' most important city-states in the eastern Mediterranean were Sidon and Tyre, both known for their production of red-purple dye, and Byblos, a trading center for papyrus. (See map on page 59.) Phoenicians built colonies along the northern coast of Africa and the coasts of Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain. The colonies were about 30 miles apart—about the distance a Phoenician ship could sail in a day. The greatest Phoenician colony was at Carthage (KAHR•thĭhj), in North Africa. Settlers from Tyre founded Carthage in about 814 B.C.

The Phoenicians traded goods they got from other lands—wine, weapons, precious metals, ivory, and slaves. They also were known as superb craftspeople who worked in wood, metal, glass, and ivory. Their red-purple dye was produced from the murex, a kind of snail that lived in the waters off Sidon and Tyre. One snail, when left to rot, produced just a drop or two of a liquid of a deep red-purple color. Some 60,000 snails were needed to produce one pound of dye, which only royalty could afford.

**Phoenicia's Great Legacy: The Alphabet** As merchants, the Phoenicians needed a way of recording transactions clearly and quickly. So, the Phoenicians developed a writing system that used symbols to represent sounds. The Phoenician system was phonetic—that is, one sign was used for one sound. In fact, the word *alphabet* comes directly from the first two letters of the Phoenician alphabet: *aleph* and *beth*. As they traveled around the Mediterranean, the Phoenicians introduced this writing system to their trading partners. The Greeks, for example, adopted the Phoenician alphabet and changed the form of some of the letters.

Alphabets—Ancient and Modern		
Phoenician	Greek	English
𐤀	Α	A
𐤁	Β	B
𐤂	Γ	C
𐤃	Δ	D
𐤄	Ε	E
𐤅	Ζ	F
𐤆	Η	G
𐤇	Θ	H
𐤈	Ι	I
𐤉	Κ	J
𐤊	Λ	K
𐤋	Μ	L
𐤌	Ν	M
𐤍	Ξ	N
𐤎	Ο	O
𐤏	Π	P
𐤐	Ρ	Q
𐤑	Σ	R
𐤒	Τ	S
𐤓	Υ	T
𐤔	Φ	U
𐤕	Χ	V
𐤖	Ψ	W
𐤗	Ω	X
𐤘		Y
𐤙		Z

#### SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

- Comparing** Which letters show the most similarity across the three alphabets?
- Making Inferences** Why might one language have fewer letters in its alphabet than another?



## Phoenician Trade

Phoenicia was located in a great spot for trade because it lay along well-traveled routes between Egypt and Asia. However, the Phoenicians did more than just trade with merchants who happened to pass through their region. The Phoenicians became expert sailors and went looking for opportunities to make money.

The Patterns of Ancient Trade, 2000–250 B.C.



### Merchant Ships

Phoenician sailors developed the round boat, a ship that was very wide and had a rounded bottom. This shape created a large space for cargo.

Phoenician ships often were decorated with horse heads.

This wicker fence runs around the outer edge of the upper deck.

Foreigners wanted cedar, an aromatic wood that grew in Phoenicia.

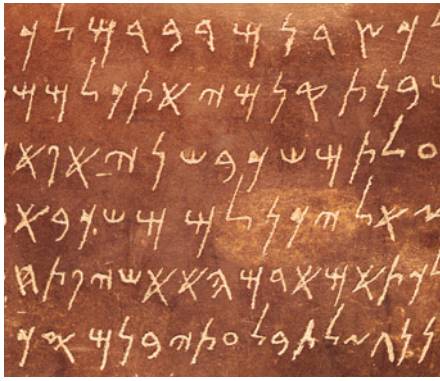
These pottery jars with pointed bottoms are called amphorae. They held oil or wine.

The most desired Phoenician trade item was dyed red-purple cloth.

### SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visuals

- 1. Drawing Conclusions** Why would traders find it helpful to tow the cedar logs instead of storing them inside the ship?
- 2. Making Inferences** What purpose does the wicker fence serve?





▲ Phoenician inscription from a sarcophagus

Few examples of Phoenician writing exist. Most writings were on papyrus, which crumbled over time. However, the Phoenician contribution to the world was enormous. With a simplified alphabet, learning was now accessible to more people.

Phoenician trade was upset when their eastern cities were captured by Assyrians in 842 B.C. However, these defeats encouraged exiles to set up city-states like Carthage to the west. The Phoenician homeland later came under the control of the Babylonians and of the Persian empire of King Cyrus I. One of their most lasting contributions remains the spread of the alphabet.

## Ancient Trade Routes

Trading in ancient times also connected the Mediterranean Sea with other centers of world commerce, such as South and East Asia. Several land routes crossed Central Asia and connected to India through Afghanistan. Two sea routes began by crossing the Arabian Sea to ports on the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. From there, traders either went overland to Egypt, Syria, and Mediterranean countries, or they continued to sail up the Red Sea. To cross the Arabian Sea, sailors learned to make use of the monsoon winds. These winds blow from the southwest during the hot months and from the northeast during the cool season.

To widen the variety of their exports, Indian traders used other monsoon winds to travel to Southeast Asia and Indonesia. Once there, they obtained spices and other products not native to India.

Though traveling was difficult in ancient times, trading networks like those of the Phoenicians ensured the exchange of products and information. Along with their goods, traders carried ideas, religious beliefs, art, and ways of living. They helped with the process of cultural diffusion as well as with moving merchandise.

Phoenician traders made crucial contributions to world civilization. At the same time, another eastern Mediterranean people, the Jews, were creating a religious tradition that has lasted more than 3,000 years. This is discussed in Section 4.

**Vocabulary**  
*monsoon*: a wind that affects climate by changing direction in certain seasons.

### SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Minoans
- Aegean Sea
- Knossos
- King Minos
- Phoenicians

#### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which of these achievements do you think was the most important? Why?

Minoan	Phoenician
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

#### MAIN IDEAS

3. What did the excavations at Knossos reveal about Minoan culture?
4. Where did the Phoenicians settle and trade?
5. Why did the Phoenicians develop a writing system?

#### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **MAKING INFERENCES** What might have caused the collapse of Minoan culture?
7. **COMPARING** What were some similarities between the Minoans and Phoenicians in terms of trade?
8. **ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES** Go back to Herodotus' account of a voyage around Africa on page 74. What words show his doubt? Why was he doubtful?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **ECONOMICS** The Phoenicians founded many city-states. These city-states often competed. Do you think it would have made more sense to cooperate? Write a brief **essay** explaining your opinion.

#### CONNECT TO TODAY MAKING A DATABASE

How might a commonly or widely accepted language make business and trade easier to transact? Make a **database** of bulleted points showing the ways a widely known language (such as English) would make it easier to conduct business around the world.