MINOAN PALACE OF KNOSSOS

Inscription on the European Heritage Label programme
Knossos – Aerial View

- Throne Room
- Inner Sanctuary
- West Wing
- Central Court
- South Wing
- East Wing
- South East Bathroom and Lustral Basin
- Altars
- Crypts
- Pillar Crypts
- Tripartite Shrine and its Treasury
- Great Hall & Sanctuary Hall
- Queen’s Hall
- Grand Staircase
- Hall of the Double Axes (King’s Hall)
- Minoan Theatre (ceremonial use)
- North Lustral Basin and Initiatory Area
- Storage Areas
- Crypts
- Crypts
An Accomplishment of Creative Ingenuity in Europe

The Palace of Knossos covers an area of 20,000 sq. m.

It is a multi-storey, labyrinthine structure, surrounding a central court, with advanced water-supply, waste management and drainage systems, a masterpiece of architectural (successive colonnades, intricate, multi-storey structures) and artistic achievements.
Map of the Archaeological Area

- Palace
- Villa of Dionysus
- Villa Ariadne
- Little Palace
- Minoan Viaduct
- Caravanserai
- South House
- Temple Tomb
- Temple of the High Priest
- Royal Villa
- Roman Amphitheatre
- Roman Basilica
- Unexplored Mansion
- Villa of Dionysus
- Villa Ariadne
- Royal Road
- Theatrical Area
Promotion of the values of the site
Visitor pathways – Access for handicapped persons
Promotion of the values of the site

Educational material provided - available in many European languages

The Minoan palace is the main site of interest at Knossos, an important city in antiquity, which was inhabited continuously from the Neolithic period until the 5th c. AD. The palace was built on the Kephala hill and had easy access to the sea and the Cretan interior. According to tradition, it was the seat of the wise king Minos. The Palace of Knossos is connected with thrilling legends, such as the myth of the Labyrinth, with the Minotaur, and the story of Daidalos and Ikaros.
Promotion of the values of the site – Restoration work

Corridor leading from the West Court to the South Gate – before, during and after restoration
Promotion of the Values of the Site

- There are a number of educational activities available on-site

- Guided tours are available

- There is visitor information placed throughout the Palace, in English and in Greek
Villa Ariadne, a modern housing complex situated within the archaeological site, that accommodates research students, including students participating in European academic exchange programmes, thus contributing to scientific cooperation, exchange of expertise and academic networking in Europe.
Minoan Palace of Knossos: Aerial View of the excavated site. Reconstruction of the Minoan Palace, by the 23rd Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities.
Water collection and purification system: here, rain-water was channeled through the stone conduit into the large stone drain
West Wing: Panoramic View
Storage Areas – used for storing grain, wine, oil and other commodities
Minoan Pottery
Throne Room: Interior
Throne Room: The Throne of King Minos
North Entrance
The North Iustral area, containing the largest and deepest of all Iustral basins in the Palace of Knossos
East Entrance to the Palace – gutters to carry away the rain-water with settling tanks (cisterns) to allow the sediment to sink to the bottom.
The Grand Staircase or Processional Way, East Wing
Knossos: South Gate and “Horns of Consecration”, the revered symbol of the Minoans
Minoan Theatre
Situated in a landscape of outstanding natural beauty.

Well-known myths form the intangible values of the site.

South Gate of the Palace and surrounding natural landscape with Mt Juktas, the Sacred Mount in Minoan tradition shown in the background.
The Bull fresco and characteristic Minoan columns
Landing of the Grand Staircase – Hall of the Royal Guard, decorated with a copy of the fresco of figure-of-eight shields
The Queen’s Hall with Dolphin Fresco
Detail of the Fresco of the Procession, which probably hung in the corridor leading from the West Court to the South Gate, depicting the Prince of the Lilies – a regal figure, most probably the Priest-King, ca. 1550 BC, Herakleion Museum
Detail from the Dolphin Fresco, which was painted on the wall of the Queen’s Hall, ca. 1600 BC, Herakleion Museum
The Blue Bird Fresco from the House of the Frescoes, north-west of the Palace of Knossos, ca. 1550 BC, Herakleion Museum
The Bull-Leaping Fresco, from the East Wing, showing all three stages of this Minoan ceremonial sport, 15th century BC, Herakleion Museum
The bull’s head from the Little Palace of Knossos. It was used as a libation vessel (pouring sacrificial offerings). Carved from a block of black steatite, with horns of gilded wood, eyes of inlaid rock crystal and jasper and nostrils of mother-of-pearl, ca. 1550-1500 BC, Herakleion Museum.
Libation (ceremonial) jug with beaked spout, a particularly accomplished piece of work with painted and relief decoration, from one of the tombs at Knossos, ca. 1400 BC, Herakleion Museum

Statuette of a Minoan goddess from the Shrine of the Double Axes in the palace of Knossos, 13th century BC, Herakleion Museum
The famous faience statuettes of the Snake Goddesses, from the Temple Repositories, ca. 1600 BC, Herakleion Museum
A Minoan gold ring from the tomb of Isopata, near Knossos, showing a religious scene which may represent an ecstatic ritual dance and an “epiphany” of a goddess, ca 1500 BC, Herakleion Museum
The celebrated Minoan lady known as “La Parisienne”, part of a fresco that was probably painted on the Sanctuary Wall. The sacral knot worn at the back of the head seems to indicate she is a priestess or even a goddess, ca. 1400 BC, Herakleion Museum.
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

First Advanced European Administrative Structure

1. Centralized organization Advanced social and administrative system
   - Central government – with decentralization system

   - Hierarchy of social classes ruled by the King
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

2. Bureaucratic control of production (written records)  Advanced form of economic organization

- Advanced commercial organization

- Customs House controlling the movement of goods
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

3. **Advanced system of writing**
   - Initially a form of hieroglyphic script and later the syllabic Linear A system and, most importantly,
   - Linear B (used by the Mycenaean), which is the first deciphered European script

4. **Creation of artistic masterpieces**
   - Advanced level of architecture, wall painting and “egg-shell” type pottery, memorably depicting plant and animal life on land and sea – joy of life
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

5. Advanced stage in town planning

- Labyrinthine, multi-storey palatial complexes surrounding an open space, the central Court – Architectural design serving the purposes of civic governance, as well as religious and athletic purposes (Bull-leaping performances)

- Advanced water-supply and waste management systems

- The Processional Way or Royal Road – Among the first processional roads in Europe
6. **First organized Navy in Europe**

- Its naval supremacy secured Knossos the monopoly of commerce in the Aegean Sea and, arguably, control of the Cycladic Islands – **first colonies in Europe**
  
  - Securing a peaceful and secure (pirate-free) trading environment in the Aegean Sea (Thalassocracy - Pax Minoica)
  - Intercultural dialogue
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

7. **European symbolism** –

- Iconography: Imagery of the bull (symbol of fertility and power), the tree of life, the dolphin and the dove (linked to the Epiphany of the fertility goddess) have exerted a significant and lasting influence on European art, literature and thought.

- The Legend of Minos, the First King of Knossos – First European Supreme Legislator and, according to myth, among the three Ultimate Judges in the Underworld (Hades) –

  → *Today, a copy of the Throne of Minos found in the Minoan Palace of Knossos is held at the International Court of Justice which is in Europe, at the Hague.*
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

- Legends: King Minos, The Minotaur, Daedalus and Icarus, Theseus and Ariadne

The Abduction of Europa by Zeus – THE MYTH THE EU HAS CHOSEN AS ITS SYMBOL

→ Depicted today in many European cities, as well as on Europe’s common currency, the Euro, reproduced on European postage stamps and depicted in a painting and modern sculpture at the seat of the European Parliament
European Significance of the Minoan Palace of Knossos

Depictions of the Myth of Europe – then and now

Mosaic depicting the myth of the Abduction of Europa by Zeus – Hellenistic Era

2 Euro coin depicting the myth of the Abduction of Europa by Zeus – Today
Commemorative Euro coin depicting Europa holding a pen over the Constitution of Europe
Europa being abducted by Zeus in the guise of a bull, from a red-figure crater, early 5th century BC, Archaeological Museum, Tarquinia
The Abduction of Europa – Boucher, XVIII century, Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Maquette of the Sculpture depicting the Abduction of Europa, at the entrance to the European Parliament

Rembrandt, The Abduction of Europa, 1632, Getty Museum
“Guernica”, Pablo Picasso, 1936
THANK YOU

Hellenic Ministry of Culture