Name: _____ Date: _____

Study Guide #8 Kingdoms in the Aegean

Minoan Civilization. Although the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea lacked the fertile resources of the river valleys, it was able to support a prosperous civilization. Advances in farming technology made it possible to grow crops on Crete, and peoples who settled there could supplement agriculture with fishing. Minoan civilization, as this culture came to be called, was built around extravagant palace complexes, the most famous being the palace at Knossos.

Archaeological discoveries have shown that the Minoans had a written language. Historians call the earliest form of this writing **linear A** and the later form that developed after contact with Indo-European-speaking groups **linear B**.

Minoan society was governed by the rulers of the various palaces, who appear to have been absolute rulers. Beneath the rulers were nobles and next in the hierarchy was a class of people who made their living by farming, trading, and other kinds of work. There was also a specially trained class of scribes who comprised the ruler's bureaucracy.

Artifacts indicate that the Minoans were not warlike. They were inventive, and developed plumbing systems as well as architectural structures that could withstand earthquakes. They decorated their homes lavishly, using **frescoes**—paintings made directly onto plaster walls. These frescos show that men and women had equal status in Minoan society and that their religion was concerned with fertility and natural cycles.

Known for their sailing abilities, the Minoans established trading posts throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean seas, where they grew rich by trading wine and olive oil. Historians attribute the decline of Minoan civilization to the combined effects of a major volcanic eruption in the region and invasion by the Indo-European ancestors of what would be the later Greek civilization.

Early Civilization in Greece. While as early as 6000 B.C. Neolithic farmers had settled in the area of Greece, it was Indo-European migration into the region about 2000 B.C. that triggered the development of the Mycenaean culture.

Beginning about 1700 B.C. the Mycenaeans built a series of fortress towns in the mountains, the most important being Mycenae. The Mycenaeans were in regular contact with the Minoans, who had a strong influence on Mycenaean culture. Many scholars believe that a Mycenaean invasion helped trigger the Minoans' downfall. In any case, Mycenaeans adopted Minoan styles of government, used linear B script, and eventually replaced Minoan traders in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas.

Mycenaean society was led by warrior-kings who gave land to the nobility in return for military service. Artisans, craftspeople and merchants formed the middle level of society and peasants and slaves, who kept the herds and tilled the soil, formed the lowest level. Mycenae also had a highly centralized bureaucratic government.

Much of what we know about Mycenaean culture comes from two epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odysse*y, both written by Homer, a later Greek poet. According to Homer, the Mycenaeans worshipped Indo-European gods headed by Zeus, the most important god in the later Greek religion. Homer's works and the archaeological record also indicate that Mycenaean society was extremely warlike.

Around 1200 B.C., Mycenaean civilization began to collapse due to the combined effect of earthquakes, warfare among the various Mycenaean cities, and a second wave of Indo-European migrants. The Mycenaeans' last great feat was to band together in an attack on the city of Troy, an attack which forms the basis of the *Iliad* and the *Odysse*y.

The Dorians. The Dorians were a group of Indo-European migrants who helped bring about the downfall of Mycenaean civilization. They were pastoralists who despised city life, trading, and farming. Preferring to rely on their weapons and formidable battle skills, they allowed the Mycenaeans' fortified cities to fall into ruin, and enslaved those they conquered to grow their crops. The Dorians and other Indo-European tribes displaced many of the earlier inhabitants of Greece, disrupting trade and leading to the disappearance of Mycenaean civilization. Historians call this chaotic time Greece's **Dark Age**.

Answer the questions below in your own words and in complete sentence. Highlight your evidence.

1. What factors led to the development of civilization on the island of Crete?

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2. Describe three characteristics of Minoan civilization.

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3. In what ways did contact with Minoans influence the Mycenaeans?

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4. Why is the poet Homer important to historians studying Mycenaean civilization?

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5. What factors allowed the Dorians to take over Mycenaean civilization?

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6. How did Dorian civilization dramatically change civilizations in Greece?

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