

Bronze Age ship in 2004

Crete, February 2001

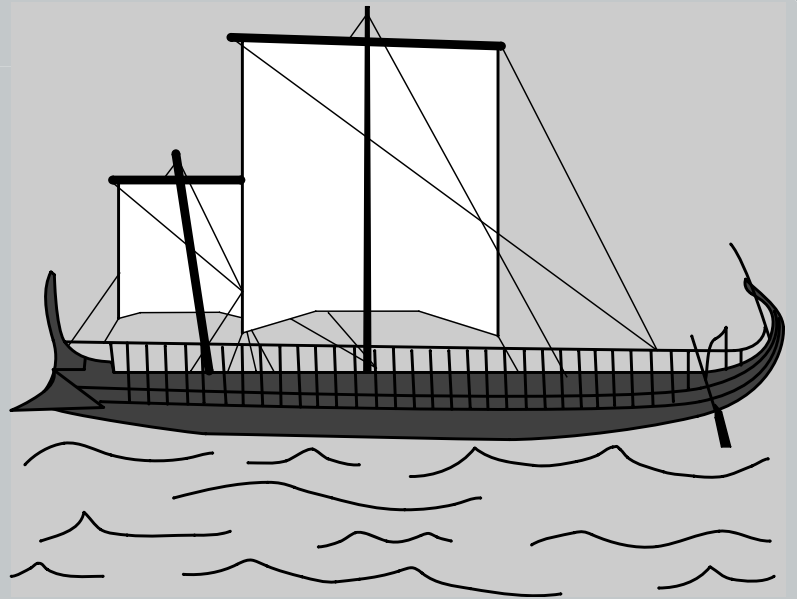
Those in Athens just before the 2004 Olympic Games may be surprised to see a Bronze Age ship sailing into port. That, at least, is the ambitious plan of a group of shipbuilders and archaeologists on the island of Crete - home some 4,000 years ago to the seafaring Minoans.

The vessel will be about 15 metres long and carry up to 22 rowers. For authenticity, it will be built from the same raw materials that the Minoans would have enjoyed, and in the same method. Workers will only be allowed to use Minoan-style tools as well. Ship sections will be bound together with natural fibres or animal hair, and any cracks or joints will be sealed with pine resin or tar. Once completed, the replica will be tested in the open sea to ensure that it's seaworthy before it begins its maiden journey to Athens.

Unfortunately, the remains of a Minoan boat are yet to be found intact. That's why the designers are using ancient texts and drawings - such as those found in the excavated palace at Knossos - to guide them. However, maritime history assures them that these sturdy, ocean-going ships were the culmination of several hundred years of innovation, and were unmatched throughout the world in their prime. This was one reason behind Crete's mastery of the Aegean Sea and the stability of its empire.

The average Minoan ship was 60 feet long with 15 oars on each side. Well-paid oarsmen, not slaves, powered the craft whenever sailing winds failed. The central mast carried an enormous square sail that hung from a yardarm 35 feet above deck. Two men constantly manned the cedar-tough rudder-oar at the rear.

Embarking at the Nile Delta, travellers could expect to reach Knossos in less than three months, including several trade stops along the way. There the Minoans bartered their much sought after olive oil, wine, cypress, pottery and wool cloth - amid constant loud haggling - for Egyptian ivory, papyrus, gold, alabaster and semi-precious stones.



Use the information above and any reference below to answer the following questions:

- Name one country the ancient Minoan sea travellers traded with. What sort of goods were exchanged?
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- What is the significance of having a Minoan ship sail into Athens before the start of the 2004 Olympic Games?
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- Look carefully at the drawing of the Minoan vessel. Keeping in mind how the modern replica will be constructed, which building tasks do you think will prove the most difficult and why?
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- Why might archaeologists be struggling to find any Minoan seacraft intact?
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