

## **The Palace of Knossos**

The Palace of Knossos is the largest of all the palaces in Crete. It is surrounded by an extensive city. The Palace was built on the low Kephala hill at the confluence of two streams. The choice of location and the subsequent growth of the settlement are connected with its proximity to the sea and the fertile earth of the region.

The site was first settled in the Neolithic period (6700-3200 BC) as early as this, there was an extensive settlement.

The first Palace was built around 1900 BC (Old Palace Period), from the few parts that are preserved, it appears that the basic plan was formed at that time. It was destroyed around 1700 BC and the New Palace was built in its Place (New Palace period). With the exception of some later addition, Arthur Evans uncovered and restored its ruins. The Palace is comprised of different buildings that grew up around the Central Court. There were entrances at all the main points, the most formal being the southwest and north. The West Wing including shrines, official halls and extensive storage areas, and the East Wing, the “Royal Apartments” workshops. There were storerooms and other areas to the north and south.

The Palace displays a great variety of architectural features: storeys such flat roofs on different levels, indented or protruding facades, embellishments of stone horns and of alternating colours etc. A great variety of materials was used: slabs of green schist for floors, wooden columns, gypsum slabs on walls floors and elsewhere. Polychrome plaster and wall paintings contributed to room decoration.

The Palace appears to have been the center of political, economic and religious authority. The main excavator, Arthur Evans, attempted to interpret the function of the spaces in the Palace and gave them names that reflected their use according to his opinion. This was based on the finds, mythological tradition, and analogies with ancient civilization and his own endeavors. These names are still current (e.g. “Queen’s Megaron” [hall], Plano Nobility [upper floor], ‘Throne room’) even though continuing research has put forward different views as to the function of some areas.

The Palace of Knossos continued in used after 1450 B.C. when the rest of the Cretan palaces were destroyed. Most experts believe that new inhabitants from the Mycenaean Greek Mainland were installed in the Palace, due to the discovery of a Mycenaean archive of Linear B script. When the Palace ceased to function remains uncertain. At any rate, after 1380 BC, a large part of its former glory had been lost.

## **The Excavation of Knossos**

The first excavation of the site was conducted in 1878 by Minos Kalokerinos of Herakleion. This was followed by the long-term excavations (1900-1913 and 1922-1930) of the Englishman Sir Arthur Evans, who uncovered virtually the entire palace. The earliest traces of inhabitation in the area of the palace go back to the Neolithic period (7000-3000 BC). The site continued to be occupied in the Pre-palatial period (3000-1900 BC), at the end of which the area was leveled for the erection of a large palace. The first palace was destroyed, probably by an earthquake, about 1700 BC. A second, larger palace was built on the ruins of the old one. This was partially destroyed about 1450 BC, after which the Mycenaean established themselves at Knossos. The palace was finally destroyed about 1350 BC

by a major conflagration. The site it covered was occupied again from the Late Mycenaean period until Roman times.

Extensive reconstruction of the Palace of Knossos was carried out by the excavator, Sir Arthur Evans. It was a multi-storey building covering an area of 20,000 square metres. Impressive features of it are the variety of building materials used, and the painted plaster, marble revetment and wall-paintings adorning the rooms and passages. The advanced level of technology attained by the Minoans is also demonstrated by some original architectural and structural features, such as the light-wells and “polythyra”, the use of beams to reinforce the masonry, and the complex drainage and water-supply systems.

The palace is set around a large Central Court, an area used for public meetings. A second courtyard at the West Court, acted both as the official approach to the palace and a ceremonial area.

The west wing was occupied by the official room for administrative and religious activities, including the Tripartite Shrine, the Sacred Repositories and the Pillar Crypts. The Throne room is outstanding amongst them, with its lustral basin and the gypsum throne flanked by benches. The most important areas in the south wing are the South Propylon, the Corridor of the Procession and the South Entrance, with the fresco at the Prince of the Lilies. The east wing contained the residential quarters and large reception rooms, the most important being the Hall of the Double Axes and the Queen’s Hall. These rooms are approached by the imposing Grand Staircase.

From the North Entrance, a road led to the harbour of Knossos. The North Entrance is flanked by elevated stoas, the one at the west being decorated with the Bull Hunt fresco.

A large, stone-paved processional way, the Royal Road, lead from the Small Palace, the Caravanserai, the Royal Villa and the Temple-Tomb. The Villa dionysos with its floor mosaics (2nd c. AD) is an important building of the Roman period.

The numerous finds from the palace, all of exceptionally high quality art, pottery, vessels, figurines, the archive of Linear B tablets, and the original wall-paintings, are all housed in Herakleion Museum.