

BULL-LEAPING



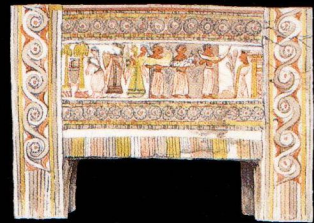
This fresco from Knossos shows a man leaping over a bull's back. The figure on the left held the bull's horns, while the figure on the right caught the leaper.

The Minoans appear to have had a daring custom, which involved leaping over a bull. From images on Minoan paintings, it seems that teams of men and women took turns to approach a charging bull. They grasped its horns

and catapulted themselves onto its back, and then onto the ground. This dangerous sport may have been a religious ritual, as the bull was a sacred animal. It probably took place in the courtyard of the palace.

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

The Minoans believed in life after death. They buried their dead with food and possessions, for use in the afterlife. In early times, the rich were buried in stone tombs with other bodies. Later on, they were buried in individual coffins.



This coffin, dated c.1400BC, was found in Hagia Triada on Crete. It is decorated with a funeral scene, showing people making offerings.

THE LEGEND OF THE MINOTAUR

According to legend, an Athenian prince named Theseus sailed to Crete, where he fought and overpowered a terrible monster known as the Minotaur. The monster was half man and half bull and was kept in a labyrinth – an underground maze.

This tale may be based partly on fact. The palace at Knossos was so maze-like that it could be described as a labyrinth. The king may also have worn a bull's mask in religious ceremonies, linking him to the idea of the Minotaur.

