









**M Y C E N A E**





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ALCESTIS PAPADIMITRIOU

# MYCENAE



John S. Latsis  
Public Benefit Foundation



# T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

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Foreword by the Minister of Culture and Sports © 11

Foreword by Marianna J. Latsis © 13

Author's Preface © 15

## THE BRONZE AGE © 17

### MYCENAE: THE LANDSCAPE © 21

#### A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

*Antiquity, 22 © Visitors, 36 © Caring for the antiquities, 42 © The Archaeological Museum of Mycenae, 46*

#### THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD

*Grave Circle A, 49 © Grave Circle, B 71 © The tholos tombs, 85 © The chamber tomb cemeteries, 94*

#### THE PALATIAL PERIOD

##### THE ACROPOLIS

*The fortifications, 151 © The underground cistern, 152 © The Lion Gate, 155 © The palace complex, 156 © The east wing of the Palace, 160 © The north storerooms, 160 © The Northwest Quarter and North Slope, 160 © The Southwest Quarter, 164 © The Cult Center, 166 © The Temple or "Room of the Idols", 167 © The Idols, 168 © The Room with the Fresco Complex, 186 © The Fresco, 186 © The South House and Annex, 198 © The House of the Warrior Vase and the Ramp House, 200 © The Granary 200*

##### BUILDING COMPLEXES OUTSIDE THE ACROPOLIS

*The House at Plakes, 202 © Houses in the vicinity of the Museum, 202 © The House of the Wine Merchant and the Cyclopean Terrace Building, 203 © The Petsas House, 203 © The House of the Oil Merchant Group, 206 © The stone vases from the House of Shields, 209 © Ivory artifacts, 212 © The Panagia Houses 212*

#### THE POST-PALATIAL PERIOD © 219

#### HISTORICAL TIMES © 231

#### THE WORLD OF AGAMEMNON

*Mycenaean civilization, 249 © System of government and structure of society, 250 © Script, 252 © The use of seals, 256 © Religion, ritual and ceremony, 260 © Trade, 264 © Domestic life and women in the Mycenaean world, 271*

##### MYCENAEAN ARCHITECTURE

*Mycenaean palaces and fortifications, 277 © Major construction projects, 277 © Funerary architecture and burial customs 278*

##### MYCENAEAN ART

*Craftsmen and artisans, 281 © Metalworking, 290 © The art of wall painting, 293 © Mycenaean terracotta figurines, 296 © Pottery as the main guide to Greek prehistory, 302*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

321

ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

323

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

325



The founding of Mycenae dates back to the Heroic Age and is attributed in myth to Perseus, the demi-god and hero who according to Jean-Pierre Vernant was pitted against Death and emerged victorious. Mycenae later rose to become the unchallenged capital of the Age of Myth, the theater of the overwhelming passions which shook the House of Atreus and inspired classical dramatists.

“Now Mycenae is no longer in existence” Strabo wrote in disappointment upon confronting the ruins of the Mycenaean acropolis and Hellenistic village. He himself had hoped to discern the remains of the glory of the “well-built city” of Homer’s “Mycenae, rich in gold”, the hegemonic seat which formed both the starting- and end-point of the Trojan cycle. But Strabo was wrong: Mycenae never ceased to exist. It lived—and continues to live—as a symbolic landscape, assuming a leading role in the World of Ideas and as a timeless theme of Literature and Art.

From the mid-19th century, Greek archaeology pioneer Kyriakos Pittakis inaugurated excavation of the site, later to be followed by Heinrich Schliemann, who believed that he had seen Agamemnon himself in one of the gold masks of Grave Circle A. During subsequent years, the Late Bronze Age civilization of mainland Greece and the Aegean, which Christos Tsountas very reasonably called *Mycenaean*, was superbly documented here.

Through continuous support of excavations and the Archaeological Service throughout the 20th century, the Acropolis of Mycenae, which was inscribed in 1991 in UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Monuments, still stands proudly at the edge of the plain of Argos, welcoming a host of visitors in search of the dawn of Greek civilization and the glory of classical mythology. Over the course of many years, the Ministry of Culture has implemented a continuous, long-term program for the protection, conservation, restoration and enhancement of the Acropolis and the monuments surrounding it, together with a modern archaeological museum which forms a significant attraction for visitors.

This year’s album in the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation’s “Museums Cycle”, dedicated to the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae, is an important publishing achievement which highlights the archaeological history of Mycenae, combining the documented scholarly text of author Alcestis Papadimitriou, Ephor of Antiquities of Argolis with the superb aesthetic presentation and artistic care exercised by the volume’s publishers. All of its contributors are deserving of warm congratulations.

ARISTIDES BALTAS  
Minister of Culture and Sports



**T**he showcasing of Greek culture has been an unwavering aim of the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, and every endeavour towards this end has been an exercise in creativity, due to the extensive diversity of our country's cultural heritage. Every year, the Foundation has been consistently and methodically setting benchmarks for this purpose, through the annual publications of the "Museums Cycle". We are aware that this endeavour acquires particular significance within the current state of affairs in our country. Alongside our programs which support social welfare networks, improve public healthcare institutions, strengthen quality of education and bolster scientific initiatives, we consider it our duty to showcase the vast cultural heritage of Greece, with the quality it demands.

The choice of the Archeological Museum of Mycenae for this year's volume came about effortlessly. It is a place where historical facts are interwoven with mythology and protagonists like Atreus, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Menelaus, Iphigenia and Orestes come alive before the eyes of the visitor. Epic sagas, myths and tragedies taking place at Mycenae or elsewhere tell the tales of their legendary rulers and the power they had accrued at the pinnacle of their prosperity. The findings of archaeologists in Mycenae, as well as numerous other parts of the ancient world, attest to the breadth of Mycenaean civilization, which inspired artistic realms across the globe in both antiquity and modern times. The archaeological site and the museum create a wonderful complex that introduces the visitor to the incomparable art of striking jewelry, unique ceramics and monumental architecture. The natural beauty of the hillside that overlooks the valley with views of Argos and Nafplion transforms each visit to this slice of Argolic land into a profound and salient experience.

In her narrative, archaeologist Alkistis Papadimitriou chooses to go beyond the legends surrounding Mycenae. Within the beautiful, well-documented text, she guides us through the quotidian reality of Mycenae, the workshops, the homes, the tombs, the temples, the palace and its walls. She has my earnest appreciation, on behalf of the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, for the manuscript now adorning the pages of the "Museums Cycle". My thanks also extend to each and every worker of the archaeological site and the Museum of Mycenae who contributed, in their respective capacities, towards the creation of this volume. Many thanks to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, through the central and regional services providing all possible support as well as the entire editorial team, which once again worked painstakingly to achieve the best outcome for the book you are now holding in your hands.

MARIANNA J. LATSIS





Agamemnon certainly owes his universal and timeless fame to the father of poets. As an authentic spokesman for the aristocratic ideal, in the *Iliad*—the oldest epic in European literature—Homer singles out the son of Atreus and places him at the summit of the royal hierarchy of the Achaeans. The “god-like” (*dios*) Agamemnon was characterized by the poet as “shepherd of peoples” (*poimēn laōn*) and “lord of men” (*wanax andrōn*), an embodiment of all the heroic virtues.

In contrast, the seat of his kingdom Mycenae, the well-built city with broad streets, would confirm its image as “rich in gold” through the brief but immensely productive—in terms of finds—excavation of the amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann.

In the wake of his impressive discoveries, many generations of scholars have shouldered the heavy burden of legitimate archaeological research, the publication of excavation results, and the conservation and protection of the monumental remains of the place that gave its name to one of the most important civilizations in Greek prehistory. As the culmination of this process of reconstituting historical truth and making it known, a new local museum was inaugurated in 2003 near the archaeological site.

In accepting the proposal by the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation to present Mycenae in the foundation’s popular series of distinguished editions “The Museums Cycle”, I felt that once again it had fallen to me to highlight the achievements of my forebears and honor the Herculean work accomplished by great archaeologists and scholars of antiquity.

I wrote the lines you will read at one of the most difficult moments in the modern history of Greece, wrestling daily with a sense of unbelievable futility. There echoed within me the harsh words of Giorgos Seferis (*Gymnopaïdia 2: “Mycenae”, ll. 12-19*):

*Whoever lifts these great stones, founders;  
I lifted these stones as long as I could bear it,  
I loved these stones as long as I could bear it,  
these stones, my fate.  
Wounded by my own soil  
tormented by my own shirt  
condemned by my own gods,  
these stones.*

But behind the eagle’s nest in Mycenae the shadows of heroes emerged, as perpetuated by the tragic poets who followed Homer, and as the clear voice of historical memory echoed through the ravines.

Somewhere, in the luster of gold which fades when the spotlight dims, there was the obligation for me—a simple messenger of front-line archaeology—to say once more that we have come from a great distance and are making our way steadfastly into the future.

ALCESTIS PAPADIMITRIOU



# THE BRONZE AGE

IN THE LATE 4th – early 3rd millennium BC, the use of metal became generalized in the Aegean for making tools, weapons, and other utensils. First copper and then bronze objects replaced earlier, primarily stone works. These new materials provided men with the chance to engage in intensive cultivation, to effectively defend themselves and their assets, and to improve their quality of life. This was a change of decisive significance for the evolution of the species, and marked the beginning of a new era which took its name from the use of metal. The Bronze Age in the Aegean lasted for about two millennia (3300-1000 BC), and was signaled by three major civilizations: the Minoan, the Cycladic, and the Mycenaean, which developed on Crete, in the Cyclades, and on the Greek mainland respectively.

The British archaeologist and investigator of Knossos, Sir Arthur Evans, established a tripartite dating system in accordance with Egyptian models in order to classify the archaeological material of the civilization on Crete, which was called Minoan, after the mythical King Minos. This division into early, middle, and late periods was also adopted by the archaeologists C. Blegen and A.J.B. Wace for the finds from the civilization of mainland Greece, which was called Helladic; a comparable schema was used for Cycladic civilization as well. The basis for the development of these important early civilizations included abundant agricultural production, livestock farming, and the exceptional skills the Aegean's inhabitants developed in navigation. With the chief goal of obtaining metal, worthy seaman tamed the sea barrier with sails and oars as early as the 3rd millennium, bringing the inhabitants of the mainland and islands close to one another and not long after, to Cyprus, the Syro-Palestinian coast and Egypt. In the process of exchanging raw materials and goods, they came into contact with neighboring developed civilizations, by which they were decisively influenced.

During the Early Bronze Age (Early Helladic: 3100-1900 BC) in mainland Greece, strong centers were created which managed the rich goods falling within the wider region of their jurisdiction through a system of centralized government which attests to early urbanization. Buildings of nearly monumental dimensions, the so-called corridor houses, accommodated the functions for controlling production

*Head of a warrior wearing a boar's tusk helmet. Chamber tomb 27. 14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2468. This plaque of ivory or hippopotamus tusk is a masterpiece of Mycenaean ivory-working. It depicts a Mycenaean warrior wearing the boar's tusk helmet typical of the age.*

carried out with the assistance of the famous clay sealings. It is very probable that this system for managing goods and products was along the lines of those of early states of the Near East.

Around the end of the 3rd millennium, extensive destruction at large and small centers, which has been attributed to a possibly violent penetration by Western Balkan populations, interrupted development on the mainland. This age has been considered as the moment when the first Greek-speaking tribes arrived.

The ensuing Middle Bronze Age (Middle Helladic: 1900-1600 BC) was characterized by great isolationism and loss of innovation. People dwelt in elongated residences called *megara*, chiefly in unwalled settlements which did not possess the characteristic features of large centers. They communicated only occasionally with the outside world, and they buried their dead without rich grave offerings in pits or mounds (*tumuli*). This major change, which primarily characterized the first two phases of the Middle Helladic period, is interpreted either as evidence of limited financial means or as a form of expression of a simple and austere society which did not allow its members any sort of differentiation among social classes. This picture was to change in the Late Middle Helladic (17th c. BC) when the bearers of civilization—farmers and pastoralists—would once more begin to communicate with the outside world and receive influences from civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean.

In the late 17th and early 16th century BC, the isolated society which had for around two centuries refused to diversify appears to have acquired leading figures, who suddenly became wealthy through commercial contacts or war. Influenced by models offered by neighboring peoples, they wanted to show off their new social and economic status.

At Mycenae, these rulers began to be buried in monumental grave enclosures, taking with them on the long journey to the other world the rich and impressive prestige objects they had acquired in life. The royal grave circles B and A mark the beginning of the Late Bronze Age on mainland Greece, the Mycenaean Age, named after this civilization's most important center, which has rightly been characterized as the first high civilization in Europe.

The rich grave offerings in the royal tombs at Mycenae attest to the close contacts the early Mycenaean had developed with the Cyclades, Crete, and the Near East, but they also confirm their risky journeys to the West and North to obtain metal and other exotic goods needed to produce weapons, tools, utensils, and luxury items. In this first stage, there was a pronounced influence from Minoan civilization, which was already at its zenith, having created about two centuries previously a system of government along Eastern models, viz. a powerful state with centralized administration exercised by the palatial centers. For around two centuries (16th-15th c. BC), Mycenaean aristocrats would re-

produce Minoan forms of expression in all fields of material culture, while at the same time projecting the characteristic elements of their origin and highlighting the ideals of the fearless warrior among men, and of the brilliantly-dressed “lady” among women. Burial in the monumental chamber tombs which extended from the southern Peloponnese to Thessaly and Epirus was inaugurated in the early 15th century BC and continued until the Late Mycenaean Age (1250 BC), succeeding the royal grave circles and functioning as an exceptional means of display for aristocratic clans.

Despite close and peaceful contacts with the Minoans, it appears that the Mycenaeans exploited the weakening of the Cretan kingdoms after the destruction which followed upon the volcanic eruption on Thera. They successfully established a Mycenaean dynasty on Crete in the mid-15th century.

By now self-reliant and all-powerful, in the 14th century the Mycenaeans founded the magnificent palatial centers, their fortified hegemonic seat, following Cretan models. They adopted the system of Minoan government and Linear B (an early form of the Greek language) in order to manage their assets. The wanax concentrated all powers in himself as the highest ruler in peace and wartime, as well as the head of a hierarchical priesthood. The high point of this age is recorded in the development of art as well as the execution of major construction projects.

During the 14th and 13th centuries BC, which are referred to as the Palatial Period, the Mycenaeans' power took off with their expansion to the entire then-known world through a very well-organized network of commercial exchanges and cultural relations. They founded trading posts in Italy, on the shores of Asia Minor, in the Black Sea, and in Cyprus, Syria, and Lebanon; they maintained close contacts with Egypt, and influenced Europe north of the Alps.

At the end of the 13th century BC in a climate of turmoil in the Mediterranean coinciding with major natural disasters on the mainland, the palace system of rule began to collapse. The 12th century BC, characterized as the Post-Palatial Period, was marked by the dissolution of political cohesion, the disappearance of writing and the higher art forms, the abandonment of large centers, and the shifting of the population to regions considered safer than the previous powerful centers.

Responsibility for the collapse of Mycenaean civilization is believed to lie either with invaders, normally identified with the Dorians of tradition, or with the hypertrophied palace system itself, which could not withstand the consequences of natural disasters and the general climate of unrest caused by the collapse of the Hittite empire, the activity of sea peoples in the eastern Mediterranean, and the associated blow to the Mycenaeans' commercial activities. One of the most brilliant civilizations in Greek prehistory, the first high civilization in Europe vanished forever.



## MYCENAE: THE LANDSCAPE

**M**ORE than any other factor, landscape must have determined the fortunes of Mycenae: located at the northeastern termination of the ever-fertile plain of Argos, it abutted the sea on the south, was protected by the mountain ranges of Arachnaion on the east and Artemision on the west, and lay atop a low elevation which the opening of the mountains to its north. Homer (Od. 3.263) placed the kingdom of Agamemnon “in the heart of Argos” (μυχῶ Ἄργεος ἱπποβότειο), and it was as if he saw it in the shadow of the steep hills of Prophetes Elias and Zara, which like horns of consecration protected it to north and south, while the two deep ravines of Kokoretsa and Havos made it impregnable. Before the Cyclopes crowned it with its emblematic walls, this isolated piece of land, which rose 278 meters above sea level and was accessible only from the west, would have been almost invisible, appearing only to those passersby who approached it.

From the summit of the acropolis, there was an unobstructed view only in the direction of Argos and the southwestern part of the plain. However, if one climbed up to the natural observatory on Prophetes Elias, they had a clear view in every direction and could mark out their kingdom at sight.

Man’s choice of this location was not only dictated by its location near the main land passage from Korinthia to the Argolic plain and sea. Another decisive role must have been played by the fact that there, where mountain and plain met, one could cultivate the fertile land and graze herds in the mountain region. A natural source of water only 360 meters to the east on the slopes of the hill of Prophetes Elias ensured the most valuable resource for the population’s viability.

Similar locations – rocky extrusions in the western foothills of Arachnaion towards the sea (Heraion, Midea, and finally, Tiryns) were used, and naturally not by chance, for important human settlements during prehistoric and historical times.

*Aerial view of the Acropolis of Mycenae from the southwest.*

# A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

## *Antiquity*

Men first settled this highly-strategic corner of the Argolic plain controlling passage to and from Corinthia and the rest of the mainland, and which overlooked the entire living space of the region stretching from the mountains down to the sea in the Neolithic Age (7th – 4th millennium BC). From this early activity and from the ensuing age, the Early Helladic (3rd millennium BC), a few meager finds, chiefly pottery, have survived atop the hill and its western slope. These finds do not allow us to detect the size and type of settlement or determine continuity or discontinuity in habitation. However, the poverty of finds must be due to the fact that there was no settlement or installations at Mycenae comparable to the large early urban centers in the Argolid such as Lerna and Tiryns.

*Gold discs with repoussé decoration. Grave Circle A, Grave III. 16th c. BC.  
National Archaeological Museum, Π 02, 08, 10, 18, 20.*





This picture would change in the late 3rd millennium BC during the final phase of the Early Bronze Age, Early Helladic III (2200-1900 BC). From this moment until the construction of the royal grave circles (B, A) (1650-1600 BC), it appears that habitation at Mycenae gradually acquired both extent and organization overlooking the extensive cemetery on the western slope.

The so-called Prehistoric cemetery occupied the entire hillside and was used throughout the Middle Helladic period (1900-1600 BC) exclusively for burials, leaving over 100 graves of simple construction (pit or built cist graves) intended to serve for single burials as indisputable testimony to the gradual increase in population and creation of a hegemonic power which in the late 17th century BC would assume rule and control over the entire region, leaving Argos—the Middle Helladic's most important center in the Argolid—by the wayside.

The economic and social supremacy of these rulers would be deliberately displayed with the construction of the two royal grave circles B and A at the edge of the Prehistoric cemetery. These would signal the beginning of a new age conventionally called the “age of the Shaft Graves” (17th-16th c. BC).

But who were these intrepid rulers and above all, how did they acquire the surplus wealth which allowed them to withdraw it from circulation and take it with them on their journey to the other world, including among other priceless objects more than 14 kilograms of gold in the form of superb works of art, many of them probably made by Minoan craftsmen in accordance with royal commissions to express the ideology of the emerging new class?





*Aerial view of the Acropolis of Mycenae from the northwest.*

*The "Treasury of Atreus". View of the entrance and dromos. 13th c. BC.*



Their profile emerges clearly from the archaeological finds as having primarily martial traits, as attested by the splendid armor found in their graves. However, we also know that they were daring travelers who went in search of noble and precious metals in central and northern Europe, promoting their rich agricultural and animal husbandry products such as wine, oil, and possibly woven textiles and becoming closely connected with the Minoans. Again, they were very familiar with the sea routes to Egypt, and it is possible they led them to the flourishing Middle Kingdom. It may have been there that the early Mycenaeans grew wealthy, placing their martial virtues at the disposal of the foreign dynasty in Egypt the Hyksos, who seized power in the mid-17th century BC. And since nothing in human history happens suddenly or by chance, we must accept that over the course of three centuries in the Middle Bronze Age, the Mycenaeans slowly but surely built the power reflected by the funerary gifts in the royal grave circles and ensured their clans a leading position not only in the Argolid but in the entire Peloponnese, giving their name to the whole of the great civilization of the Late Bronze Age.

During the following century (15th c. BC), the Mycenaeans scaled the display of their hegemonic status, constructing six (6) monumental tholos tombs for the members of their royal clans, having probably adopted a form of display which the rulers of Messenia had been the first to establish. At the same time, they chose another type of tomb for other members of the ruling class: chamber tombs, which have been found at 27 locations around the hill of Mycenae's acropolis. The large number, extent, and dispersion of both chamber tombs as well as groups of tholos tombs is indicative of the prosperity of the ruling class, which in establishing the cemetery for its clan, enshrined and demarcated its land ownership.

This age was also characterized as the Early Palatial Period, since we conclude from the meager building remains preserved buried beneath later building complexes and interventions belonging to the Palatial Period that a central building was constructed at the summit of the acropolis. Oriented N-S, it was decorated with frescoes, served for official gatherings, and may lay claim to having occupied the role of the ruler's seat.

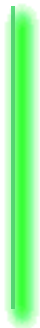
It was these early kings who expanded their trading activities eastward and westward, carrying their own products and the precious metals they had acquired either directly or through third parties and exchanging them for the exotic materials required to construct the prestige items demanded by their high social position. Identifying trading stations extending from the shores of south Italy to the Halkidike and Hellespont, and arriving at Egypt, Cyprus and the Syro-Palestinian coast via the Cyclades and Crete, they laid the foundations for the trading network of the ensuing Palatial Period.

Particularly valuing the importance of Crete in this network of wide-ranging commercial exchange, they were not intimidated by the good relations they had developed with the Minoans.



*Gold diadem with repoussé decoration. Grave Circle A, Grave III. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 03.*

*Bronze sword, Type A, with gold revetment on the handle and pommel. Grave Circle A, Grave V. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 763.*





*Steatite figurine of a seated female. Probably Neolithic in date, but used over a long period as a pendant. Found stored in the area of the Cult Center's "Megaron". MM 224.*



*Early Helladic I basin (3100-2700 BC) from the Great Ramp area. MM 1029.*



*Jug with matt-painted decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave Γ. ME III (1700-1600 BC). MM 1035.*



*Amphoriskos. Grave Circle B, Grave Γ. ME III (1700-1600 BC). MM 1034.*



*Askos decorated by leaves and with the lustrous decoration characteristic of the Mycenaean age. Grave Circle B, Grave M. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 458.*

They exploited the recession following upon the devastation to the island after the volcanic explosion on Thera and established a Mycenaean dynasty at Knossos in the mid-15th century BC, essentially controlling the entire island.

Having solidified their position in mainland Greece and with enormous influence abroad, the Mycenaean reached their apogee, which is recorded in the impressive reconfiguration of the entire acropolis and its greater environs. During the so-called Palatial Period (14th-13th c. BC), the “Cyclopaean walls” were built with the assistance of the knowledge of royal partners from the Hittite empire, the magnificent palace with all its annexes involving the control of secular and religious power (palace workshops and storerooms, religious center) was built, and all those functions which could not be accommodated within the fortification walls were installed outside and surrounding the acropolis in building complexes clearly dependent upon the palace. The ruling class continued to be buried with rich grave goods in chamber tombs or impressive monumental tholos tombs, which reached a total of nine by the end of this period. Mycenaean merchants inundated Mediterranean markets with their goods, while the rulers continued to practice ostentatious display through objects now of a purely Mycenaean style made of precious or exotic materials which the specialist craftsmen in the palace workshops made prominent. Lavish production was subject to centralized management control which was mastered with the recording of accounting data on clay tablets written in the early Greek Linear B script.

The high point of these two centuries, omnipotence and the preeminent place held by the rulers of Mycenae throughout the Mycenaean world, was personified in historical memory with the commander of the Greeks in the Trojan War, the mythical king Agamemnon. Myth—which always conceals within it historical truth—would select this fearless wanax as leader, while it would record Nestor, king of Pylos as the wise councilor to the expedition, reflecting the importance of the region in the first stages of the creation of Mycenaean civilization under the influence of Minoan Crete. The cunning king and splendid seafarer Odysseus would have his seat on Ithaca, the small island at the edge of the Mycenaean kingdoms but at the beginning of the sea route that brought the Mycenaean in contact with the West and Europe north of the Alps.

At the end of the 13th century BC, Mycenae—in common with the other kingdoms in the Peloponnese— would be struck by a series of natural disasters. Earthquakes and ensuing fires caused large-scale destruction to all the building complexes both inside and outside the fortified acropolis. Repairs and more general efforts to recover during the 12th century BC, the so-called Post-Palatial period, would not manage to keep the palace system of governance alive, and collapsed under the pressure of other factors which brought decisive blows to the mighty empire.



*Boar's tusk helmet made from the teeth of a wild boar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 515. 14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 6568. Boar's tusk helmets from the teeth of a wild boar were made from the trophies of the dangerous hunting of these wild animals and emphasized the bravery of rulers.*



During the centuries that ensued, Mycenae would follow a declining course. Abandoned by its many inhabitants, poor and dark, it would hide in the shadow of the emerging power of Argos, which in the early 7th century would found one of the most powerful city-states in Greece during historical times, exercising an expansionist policy at the expense of the once-strong centers in the Argolid. One of its victims was Mycenae, which had maintained its autonomy as confirmed by its participation in the Persian Wars and the inclusion of its name on the bronze tripod which supported the trophy of the Greek victors at the oracle of Delphi. The Argives finally occupied Mycenae in 468 BC, destroying key points along its fortification walls and enslaving its inhabitants. In the early 3rd century BC they would found a small town (komē) here which would flourish until the mid-2nd century BC and be abandoned following the Roman conquest of the Argolid. The testimony of Strabo (*Geography* H 372) that in his own era (64 BC - 25 AD) “not a trace was to be found of the city of Mycenae” seems a bit excessive, given that the traveler Pausanias, who arrived in the region in the mid-2nd century AD, mentions that the walls built by the Cyclopes, the Lion Gate, and tombs both within and outside the fortifications were still visible. However, in addition to these —which in Pausanias’s age lay in ruins and were considered monuments— he mentions the «Perseia» fountain house near the Lion Gate, which appears to have still been in operation and perhaps served the few farmers and herdsmen who had remained in the area.



*Restoration of a bronze sword from Grave Circle A. Rendering using the electrotype technique devised by the famous painter-copyist Emile Gilliéron père. Archaeological Museum of Mycenae.*



*Linear B clay tablet. Considered the oldest such tablet in mainland Greece, it refers to the delivery of an unknown product. Petsas House. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 2062.*



*Lapis lazuli pendant. North Slope. LH IIIB (1300-1189 BC). MM 1492.*



*Lapis lazuli beads. Cult Center area. LH IIIC (1180-1050 BC). MM 1493, 1494.  
This exotic stone was used in royal courts to make seals and jewelry, attesting to relations between the Mycenaeans and the developed civilizations of Egypt and the East.*



*Deep bowl decorated with a dotted circle.  
Cult Center area. LH IIIC Early  
(1180-1150 BC). MM 1072.*



*Stirrup jar. House of the Wine Merchant.  
LH IIIA2-LH IIIB1 (1350-1250 BC). MM 115.  
These vases, the "trademark" ware of Mycenaean  
pottery production, were used for storing and trans-  
porting olive oil and wine, which were the main  
products the Mycenaean promoted through trade.*



*Hydria decorated in the Close Style. Kalkani, Chamber Tomb F. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1100BC). MM 1077.*

*Tripod askos decorated with geometric motifs. House of Shields, grave PG 601. Protogeometric period (1025-900 BC). MM 869.*



*Corinthian globular aryballos with a representation of a chimaera. Kokkinia, Tomb XII. Archaic period (6th c. BC). MM 943.*



*Head of a male figurine. North Cyclopean wall. Hellenistic age, 4th-3rd c. BC MM 1155.*



*Black-figure Attic skyphos with a scene of a musical troupe. Agamemnoneion. Early Classical period (5th c. BC). MM 1220.*

## *Visitors*

During the following centuries and until Greece became an independent state in the modern age, Mycenae would gradually be buried beneath tons of ruins of its erstwhile glory. But it would not be entirely forgotten given that its walls, tholos tombs, and the Lion Gate remained partially visible, keeping alive its mythical name and history and attracting visitors over the years.

Unfortunately for the remains of Greek civilization, visitors to the enslaved country were not always guileless. From the Roman looters and first angry Christians to the Franks, Venetians, and Ottoman conquerors and finally, after the Middle Ages foreign “lovers of antiquity” who were in actuality dealers in illicit antiquities and antiquities hunters disguised as cultivated humanists, the plundering of antiquities left the monuments bloodied from about twenty centuries of unrestrained haemorrhaging.

Although Mycenae was not one of the ancient sites that was plundered so barbarously (as Athens, for example), it too paid a price, either by providing building material for the erection of the Venetian fortifications at Nafplion, or by enriching the collections of foreign museums.

Certainly the heaviest loss is considered to be the abduction of parts of the relief semi-columns on the façade of the so-called Treasury of Atreus between 1807 and 1812, led by the Veli Pasha, governor of the Peloponnese and the second son of Ali Pasha of Ioannina. It is known that this notorious antiquities looter sold the antiquities he looted from the greater area within his jurisdiction, including among others the tomb of Clytemnestra, which was discovered by chance in 1809. His major clients were the British, as beyond pecuniary gain he also endeavored to acquire the political and diplomatic support of the British government. This is clear in the case of the Irish Marquess of Sligo Howe Peter Browne (1788-1845), to whom the Mora Valesi Veli Pasha shortly before he departed from the Peloponnese (autumn 1810) gave pieces from the Treasury of Atreus without receiving anything in return. The Marquess for his part transported them to his villa in Westport (Ireland), where they would remain forgotten in the basements until 1904, when they would be donated and placed on exhibit in the British Museum together with other pieces that had ended up there in 1843 and 1900.

Before Browne, the Scottish diplomat Thomas Bruce, Earl of Elgin (1766-1841) took advantage of his excellent relations with the Sublime Porte, and on the occasion of his trip to Athens and well-known looting of the Parthenon, toured the Peloponnese in May of 1802 accompanied by his family. From the letters written by his wife Mary Nisbet to her mother, we learn the shocking details of their visit to



*Mycenae, the Lion Gate. Engraving based on a drawing by Edward Dodwell, early 19th century.*

*Mycenae, the Lion Gate. Engraving based on a drawing by William Haygarth, 1814.*





*The Lion Gate with Argos and the Argolid plain in the distance.  
Engraving based on a drawing by Otto Magnus von Stackelberg, early 19th century.*





*Le Château de Mycènes. M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche.*  
*Le Château de Mycènes. M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche.*  
*Le Château de Mycènes. M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche.*  
*Le Château de Mycènes. M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche.*  
*Le Château de Mycènes. M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche, M. de la Roche.*

S IXT JOIE MYCENE.

Mycenae as well as of the surrender of antiquities from the Treasury of Atreus to them upon the approval of the Voevoda of Nafplion. These had been found during an illicit excavation carried out at Elgin's orders by the local notable Vlassopoulos. The total payment was 655 grosia.

Unfortunately we will never learn if some of the "distinguished" visitors to Mycenae also seized the heads of the lions from the Gate, or if they had already been destroyed by natural causes by 1700, when the engineer Francesco Vandyek did the first cleaning within the framework of a land registration program carried out for the Venetians. The unique relief itself appears to have escaped plunder by the Elgins due to its enormous weight, which made its transport totally impossible.

As a gift in return or consolation for their marauding raids, European travelers after the mid-17th century left behind valuable narratives, map, and illustrations of the Greek monuments. The Enlightenment and the quest for the Classical ideal in the late 17th-early 18th century primarily led the French—who maintained good relations with the Ottoman conquerors—to Greece. We owe our first (1729) interesting though poorly-executed illustrations of Mycenae and a very useful map to the academician the Abbot Michel Fourmont, the worst antiquities-hunter of all time.

Knowledge of antiquity as a response by Europe's ruling class to the consequences of the French Revolution (1789) and Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) would find expression in the late 18th and early 19th centuries with an increased number of travelers who under the pretext of studying the ancient world obtained small or large collections of Greek antiquities. Among the numerous visitors to Mycenae (who in time exceeded fifty), the leading travelers of the 19th century, the British archaeologist and topographer William Gell (1777-1836) and Colonel William Martin Leake (1777-1860) are distinguished for the quality of the paintings and scientific information they provided. However, the work of the Irish archaeologist and painter Edward Dodwell remains incomparable; he visited Mycenae in 1805, immortalizing the ruined fortress of Agamemnon and above all its legendary Gate while denouncing the plundering of antiquities. Among other British scholars who criticized the barbaric plundering of antiquities, one may single out the attitude of Lord Byron, who denounced Elgin in an 1812 poem in the blackest of terms:

*Tore down those remnants with a Harpy's hand  
Which envious Eld forbore, and tyrants left stand.*

(CHILD'S HAROLD PILGRIMAGE, 1812)

The long-term looting of antiquities was of concern to the Greeks throughout the period of Ottoman domination, and there were more than a few heartrending cries protesting the barbaric removal of parts of monuments. The letter of a Greek, Anastasis Bakas, written in Argos in 1810 and addressed to Ismail Paso Bey, a close collaborator of Veli Pasha who had delegated him to spy on Lord Sligo, is surprising in that someone who was essentially an “employee” of the Turks felt such strong discomfort at the behavior of the lord and attempted through various subterfuges to halt his maniacal and rapacious mission.



*The Acropolis of Mycenae. Drawing and engraving by Théodore du Moncel, 1845.*

### *Caring for the antiquities*

The need to prevent this situation was one of the serious concerns of the first rulers following the new Greek state's declaration of independence. Through the adoption of decrees between 1825 and 1829, caring for antiquities initially focused on their collection and safeguarding, as well as on prohibiting their sale and export. In 1833, King Otto founded the state Archaeological Service, with responsibilities for the preparation for excavations and discovery of lost artistic masterpieces, safeguarding of existing antiquities, and ensuring they were not exported outside the state's borders. Shortly afterward, in 1836, the Archaeological Society at Athens was founded with the object of rescuing, discovering, conserving, and promoting the country's archaeological monuments. A decisive figure in this era was the Ephor of Antiquities and member of the Archaeological Society Kyriakos Pittakis, who in 1841 assumed responsibility for carrying out at Mycenae the first excavations at the Lion Gate and the tholos tombs of Atreus and Clytemnestra. The great Greek archaeologist, delegated by the Archaeological Society, arrived in Mycenae thirty years after the last representative of the illicit excavators, the British architect and archaeologist Charles Robert Cockerell, who had cleared and recorded the termination of the tomb of Atreus in 1811.

Clearly, this move signaled the intention of the first Greek scholars and institutions to protect antiquities and put an end to illicit excavations, which only a few years prior had led to the looting of the Temple of Aphaia on Aigina and that of Apollo Epikourios at Phigaleia (Bassae), and which continued to be conducted by the *Expédition scientifique de Morée* even after Greece's liberation, and indeed with the approval of Kapodistrias. The ambivalence of the first Governor of Greece, who on the one hand instituted protective measures for antiquities but on the other allowed their export, is apparently explained by the perception which unfortunately has survived down to the present day, viz. that antiquities fare better in European museums than in the country which gave birth to them.

A justification involving the country's financial distress and inability to meet large-scale financial demands, or even an incorrect assessment of the importance of cultural heritage probably led the authorities of the new Greek state to grant Heinrich Schliemann a permit to excavate at Mycenae. Despite the notoriety accompanying him by dint of his treatment of the finds from his excavations at Troy and the fact that he began excavation in 1874 at Mycenae, opening 34 trenches without having received approval from the Greek authorities, Schlieman finally secured the coveted permit. Within a few months in 1876 and under the supervision on the part of the Greek authorities by Panagiotis Stamatakis, a representative of the Archaeological Society at Athens, he excavated five shaft graves and brought to light the astonishing finds from Grave Circle A. The year following Schliemann's departure, Stamatakis identified and excavated the sixth shaft grave, which had escaped the attention of the "romantic admirer" of Homer.



*The excavation of Grave Circle A by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876. The rapid excavation was owed inter alia to the large number of workmen.*

*The excavation of Grave Circle A by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876. Sophia Schliemann is shown in the foreground, and Panagiotis Stamatakis in the background.*



If the ills that had plagued the protection of antiquities in Greece over time had not designated the controversial—and in any case, non-archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann as excavator, the discoverers of the treasure in Grave Circle A would have been the distinguished and tireless researchers into the past K. Pittakis, P. Stamatakis, or Christos Tsountas, founder of Greek prehistoric archaeology, and no one would have doubted (due to Schliemann's reputation and activities) the finds' authenticity or provenance.

The condition of the site following Schliemann's investigations was depicted by the German military engineer Bernhard Steffen in his work "Die Karten von Mykenai" (1884), essentially the first scientific documentation of a site that would later be excavated systematically by great archaeologists.

The first of these men was Christos Tsountas (1857-1934), who undertook excavations on behalf of the Archaeological Society at Athens in 1886. With brilliant studies in Germany and a tried-and-tested excavation method, the later university professor and co-founder of the Academy of Athens had excavated the entire Acropolis, five tholos tombs, and more than 100 chamber tombs.

The scientific results of his investigations were crystallized in 1893 in his monumental work *Mycenae and Mycenaean Civilization*. Tsountas's scientific awareness led him beyond excavation and publication to the restoration of the ruins on the acropolis, a project to which he devoted eleven years.

In 1920 and with Tsountas's approval, excavation rights were granted to the British School at Athens and the distinguished archaeologist A.J.B. Wace, who worked intermittently at Mycenae until his death in 1957. Starting with work at the sites of earlier excavations on the acropolis, he subsequently studied all the tholos tombs; he excavated the prehistoric cemetery, a great many chamber tombs and the "Oil Merchant's House" complex. His work was continued by Lord William D. Taylour and Wace's daughter Elizabeth French, bringing to light the impressive finds of "The Temple" and the "Room with the Fresco Complex".

The Archaeological Society, which had regained its interest in Mycenae, was represented in these excavations by Ephor of Antiquities Ioannis Papadimitriou and subsequently by Professor Georgios E. Mylonas.

This investigation period by the Archaeological Society, which began in 1950 with work by I. Papadimitriou and Ph. Petsas outside the Acropolis, was continued under the direction of G.E. Mylonas (1958-1988) and academician Spyros Iakovidis (1988-2013). Excavation focused on all the unexplored points on the Acropolis and expanded to important building complexes outside the fortification walls (Panagia Houses, Plakes House, Petsas House).



*The Archaeological Museum of Mycenae.*

The foremost find may be considered to be Grave Circle B, which was excavated between 1951 and 1954 by the leading prehistoric archaeologists of the era I. Papadimitriou, Ant. Keramopoulos, Sp. Marinatos, D. R. Theocharis, and G. E. Mylonas, who also published the finds.

Parallel to systematic investigations, rescue excavations were carried out after World War II by the Greek Archaeological Service (4th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities).

The long and admirable collaboration by these three research bodies culminated in an accurate topographic survey of all the archaeological finds from Mycenae. This was carried out under the direction of Elizabeth French between 1991 and 1994 and published by the Archaeological Society in 2003. The *Archaeological Atlas of Mycenae* is an original and exemplary documentation of monumental remains, worthy of the importance of the archaeological site of Mycenae and a complement to the enormous scientific body of already-published results.

The Greek state assumed responsibility for the conservation and promotion of Mycenae's monumental remains. During the 1950s, the Directorate of Restoration of Ancient Monuments of the Greek Archaeological Service implemented a massive restoration program on the fortifications, the Megaron, the Palace, and the tholos Tomb of Clytemnestra. Similar projects, though on a smaller scale, were carried out during the 1990s within the framework of the Scientific Committee for Mycenae. They included the enhancement of the "Oil Merchant's House" complex, partial restoration of the tholos Tombs of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and the Lion Tomb as well as more general projects to configure and enhance that part of the site which is open to the public.

In 1999, Mycenae and Tiryns were inscribed in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Monuments.

## *The Archaeological Museum of Mycenae*

The need to build a new archaeological museum to store and exhibit excavation finds from over a century's work had become imperative by the early 1980s, when Georgios E. Mylonas in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture with characteristic wisdom chose its location on the northern slope of the Acropolis, working around objections by local representatives who wanted to build the new museum in the adjacent village.

The ingenious study prepared by architects of the Archaeological Service successfully integrated the building harmoniously into its wider natural and archaeological surroundings, offering a discreet and functional solution which provided for the storage, conservation, and study of the many finds and for serving visitors, in addition to a beautifully-arranged exhibition space.

Construction of the museum, which is configured like steps on the hillside, began in 1984 and was completed in 1997, bypassing financial problems and delays of other types. Between 1998 and 2003, when the new museum was inaugurated, around 35,000 portable finds scattered among various storage areas were transferred to its storerooms, the museological and museographic studies were prepared, and the exhibition was completed.

The museum construction project was co-funded by the European Union and the Greek state, and implemented by the Scientific Committee for Mycenae and the 4th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities. Through the participation of dozens of first Greek-speaking tribes arrived, the decisive guidance of Ephor of Antiquities Elizabeth Spathari and the invaluable assistance of Mycenae scholars Professor Elizabeth French and academician Spyros Iakovidis, the site acquired a museum which drew 2,500 artifacts from silence and obscurity and offered them to the site's many visitors within the framework of a didactic presentation highlighting Mycenae's history down through time.

The exhibition unfolds in a total of four galleries arranged on two different levels, following a circular route with the aid of ramps. On the upper level, the spacious vestibule with educational material and its superb view towards the sites which once occupied the cemeteries of Mycenaean nobles forms the starting-point and conclusion to one's visit. The first gallery, which is on the same level, presents the finds from the Mycenaeans' public and private activities. A ramp leads visitors to the second level, which is devoted to the kingdom of the dead. Here the finds from the royal Grave Circle B, the rich cemeteries of chamber tombs, and a number of historical copies of the grave goods from royal Grave Circle A are displayed. This is followed by a section on Mycenae during historical times, and the exhibition closes with the presentation of the achievements of Mycenaean civilization.



Building the museum within the greater archaeological site also determined the presentation of finds in the exhibition, which follows the topographical arrangement of find spots, interrupted or concluded by thematic sections which aim to highlight both the crucial importance of Mycenaean civilization as well as less brilliant moments in its history. The main objective, however, is the educational dimension of the presentation, which is achieved with the help of supporting material and the latent representations of the find spots of important assemblages such as the ugly idols and the large fresco from the Religious Center, as well as the shape of the display cases for finds from the two royal grave circles. Without possessing the impressive wealth of the first rulers (which for the time being remains in the National Archaeological Museum), the local museum of Mycenae disposes of an exceptional aesthetic and harmony, managing to provide visitors to the archaeological site information which ultimately offers comprehensive knowledge concerning the capital of Agamemnon.



*The vestibule of the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae.*



# THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD

## *Grave Circle A*

Heinrich Schliemann's sole discovery brought to light in 1876 both impressive grave goods and a previously-unknown civilization, that of the Mycenaeans. Grave Circle A lay at the center of the eastern boundary of the Prehistoric cemetery. There in the soft rock of the slope, six pits were opened in the early 16th century BC in order to construct the large vertical shaft graves that would hold the members of Mycenae's most powerful family. Five of the six graves were used for more than one burial, while the total number of those buried was 19, including 9 men, 8 women, and 2 children. To delimit the area, a low circular enclosure wall of large, unworked stones was used. Stone grave steles marked the graves, underscoring with their relief representations the identity of these new rulers. The chariots speak to their martial temperament, and the age-old spiral ornament to their locale, while the priceless objects they took to their graves were the true witnesses to their absolute primacy. The five gold funeral masks, the elaborate weapons, the many pieces of gold jewelry as well as the objects and utensils of precious metals and exotic materials appear to have created the enormous fame of the royal clan which Homer preserved in his unique characterization "Mycenae, rich in gold" (Il. 11.28: «βασίλῆα πολύχρυσιο Μυκῆνης»).

The particular importance of this tomb complex also results from the fact that all those who came after it accorded it enormous respect. None of the graves was violated, while in the mid-13th century BC when there was a need to expand the fortification wall towards the southwest slope, it was designed with a curved outline to include the grave enclosure inside the fortifications. With the construction of a retaining wall on the west side, they raised the ground level and configured a flat surface a little lower than the monumental gate and entrance, while they enclosed the site with an impressive circular parapet consisting of a double row of well-finished sandstone slabs and conglomerate with comparable covering. The new boundary of the royal graves had a diameter of 26 meters and an entrance on the

*Gold funerary mask known as the "Mask of Agamemnon". Grave Circle A, Grave V. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 624α.*

northwest side, so that it could be visited immediately after entering the acropolis. It is obvious that the Mycenaeans of the Palatial Period treated these important burials as a monument to their glorious ancestors and used it to legitimize their own authority, pointing it out to whoever passed through the imposing Lion Gate into the fortified acropolis. The special nature of this site was preserved throughout antiquity, and it was no accident that Pausanias conveys this ancient memory, recording it in the information on the burial of Agamemnon inside the walls. This was the mythical ruler whom Heinrich Schliemann had been in search of; when he encountered him behind his gold burial mask, Schliemann considered that his mission was complete and departed from Mycenae, leaving Panagiotis Stamatakis, the supervisor for the Greek state, to continue excavating in a tried-and-tested manner and to find the sixth royal grave.

The absence of a systematic excavation method and inadequate documentation of Schliemann's investigation led all later researchers who were scientifically active at Mycenae to return both for excavation and for reasons of documentation, study, and publication to the site of these unique finds. After the mapping of the enclosure by the pioneer B. Steffen (1884), systematic investigations by Christos Tsountas (1887-1910), supplementary investigation by A. Keramopoulos (1913) and the first complete scholarly presentation of the shaft graves by Georg Karo (1915/1930), excavation was assumed by Alan J.B. Wace (1920-1923), to whom we also owe the first documented reconstruction drawing of Grave Circle A. Finally, decisive contributions were made by Ioannis Papadimitriou (1955) and Georgios E. Mylonas (1962), who returned for supplementary research and study of the new evidence.

The funerary gifts from Grave Circle A, unique in terms both of wealth and artistic value, are on exhibit in the National Archaeological Museum. Exact replicas of some of them are presented in the second gallery of the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae in a prominent prismatic display case. These copies are owed to the astonishing virtuoso Louis Emile Emmanuel Gilliéron, called Emile Gilliéron père (1851-1924) to distinguish him from his son and colleague Edouard Emile (1885-1939), referred to as Emile Gilliéron fils. This Swiss painter worked in Greece from 1876 onward, among other things as Heinrich Schliemann's draughtsman, as the painting master of the children of King George I, and from 1900 as a painter and conservator working with Arthur Evans at Knossos, with his son as his close collaborator and successor. Thanks to his exceptional abilities as well as his access to the original masterpieces which came to light in the excavations of Mycenae and Knossos, Gilliéron père created exact copies as well as restorations of the funerary gifts in Grave Circle A, rendered the famous wall paintings of Knossos in aquarelles, and fashioned painted plaster copies of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus, stone vases, and faience objects. The precision of his copies and restorations was largely due to his close cooperation with the archaeologists Gerhardt Rodenwaldt (for the wall paintings) and Georg Karo (for works from Mycenae). Using the electroplating technique, this master copyist created genuine art works which he

put up for sale on the international market, thus making Minoan and Mycenaean art known throughout the world. Many famous representatives of the arts and letters, including James Joyce, Sigmund Freud, and Pablo Picasso and well-known scholarly foundations in Europe and America possessed such copies, cast by the renowned WMF Company from molds Gilliéron made directly from the ancient works.

*Gold cup known as "Nestor's Cup". Grave Circle A, Grave IV. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 412.  
Two birds, possibly doves, with open wings have been attached to the handles. They are turned towards the rim of the vase, which has been identified as the *depas amphikypellon* described by Homer.*



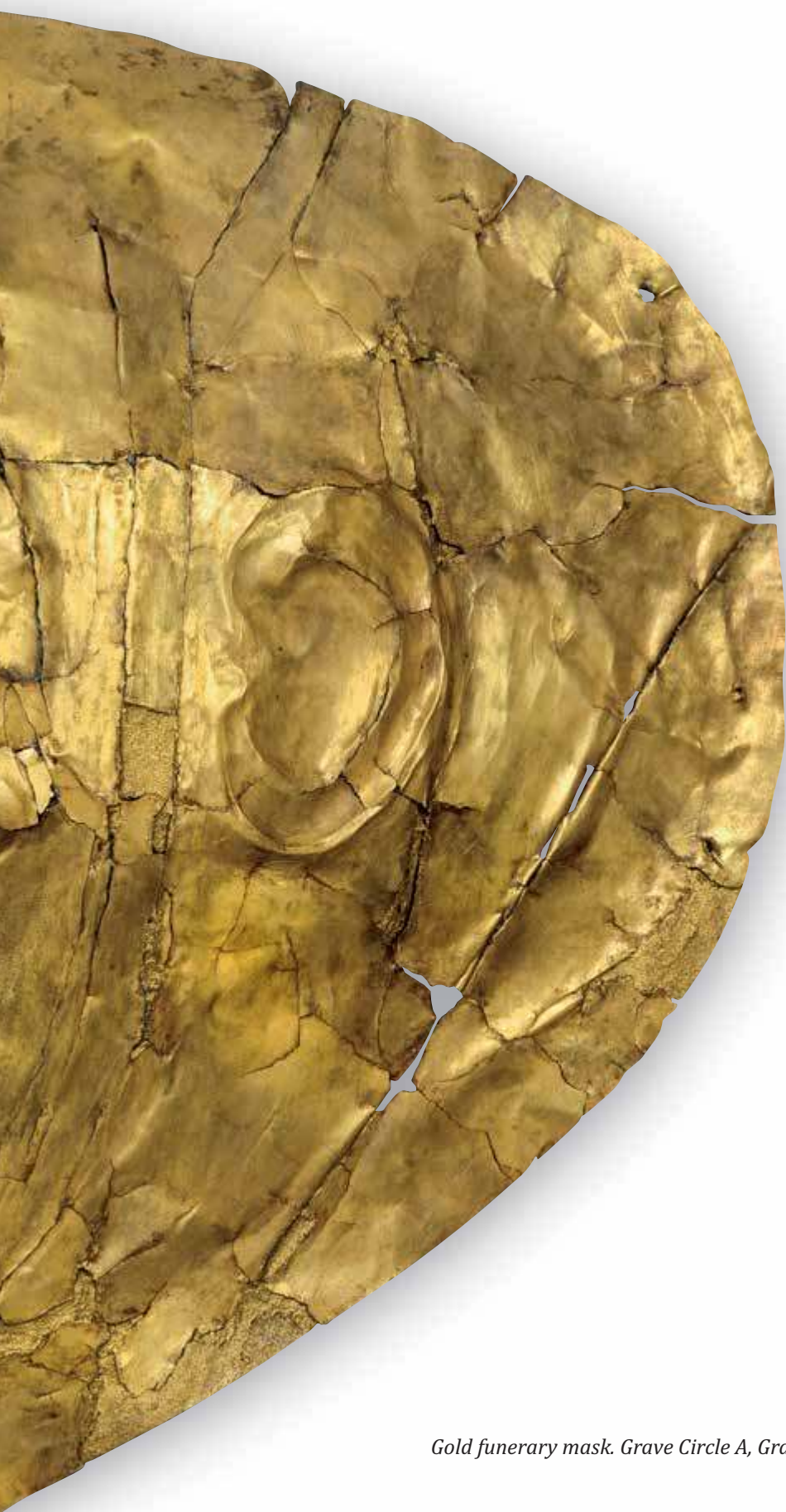
NEXT PAGES: *Gold diadem with repoussé decoration. Grave Circle A, Grave III. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 01.*











*Gold funerary mask. Grave Circle A, Grave IV. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 254.*

*Gold funerary mask. Grave Circle A, Grave IV. 16th c. BC.  
National Archaeological Museum, Π 253.*









*Hexagonal wooden pyxis with a revetment of gold sheet foil. Grave Circle A, Grave V. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 808-811. Two pieces of gold sheet foil were attached to each of the box's six sides, one to the vessel and one to the lid. The repoussé decoration of the rectangular foil sheets consists of three repeated motifs: a lion hunting a deer, a lion hunting an antelope, and a mesh of spirals.*





*Detail from the decoration of one of the gold foil sheets from the hexagonal pyxis: above the lion hunting the antelope the head of a bull (bucranium) with striking features is set as an inlay. The style of this work is purely Mycenaean. It is pervaded by formalization, linearity, and a fear of the void, while the abstract rendering of movement and the modeling of the bodies have been considered a recollection of nomadic art.*







*Gold foil sheets used for the covering of the remains of two infants in Grave III of Grave Circle A. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 146.*



*Gold pendant in the form of a woman holding a pyxis. The details of her hairstyle, necklace, garments, and of the pyxis are rendered in the granulation technique. 14th-13th c. BC. Chamber Tomb 68. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2946.*



*Silver pin with a gold head. Grave Circle A, Grave III. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 75. A bare-breasted female figure, formally dressed and adorned, extends her hands, which are holding a garland, towards the bending branches of the exotic plant springing from her head. A Mycenaean artisan with Minoan influences must have created this unique depiction of the goddess of Euphoria.*







*Bronze dagger in the inlay technique. Representation of lions galloping. Grave Circle A, Grave IV. 16th c. BC.  
National Archaeological Museum, Π 395.*



*Bronze dagger in the inlay technique. Scene of a hunt on the banks of the Nile. Grave Circle A, Grave V. 16th c. BC.  
National Archaeological Museum, Π 765.*



*Bronze dagger with a representation of a hunt. Grave Circle A, Grave IV. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 394. One of the masterpieces of early Mycenaean art depicts men hunting a lion, armed with shields, spears, and bows. One of them already lies dead on the ground, and the battle's outcome is doubtful. Gold, silver, bronze wire and niello, an alloy of copper, silver, and sulfur, render the dramatic scene in an impressive manner.*







## *Grave Circle B*

In 1951, seventy-five years following Heinrich Schliemann's discovery of Grave Circle A, another grave circle was identified by chance on the western boundary of the prehistoric cemetery during a restoration project on the tholos of the Tomb of Clytemnestra. Its systematic excavation under the direction of I. Papadimitriou and G. E. Mylonas and its exemplary publication led to secure scientific conclusions regarding the unanswered questions following Schliemann's improvised presentation of the finds from Grave Circle A.

Grave Circle B, built of low Cyclopean masonry, had a diameter of 28 meters and included 26 tombs, 14 of which were vertical shaft graves while the others were simple, shallow pits. Tomb Rho constitutes a special case; it was built in the 15th century BC inside the pit of an earlier shaft grave. It was a built, quadrangular tomb with a dromos (entrance passage), chamber, and corbeled roof. The plastered wall courses of the chamber were covered in red and black bands. This tomb type finds parallels in Ugarit, on the Syrian coast, and at Trachonas in Cyprus; it may be compared to the "Temple Tomb" of Knossos.

The tombs of Grave Circle B, which held between one and four dead (for a total of 35 persons), are partly earlier (1650-1600 BC) and partly contemporary (1600-1550 BC) with those of Grave Circle A. The richer ones were marked by stone grave stelai, five of which were found in situ. Some carried relief or incised decoration, thus providing an idea of the art of Mycenaean monumental sculpture.

The funerary gifts, although not as rich as those from Grave Circle A, highlight the upper class and prosperity of the deceased. Bronze weapons recall their martial nature, while the gold, silver, and bronze utensils as well as jewelry fashioned of precious metals and semi-precious stones in combination with the electrum mask and portrait of the bearded ruler on an amethyst seal stone identify the deceased as having belonged to one of Mycenae's ruling clans. An amber necklace links them with South England, while the tiny rock crystal kymbe (a spouted bowl) concluding in a duck's head is a Minoan imitation of an Egyptian prototype.

However, the commonest grave goods were pottery vases. The Middle Helladic tradition is represented by the stout Minyan Ware vases, a category of pottery imitating silver and gold models which took its name from Minyas, the mythical king of Orchomenos. Their yellow or greyish surface with its high burnish,

*Stone grave stele with a battle scene. Grave Circle A, Grave V. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 1428. The outstanding examples of early Mycenaean sculpture, funerary stelae, encapsulate the ideology of these vigorous rulers, who are shown in scenes of battles, hunts, or funerary chariot races. The spiral, a venerable and timeless artistic motif of the Bronze Age, seals the scene with its heavy style, recalling the nomadic art of earlier ages.*

angular outlines and incisions give these cups a primitive and simultaneously robust form directly recalling the image of the first rulers as illustrated by the other types of funerary gifts in Grave Circle B.

Another characteristic category of the “Shaft Grave Period” was the renowned matt painted pottery. Linear—primarily, decorative—elements were adapted to a burnished, light-colored surface. These added elements have a dull color, thanks to the use of manganese in the paint mixture. In addition to dark brown and dull black paint, more vibrant colors were also chosen, including red, creating the so-called “polychrome” variant which was strongly influenced by contemporary Cycladic pottery. It was not unusual for these vases to depict birds, a popular Cycladic iconographic motif.

During the transition from the Middle Helladic to Mycenaean period, Mycenaean potters discovered the lustrous paint that would mark the beginnings of purely Mycenaean pottery. During these early stages, vase shapes and the repertoire were strongly or nearly exclusively influenced by Minoan Crete. Linear and iconographic motifs would be combined with exceptionally fine results on the splendid vessels of the Early Mycenaean period.

*Grave stele and bronze sword, Type A. Grave Circle B, Grave A. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 407 & 1706. The stele has an incised representation of narrative character. The lion attacking the bull and the male figures rushing to restrain it recall the nomadic life of the Mycenaean ancestors.*





*Grave stele. Grave Circle B, Grave Γ. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 451. The stele has a relief decoration of interconnected spirals above and a scene from the nomadic life of the ancestors of the early Mycenaeans below: lions attacking a herd of cattle, with shepherds hastening to protect the animals. After its original use, the stele was employed as a base. The opening made for this purpose has destroyed part of its decoration.*



*Bronze two-handled dish. Grave Circle B, Grave E. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 1706.*



*PAGE 75: Rock crystal kymbe in the shape of a duck. Grave Circle B, Grave O. 16th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 8638. This unique vessel, for cosmetic use is an exceptionally fine example of Minoan stoneworking. The Minoans who had an excellent knowledge of working rock crystal, created a masterpiece of the Bronze Age by transforming the animal's body into a functional utensil.*

*Bronze hydria. Grave Circle B, Grave E. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 1707.*





*Minyan goblet. Grave Circle B, Grave Y. MH III (1700-1600 BC).  
MM 429.*



*Minyan goblet. Grave Circle B, Grave Y. MH III (1700-1600 BC).  
MM 431.*



*Minyan goblet. Grave Circle B, Grave I. MH III  
(1700-1600 BC). MM 397.*



*Kantharos with matt-painted decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave A1. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 422.*



*Semi-globular cup with matt-painted decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave H. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 411.*



*Amphora with matt-painted decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave Y. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 430.*



*Cycladic beak-spouted jug with a scene of birds. Grave Circle B, Grave N. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 426.*





*Cycladic jar with floral style decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave N. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 424.*

*Amphora with polychrome decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave I. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 392.*



*Cycladic jar with floral style decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave N. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 425.*



*Jar with matt-painted decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave I. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 396.*



*Cycladic jar with floral style decoration. Grave Circle B, Grave N. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 423.*



*Jar. Grave Circle B, Grave O. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 474.*

*Jug with cutaway neck. Grave Circle B, Grave K. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 436.*





*Cup. Grave Circle B, Grave A. LH I  
(1600-1500 BC). MM 432.*



*Cup. Grave Circle B, Grave Γ. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 442.*



*Jug with cutaway neck. Grave Circle B, Grave Γ.  
LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 450.*



## *The tholos tombs*

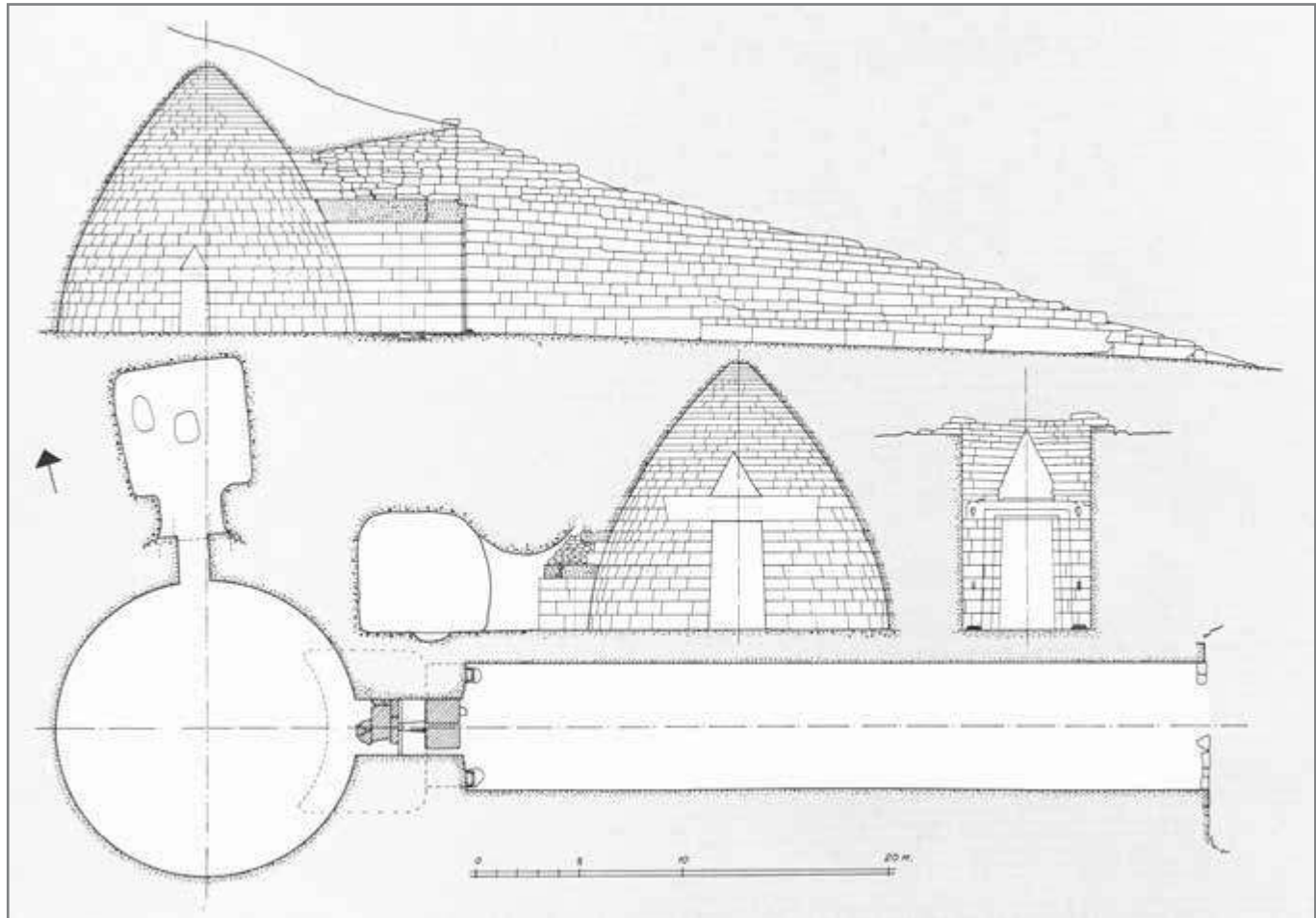
In the early 15th century BC, the Mycenaean rulers who were still burying their dead in vertical shaft graves adopted—apparently, from Messenia—a new type of tomb, the tholos. With dimensions more than twice those of the largest shaft graves, and of exceptionally costly construction, chamber tombs were the emblematic burial monuments par excellence of the royal clans, something also reflected in the conventional names of some of them as preserved in historical memory: the “Treasury” of Atreus and the royal tombs of Agamemnon, his adulterous wife Clytemnestra, and the sworn rival to Agamemnon’s throne, Aegisthus.

The tholos tombs consisted of a circular mortuary chamber, in the floor of which the pits to contain the burials were opened. A long passageway led to the chamber. To build them, two corresponding pits were opening in the soft stone of a hillside, within which the new circular chamber was built as a dome (tholos) in the shape of a beehive, while the passageway (dromos) was built with vertical walls. The entire construction was covered by a mass of earth that formed an enormous mound (tumulus). Their dimensions, which were monumental, varied in ascending order from earliest to latest between 8 and 14.60 meters (diameter and height of the domed burial chamber), between 5 and 6 meters (width), and between 22 and 37 meters (length of entrance passageway).

Despite the fact that tholos tombs have been found at all the large Mycenaean centers, only Mycenae, as the most powerful kingdom, had a total of 9 tholos tombs, classified by A.J.B. Wace chronologically into three groups. The following tombs belong to the first group (1510-1460 BC): the tomb of the Cyclops or the Cyclopean Tomb, that of Epano Phournos, and the tomb of “Aegisthus”. The second group (1460-1400 BC) consists of the Panagia Tomb, Kato Phournos Tomb, and the Lion Tomb. The tomb of the Daemons (Genii) or “Orestes”, the “Treasury of Atreus”, and the tomb of “Clytemnestra”, considered the most brilliant examples of this tomb type, belong to the third group (1400-1250 BC). Characteristic of the technical expertise of the early Mycenaean is the fact that at least seven of Mycenae’s nine tholos tombs were built before the first fortification phase (1350 BC).

Without doubt, the most splendid funerary monument of Mycenaean culture was—and remains today—the enormous tholos tomb built at the apogee of Palatial Period prosperity on the hill of the Panagia near what was at the time a densely-inhabited region west of the main road leading to the acropolis. A work of inconceivable financial and construction demands, it achieved its perfection of form both with its corbelled domed chamber, which numbered 33 horizontal rings of finished

*“Treasury of Atreus”, view of the tholos and entrance to the side chamber. 13th c. BC.*



*Section and plan of the "Treasury of Atreus", after A. J. B. Wace, The Tholos Tombs of Mycenæ.*

conglomerate as well as its monumental entrance, which was covered by a lintel weighing 120 tons and which, like the courses of the dome, had been hewn into a curved shape on its inner face. An equally imposing impression would have been caused by the revetment of the long entrance passageway with its enormous, nearly-isodomic stones. And since this achievement was not enough for the Mycenaean kings, leading artists from the palace workshops were called upon to fit the interior of the tholos with bronze ornaments, the façade with green relief half-columns, and to cover the upper part of the façade and the relieving triangle with horizontal relief compositions done in red. A side chamber cut into the rock with monumental entrance, central support column, and probably a revetment on its walls of relief-decorated gypsum slabs supplemented the complex as a unique appendage among Mycenæ's chamber tombs.

Today, the worldwide influence enjoyed by this monument competes only with that of the contemporary Lion Tomb. As a means of expressing the omnipotence of the Mycenaean royal house, these remarkable artistic and technical achievements were built at the moment when the palace system of governance was feeling its first tremors. The goal of the kings was to maintain their authority beyond



question, employing yet again the power of impressing their subjects and royal partners as well as those conspiring against their mighty regime. The choice of location for monuments at key points before the entrance to the fortified palace, as well as their extremely ostentatious form belongs to the tactic of manipulation with which the Mycenaean kings were very familiar, and which they effectively employed for around four centuries.

The impact of their exterior form was complemented by the untold wealth of funerary gifts that accompanied the royal deceased to their monumental tombs. This fame, which was reflected in their being characterized by the traveler Pausanias as the “Treasury of Atreus and his sons”, in combination with the fact that due to their construction their location was always clearly visible, led to their total desecration between antiquity and the period of Ottoman rule. The meager examples which escaped the notice of past and more recent antiquities looters such as a large piriform jar from the tomb of “Aegisthus” (today in the Museum of Mycenae) as well as the relief decoration on the façade of the “Treasury of Atreus” in the National Archaeological Museum and the British Museum, are not enough for us to imaginatively reconstruct the overall grandeur of the tholos tombs.



*Piriform jar, Palace Style. Tholos “Tomb of Aegisthus”.  
LH II (1500-1400 BC). MM 481.*





*The tholos "Tomb of Clytemnestra". View of the relieving triangle. 13th c. BC.*

PAGE 88: *The tholos "Tomb of Clytemnestra". View of the dromos and entrance. 13th c. BC.*

*The tholos "Tomb of Clytemnestra". View of the interior of the tholos. 13th c. BC.*







*The Lion tholos Tomb. View of the entrance and lintel from the interior. 1460-1400 BC.*



ABOVE: *The tholos tomb at Epano Phournos. View of the dromos and entrance. 1510-1460 BC.*

PAGE. 93: *The tholos "Tomb of Aegisthus". View of the dromos and entrance. 1510-1460 BC.*

BELOW: *The Panagia tholos tomb. View of the dromos and entrance. 1460-1400 BC.*





### *The chamber tomb cemeteries*

Most Mycenaean people who belonged to the upper classes but probably not to the royal family and possibly, some ordinary people were buried in a very widely-disseminated tomb type, the chamber tomb. It was an imitation of the royal tholos tomb with a simpler form of construction and smaller dimensions.

The chamber tomb had a rock-cut underground burial chamber to which an open, descending passageway led, beginning from ground level and concluding at the depth at which the composition of the rock allowed construction of the chamber. Access from the dromos to the burial chamber was through an opening sealed with dry wall each time there was a new burial. Inside the burial chamber, which was normally quadrangular, circular, elliptical, or irregular depending on the ease of carving afforded by the geological substrate, pits or niches were opened for burials and benches were for depositing offerings to the dead. Some chamber tombs had decorated facades or even side chambers for the deposition of additional dead.

To construct chamber tombs, the Mycenaean people chose hillsides or the sides of a ravine with relatively hard rock such as conglomerate, limestone, and poros stone which on the one hand allowed the stone to be cut away, but on the other ensured the burial chamber against future collapse. Such tombs, organized in smaller or larger groups, have been found at 27 sites scattered among the hills around Mycenae's acropolis and at a distance from the inhabited area outside it. They were widely disseminated, and some probably belonged to neighboring settlements controlled by the acropolis of Mycenae, in the modern-day areas of Fichtia to the west and Monastiraki and Vraserka to the south near the ancient Heraion.

The oldest are dated to the 15th c. BC, and most of them continued in use throughout the Palatial Period (14th-13th c. BC). In the Post-Palatial Period (12th c. BC), some were abandoned, but others—chiefly, those in the larger clusters—remained in use and demonstrate the continued habitation of the acropolis and greater area after the critical turning-point in the late 13th century BC. Furthermore, during this period some new cemeteries were founded; these have mostly been found in regions possessing natural resources such as stone for quarrying and clay for making ceramics, but which were also located near natural water sources. These tombs, however, were smaller and less well-made than the earlier ones of the Palatial Period.

The diversity of number and quality of funerary gifts in each cemetery reflects the different financial status and social position of those buried there, who apparently belonged to the same family and were laid to rest near the land the rulers allowed them to control.



From the period when Christos Tsountas carried out extensive excavations in the late 19th century down to the present, at least 250 chamber tombs which had been used for more than one burial have been found and investigated. In addition to the 103 such tombs excavated by Tsountas at various points, a large number came to light in the excavations of A.J.B. Wace, Georgios E. Mylonas, and the Greek Archaeological Service.

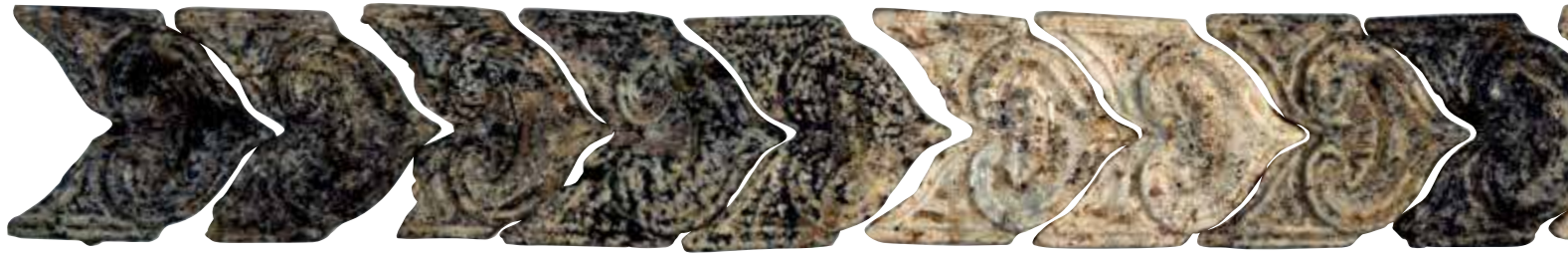
The precious finds from the old excavations are on exhibit in the National Archaeological Museum, while all the old finds which remained in the Argolid, as well as the funerary gifts from burials from more recent excavations are in the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae. The exhibits are arranged according to the topographic location of the cemeteries, starting from those in the areas southwest of the Mycenae acropolis and continuing on to the cemeteries northwest and northeast of Mycenae, as well as from the Vraserka group.

Despite the fact that the grave goods from the chamber tombs cannot be compared in wealth and artistic value with those we know from the royal grave circles, or those we can imagine among the now-lost artifacts which would have accompanied the tenants of the tholos tombs, they remain distinguished for their number, high quality, variety of types, and for the collectively great value of each cemetery.

Pottery, which is the commonest type of funerary gift in the chamber tombs, may boast of exceptionally fine vases of unique conception and execution, which would have been among the finest examples used in life by the distinguished deceased, or which would have been specially made to accompany them on their long journey. Many of them are substitutes for valuable



*Conical rhyton. Chamber tomb cemetery at Koustsoumbela, Tomb 1. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 764. Rhyta, which were characteristic vases of the Mycenaean age, had a hole in their floor and were used both for purely household purposes as funnels, but chiefly for the pouring of liquid offerings in the cult rituals of the priesthood. Ritual vases were of the finest quality and were decorated with elaborate designs.*



vessels made of precious metals or exotic materials; others such as the rhyta were perhaps used for burial rituals. But the majority of vases found in the tombs consisted of table ware used by nobles at official banquets (*symposia*). They are eating and drinking vessels (skyphoi, kylikes, jugs, vessels for mixing wine with water (kraters), for storing wine and oil, and for keeping water cool (hydrias, amphorae).

The most prominent in terms of number, quality, and variety of size and decoration was the stirrup jar, the trademark vase of Mycenaean pottery production, which was used for the storage and transport of wine, oil, and essential oils.

The motifs which adorn these vases were inspired by the natural environment of land and sea or were linear. Despite having initially been heavily influenced by the Minoan repertoire, during the Palatial Period (14th-13th c. BC) they became highly formalized, arranged in strict and orderly fashion on the body of the vase.

On rare occasions, vases depicting people and animals or representing scenes with a narrative character were deposited in tombs in Mycenae. The Argolid, which appears to have been the home of the “pictorial style”, had a particular weakness for such depictions, the main focus being on chariots and their noble riders.

Mycenae’s potters, perhaps the most distinguished of those in the Mycenaean kingdoms, managed to construct high-quality products even after the collapse of the palaces in the 12th century BC, presenting yet another local style, the “Close Style”, which transformed the dark emotions of the end of a brilliant era into a decorative network covering the entire vase. In parallel, these great artists, who probably switched to pottery production from the now-defunct art of wall painting, dared to speak of the climate of fear in the scenes connected with acts of aggression by land and sea.



*Glass inlays. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 520. LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1722.*

Furthermore, these same potters filled the houses and tombs of their rulers with the famous Mycenaean figurines, clay models of men, animals, and all sorts of objects. Their outstanding ability and great self-confidence even led them to produce an example—unique in the Argolid—of a painted clay sarcophagus (larnax). This type of coffin was used extensively in Crete, but was also adopted now and then by the Mycenaean of mainland Greece, the leading examples being the larnakes from Tanagra in Boeotia.

However, despite the fact that the ceramic artifacts deposited in tombs adorned the monuments with their beauty and grace, the substantive indication of the economic and social identity of the deceased was possible only with the depositing of prestige items constructed of precious materials and fashioned by highly-specialized artisans in the palace workshops.

Jewelry of gold, silver, semi-precious stones, beads of various materials including amber, as well as glass and faience substitutes for precious materials ranked among the most popular funerary gifts. Necklaces, pendants, and bracelets were very common, while earrings were somewhat rarer. Gold seal rings bearing unique depictions from the repertoire of rituals of the ruling class were very valuable and thus rarer, while there were also miniature seal masterpieces of semi-precious stones.

Elaborate toiletry items accompanied wealthy Mycenaean women to the other world. Combs and small boxes for cosmetics and jewels, the so-called “pyxides”, were of ivory. Bronze mirrors and toiletry accessories such as tweezers are impressive indications of women’s timeless coquettishness.

Correspondingly, wealthy men took with them in death the chief symbol of their power and origin, their elaborate armor. The Mycenaean defensive and offensive weapons, which were made of bronze and decorated with gold revetments and cast inlays, belong to the era’s most impressive category of artifacts.

Metal, glass, and stone vases and utensils of great economic and artistic value complemented the assemblage of prestige objects which asserted the special position of the rulers.

Of all exotic materials, the Mycenaean loved above all the bone from elephant and hippopotamus tusks which they obtained from Syria and Egypt. Important artists in the palace workshops worked this precious material, turning it into sculptures in the round of humans and animals, into reliefs or intaglio tiles as revetments or inlays for wooden furniture and other utensils, as well as into toiletry articles.

The high aesthetics of Mycenaean cultural artifacts was not solely owed to the inspiration of artists and their ability to translate this into superb material form. It was directly connected with a profound knowledge of the techniques of working metal, stone, and synthetic materials. Making the most of the experience of the Minoans, who had in turn taken inspiration from the great civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Mycenaean kept this high technical expertise safe behind the heavy doors of the palace workshops. For metal objects they employed both casting as well as hammering, while they rendered exquisite details with the granulation and filigree techniques. Through enameling or inlaying semi-precious stones or synthetic materials such as glass and faience, they lent their works luxury and sophistication.

However, Mycenaean art was also possessed of the joy of polychromy, which was served by semi-precious stones: orange-red carnelian, red and white sardonyx, violet amethyst, varicolored agate, veined onyx, blue lapis lazuli, red jasper, crimson hematite, yellow-red chalcedony, semi-transparent white rock crystal, and grey-green steatite. These stones were joined in decorative compositions in necklaces, rivalled only by gold or amber, the fossilized resin of the North. The same became seal stones to attest with brilliance and distinction to the identity of the officials-administrators of the palace estate.

And when they no longer had the financial means to obtain them, the Mycenaean replaced them with the jewelry they cast in stone molds, employing blue and white glass and flamboyant faience.

*Jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Aspria. LH IIB (1450-1400 BC). MM 501.*





*Jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 528.  
LH IIA (1500-1450 BC). MM 541.*



*Jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VII.  
LH IIIA1 (1400-1350 BC). MM 1048.*



*Ewer. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 518. LH I  
(1600-1500 BC). MM 552.*



*Jug with cutaway neck. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani,  
Tomb 518. LH IIA (1500-1450 BC). MM 548.*



*Piriform jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 529. LH IIA (1500-1450BC). MM 568.*





*Stirrup Jar with a pictorial scene of an octopus and fish. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VIII. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 2007.*

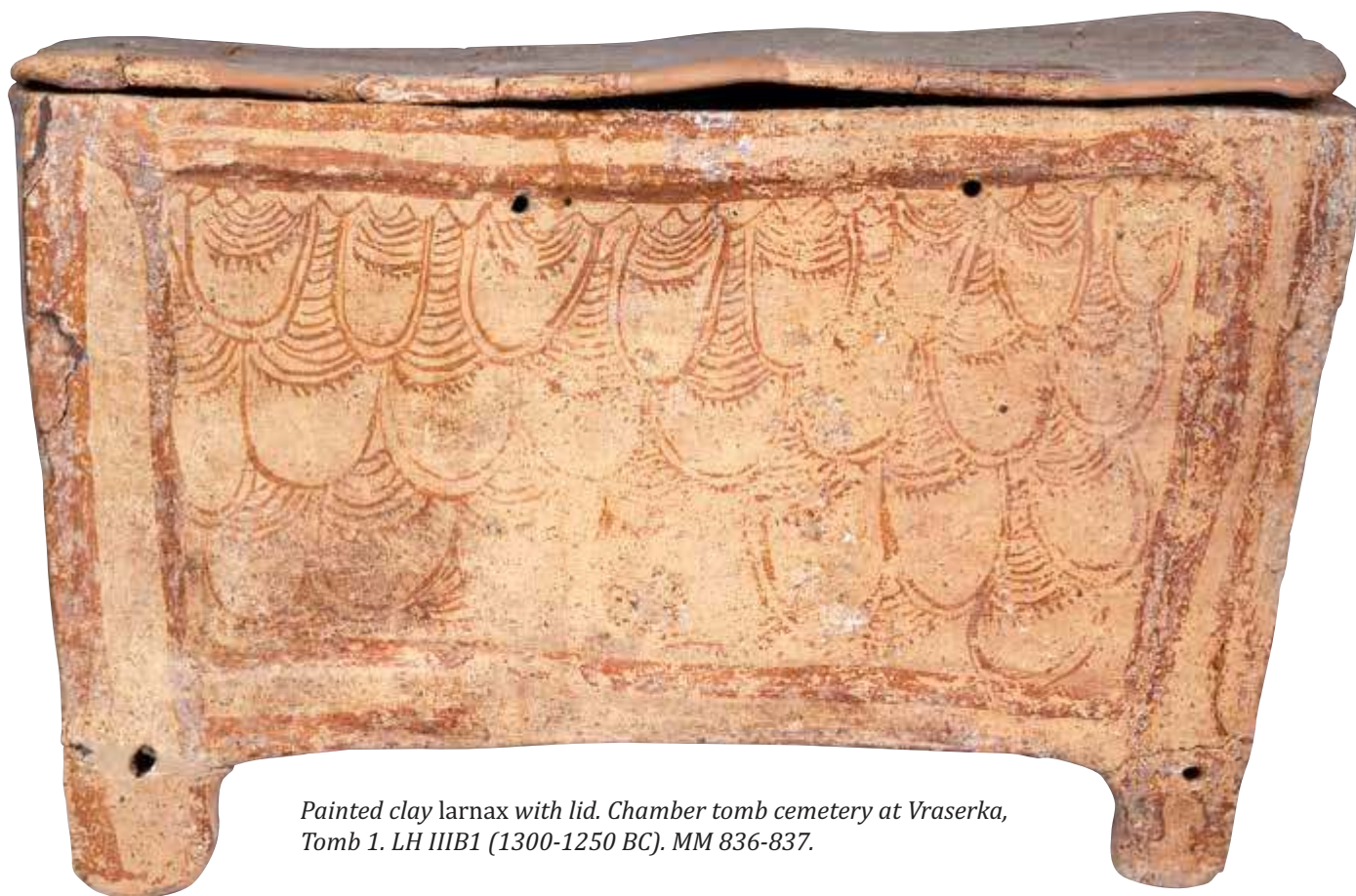




*Jug with cutaway neck. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 523.  
LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 618.*



*Cup with a pictorial representation of a horned animal. Chamber tomb cemetery  
at Palaiomandri, Tomb Δ. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 1940.*



*Painted clay larnax with lid. Chamber tomb cemetery at Vraserka,  
Tomb 1. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 836-837.*

*Cup. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 2.  
LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 1059.*



*Ephyrean goblet. Chamber tomb cemetery at  
Souleimani, Tomb 9. LH IIB (1450-1400 BC).  
MM 1045.*



*Alabastron. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani.  
LH IIIA1 (1350-1300 BC). MM 1057.*



*Lekythos. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 517.  
LH IIIC Late (1100-1050 BC). MM 1082.*



PAGES 106-109: Gold necklaces from the chamber tombs at Mycenae. 14th-13th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2791, 3087, 2291, 2847, 3194, 3186. The great goldsmiths of the Mycenaean age exhausted all their virtuosity in creating jewelry inspired by flora. Rosettes, lilies, papyri, and ivy leaves were depicted in the repoussé technique, recalling Mycenaean iconography's close relation with nature.









*Gold seal ring. A procession of three women makes its way to a sanctuary which is presented abstractly using its basic symbols, the column and the horns of consecration. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2853.*





*Gold seal ring. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2970. The ring depicts two griffins with open wings, turning their heads towards the center of the scene. This mythical being, half-lion and half-eagle, originated in Minoan iconography and symbolized the prestige and power of the royal house.*





*Gold seal ring. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 3148. A male figure turns to the sacred tree, with the wild goat to be sacrificed behind him. Depictions of tree cults are a frequent motif in Mycenaean iconography.*



*Gold seal ring. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2971. A seated female figure depicting the goddess in front of a sacred tree and a standing male holding a spear are gesturing in a scene which has been called the "sacred conversation".*





*Gold seal ring. Hoard outside Grave Circle A. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 992. One of the most complex religious scenes in the Mycenaean repertoire presents the Great Goddess seated with poppies in her hands beneath the sacred tree, accompanied by her maidservants. Two women, apparently her priestesses, are drawing near her holding irises. High in the sky, the Sun and Moon shine simultaneously, while the scene is completed by six lion's-heads, the symbol of the double axe and the "Palladion" wearing a helmet and carrying a figure-of-eight shield and spear. This gold ring from Mycenae compresses in a single densely-constructed composition the most important symbols of Mycenaean religion.*



*Gold seal ring. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 3180. Two female figures in an attitude of prayer frame a sacred building. The flowers on the altar and ashes associate this religious practice with rituals for the fertility of the earth, while the style and iconographic details confirm that this was an exceptional piece by a Minoan artist.*



*FOLLOWING PAGES: Gold seal ring. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 3179. A representation of a sacred ritual connected with tree worship. In the center, a female figure is dancing and striking her thighs, while a male figure to her left shakes the trunk of the sacred tree on an altar. A second female figure at right is leaning on another altar; perhaps she is engaged in a lament. The representation echoes the ecstasy of cult activities associated with the earth's fertility. An exceptionally fine work by an artist from Minoan Crete who may have worked in Mycenae's royal workshops.*









*Gold figure of a bull. Chamber tomb 68, 14th-13th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2947 .*





*Gold jewelry. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tombs 520, 515.  
LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1718, 1714, 1720.*





*Gold inlays with repoussé decoration in the form of a rosette. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 515. LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1715.*

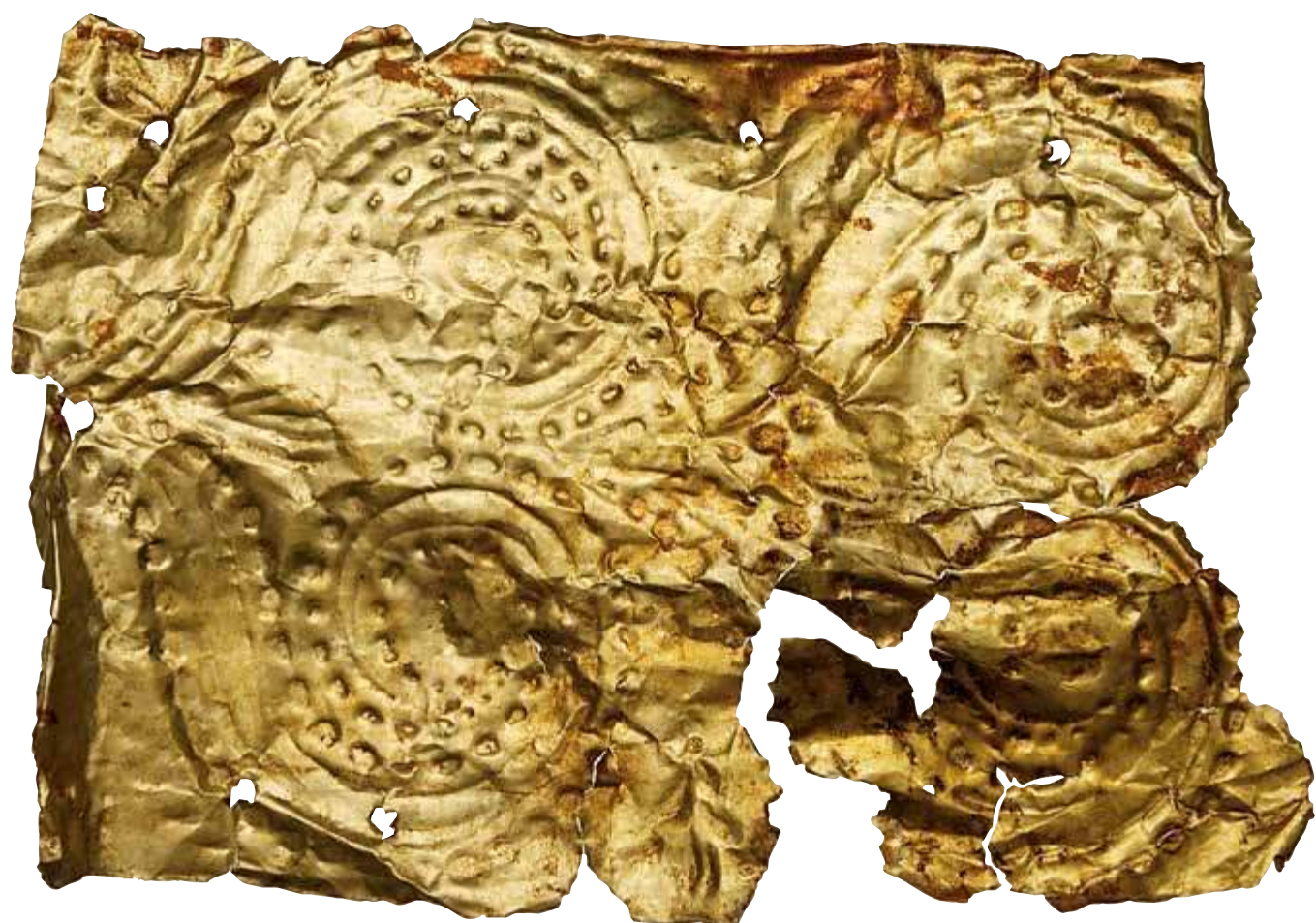
*Gold ring and inlays with repoussé decoration  
in the shape of a rosette. Chamber tomb  
cemetery at Kalkani, Tombs 513, 515.  
LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1719, 1715.*





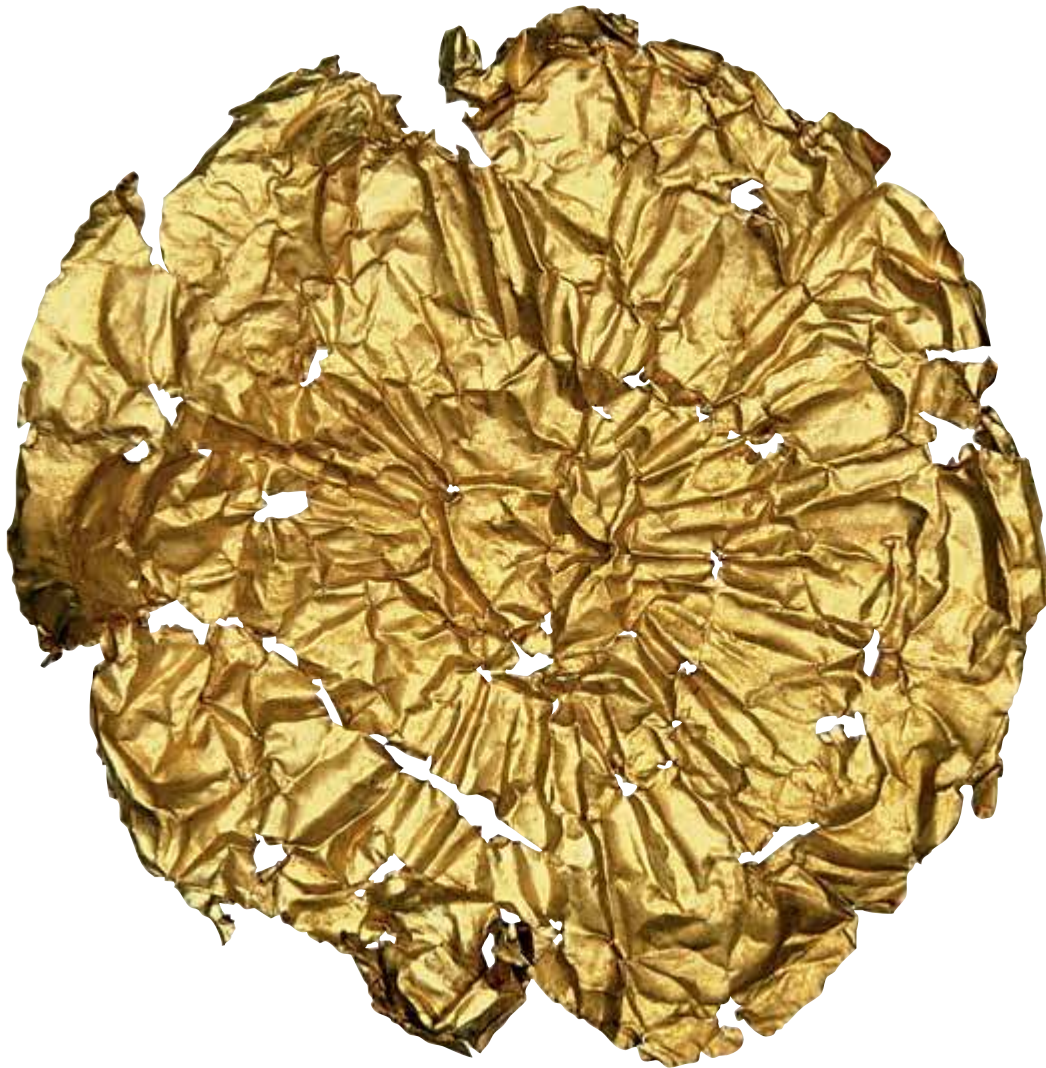


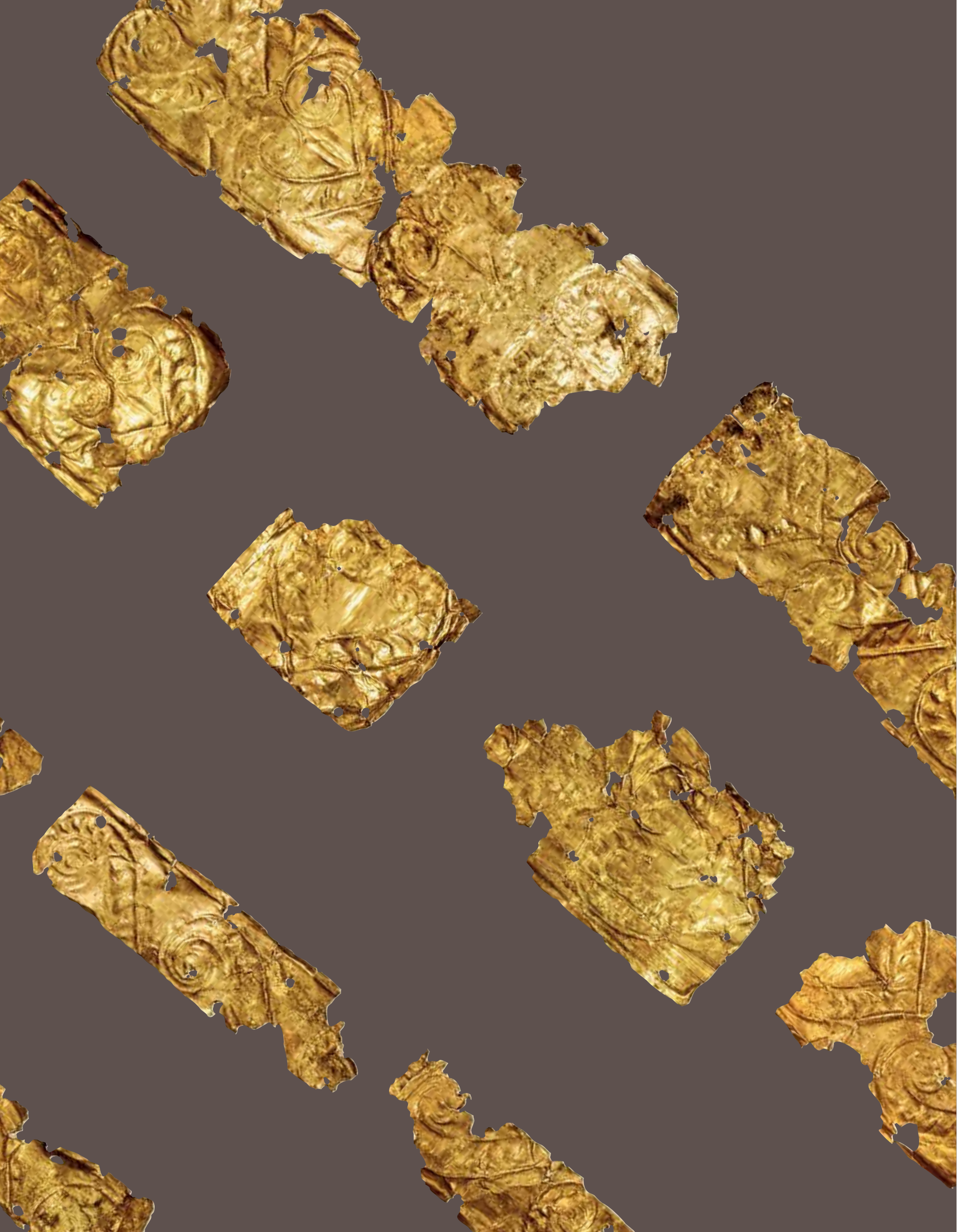
PAGES 122-123: *Gold inlays. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 2167, 2197, 2178. Gold inlays with repoussé decoration consisting of geometric or floral motifs were sewn on fabrics, as evidenced by the holes at their ends.*





PAGES. 124-127: *Gold inlays. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma and Kalkani, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).  
MM 2182, 2179, 2196, 1717.*



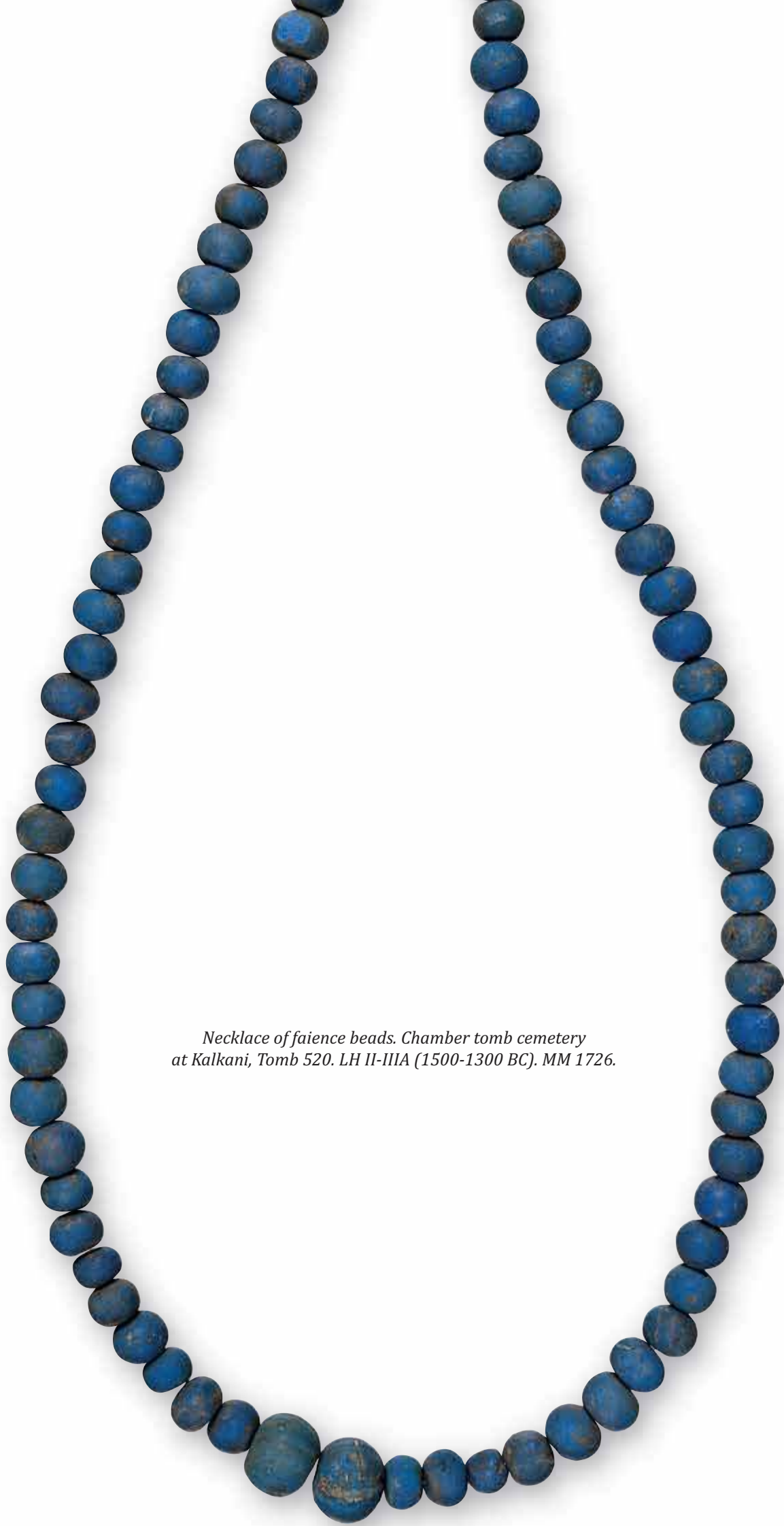








*Necklace with glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 517. LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1723.*



*Necklace of faience beads. Chamber tomb cemetery  
at Kalkani, Tomb 520. LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1726.*



*Necklace of glass and faience beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 517. LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1724.*

*Faience pendants. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH III A (1400-1300 BC). MM 723.*





*Necklace of faience beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani Cemetery, Tomb 518. LH II-III A (1500-1300 BC). MM 1725.*



*Necklace of stone conuli. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 520. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1735, 2386-2402.*



*Necklace of glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 730.*



*Necklace of glass and carnelian beads.  
Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb2.  
YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1878, 1880.*



*Necklace of glass and faience beads.  
Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani,  
Tomb 9. YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC).  
MM 1874, 1875.*



*Necklace of amethyst and rock crystal beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb V. YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC).  
MM 2427-2428.*





*Necklaces of glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VIII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 699-700.*

*Necklace of faience and glass beads. Chamber tomb  
cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 9. YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC).  
MM 1881, 1882.*





*Necklace of faience beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani Cemetery, Tomb 9. YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1879.*



*Necklace of faience and glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 2. YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1877.*



*Necklace of faience and glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 2. YE IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1877.*



*Necklace of glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 694.*



*Necklace of glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VIII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).*



*Necklace of glass beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).*





*Necklace of glass, carnelian, and rock crystal beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tombs IV, V, VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 727, 691, 709.*



*Necklaces of carnelian beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).  
MM 693, 715, 704, 712, 708.*



*Necklaces of carnelian beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 693, 715, 704.*



*Agate seal stone with a scene of a male figure and lion. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VIII. LH IIB-III A2 (1450-1300 BC). MM 1846. Lion-hunting was especially popular among Mycenaean rulers. The choice of this iconographic motif to decorate leading artworks of the era forms a unique testimony to the display of rulers' physical vigor and courage not only in war but in peacetime as well.*



*Agate seal stone with a male figure. Chamber tombs at Mycenae. 15th-14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2446.*

*Glass inlays. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma,  
Tombs VII, VIII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 731, 728.*

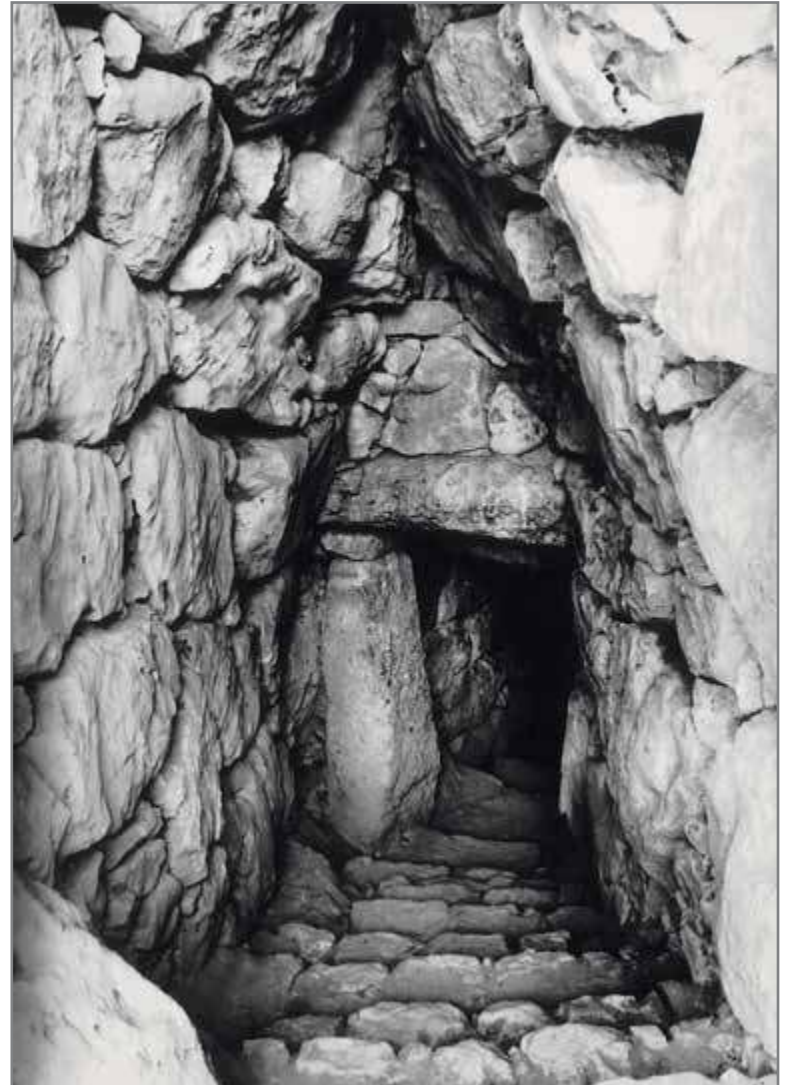
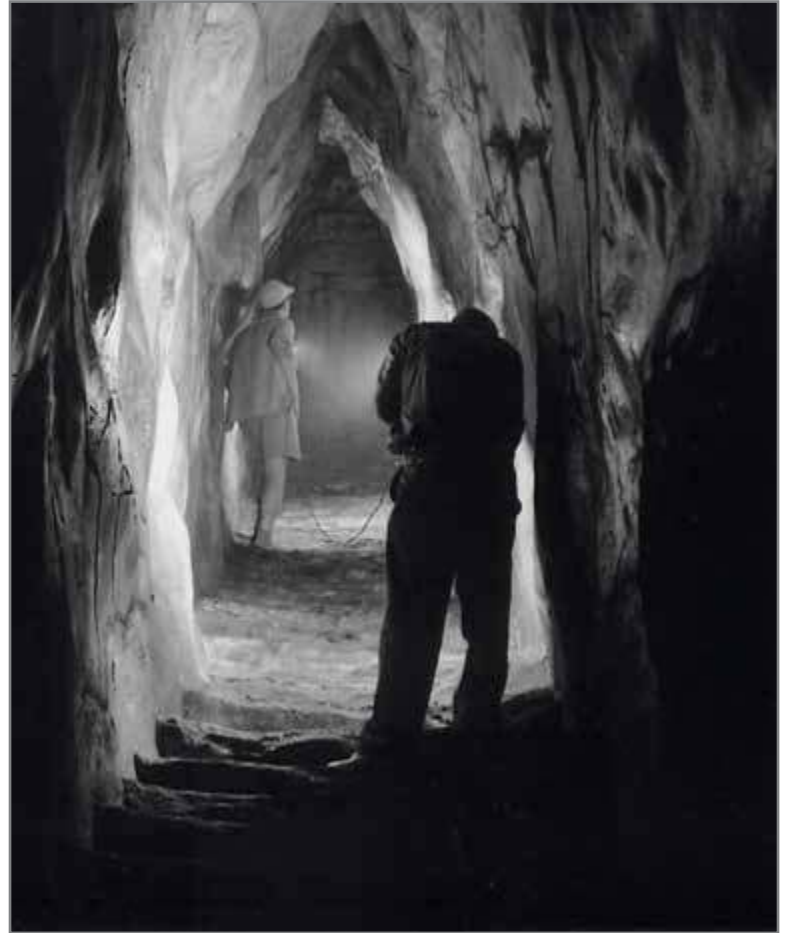








*The Underground Cistern.*





## *The Lion Gate*

During the second building phase of the wall in the mid-13th century BC, the Acropolis of Mycenae acquired a new, monumental entrance. Built of four giant conglomerate stones, it is one of the most impressive constructions of all times. The gate, which is nearly square, measures 3.10 x 2.90/3.10 meters. The threshold and lintel each weigh around 20 tons; the jambs are lighter. A wooden double-leaf door which opened inward turned on vertical elements and was secured with a horizontal post.

The gate's apical element was the limestone relief slab that covers the "relieving triangle". Two rampant facing lions, resting their front legs on two small altars, atop which rose a column of Minoan type supporting the entablature of a building. The lions' heads have not survived, but it is probable they were depicted frontally facing visitors, and that they were of some other material such as steatite, on which it would have been easier to depict their features.

The heraldic scene is strongly symbolic, given that the column refers to the palace and royal house of Mycenae, which was protected by the all-powerful king of animals. The "crest" of the Mycenaean wanakes employs a well-known theme from the iconography of earlier small-scale works like seals and seal rings. However, the uniqueness of this emblem of the palace dynasty lies in its enormous size. Although competent artisans in miniature sculpture, the Mycenaean could not boast of many large-scale sculptures.

This exceptional contrast and the uniqueness of this work, which has rightly been characterized as the earliest example of monumental architectural sculpture in European civilization, is interpreted by the prominent position occupied by the "Zeus-born" (*diogeneis*) kings of Mycenae in the brilliant palatial environment of the greater Mycenaean dominion.



## *The palace complex*

As the supreme symbol of the power of the wanax and expression of the centralized system of governance, the palace complex was built at the summit of Mycenae's acropolis. During the early periods (15th-14th c. BC), the central palace building, the Megaron, had, according to G. E. Mylonas, a north-south orientation. With the construction of wide terraces and artificial level crossings, an ambitious building program began in LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). The Megaron was oriented east-west, and reception areas, storerooms, and workshops were organized around it. In the middle of LHIIIB (1250 BC), following a catastrophic earthquake and fire, the complex assumed its final form. The palace and its annexes were destroyed by fire at the end of LH IIIB2 (1180 BC), though the area was likely also used during LH IIIC (1180-1050 BC).

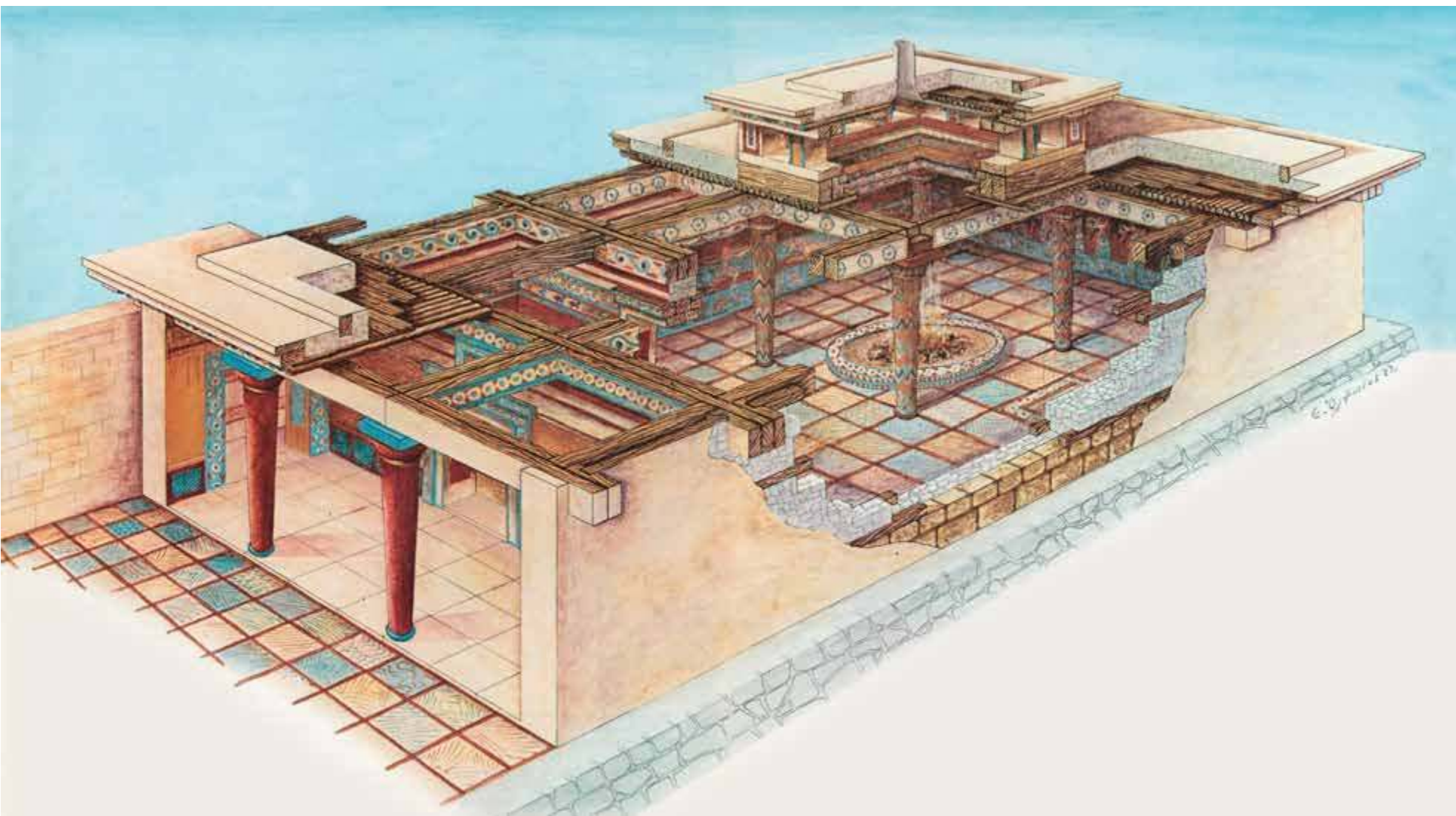
From the meagre remains preserved, it is nearly impossible for us to imagine the actual form of this building, which must have been elaborately decorated. Painted plaster covered the walls and floors, and the remaining elements not preserved today like the wooden beams and columns supporting the roof must have been polychrome and glittering. The first in a series of rooms, the Homeric great "ceremonial hall", had a floor of gypsum, a stone they had brought from Crete. The same material was also used as a border for the floor in two other rooms decorated by painted squares with a red outline and geometric shapes painted yellow, red, and dark blue on the interior. The circular hearth of the great "ceremonial hall" was covered by plaster with painted spirals and a flame-shaped ornament. From the rich painted decoration on the walls, only small pieces depicting scenes from the preparation and conducting of a battle have survived. Women at the windows of the palace are watching the outcome of the dramatic events. It is possible that the scene selected by the ruler to adorn his palace told the story of one of his own heroic adventures, like those narrated by the Homeric bards in praise of bravery, the supreme virtue of the warlike Mycenaeans.

ABOVE: *Color reproduction of the Megaron on the Acropolis of Mycenae by E. Olympios. G.E. Mylonas, Mycenae Rich in Gold.*

BELOW: *Plan of the Acropolis of Mycenae by G.E. Mylonas.*

*1. The Lion Gate. 2. The Granary. 3. The Staircase. 4. Grave Circle A. 5. The House of the "Warrior Vase". 6. The Ramp House. 7. The Great Ramp. 8. The Small Ramp. 9. The South House. 10-12. The Cult Center. 13. The Southwest Quarter. 14-21. The Palace. 22. The Artisans' Quarter. 23. The House of Columns. 24. Building Δ. 25. Building Γ. 26. The Underground Cistern. 26 α. The Southeast Postern Gate. 27. The Northeast Postern Gate. 28. Houses A and B. 29. The North Storerooms. 30. The North Gate. 31. Building M. 32. The Storerooms in the North Wall. 33. Building N.*

FOLLOWING PAGES: *Aerial view of the Acropolis of Mycenae from the west.*







### *The east wing of the Palace*

Particularly important buildings directly connected with the operation of the palace were built in the second half of the 13th century (LH IIIB2) to the east and at a lower level than the palace complex. The two-storey House of Columns, organized around a peristyle courtyard, had a megaron-shaped room and basement storage areas where pithoi, commercial stirrup jars, and a Linear B tablet were found. The large building complex differed from normal residences in terms of its size, ground plan, and the fact that it incorporated elements of palatial architecture. The Artisans' Quarter to its west included a series of rooms around an elongated courtyard in which unfinished objects, unworked raw materials, precious and semi-precious stones were found, thus confirming its use as a palace workshop for processing ivory and making jewelry. A triangular courtyard separated these complexes from Buildings C and D, which were adapted to the walls of the north and south sides. Their use is unclear although it is possible they belonged to the east wing of the palace and served functions associated with processing and storing. All these buildings were destroyed by fire in the late 13th century BC (LH IIIB2-IIIC).

### *The north storerooms*

An oblong, two-storey building with five rooms on its ground floor was built during LH IIIB2 (1250-1200 BC) facing the street leading from the north gate to the northeast expansion and House of Columns. On its ground floor, pithoi for the storage of dry food and other vases were found. Objects made of ivory, lead, bronze and semi-precious stones were stored on the second floor together with two fragments of a Linear B table which collapsed when the building was destroyed by fire in late LH IIIB2 (1200 BC) and abandoned. The finds presented in the Mycenae Museum recall the administrative control exercised by the palace's central administration.

### *The Northwest Quarter and North Slope*

At the northwest bend in the wall above the Lion Gate, Buildings N, I, and II forming the Northwest Quarter were built after the mid-13th century BC. Their basement rooms must have been used for storage. These buildings were destroyed by fire in the late 13th century BC and abandoned. Two hoards of bronze objects (weapons, a bronze talent and two violin-bow fibulae) were concealed in their ruins. To the east, Building M and around it, rooms which served as storage spaces were built on the North Slope of the Acropolis during the same era. The three rooms built in the wall on the north side were also intended for storage; beside them a fourth room had a corbelled roof like the famous galleries of Tiryns. These spaces were used until late in LH IIIC (12th c. BC).



*Fragment of an unworked agate. Artisans' Quarter.  
LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 97.*



*Glass and faience beads. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 716.*



*Conical cup with blue pigment, called "Egyptian blue". Artisans' Quarter.  
LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 67, 72-76.*

*Fragment of an ivory pyxis with  
figure-of-eight shields.  
Northeastern Extension.  
LH IIIB2-IIIC Early  
(1250-1150 BC).  
MM 1688.*



The discovery in the wider area of bronze and stone tools, raw materials, cult objects, and dry food as well as the presence of hundreds of glass and amber beads and two faience plaques with the cartouche of Pharaoh Amenhotep III may point to a mixed use for these building complexes, which would have housed workshops and storerooms like corresponding complexes on the Lower Acropolis of Tiryns.



*Fragment of a bronze ingot. North Staircase.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1355.*

*Fragment of an ivory female figurine. Artisans' Quarter.  
LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MMM 1803.*



*Unworked segment of a hippopotamus tusk.  
Cult Center area. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 223.*



*Faience plaques with hieroglyphic inscription (cartouche). North Slope. Building M. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1498-1499. The inscribed faience plaques found at Mycenae belong for the most part to the age of Amenhotep III, a Pharaoh who maintained close and friendly relations with the Achaeans. It is likely they accompanied –as a sort of “visiting card”– goods from Egypt which arrived at the royal court of Mycenae as commercial goods or royal gifts.*

### *The Southwest Quarter*

South of the Tsountas House on the southwest slope of the Acropolis, around 11 houses separated by corridors and steps were built on successive terraces in the mid-13th century BC (LH IIIB2). Most of the buildings had a purely residential use, while some which were adorned with wall paintings or had an altar and benches apparently housed cult activities. After the destructive earthquake at the end of the 13th century BC, some residences were abandoned, while others were repaired and also remained in use during the 12th century BC (LH IIIC).



*Krater. Southwest Quarter, Corridor M.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 198.*



*Krater. Southwest Quarter, Basement rooms Z1-Z2.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 197.*



*Tray. Southwest Quarter, Building Γ. LH IIIC Late (1100-1050 Bc). MM 201.*

*Amphora. Southwest Quarter, Building Γ. LH IIIC Early (1180-1150 BC). MM 203.*



*Cooking stand. Southwest Quarter, Building Γ. LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 200.*

*Miniature handmade cup. Southwest Quarter, Building Γ. LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 202.*



*Griddle-tray. Southwest Quarter, Building Γ. LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 199.*

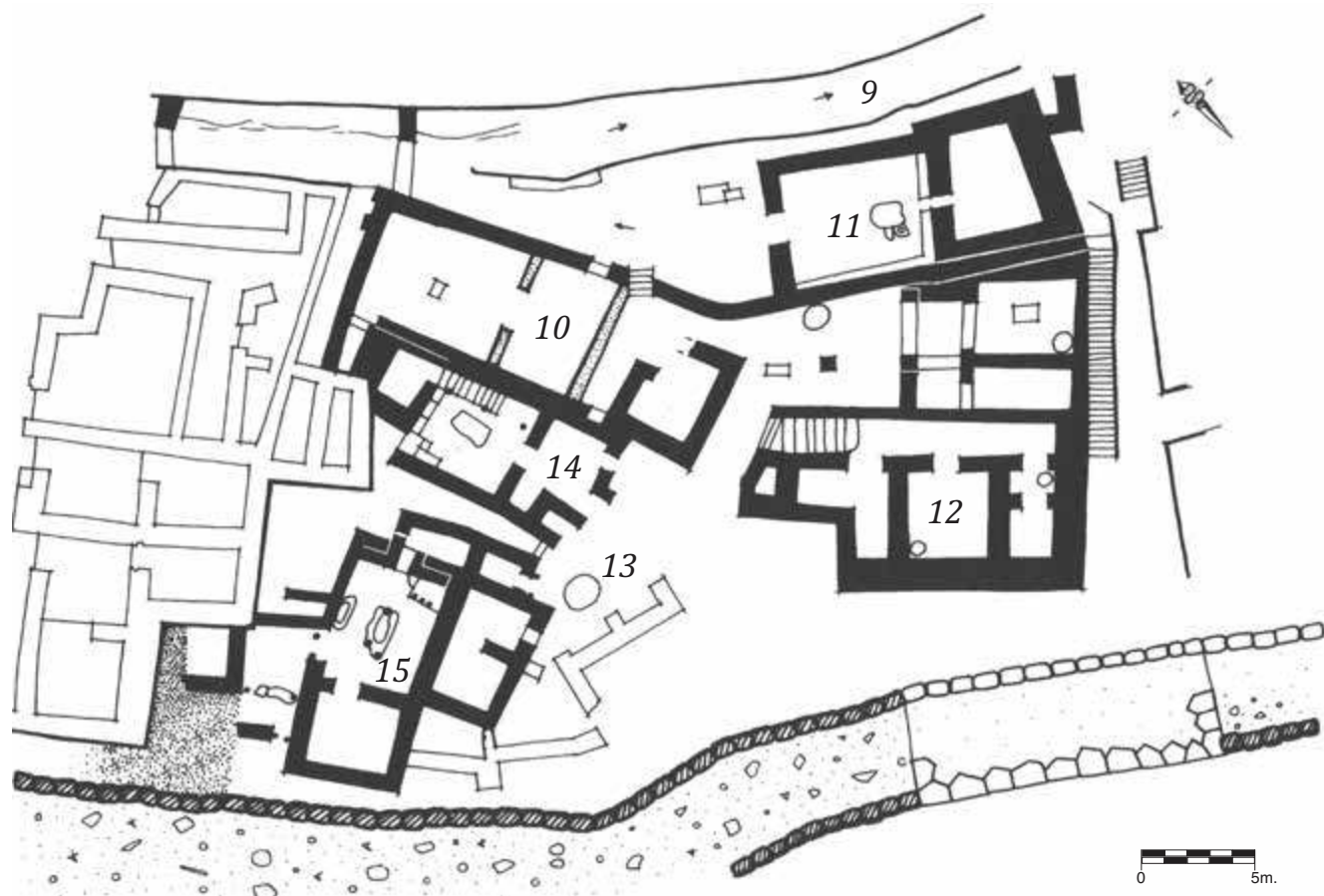
## *The Cult Center*

The Cult Center on the Acropolis of Mycenae, a complex of temples, shrines, and their annexes, was built on the southwest slope of the acropolis in the center of the residential area and at a lower level than the palace. The buildings composing it were built in the period from the late 14th to the mid-13th century BC (LH IIIB1); some must have predated the fortification wall. The main means of accessing the sanctuaries was via the processional road which led to the large staircase and palace. However, one could also enter the site from the area of the South House as well as the courtyard to the west. Access to the religious center from the processional road was through a monumental entrance leading to a courtyard with an altar, which was flanked by two buildings, the so-called Megaron (on the west) and Shrine  $\Gamma$  (on the east).

The Megaron consisted of two rooms, the inner one of which had a hearth. Shrine  $\Gamma$  was also two-roomed, with a stone for sacrifices and a horseshoe-shaped hearth in the first, and a blind second room which has been considered the sanctuary's adyton (inner shrine). This was followed at a lower level by the so-called "Tsountas' House", a two-storey building which may have served as a priests' residence. Next to it was the central courtyard of the Cult Center complex with its circular stone altar. The two most important buildings in the complex, the Temple and the Room with the Fresco Complex, faced onto this courtyard.

*The Cult Center area according to E. French, Mycenae: Agamemnon's Capital.*

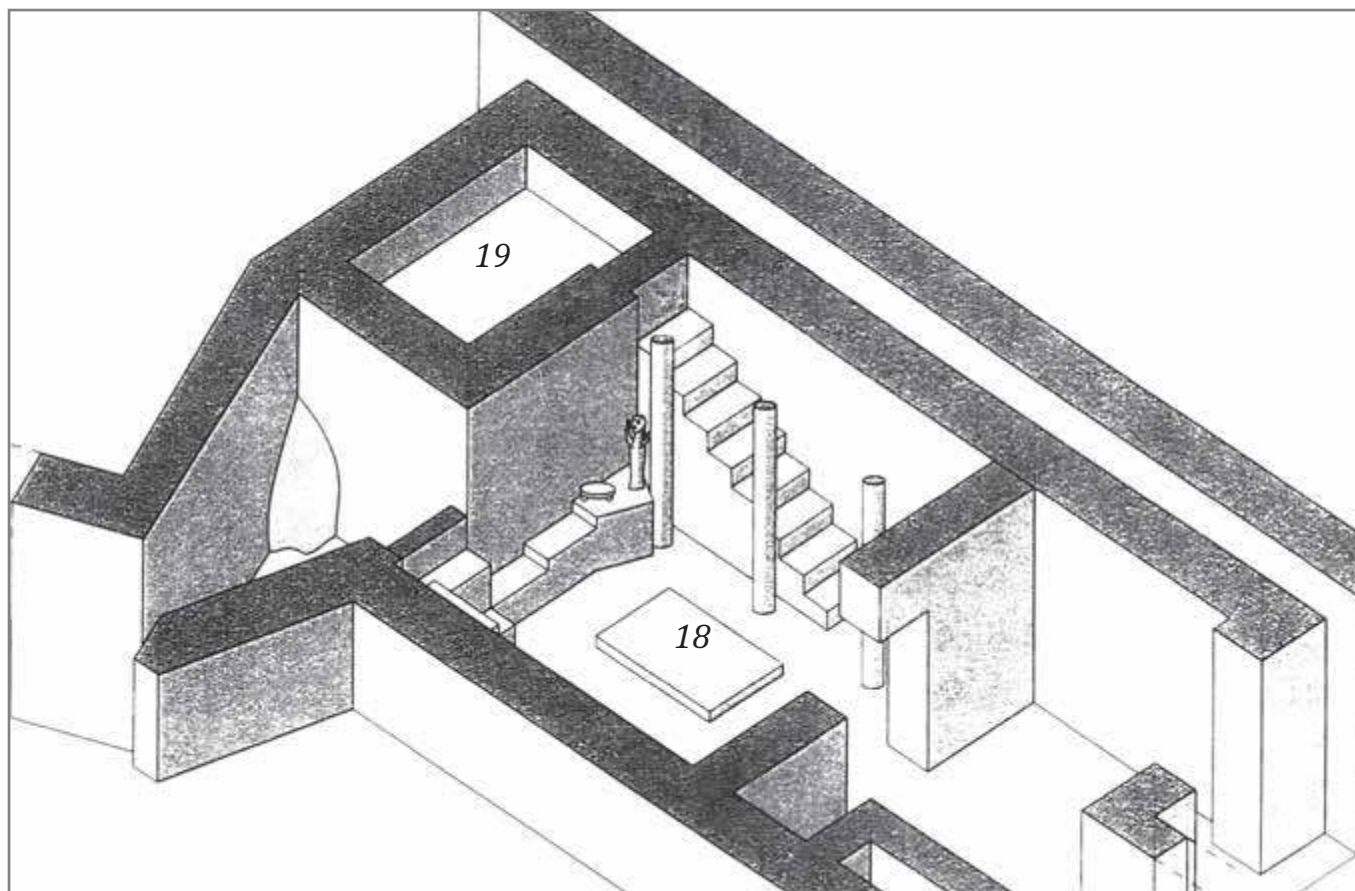
9. "Processional Way". 10. The "Megaron". 11. "Shrine Gamma". 12. The "Tsountas House". 13. The Central Courtyard. 14. The "Temple". 15. The "Room with the Fresco".



### *The Temple or "Room of the Idols"*

The Temple was one of the most interesting buildings in the Cult Center, mostly because of its important and numerous finds, among which the anthropomorphic idols hold pride of place. The main room (18) included a central hearth and a series of stepped benches along its north wall. One of the idols was found nearly intact in its original position on the east bench together with a portable clay hearth. A staircase attached to the room's east wall led to an elevated room (19) where numerous broken objects associated with cult rituals had been deposited. The idols with human features, snakes, portable hearths, vases, and a hoard of valuable items were sealed in this room as well as in an alcove in the building's northwest corner following a catastrophe in the late 13th century BC.

*Reconstruction of the "Temple". Axonometric drawing by E. French, Mycenæ: Agamemnon's Capital.*



## *The Idols*

The wheel-made anthropomorphic idols were entirely painted except for some points on the face. Their protruding eyes, ugly noses, large ears as well as their gestures lend them an especially frightening appearance. Except for some on which breasts have been depicted, or which have lovely, curly hair, most have nothing to distinguish their sex. The holes in their upper torsos may have served for the attachment of real jewelry, while their different gestures may indicate that they held objects that would have symbolized their attribute(s). The effigies of snakes depicted coiled and with raised heads as if ready to taste the offerings of the faithful are also impressive. While the Mycenaean coroplastic art could boast of an enormous production of replicas of human beings and animals (figurines), the group from the Cult Center is unique and has no exact parallel in Mycenaean art. The grotesque idols have been interpreted as depictions of female and male deities, as “apotropaic” (*αποτρόπαια*) that is, likenesses to ward off the powers of evil, as depictions of venerated ancestors, or even as depictions of believers devoting themselves to cult rituals. But whatever the idols represented, we must accept that they were employed in some of the rituals organized by the priesthood. Their uniqueness, the conscious choice of their frightening appearance, as well as the fact that they were hollow makes attractive the hypothesis that they were carried in processions supported on poles. Indeed, if such rituals took place at night accompanied by torchlight, this procession would have been particularly evocative.



*Anthropomorphic vase. The "Temple". Room 18, alcove. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 307.*





*Snake figure. The "Temple", Room 19.  
LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 283.*

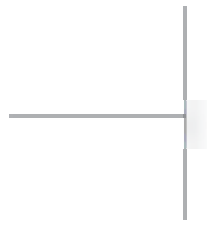
*Snake figure. The "Temple", Room 19. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 285.*



*Snake figure. The "Temple", Room 18, alcove. LH III B2  
(1250-1180 BC). MM 284.*



*Brazier. The "Temple", Room 19. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 297.*



*Anthropomorphic figure. The "Temple", Room 19. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 286.*





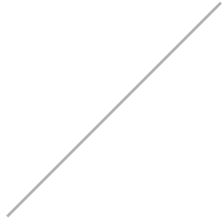


*Anthropomorphic figure. The "Temple", Room 19. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 290.*



*Anthropomorphic figure.  
The "Temple", Room 19.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC).  
MM 292.*









*Anthropomorphic figure.  
The "Temple", Room 19.  
LH IIIB2 (125-1180 BC).  
MM 289.*



*Anthropomorphic figure. The "Temple", Room 19. LH IIIB2  
(1250-1180 BC). MM 296.*







*Anthropomorphic figure holding  
an object which has been interpreted as  
a double axe. "The Temple", Room 19.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180BC). MM 295.*



*Anthropomorphic figure. The "Temple", Room 19,  
alcove. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 287.*

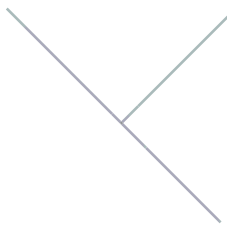


*Anthropomorphic figure and clay tripod offering table. The "Temple", Room 18. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 288, 308.*









*Anthropomorphic figure. The "Temple",  
Room 19. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 291.*



### *The Room with the Fresco Complex*

At an even lower level and towards the wall there was another building whose main room was decorated by a fresco. The central hearth, the fresco, the altar and other valuable finds make it one of Mycenae's most important discoveries. A small storage area behind the wall with the fresco contained many vases, fragments of ivory objects, and jewelry. An individual female figurine with raised arms which had been placed on a low bench at a point not visible from the door must have been used as a cult object.

The buildings of the Cult Center, which suffered serious damage in the late 13th century BC (LH IIIB2) from a powerful earthquake, were repaired and reused on a smaller scale. Shortly after this, they were destroyed by a local fire and abandoned. In the 12th century BC (LH IIIC) during the gradual decline of the acropolis, the area was taken over by houses which were in use until the end of the Mycenaean age.

### *The Fresco*

This fresco is the largest piece of Mycenaean wall painting found intact and *in situ*. Although its quality is adequate, there are examples of hastiness in the painting. Perhaps it was intended to form part of a larger composition that was never completed. The fresco and altar must have been considered as a single unit representing an architectural setting with three female figures on two different levels. At a higher level, the left side is occupied by a door frame adorned by rosettes, while the right has a female figure in a cloak holding a sword and confronting another holding a staff. Between them, two nude miniature male figures were drawn suspended. All the figures have been included in the frame of a room with a tile or brick floor and two spiral columns supporting the ceiling. At the lowest level is depicted a room with two columns and a female figure holding sheaves of corn in her upraised arms. The yellow tail and front feet are all that remain of a lion accompanying her. To the right appears an altar which was probably originally completely plastered and painted all over. The "horns" and beam ends decorating the side indicate that the fresco was a representation of the exterior of a building. All the women's garments are of Minoan and Mycenaean type.



PAGES 187-191: *The fresco. Room with the Fresco. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 385.*

PAGE 187: *Frontal view of the fresco.*

PAGES 188-189: *Detail: the "Mistress of Grain" (Sitopotnia), the goddess who protected the harvest and ensured the earth's fertility.*









*Restoration of the fresco, altar, and the objects found in the Room in the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae.*

PAGE 190: Detail: the suspended male figures.



*Detail from the decoration of the altar. Horns of consecration and roof beams from the ceiling.*

*Tripod cooking pot. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 377.*



*Amphora with a Linear B sign. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 384.*



*Stemmed bowl. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180BC). MM 330.*

*Amphora. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 376.*

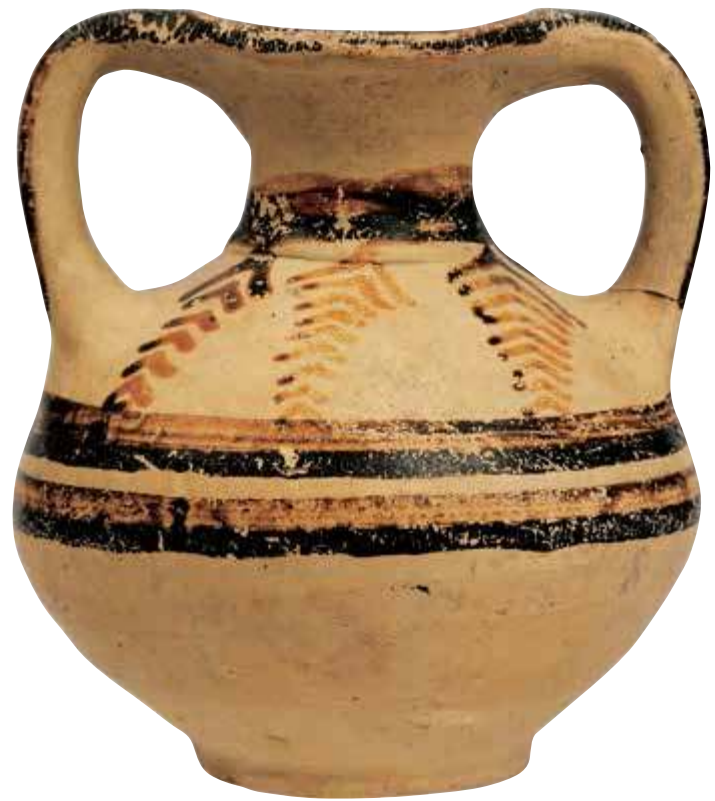
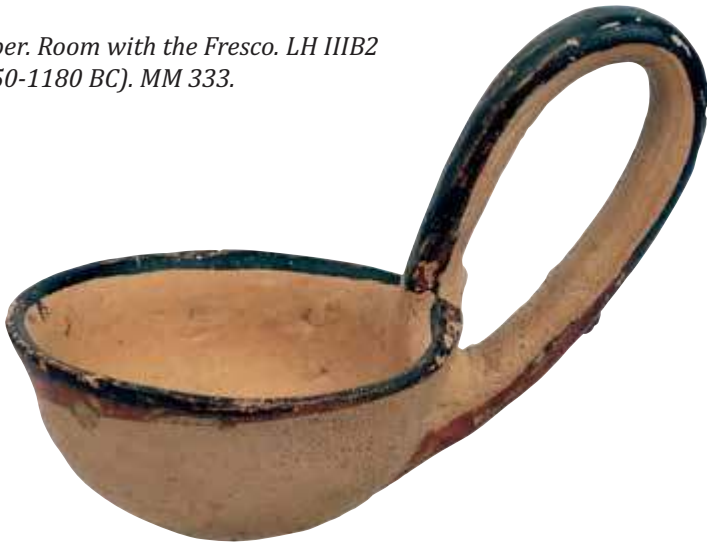




*Kylix. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 378.*



*Dipper. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 333.*



*Miniature amphora. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 334.*



*Amphora. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 383.*



*Jug. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC).  
MM 331.*



*Miniature handmade hydria. Room with the Fresco.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 374.*



*Alabastron. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2  
(1250-1180 BC). MM 332.*



*"Bird's nest" stone bowl. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 375.*



*Glass conuli and steatite spindle whorls. Room with the Fresco Complex, Room 32.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 2305-2355.*





### *The South House and Annex*

The South House, which lies directly northwest of the Cult Center, was built on an artificial terrace with strong foundations. Its construction dates in the 13th century BC, and it probably predated the western expansion of the fortification enclosure. The ground level's masonry was of stonework with a timber frame, while the walls of the two upper floors were built of mud brick and similar wooden framework. The entrance to the complex was on the west across from Grave Circle A. Like many other buildings in the wider region, the South House was destroyed by fire in the late 13th century BC, leaving very few finds that could clarify the building's use. Among these, the most notable is the amphora, an import from Canaan, indicating the extent of Mycenaean trade.



*Miniature handmade kylix. South House, Room 15.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC) MM 355.*



*Dipper. South House, Room 15. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC).  
MM 353.*



*Askos. South House, Corridor 6. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC).  
MM 356.*

*Canaanite amphora. South House, Room 1.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 362.*



*Kylix. South House, Room 15. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 354.*

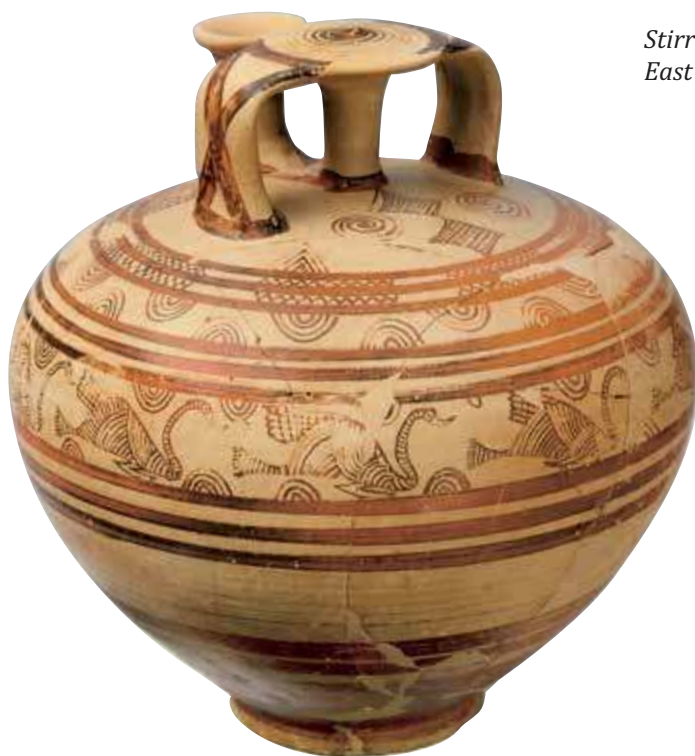
### *The House of the Warrior Vase and the Ramp House*

The two buildings between Grave Circle A and the South House were probably erected after the expansion of the fortification enclosure. The famous krater with a scene of warriors dated to the mid-12th century BC was found in the ruins of the former.

The second had a megaron-shaped room and three smaller rooms that may have served as storerooms. The fresco with the scene of “Women at the Window” was found here, while the unique female head of colored limestone interpreted as a depiction of a deity or sphinx comes from the wider area. Today, all three objects adorn the National Archaeological Museum.

### *The Granary*

A peculiar two-storey building was constructed after the second building phase of the wall (1250 BC). Carbonized remains of grain (barley, wheat, and vetch) were found in its two basement rooms in storage containers. They gave their name to the building and simultaneously provided an interpretation of its use, though according to another version it was a billet for the garrison. This name also characterized the category of pottery (Granary Class) which came from the building’s destruction level (Middle LH IIIC:1150-1100 BC).



*Stirrup jar and deep bowl with “Close Style” decoration. Granary, East Basement. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1100 BC). MM 12 and MM 22.*







*Krater with a pictorial representation of warriors.  
House of the Warrior Vase. LH IIIC Early (1180-1150 BC).  
National Archaeological Museum, Π 1426.*



*Krater with "Granary Class" decoration. Granary, above  
East Basement. LH IIIC Late (1100-1050 BC). MM 24.*



*Deep bowl. Lion Gate, from Nest near the Bath Grave.  
LH IIIC Late (1100-1050 BC). MM 9.*

## BUILDING COMPLEXES OUTSIDE THE ACROPOLIS

**O**N THE NORTH and northwest slope outside the Acropolis of Mycenae, spacious building complexes were constructed to house a series of functions above and beyond their strictly residential use. As their rich finds attest, these houses hosted workshops for processing exotic materials, storage areas for key exports such as wine, oil, and wool, as well as spaces connected with the management of products and goods. The decoration of some of them with frescos, the discovery of Linear B tablets, the great value of the stored products as well as the possibility of producing prestige items from imported raw materials attest to the direct relationship between the buildings' owners and the palace. It is quite probable that these complexes were annexes which operated outside the Acropolis both due to a shortage of living space inside the fortification as well as to facilitate trade carried out on behalf of the palace.

### *The House at Plakes*

North of the Acropolis and beside the Kokoretsa ravine, a house on two terraces with painted floors and walls was built in the second half of the 13th century (LH IIIB2). The scene of helmeted, unarmed men offering gifts from the House at Plakes is an exceptional example of miniature fresco painting. The skeletons of three adults and a child who were crushed during an earthquake that destroyed the house in the late 13th century BC were found in the basement rooms.

### *Houses in the vicinity of the Museum*

An extensive building complex, the House of the Tripods, erected on the north slope of the Acropolis, was in use from LH IIIB until early LHIIC (1300-1150 BC). Subsequently, the site was used for burials. One of the seven graves excavated had rich grave goods and probably belonged to a metallurgist who had been buried together with the inventory from his workshop. Northwest of the House of the Tripods, a building used as a workshop was found with a lifespan identical to that of the House of the Tripods.

### *The House of the Wine Merchant and the Cyclopean Terrace Building*

The House of the Wine Merchant was built northwest of the Acropolis in the second half of the 14th century (LH IIIA2). The building acquired its name from the 50 stirrup jars found there which were probably used for exporting wine.

In early LH IIIB (early 13th c. BC), the Cyclopean Terrace Building was constructed atop the ruins of the house. The later building consisted of the North and South Megaron. Built as terraces, with strong Cyclopean masonry, they were destroyed by fire, probably at the end of the same period.

### *The Petsas House*

Northeast of the House of the Wine Merchant, The Petsas House, which took its name from that of its excavator, was built in the second half of the 14th century (LH IIIA2). It had two wings, one of which had basement rooms which served as storerooms. Around 500 unused vases were found stored there, neatly arranged by shape on shelves. In addition to a large number of figurines, part of a Linear B clay tablet was found which is considered to be the oldest such tablet in mainland Greece. These houses were destroyed by fire in the late 14th century.



*Animal figurine, deer. Petsas House, Room F. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 132.*

*Animal figurine, bull. Petsas House. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 133.*





*Piriform jars. Petsas House, Room A. LH IIIA2  
(1350-1300 BC). MM 124 and MM 125.*



*Stirrup jars. Petsas House, Room A. LH IIIA2  
(1350-1300 BC). MM 130 and MM 131.*



*Stirrup jar. House of the Wine Merchant.  
LH IIIA2-IIIB1 (1350-1250 BC). MM 117.*

*Stirrup jar. House of the Wine Merchant LH IIIA1-IIIB1  
(1350-1250 BC). MM 116.*



### *The House of the Oil Merchant Group*

A building complex consisting of four houses was built in the early 13th century BC (LH IIIB1) on the slope west of the main road leading to the Acropolis. It operated as an annex to the central palace administration and was destroyed by fire in the mid-13th century BC.

The earliest building, the West House, probably oversaw the entire complex; in addition to its residential use, it housed administrative functions as attested by the Linear B tablets which contained information about the feeding of staff.

The House of Shields a ground-floor building with a unique ground plan, took its name from the ivory replicas and relief plaques with “figure-of-eight” shields found there. It was used as a storage place for exotic materials, a transit hub, and a furniture workshop, as evidenced by the large number of stone vases, processed ivory fragments, and faience objects found there.

The ground floor of the two-storey House of the Oil Merchant with its monumental façade was used for the storage of oil and wool, while the houses’ private apartments and the archive of Linear B tablets were located on the upper floor. The many stirrup jars of Cretan provenance confirm large-scale trade with the Minoans.

The House of the Sphinxes, which was also two-storied, had a similar use to that of the House of Shields, while simultaneously also housing administrative functions, as confirmed by the inscribed clay sealings and Linear B tablets. The building’s name is owed to ivory plaques with scenes of sphinxes.



*Spouted conical bowl. House of the Oil Merchant.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 179.*



*Stone mortar and pestle. House of the Sphinxes.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC) MM 156, 157.*



*Amphora. West House. LH IIIB1  
(1300-1250 BC). MM 2356.*



*Stirrup jar. House of the Oil Merchant. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC).  
MM 853.*



*Stirrup jar. House of the Oil Merchant. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC).  
MM 852.*



*Stirrup jar. House of the  
Oil Merchant.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC).  
MM 178.*



### *The stone vases from the House of Shields*

Stone vases were one of the luxury items used by the palaces' ruling class to underscore their social class and prestige. The original inspiration for the use of stone vases was owed to Egypt. The first Egyptian stone vases arrived on Crete in the 16th and 15th centuries BC. These were the renowned *alabastra* which took their name from the homonymous yellowish stone and which were in all likelihood sent by the Egyptian Pharaohs as gifts to Minoan rulers. Comparable vases found in mainland Greece at Vapheio and the Argive Heraion appear to have arrived via Crete. The Minoans particularly developed the art of processing stone—the lapidary art—and dared to copy Egyptian shapes, using equally-impressive local stones like gabbro and dolomitic marble. Moreover, there were quite a few cases where artisans in Minoan Crete retrofitted Egyptian vases into shapes known in their own regions, and which they liked better.

It would seem that Mycenaean lapidaries in the palatial centers, who created outstanding art works in carrying out commission for their rulers, learned the art from these experienced artists. Employing local stones such as ophite (serpentine), limestone, and amygdaloid (conglomerate), they imitated purely Egyptian vessels like that which resembles a bird's nest, or constructed shapes adapted to the Mycenaean repertoire. The exquisite collection of these vases with their shiny surfaces is an unalloyed creation of Mycenaean palace artists in the 13th century BC which demonstrates the technical virtuosity of these specialist artists. Certainly the sculptors of miniature seal stones as well as the leading artists in the field who made the monumental sculpture of the Lion Gate—and in doing so, gave European civilization its first “coat of arms”—belonged to this broader professional category.

*“Bird's nest” stone bowl. House of Shields,  
West Room. LH III B1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 147.*





*Stone vase with lid. House of Shields, West Room.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 149.*



*Stone alabastron with lid. House of Shields, West Room.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 152.*



*Stone alabastron with lid. House of Shields, West Room.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 146.*



*"Bird's nest" stone bowl. House of Shields, West Room. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC).  
MM 145.*



*"Bird's nest" stone bowl. House of Shields, West Room. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC).  
MM 148.*

## *Ivory artifacts*

The head of the warrior wearing a boar's tusk helmet, the ivory plaques with relief scenes of a "figure-of-eight shield" which served as revetments for the luxurious wooden furniture from the House of Shields, as well as the plaque with the scene of heraldic sphinxes which gave its name to the House of the Sphinxes attest to the processing of this exotic material by highly-specialized artisans who worked on behalf of the palace. These ornate ivory finds may be compared with other important works intended for cult use such as the lion and the male portrait of a divinity from the Cult Center, the plaque of a goddess seated on a rock from the Acropolis of Mycenae, as well as with the renowned figurine of a sphinx from the Athenian Acropolis. The same artists would also have made the ivory toiletry accessories for the coquettish Mycenaean women: elegant combs, bronze mirror handles, and pyxides. The ivory-workers of Mycenae were taught their art by the Minoans, as the renowned ivory triad dating to the 15th century BC from the palace area, the work of a great Minoan artist, attests. However, Mycenaean craftsmen gradually adapted their repertoire to purely Mycenaean symbols like shields or boar's tusk helmets, and when they settled on Crete, they accompanied nobles who died and were buried there with comparable works, as witnessed by a head of this type found in Chania.

The ivory-working workshop at Mycenae may be compared only with that of the kingdom of Thebes and its masterpieces such as the sceptre handle, the throne legs, and the *pyxis* with the heraldic sphinxes.

## *The Panagia Houses*

North of the "Treasury of Atreus" on the hill of Panagia, a complex of three houses was built in the early 13th century BC (LH IIIB1) which form a typical example of simple houses in the Mycenaean age. Rooms were arrayed on either side of a corridor; on one side were rooms having a tripartite arrangement while on the other was a series of uniform storages areas. These houses were destroyed by an earthquake which crushed a middle-aged woman beneath the rubble. In contrast to House I, Houses II and III were repaired and used for a short time, until House II was destroyed by fire. House III continued in use until the end of LH IIIB2 (1200 BC). In addition to the usual clay vessels, animal figurines and miniature vases, an ivory female figurine as well as an exceptionally fine clay model of a boot were found here.

*Ivory plaque. House of the Sphinxes. 13th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 7526.  
One of the masterpieces of the ivory workshop which operated in the House of the Sphinxes depicts two heraldically-posed sphinxes stepping on a column with their front paws and on horns of consecration with their rear ones. Superb workmanship and iconography owed to Eastern influences.*





*Ivory plaque. Acropolis of Mycenae. 15th-14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 5897. The seated, bare-breasted female figure in Minoan dress and ornate necklace probably depicts a deity.*

*Ivory lily-shaped inlays. Cult Center area.  
LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 222.*



*Ivory inlay with bee.  
Southwest Quarter.  
LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC).  
MM 2085.*



*Ivory female figurine. North Slope, Building M.  
LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1303.*

*Ivory female figurine, fragment.  
Panagia Ridge, House II.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 195.*



*Ivory seated male figurine. The "Temple", Room 19, "Deposit in pot". LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 243. The miniature masterpieces of Mycenaean ivory-carving were found with other objects of exotic materials (amber, faience, glass, rock crystal and steatite) in a small vase kept in the sealed Room 19 of the "Temple". Apparently, they formed a "hoard" of objects used in rituals at Cult Center.*



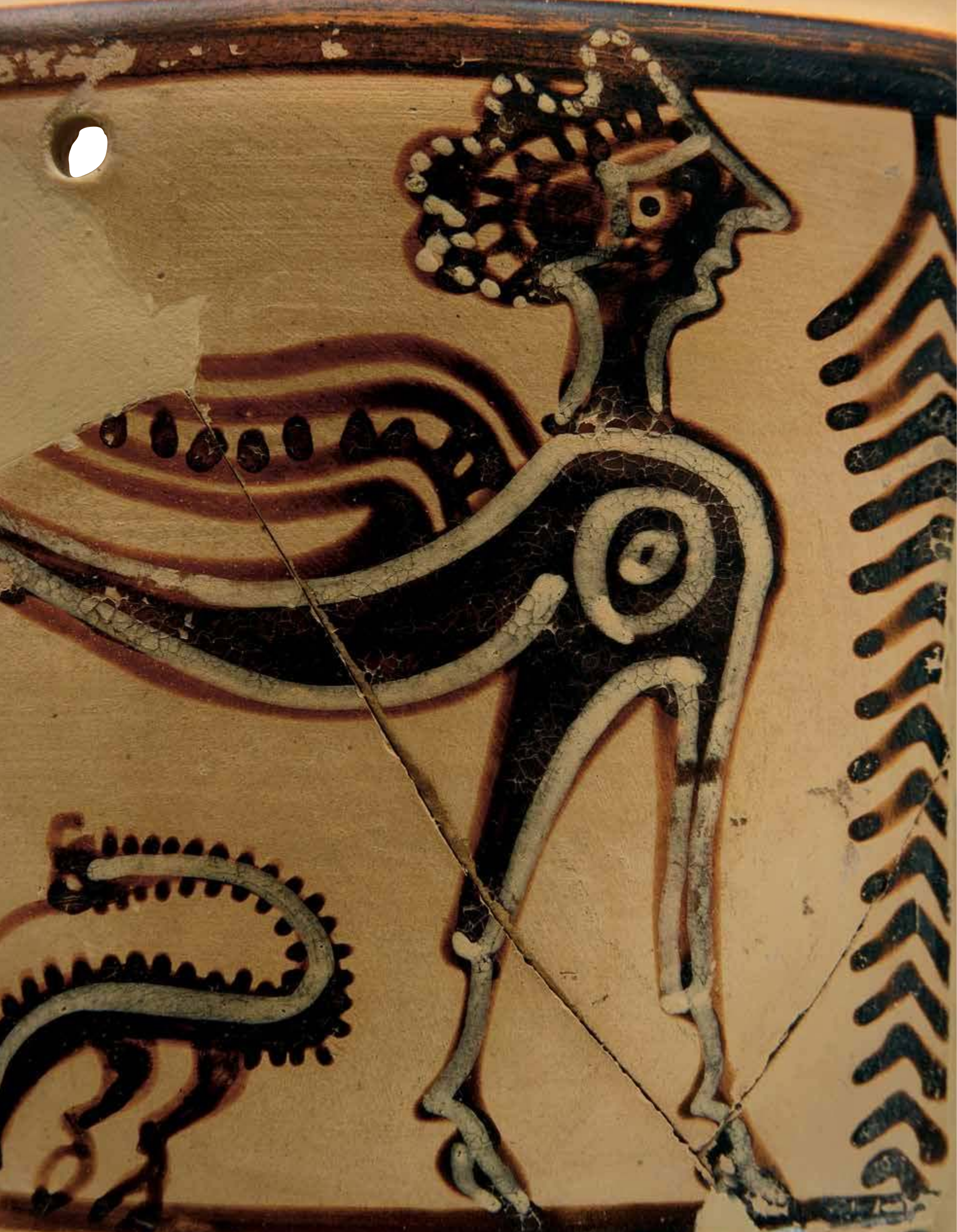
*Ivory hand. The "Temple", Room 19  
"Deposit in pot". LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC).  
MM 234.*



*Ivory group carved in the round, the so-called "ivory triad" ("sacred triad"). Acropolis of Mycenae, Palace area. 15th-14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 7711. This ivory sculpture, which is unique in conception and superbly-executed, has no comparable parallel in Mycenaean art. It depicts two seated women and a young boy leaning on their knees. The bare-breasted women are covered by a protective cloak and embrace the boy. This scene belongs to the realm of divine depictions, and is perhaps a precursor to the triad of historical times depicting Demeter, Kore and Iacchos.*







## THE POST-PALATIAL PERIOD

**M**YCENAEAN society during the Palatial Period (14th-13th c. BC) had a hierarchical structure, at the summit of which was the supreme ruler, the wanax. With the help of officials, he exercised religious and secular authority (with a division of responsibilities) within the limits of his territory. Through a centralized bureaucratic system, authorized palace officials checked and recorded the production and trading of products with the help of the clay Linear B tablets, seals, and clay sealings.

In parallel, professionals and merchants supported the ruling class, while permanent military forces were responsible for the safety of the federal states in Mycenaean territory. In addition to the upper classes, tied workers as well as slaves must have contributed decisively to the creation of the achievements of Mycenaean civilization.

The power of the Mycenaeans, however, was due to the exploitation of production through trade, which reached its zenith during the 14th century BC when the rulers acquired trading partners in all the markets of the eastern Mediterranean. Their seat, the frequently-fortified palace complex, was monumental in form, decorated by elaborate frescoes, and comprised the place where the ruling class's administrative and religious activities were practiced. The rulers' special social position was expressed primarily by prestige objects constructed of exotic and precious materials by specialist artisans in the palace. The Homeric epics reflect the Mycenaeans' heroic ideals, which are attested by the archaeological finds. The two-wheeled chariot and defensive and offensive weapons express the nature of this class of rulers, which engaged in hunting, contests, and war.

The hypertrophied system of administration in the Palatial Period, which functioned very successfully and yielded impressive results for around two centuries, gradually collapsed in the 13th century BC as a consequence of a series of changes which disturbed the balance of the palace world and led to a period of limited economic possibilities and clear tendencies to become detached from palatial guardianship.

*Pyxis with sphinx (detail). Cult Center area. LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 1973.*

The period “after the palaces” has been associated with a climate of insecurity and unrest which is implicit in pictorial representations with similar content, and which probably reflect hostilities between rulers. This period is also characterized by the abandonment of a large number of settlements, the desertion of the countryside, and mass movements to the islands of the Ionian and the Aegean, to Crete, Cyprus, and to other safe regions in the eastern Mediterranean.

In addition to the fact that a new form of central authority supported and directed developments both in the former palace centers which continued to be inhabited as well as in the new centers which rose to prominence during the 12th century, a series of changes marked the exit from the palace lifestyle and centralized system of governance. Together with the nature of the wanax, writing, the higher art forms and building prowess declined. Religious elements and rituals as well as the prestige items of rulers became rarer and rarer, and major changes in burial customs were observed.

Pylos, the important unfortified palace center in Messenia, was destroyed around the end of the 13th century BC, possibly within the context of a military confrontation that might have been associated with a confirmed climate of tension between the Mycenaean states, which were attempting to ensure their share of continually-decreasing natural resources. At the same time, small settlements were abandoned en masse without any concentration of inhabitants in some important Palatial Period center or the creation of a new center that would replace Pylos. The same fate appears to have befallen densely-settled Lakonia, where a discernible decline of regions which continued to be inhabited was observed in the 12th century BC.

In the Argolid on the contrary, although all the major palace centers suffered significant damage which is attributed (though not always securely) to earthquakes and subsequent fires, continued habitation has been found, even if with a completely different organization, as well as examples of reconstruction.

At Mycenae a series of disasters are attested during the 12th century BC which in most cases were due to fires possibly associated with intense and repeated periodic seismic activity. The Acropolis and surrounding area outside the walls continued to be inhabited, but nothing any longer recalled the picture afforded by the Palatial Period. The surroundings of the Religious Center were covered by the ruins of burned and collapsed buildings, but it was reused, some new buildings were constructed in the large courtyard of the palace and the area of the House of Columns, while the sturdy Granary building, which was destroyed in mid-LH IIIC (1150-1100 BC), continued in use.

The cemeteries of chamber tombs continued in use, confirming with the number of burials—now accompanied by more ceramic grave goods—the presence of a sizable population in the area during the Post-Palatial Period. In parallel, some changes are observed in burial customs. The famous “Warrior

*Amphoriskos. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 515.  
LH IIC Early (1180-1150 BC). MM 1029.*



*Stirrup jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani,  
Tomb 527. LH IIC Early (1180-1150 BC). MM 1074.*



Vase” found in the fill of the house of this name as well as an elaborately-illustrated vase from the area of the Cult Center have been considered as the markers of individual tombs probably opened in the deep and consistent debris of the destruction layers as harbingers of a type of burial which would become established in historical times. One very interesting phenomenon is the appearance of a tumulus in the area of Chania 2.5 kilometers southwest of Mycenae’s acropolis which attests for the first time to the custom of cremation in the Argolid.

Tiryns accepted a large population which abandoned other destroyed centers and settled at the site of the Lower City. Both on the Lower Acropolis and in the Lower City outside the fortification walls, Tiryns could boast of systematic rebuilding in the 12th century BC, making it perhaps the largest settlement in Greece in this period. More specifically, at the site of the Lower Acropolis, building complexes were used as houses as well as areas which functioned as workshops, storerooms, and sanctuaries. The organization of the settlement on the Lower Acropolis varied sharply before and after the major earthquake at the end of the 13th century BC. The site of densely-built Palatial Period complexes organized along paths, some of them two-storied, was occupied in the 12th century BC by one-storey houses lacking a regular arrangement which appeared in isolation in large, open space. The only reminder here of past glory was a megaron-shaped building (room 110a) in which cult objects (including impressive idols) were found.

On the other hand, the enlargement of the settlement outside the walls in combination with the abandonment of smaller sites around Tiryns may be interpreted as a certain disposition for “synoecism” in the immediate environment of the once-mighty acropolis.

Tiryns was also the only site in Greece at which there was an attempt to repair the palace Megaron following the destruction of 1200 BC. At that time, an elongated building was constructed among its ruins in such a way as to include the throne and hearth, leading symbols of the earlier palatial authority, and the altar in the central courtyard of the palace was repaired. It is obvious that the leaders of the new order wished in this way to legitimize their leading position, by underscoring their direct relation with their illustrious ancestors.

Tiryns retained or regained its contacts with the outside world immediately following the destruction. The excavation finds confirm relations and contacts with Italy, Crete, Cyprus, and the Near East.

Arcadia, Achaea, and Elis, areas without former palace centers, displayed pronounced growth during the 12th century BC, both in settlements (Aigeira, Teichos Dymaion) as well as in the numerous ceme-

teries of chamber tombs which impress us with their rich burials of “warriors”. A new ruling class found in this period the chance to demonstrate its character and strength which in the earlier palatial period had remained in the shadow of the ruling houses of the Argolid and Messenia.

The phenomenon of the collapse of the major palace centers, the concentration of population at sites of lesser importance and/or the founding of new settlements which would become especially dynamic during the 12th century BC is also observed in regions of the Mycenaean world outside the Peloponnese. Thus, Thebes did not especially recover following the catastrophe; in contrast, Lefkandi on Euboea, freed of its dependence on the great palace center, developed at Xeropolis a residential core with a careful design and organization which would make it an especially important site with continuity down to historical times.

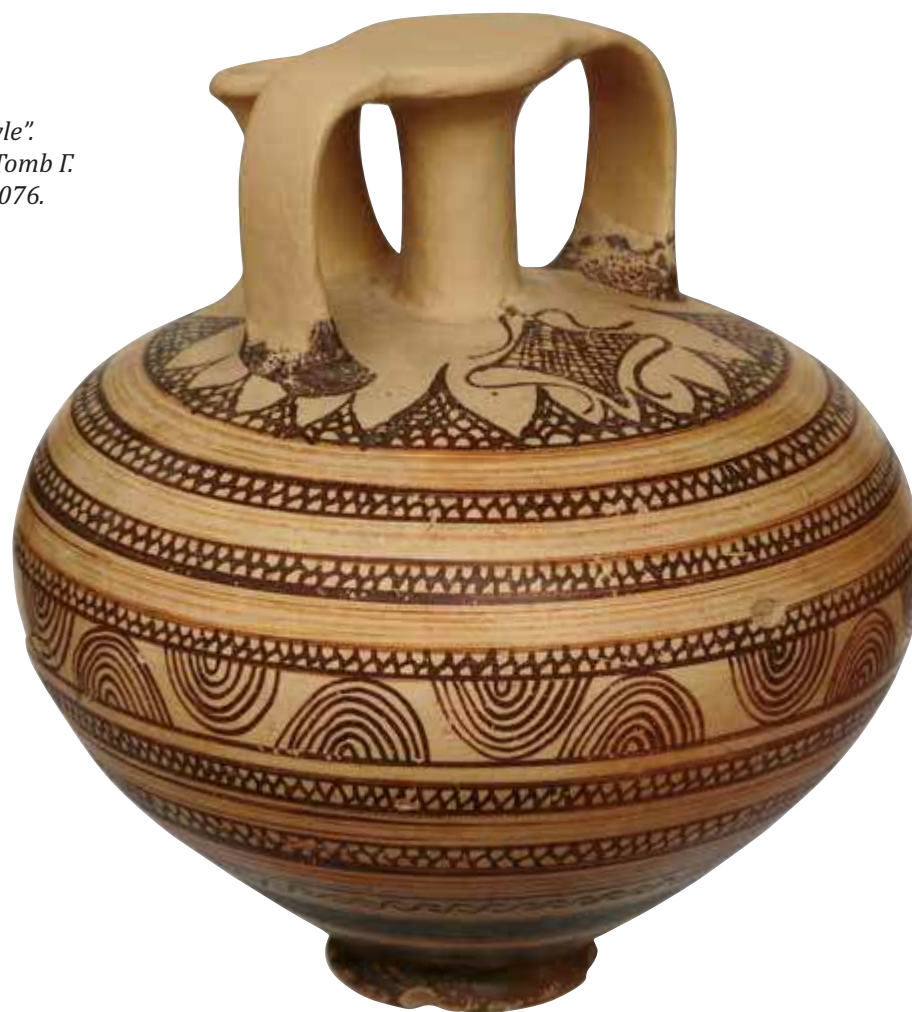
Furthermore, a series of coastal sites from Attica to the Dodecanese would suggest a sea route connecting mainland Greece with Cyprus and the Near East, and perhaps Egypt and Syria. The special role played by these regions in the 12th century BC is confirmed by the finds from the cemetery at Perati, the fortress-like building at Koukounaries on Paros, the settlement and the cemeteries on Naxos, and the rich cemeteries of the Dodecanese on Kos and Rhodes.

The collapse of the Mycenaean palatial system of governance and the end of this brilliant civilization of Greek prehistory has at times been attributed to various causes. Natural disasters and climate changes, social unrest in Mycenaean territory as well as invasions by foreign tribes identified as the Dorians of Greek written tradition and/or the “Sea Peoples” of the Egyptian sources, the collapse of the Hittite Empire in the East and the consequent loss of trading partners for the Mycenaeans appear to have brought about cumulative blows to the over-centralized system of governance, which failed to confront the crisis effectively.

The final glimmer of glory in a few once-glorious centers and new settlements was most likely owed to the dynamics of the merchant and seamen classes, which when freed of the guardianship of the wanax gradually shaped a new social, political, and economic reality which led to the founding of the city-state in historical times. One testament to these developments was the almost-exclusive dispersion of new centers along the coasts and the creation of sea routes leading primarily to the region long known for obtaining raw materials in the eastern Mediterranean.



*Pyxis with a representation of a sphinx. Cult Center area. LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 1973. Sphinxes were fantastic beings of Eastern inspiration which had the body of a winged lion and the head of a woman. The Mycenae sphinx, with its elegant body and details of added white, was an exceptionally fine example of the Mycenaean pictorial style which confirms that at least some myths of the historical period had already been created in the Mycenaean age.*



*Stirrup jar decorated in the "Close Style". Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb I. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1100BC). MM 1076.*





*Carinated krater decorated with added white. Cult Center Area. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1100 BC). MM 1079.*

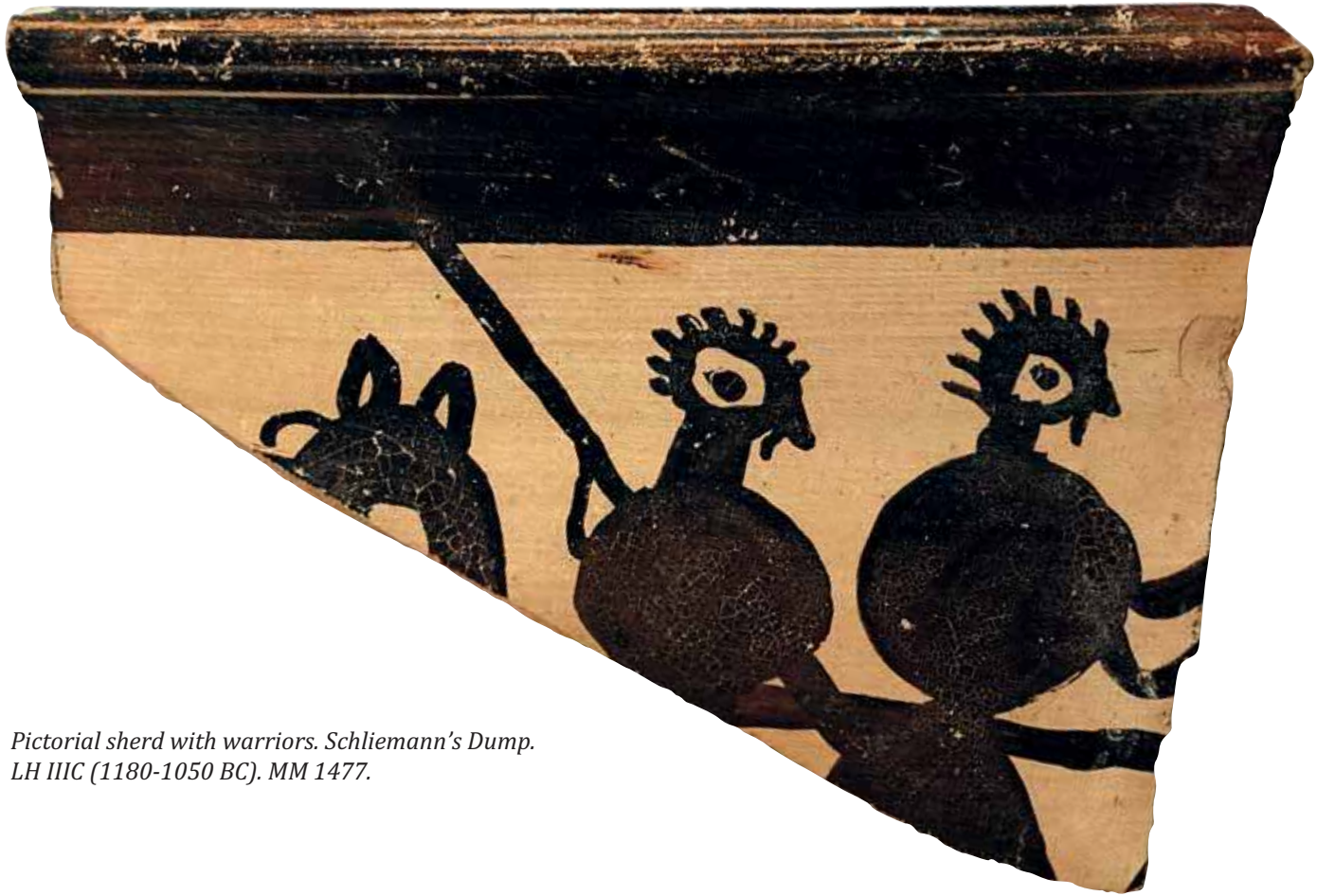


*Krater sherd decorated in the "Close Style". Cult Center Area. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1100BC). MM 2241.*





*Krater sherds with a pictorial representation. A chariot and riders are shown, probably taking part in a hunt rather than in a battle. Southwest Quarter. LH III B2-III C (1250-1050 BC). MM 2257.*



*Pictorial sherd with warriors. Schliemann's Dump.  
LH IIIC (1180-1050 BC). MM 1477.*



*Pictorial sherd with charioteer. Hellenistic  
Tower area. LH IIIC (1180-1050 BC). MM 1480.*



*Pictorial sherd with boxer.  
Cult Center area. LH IIIA2-III B  
(1350-1180 BC). MM 2256.*



## HISTORICAL TIMES

**D**ESPITE the modest recovery presented in the mid-12th century BC, it would appear that the system which replaced the Mycenaean regime was not particularly stable. During the years which followed and which marked the start of historical times, society attempted to survive by simple means, as reflected in the meager remains of material culture.

During the Submycenaean and Protogeometric periods (1050-900 BC), makeshift houses built atop the voluminous fill created by the ruins of Mycenaean buildings inside and outside the acropolis of Mycenae must have housed the few remaining residents. Their isolated graves, intended for a single burial, have been found scattered both within and beyond the acropolis. Clearly during these early years there was no sort of urban organization; people lived in poor dwellings and buried their dead near their houses. Simple geometric designs adorned the humble vases which accompanied the dead on their eternal journey. Metal fibulas and pins attest to the change from the sewn, ornate Mycenaean garments to Dorian capes. More rarely, weapons accompanied the deceased.

One exception was a grave with rich funerary gifts opened up with another six in the ruins of a building complex on the north slope outside the acropolis at the site of today's museum. It was in used from LH IIIB to LH IIIC Early period (1300-1150 BC). The Tomb of the Tripods, which took its name from the two bronze tripods which covered it as grave markers, held the burial of a thirty-year-old male. Twenty bronze double axes which had never been used formed two compact layers before the deceased's feet. A bronze wedge-shaped tool rare in the Aegean for which the model should be sought in Central and Northern Europe had been deposited near his hand.

Testimony of a similar category is provided by the burial in an enormous pithos found in the ruins of the Cyclopean Terrace Building relatively near the Tomb of the Tripods. The pithos, with its elaborate attached and incised decoration had no parallels in the Argolid. It contained an adult skeleton and three vases dating to different periods, probably ranging from the 14th to the 10th century BC.

*Relief of the head of a female figure, fragment. Acropolis of Mycenae, from the Archaic temple area. Late 7th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, 2869. This relief in the Late Daedalic style has been attributed to the sculptural decoration of the temple built on the summit of the Acropolis. It is believed to depict the goddess Hera in the nuptial gesture of revealing herself.*

The construction of a costly burial vase and rich grave goods including the presence of heirlooms differentiate these graves from other, contemporary ones. It seems that their owners, living through the difficult times following the glorious palatial period, wishing to highlight their economic and social distinction, pursued a dominant position in the new order by invoking their relationship to renowned ancestors.

Residential remains in the area of the Mycenaean Megaron and an apsidal house east of the House of the Oil Merchant have been preserved from the Geometric Age (900-700 BC). The graves of this era were now found only outside the acropolis, chiefly on the west slope, but they still did not form an organized cemetery.

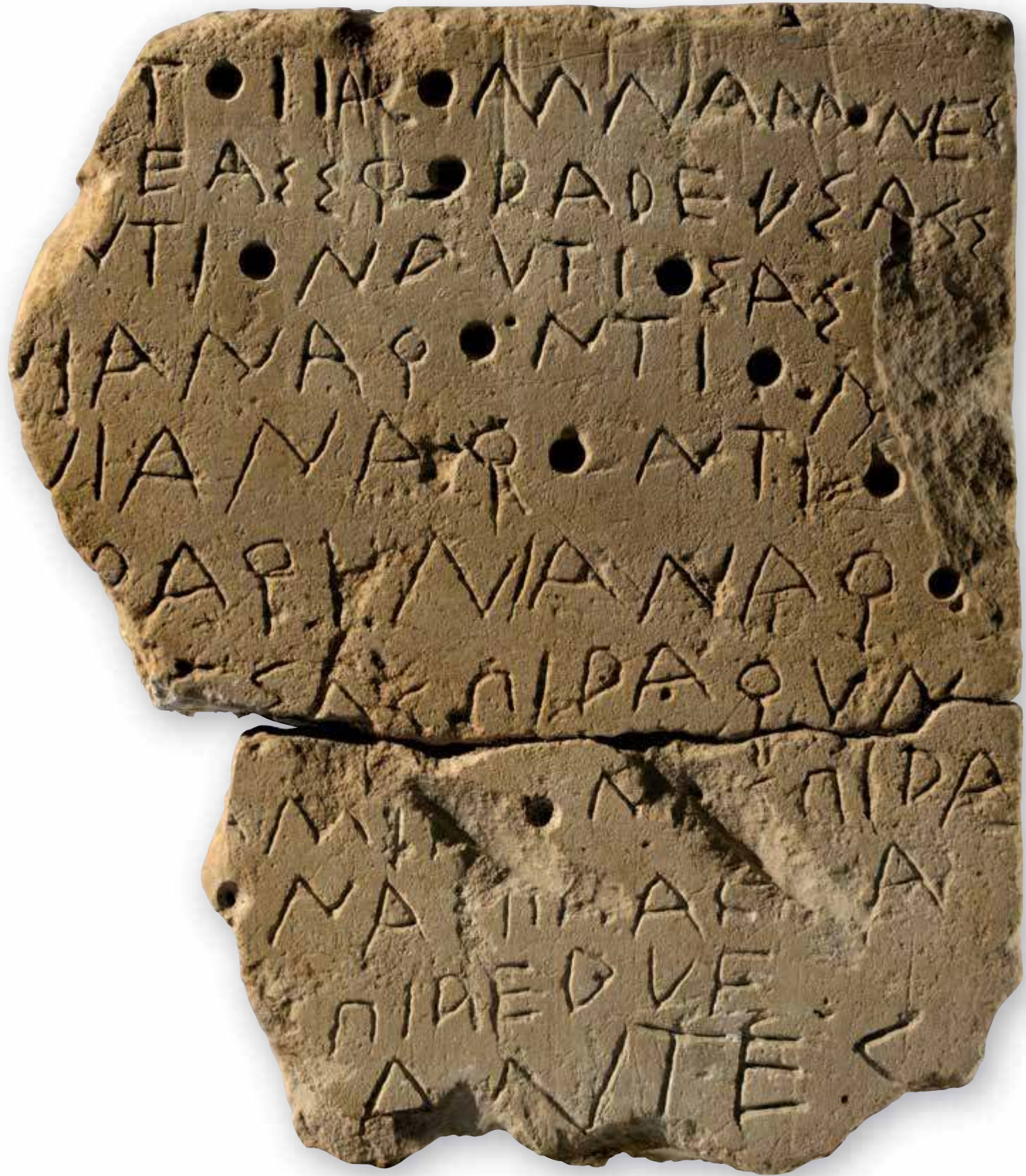
Around the end of the 8th century BC, cult activities are attested for the first time in the area of some Mycenaean tholos and chamber tombs. Moreover, small sanctuaries were built beside the roads leading to Mycenae, while the founding of a sanctuary of the war god Enyalios and of the so-called Agamemnoneion are dated to the late Geometric/ early Archaic period (late 8th - early 7th c. BC). Cult activity in the area of the Mycenaean palace most probably began in the late 8th century BC, as evidenced by votives of this period found on a terrace at the later site of the archaic temple.

During the Archaic period (700-500 BC) it is possible there was some sort of settlement, which although it left no architectural remains is confirmed by the existence of tombs at key points leading to the Acropolis as well as by the testimony of two inscriptions of the 6th and 5th century BC referring to higher state officials delegated with the cult of Perseus, who assumed responsibility adjudicating disputes between boys during competitions. It was said that the boys took part in these rituals wearing Gorgon masks similar to those from Tiryns which are on display in the Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.

In contrast to the meagre residential remains, there is evidence for cult practice both on the Acropolis as well as the greater area. Apart from the continuation of cult activities at some Mycenaean tombs and operation of the important sanctuaries of Enyalios and the Agamemnoneion, around 620 BC a Doric temple was built at the summit of the Acropolis. It was most likely dedicated to Hera, as indicated by an inscribed sherd of the Hellenistic period, a boundary stone of the sacred precinct built into the Perseia Fountain House, and the Homeric testimony which presents Mycenae as one of the goddess's most beloved places (Homer, *Iliad* 4.52). Eight reliefs are preserved from the temple's sculptural decoration including a female protome displaying the wedding gesture of revelation characteristic of the iconography of Hera; this sculpture is now in the National Archaeological Museum.

Both the written sources and archaeological testimony confirm that in the early Classical period (5th c. BC), Mycenae retained its autonomy and continued to recall its past glory, claiming a leading role in the supervision of the Argive Heraion and the Nemean Games. In the early 5th century BC,





*Stone inscription. The hieromnemes ("sacred recorders") are mentioned, as are votive weapons.  
Sanctuary of Enyalios (Ares). 500-475 BC. MM 1445.*

there was built atop the ruins of the West House in the once-famous House of the Oil Merchant Group the sanctuary of this name. Among the impressive votives are clay models depicting animals, mythical beings, and human figures with separate, movable limbs. The Mycenaeans took part in the Persian Wars, sending hoplites to the battle of Thermopylae (480 BC) (Pausanias 2.16.5) and that of Plataea (479 BC) (Herodotus 9.28). In memory of their participation in this national struggle, their name was carved on the bronze tripod which supported the victors' trophy set up by the Greeks at the Delphic oracle. Perhaps this was one of the reasons which led the Argives, who had gone over to the Persians, to besiege and occupy Mycenae in 468 BC, although they did not destroy it apart from a number of critical strategic points in the fortification wall of the Acropolis. All the inhabitants who failed to escape to neighboring lands or other places were sold into slavery. From the Archaic and Classical finds, it is obvious that the Mycenaeans maintained close relations with the era's major trading center of Corinth as well as with Athens.

*Bronze tripod cauldron. The Tomb of the Tripods. Early historical period (late 11th c. BC). MM 1446.*

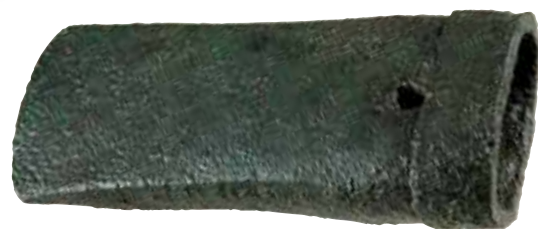


According to the testimony of the written sources and archaeological finds, Mycenae was once more inhabited during Hellenistic times in the early 3rd century BC when Argos founded a small town (kome) here. Parts of the Cyclopean wall in the area of the Lion Gate were repaired using the polygonal masonry characteristic of the times, and the lower city was fortified. Outside the gate, a large fountain house was built which the traveler Pausanias (2.16.6) called the “Perseia”; a little further down on the passageway (*dromos*) of the tholos Tomb of Clytemnestra, a theatre was built. Buildings in the western section of the Acropolis testify to residential as well as industrial activity in the small village of Mycenae, whose prosperity is confirmed by the large number of Hellenistic coins found in excavations. The testimony of the few graves found north of the Treasury of Atreus and in the lower city is clearly not representative of the small town’s prosperity. In contrast, there is significant evidence of cult activity. On the acropolis, the archaic temple’s precinct wall was enlarged and strengthened to include a new building which had only a cella oriented North-South and which occupied the site of the Mycenaean megaron. No trace of this simple temple without a surrounding colonnade remains today, since it was probably dismantled by the Venetians in 1700 for use as building material for the Palamidi castle. The remains of its foundations were removed in excavations in the 19th and early 20th century. Of the old sanctuaries, the Agamemneion was rebuilt, and there is also evidence for the survival of worship at the sanctuary of Enyalios.

The finds from this period confirm the operation of a local textile workshop as well as economic exchanges with other regions such as Sicyon, Corinth, Aegina, Laconia, and Phocis. Two coin hoards (today in the Numismatic Museum, Athens) were perhaps associated with military events in the 3rd century BC such as the assassination of the Argive tyrant Aristippos at Mycenae (235 BC) and the invasion of Argos by Pyrrhus and his inglorious end (272 BC). Habitation ceased abruptly in the second half of the 2nd century BC after the conquest of the Argolid by the Romans.



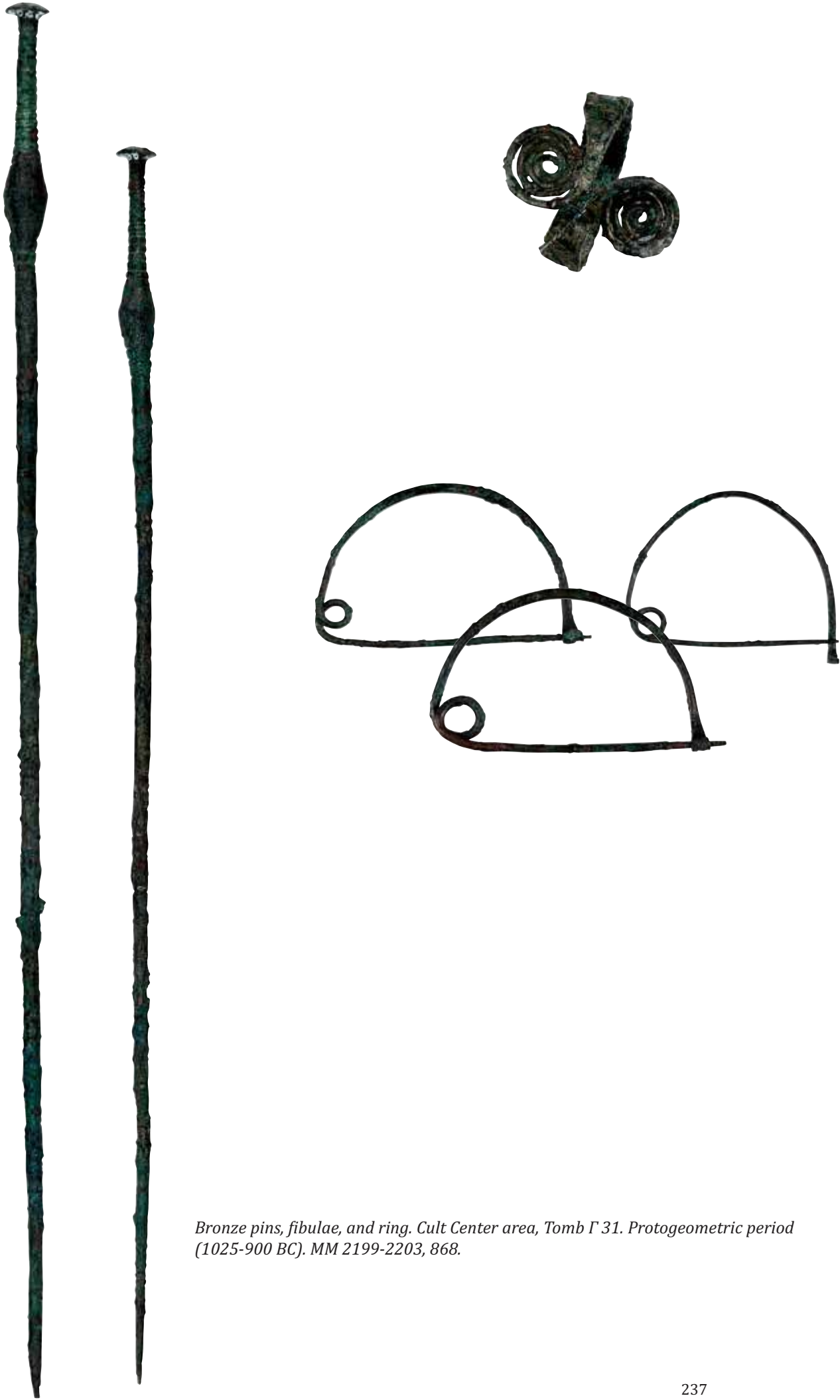
*Bronze double axe. Tomb of the Tripods. Early historical period (late 11th c. BC). MM 1323.*



*Bronze wedged implement. Tomb of the Tripods. LH IIIC (1180-1050 BC). MM 1339.*



*Amphora. House of Shields, Tomb G 603. Early Geometric period (900-875 BC). MM 898.*



*Bronze pins, fibulae, and ring. Cult Center area, Tomb Γ 31. Protogeometric period (1025-900 BC). MM 2199-2203, 868.*



*Kantharos. Prehistoric Cemetery, Grave G II. Late Geometric period (750-730 BC). MM 932.*



*Trefoil oinochoe. Prehistoric Cemetery, Grave G II. Late Geometric period (750-730 BC). MM 931.*



*Corinthian krater with a scene of mythical beings (griffins) and birds. Kokkinia, Tomb II. Archaic period (6th c. BC).  
MM 942.*





*Black-figure Attic krater with a Dionysian scene. Sacred House. Archaic period (6th c. BC). MM 974.*

*Seated female figurine. Agamemnoneion.  
Archaic period (6th c. BC). MM 1236.*



*Seated female figurine. Agamemnoneion.  
Archaic period (6th c. BC). MM 1234.*



*Fragment of the rim of a vase bearing the inscription "To Agamemnon".  
Agamemnoneion. Classical period (4th c. BC). MM 1292.*



*Lagynos. Grave on the road of the West House. Hellenistic period (3rd-2nd c. BC). MM 1088.*



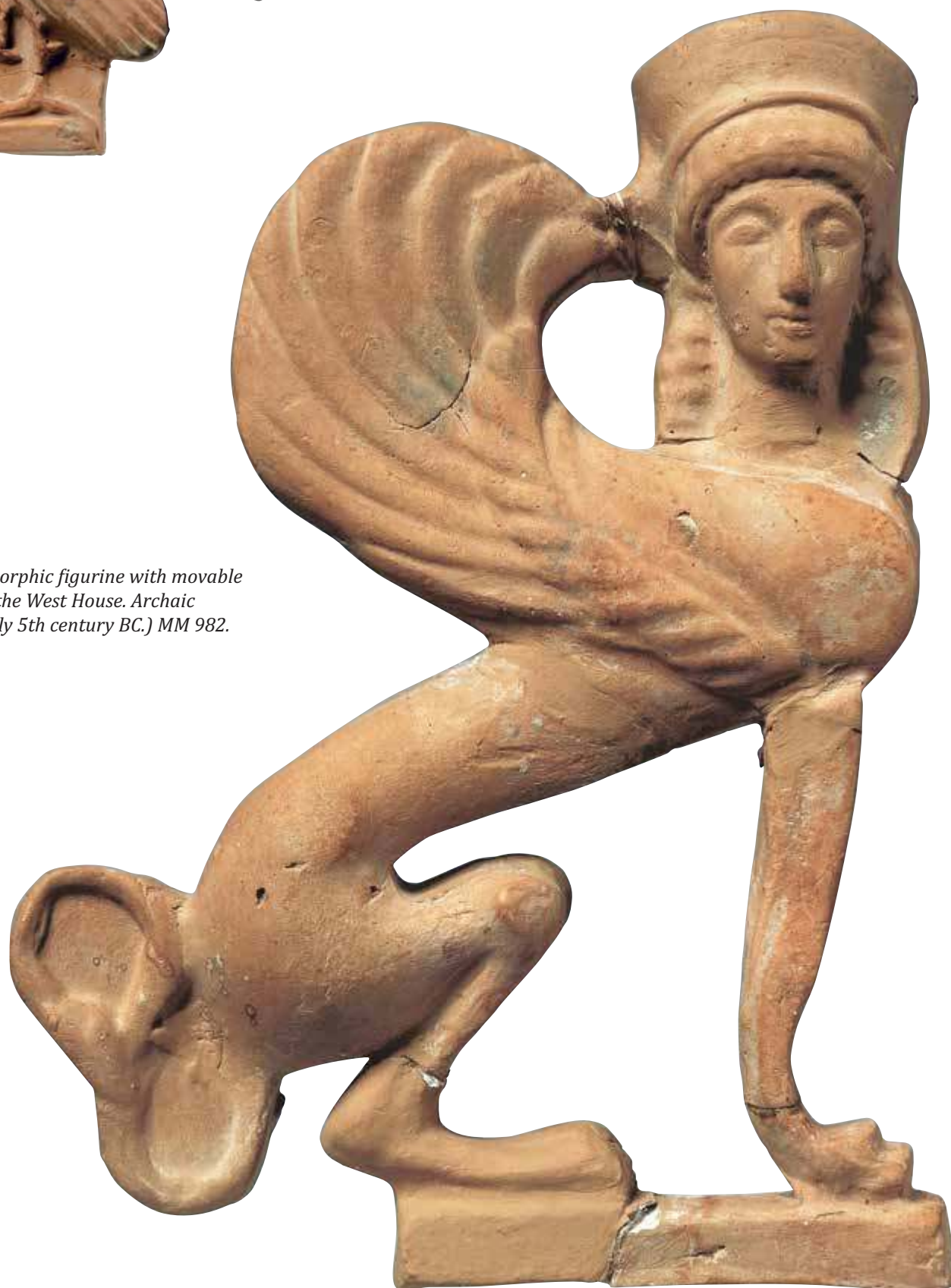
*Megarian bowl, sherd. Cult Center area, Room M. Hellenistic period (200-125 BC). MM 1146.*





*Rooster figurine. Shrine above the West House. Archaic period (late 6th-early 5th c. BC). MM 988.*

*Sphinx figurine. Shrine above the West House. Archaic period (late 6th- early 5th c. BC). MM 977.*



*PAGE 246: Anthropomorphic figurine with movable limbs. Shrine above the West House. Archaic period (late 6th- early 5th century BC.) MM 982.*





# THE WORLD OF AGAMEMNON

## *Mycenaean Civilization*

In the early 16th century BC, Mycenaean civilization was born in mainland Greece. It rose to become one of the high civilizations of the Bronze Age in the Aegean, and is considered one of Europe's first civilizations. This civilization, which ruled the Mediterranean world for around five centuries (Late Bronze Age: 1600-1050 BC), was rooted in the Helladic culture of the Middle Bronze Age (1900-1600 BC), but it accepted and absorbed influences from prosperous Minoan Crete and the developed cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. The new ruling class owed its wealth to military activities as well as to the commercial relations it developed with central and northern Europe, primarily to acquire metals. Its most important center, Mycenae (for which it was named) and other centers such as Iolkos, Orchomenos, Gla, Thebes, Athens, Tiryns, Midea, and Pylos formed the seat of autonomous states linked by a dense road network, and which maintained peaceful relations among themselves.

In the magnificent palaces with monumental fortifications founded in the 14th and 13th centuries, Mycenaean rulers as heads of a hierarchical society exercised secular and religious power, controlled the production and distribution of goods through a detailed recording of data in an early form both of Greek as well as of writing (Linear B), while ensuring by their protection the conditions for the development of arts and crafts. The homogeneity of material culture as well as a shared religion and language (Greek) testify to a solid political foundation largely based on rich agricultural and livestock production and on their commercial exploitation. The palace system of rule collapsed in the late 13th century BC in a climate of insecurity presumably caused by a number of reasons. Unrest in the eastern Mediterranean, major natural disasters, and the inadequacy of the over-centralized system itself led to a loss of trading partners, the abandonment of many settlements, rural depopulation, and mass migration to the islands or other safe regions. Homer conveyed in his epics echoes of this brilliant civilization and made the Mycenaeans eternal.

*Ivory male head. Room with the Fresco. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 2084.*

### *System of Government and Structure of Society*

The palace system of government which developed at the seats of Mycenaean rulers was based on control of agricultural and livestock production, and on the trading of goods and products via a central administration organized bureaucratically. Linear B clay tablets, seals, and clay sealings confirm the form and extent of administrative control, delineating a system for the redistribution of goods directed by an extremely powerful ruling class characterized by a hierarchy of offices and division of labor. The Homeric epics echo the Mycenaean heroic ideals, evidenced by the archaeological finds. The two-wheeled chariot and defensive and offensive weapons express the nature of the ruling class, which was engaged in hunting, contests, and war. In parallel, professionals and merchants supported the ruling class, while permanent military forces had the responsibility for the security of member states in Mycenaean territory. In addition to the upper social classes, individuals with a dependent work relationship to them as well as slaves must have contributed significantly to the achievements of Mycenaean civilization.



*Sardonyx seal stone. Two lions are depicted leaning their front legs on an altar. Chamber tombs in Mycenae. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). National Archaeological Museum, Π 2316.*



*Agate seal stone. Two lions are depicted leaning their front legs on the middle of a column. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1863. The motif of the heraldic depiction of lions in combination with a column or altar, two symbols of the secular and religious power of the Mycenaean wanakes, refers to the royal house. Clearly these seals belonged to high-ranking officials, probably members of the royal family. The choice of this iconographic motif for the relief on the Lion Gate and its identification as the royal coat-of-arms attests to the Mycenaean intention to associate the strength of the "king of animals" with the power of the royal house.*



### *Script*

Script was invented in the city states of Mesopotamia around 3300 BC. The first examples of writing in European civilization were owed to the Minoans, who invented three different writing systems to support the palace system of rule: Hieroglyphic, Linear A, and Linear B. The Mycenaeans employed Linear B to audit the production the palace exercised in its territory. The accounting ledgers which have survived, written on clay tablets in the palace archives, provide invaluable information about the administration, religion, economy, society, and the private and public life of the Mycenaeans. Some stirrup jars intended for the transport of liquids carried inscriptions in the same writing system and constituted a guarantee of the quality and origin of the product. The Linear B writing system, which was deciphered by Michael Ventris, was a syllabic system which originated from Linear A, and represented a pre-Doric Greek dialect. The collapse of the palace system in the late 13th century BC led to the disappearance of this writing system.

*Styluses, tools for writing on the Linear B tablets. Cult Center area. LH IIIA-III B (1400-1180 BC). MM 2069-2070.*



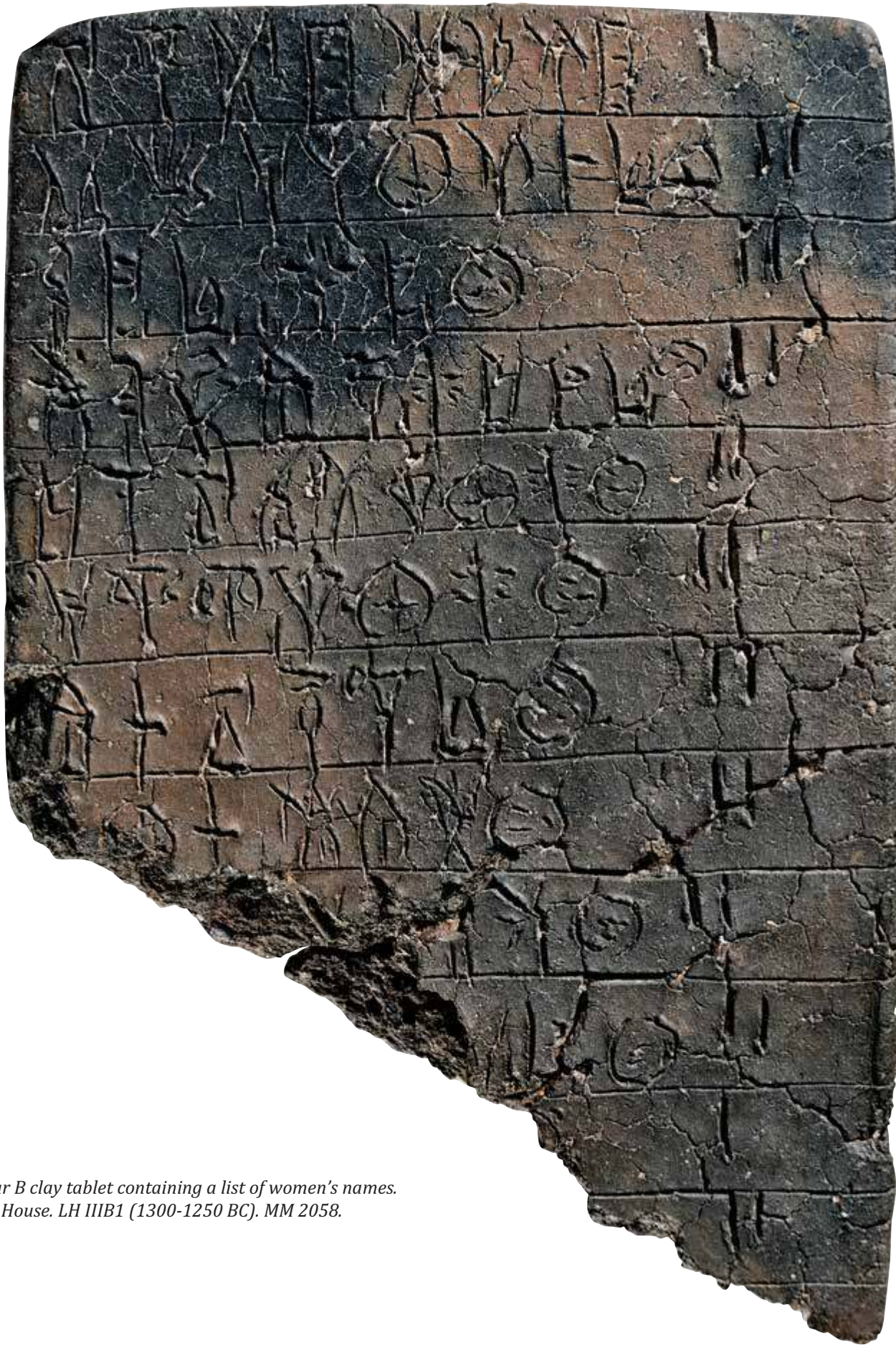
*Clay tablet with Linear B inscription, without exact interpretation. West House. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 2063.*

*Linear B clay tablet. It mentions Sitopotnia, the deity who protected the fruits of the earth, as well as craftsmen specialized in the processing of blue glass. Cult Center area, Room 4. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 2066.*





*Linear B clay tablet with inscription containing a list of cereals, wine, and olives. West House. LH IIIA-IIIB (1400-1180BC).  
MM 2048.*



*Linear B clay tablet containing a list of women's names.  
West House. LH III B1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 2058.*

### *The use of Seals*

In the middle of the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC), seals appeared in the Aegean following their long use in the developed administrative systems of Near Eastern civilizations. Their wide dissemination and use for management purposes reached its apogee in the Minoan palaces. Miniature engraved seals and seal rings were genuine artworks, and were used in parallel as jewelry, votives, and amulets, which were long-lived and very valuable. In combination with clay sealings, they confirm the existence of a developed system for controlling trading and quality of goods. The owners-users of seals were representatives of the ruling class or their authorized employees. Despite pronounced Minoan influences in iconography, the Mycenaeans used seals primarily as prestige objects; their contribution to the central administrative system through clay tablets was secondary. The rich iconographic repertoire of seals provides valuable information about religious beliefs, the structure of administration, and social structure.



*Green jasper seal stone with a representation of two "Minoan dragons". Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VII. LH IIB-III A2 (1450-1300 BC). MM 1862.*





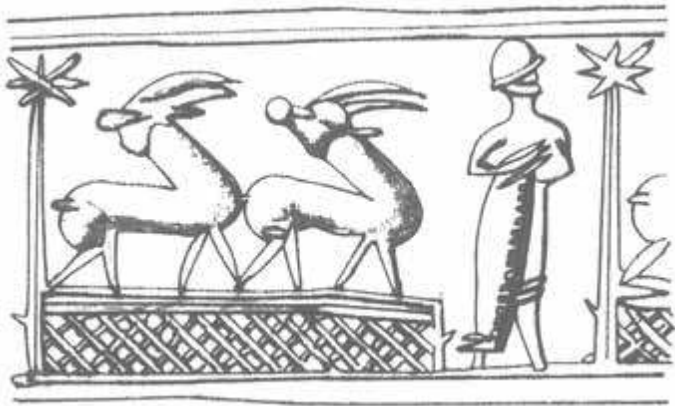
*Agate seal stone. It presents a naturalistic depiction of two horned animals and a male figure performing a somersault. The subject depicts the sport of bull-leaping, known from Minoan Crete. The "Temple", Room 19. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1861.*

*Chalcedon seal stone depicting a horned animal, perhaps a wild goat. The movement of its body and facial expression, dominated by intense eyes and a huge tongue, may depict the pain of the animal which has been wounded by hunters. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1873.*





*Agate sealstone with lion hunting a bull. Building M. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1842.*



*Faience cylinder seal with a representation of a male figure and two animals. Chamber tomb cemetery at Batsourorachi, Tomb 2. LH IIB-III A2 (1450-1300 BC). MM 1845.*

## *Religion, Ritual and Ceremony*

Under the pronounced influence of the religious beliefs and rituals of Minoan religion, the Mycenaeans adapted forms of worship to their own temperament. The supreme secular ruler, the wanax, was at the top of a hierarchical priesthood of men and women. He exercised his religious duties in the main building of the palace, the megaron. Artifacts and building foundations associated with religious rituals including hearths, altars, wall paintings, idols, and figurines are found both at sites in the palace centers that were intended for worship, as well as in small household sanctuaries and in the private residences of the ruling class.

The Linear B tablets record gods receiving offerings who survived in the Pantheon of historical times, including Zeus, Hera, Poseidon and Hermes in addition to others who disappeared.

Seal stones and wall paintings depict female anthropomorphic deities, a warrior goddess in the form of a palladium, as well as open-air sites for cult practice, religious processions, and sacred symbols, including the double axe and horns of consecration.

Despite the mists of time obscuring the exact nature rituals, the written sources and archaeological finds provide an outline of a form of worship adapted to a human scale which was in turn directly associated with everyday life and celebrate nature and fertility.



*Anthropomorphic figure. The "Temple", Room 19. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 293.*



*Anthropomorphic female figure depicting a deity. The "Temple", Room 19. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 294.*



*Figure of a female deity in an attitude of prayer. Room with the Fresco complex, Room 32. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 320.*



*Bridge-spouted jug with double axe. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 518. LH IIA (1500-1450 BC). MM 1547.*



## *Trade*

The power of Mycenaean civilization was largely owed to trading activities which the Mycenaeans developed from as early as the 16th century BC with the Cyclades, Crete, Egypt, the western Mediterranean, and central and northern Europe, with the object of obtaining raw materials like amber, gold, copper, and tin, and to acquire exotic products of faience, glass, and semi-precious stones. Following the collapse of the Minoan palaces in the mid-15th century BC, the Mycenaeans expanded to markets in the eastern Mediterranean, inundating Cyprus, the Syro-Palestinian coast, and Egypt with their products. Land and sea communication was supported by the central authority, while the volume of traded goods led to the creation of a system for auditing and archiving with the help of Linear B. In the 12th century BC, trade—the foundation of Mycenaean hegemony—suffered from generalized unrest in the eastern Mediterranean states and the destructive activities of the “Sea Peoples”.



*Jug imported from the Cyclades. Grave Circle B, Tomb Z. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 1531.*

*Kantharos from Central Greece (Thessaly). Grave Circle B, Grave O. LH I (1600-1500 BC). MM 1534.*







*Faience plaques with hieroglyphic inscription (cartouche) of the Pharaoh Amenhotep III (1390-1360 BC). Cult Center area, Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 1500-1501. Cartouches bearing the name of the Pharaoh Amenhotep III which arrived in Mycenae accompanying Egyptian objects appear to have had great significance for the Mycenaeans, who kept them for years in the Cult Center area. Apart from the name of the Pharaoh in the cartouches, there was also normally a reference to the good god. This particular inscription mentions "the good god Meb-Maat-Re, son of Re".*



*Pyxis imported from Crete. East of the Tomb of Clytemnestra. LH IIIA-IIIB (1400-1180 BC). MM 1516.*



*Amphora imported from Crete. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VII. LH I-II (1600-1400 BC). MM 1487.*



*Steatite lamp with relief spirals. Chamber tomb 102. 15th-14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 4924.*

*Marble lamp with relief petals. Tholos tomb of the Lions. 15th-14th c. BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 2921.*





*Stone vase of lapis lacedaemonius. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb III. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 1936.*



*Stone rhyton of lapis lacedaemonius, fragment. Acropolis, "The Rhyton Well". LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 1549.*



*Domestic Life  
and Women in the Mycenaean World*

Apart from the professional specialization which characterized the Mycenaean palace world, and which is confirmed in the texts of the Linear B tablets, the Mycenaean engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing. Grains, oil, wine, and honey comprised major food sources as well as products of their renowned export trade. Nutritional needs were supplemented by pork, lamb, and goat meat as well as by hunting. Their preferred seafood was shellfish; fish were considered food for the poor. An important role in both the household and palace economy was played by women, who were entrusted with such specialized tasks as weaving and grain processing. Many were in a dependent work relationship to the palace or were slaves. Women of the ruling class took part in royal activities and owned luxury goods which were genuine masterpieces of Mycenaean art. The special place held by women in Mycenaean society is also shown by the depiction of female deities as well as the many female figurines and idols destined for cult use.



*Plaster female head. Cult Center area. 13th c. BC. Π 4575. This unique plaster head is of nearly life size, with strong anatomical features underscored by the vibrant colors on her white skin. It is not a depiction of just any woman. It recalls the technique used in fresco-painting, and has been considered a goddess, perhaps Olympian Hera. Another interpretation holds that the head's frightening appearance recalls a sphinx, a mythical beast with the body of a winged lion and female head which survived in the mythology of the Theban cycle in historical times.*



*Bronze mirrors with ivory handles. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VII. LH IIIA1 (1400-1350 BC). MM 1575-1576.*



*Bronze tweezers. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 8. LH IIIA-III B (1400-1180 BC). MM 1582.*

*Stirrup jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb III. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 1574.*



*PAGE. 273: Reconstruction of a loom with stone and clay conuli. Prehistoric cemetery, House of the Warrior Vase. LH II-III (1500-1050 BC). MM 1757-1802.*







*Bone spoon. Cult Center area. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 1590.*



*Bone cosmetic implements. Auxiliary rooms of the palace complex. LH IIIB2-IIIC Early (1250-1150 BC). MM 1583-1584.*



*Bone pins. Cult Center area, House of Lead. LH IIIB-IIIC (1300-1050 BC). MM 1740, 1586-1589.*



*Glass flask. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb III. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 2029.*



*Ivory comb. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 1591.*





*Cooking amphora. Cyclopean Terrace Building. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 1629.*

*Brazier. West House. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1630.*



*Dipper. The House of the Tomb of the Tripods. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1602.*



*Tripod cooking pot. Cult Center area. LH IIIC Early (1180-1150 BC). MM 1598.*





# M Y C E N A E A N   A R C H I T E C T U R E

## *Mycenaean Palaces and Fortifications*

The seats of activities for Mycenaean rulers were luxurious palaces built atop a hill (acropolis) and normally fortified. The palace complexes founded in the early 14th century BC were modeled after the architecture of the preceding Middle Bronze Age, but they also showed influences from Minoan Crete. The palace was organized around a central building with a tripartite arrangement, the megaron, which communicated in turn with the other wings through a system of corridors. These wings included areas for religious rituals and administrative activities, private apartments, storerooms, and workshops. The monumental construction and luxury stressed the power of the ruling class and impressed visitors and subjects. This imposing picture was complemented by the Cyclopean fortifications of the acropolises of the 14th and 13th centuries BC, the apogee of Mycenaean civilization. Mycenae, Tiryns, Midea, Athens, and Gla acquired walls over 12 meters high and 7 meters wide; they had monumental gates and vaulted passageways leading to sources of underground water. The palace of Pylos was unfortified. In the late 13th century BC, extensive destruction to the palace complexes and fortifications marked the gradual decline of Mycenaean civilization.

## *Major Construction Projects*

In addition to the Cyclopean walls and their monumental gates, rooms and tunnels with corbelled arches, the Mycenaean left their mark on their age in a series of major construction projects. Among the leading technical projects was the land improvement works associated with the draining of Lake Copais: embankments of Cyclopean construction and large-scale drainage canals attributed to the mythical king Minyas. A comparable work was the diversion of the torrents which flooded the acropolis of Tiryns and its surrounding cultivated region, and the construction of a dam five kilometers east of the acropolis.

Furthermore, a road network (attested chiefly in the Argolid) connected the region's major centers with carriage roads suitable for the two-wheeled chariots of Mycenaean rulers. Impressive stone bridges of Cyclopean masonry with corbelled arches and drains for rainwater confirm technical training and knowledge in the field of engineering, while in the background of these projects was the underlying palace system, which was responsible for the design and execution and was able to muster the necessary workforce.

*Tholos tomb of the Genii or Orestes. Interior view of the monumental entrance. 13th c. BC.*

One especially demanding construction was access corridors leading to underground sources of water. With corbelled arch tunnels running through the walls, the Mycenaeans took care to ensure their acropolises with drinking water in the case of a siege. The famous “Syringes” (tunnels) at Tiryns and in particular, the underground cistern (a natural water collector) outside the acropolis of Mycenae at which a stairway of 70 rock-cut steps concluded attest to the Mycenaeans’ high level of technical expertise in hydraulics and engineering.

It was no coincidence that the Greeks of historical times had difficulty believing that these projects had been executed by men. The myth of Proitos, the royal offspring of the dynasty of Argos, who after suffering defeat at the hands of his brother Akrisios fled to the king of Lycia and married his daughter, received as a wedding gift the Cyclopes, who built for him the walls of Tiryns, followed by those of Mycenae and Argos, reflects a historical truth of the Mycenaean age. The flourishing Hittite empire appears to have been the source of the knowledge required to construct the incomparable technical works of Mycenaean civilization. The fortified capital of the Hittite state, Hattousa, with its corbelled galleries and monumental gates—one of which was adorned with lions—must have been close partners of the royal clans of the Mycenaean state. These mythical Cyclopes were perhaps specialist engineers and architects who either taught the Mycenaeans there, or came as official guests to pass on their knowledge to the ambitious Achaean kings.

### *Funerary Architecture and Burial Customs*

The chief means of burying the dead in the Mycenaean world was internment. The practice of cremation remained sporadic throughout the entire Late Bronze Age.

During early Mycenaean times the emerging ruling class employed vertical shaft graves organized within a built enclosure. Representative examples of this method include Grave Circles A and B at Mycenae.

Large groups of individuals belonging to the upper classes were buried in chamber tombs, rock-cut underground chambers with a dromos (access road). These are considered to be family tombs, given that they were used for successive burials over a long period.

But the tholos tombs belonging to the royal family were a unique achievement of funerary architecture. They had an access road (*dromos*) and rock-cut chamber, and walls with stone revetments in the corbelled system. The leading example is the so-called “Tomb of Agamemnon” or “Treasury of Atreus” at Mycenae. The Mycenaeans honored their dead with burial gifts (*kterismata*) which represented their financial situation and social class, as well as with rituals both during burial and upon the removal and displacement of bones from older burials.



*Model of a chariot mounted by two human figures covered by a parasol. Chamber tomb cemetery at Batsourorachi, Tomb 2. LH IIIB2 (late 13th c. BC).*

*The light two-wheeled chariot originated in the East. In Mycenaean Greece, it was used to transport warriors to the battlefield as well as a vehicle for nobility participating in games, on hunting excursions, and in religious processions. The chariot was a popular motif in Mycenaean iconography and was often depicted in all forms of Mycenaean art. The Mycenae chariot apparently represents a chariot taking part with its noble riders in some festal procession. Despite the careless and almost clumsy rendering of its form, the Mycenae chariot is impressive for the inventiveness of the compression of individual details and the pleasure of the search for unconventional means to render established forms of expression in Mycenaean art.*







*Craftsmen and Artisans*

The Mycenaean palace system of governance created the presuppositions for the development of art and craftsmanship. The rulers' power and prosperity favored the manufacture of luxury items in exotic materials, including gold, copper, ivory, faience, and semi-precious stones. An important place was occupied by amber, the "gold of the north", which confirms the Mycenaean's early trading relations with the Wessex culture in South England, as reflected in the myth of Phaethon and the Heliades.

Highly-specialized artisans carried out commissions for the ruling class, which controlled and protected raw materials as well as the artisans' workshops. Metallurgists used casting (in single and double molds) and hammering; goldsmiths were distinguished for filigree and granulation, and there were impressive miniature art works. Alongside craftsmen in exotic materials, potters took maximum advantage of this cheap and accessible material, turning clay into genuine works of art.



PAGE. 280: *Gold and agate necklace.*  
*Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma,*  
*Tomb VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).*  
*MM 2086.*

*Gold ornament with a*  
*repoussé decoration of circles.*  
*Grave Circle B, Grave E. LH I*  
*(1600-1500 BC). MM 30294.*

ABOVE: *Gold diadem*  
*with a repoussé*  
*decoration of circles.*  
*Grave Circle B, Grave E.*  
*LH I (1600-1500 BC).*  
*MM 1710.*



*Gold and carnelian necklace. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tombs VII, VIII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).*



*Gold necklace. Chamber tomb cemetery at Asprochoma, Tombs VII. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC).*





*Red steatite mold. Cult Center area. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1686.  
Stone molds were intended for the mass production of jewelry for the famous Mycenaean gold and glass necklaces.  
Their standardized repertoire included ivy leaves, lilies, papyri, octopuses, nautiluses, and spirals. The mold from  
Mycenae stands out for two particular motifs: a daemon in front of a palm tree and its elaborate columns.*





*Ivory male head. Room with the Fresco. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 2084. This head carved in the round, an outstanding work of Mycenaean ivory carving, depicts a young male figure with diadem, necklace, and elaborate hairstyle. His strong facial features, above all his large, expressive eyes and pursed mouth radiate the seriousness suitable to a divine personage or the deified figure of a young ruler.*





*Ivory lion. Room with the Fresco. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 2083. This seated lion, carved in the round, depicts all the characteristics of the king of animals, above all the silent strength that made him the emblem of the royal house.*





*It was placed on the altar of the Room with the Fresco as a cult object, along with the early portrait of the youthful god and other sacred utensils.*



### *Metalworking*

The processing of copper to make weapons, tools, jewelry and utensils developed in the Aegean in the early 3rd millennium. The Minoans were the first to uncover the rich deposits of this metal in Cyprus, exploiting them and developing a high level of expertise. The art of metalworking gradually spread to the mainland, with exceptional bronze examples in the shaft graves of Mycenae's grave circles. Bronze, a copper-tin alloy (ratio 9:1) is smelted at lower temperatures than copper; after smelting it becomes harder and thus, more resilient. Artisans had permanent workshops or were itinerant, traveling from place to place. Mycenaean metalworking experienced two phases of development associated with its liberation from Minoan prototypes in the early 14th century BC. The early phase (16th-15th c. BC) was characterized by the search for new forms and methods, and by great technical skill. In the late phase (14th-12th c. BC), metal artifacts were disseminated among broader strata of the population.

*Bronze sword with bone revetment on its handle. North Staircase. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1350.*



*Bronze cleaver. Chamber tomb cemetery at Vraserka, Tomb 2. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1656.*



*Bronze razor. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VIII. LH IIIA-IIIB (1400-1180 BC). MM 1670.*

*Bronze razor. Chamber tomb cemetery at Vythisma, Tomb 4. LH IIIA-IIIB (1400-1300 BC). MM 1669.*





## *The Art of Wall painting*

The Mycenaean learned the art of wall painting from the Minoans, who began to decorate their palaces with paintings as early as 1700 BC. Their art initially spread to the Cyclades and the rest of the Aegean. It was adopted on mainland Greece in the 15th century BC, but the most important Mycenaean wall paintings belong to the period when the palaces were at their zenith, the 14th and 13th centuries BC. Wall paintings primarily adorned the important buildings in the large palace centers such as Pylos, Tiryns, Thebes, and Orchomenos, but there are also examples of lovely murals from the seats of local rulers, from private homes, and more rarely, from the tombs of prominent individuals.

The subjects of these paintings initially showed the pronounced influence of Minoan Crete. Gradually, though, the Mycenaean absorbed their teachings and adapted them to their own temperament. Popular subjects for rulers included hunting scenes and military confrontations reflecting their heroic ideals. In parallel, in places devoted to cult practice we find ritual processions of women carrying offerings for sacrifices in the countryside or at sanctuaries. Compositions also featured depictions of animals and fantastic beings like sphinxes, griffins, and lion-headed *daemons*. Scenes normally unfolded within a frame of decorative motifs, either linear or naturalistic. The human figures were very often done on a large scale approaching life-size, though there were also small-scale depictions of people and animals.

Special interest is presented by the technique employed for these paintings, i.e. fresco. Specialized artists covered the surfaces they wanted to decorate with a thin layer of plaster, and while the plaster was still damp they painted their compositions in bright colors. Red, blue, yellow, and black, all prepared from organic materials, were the preferred colors. Wall paintings were one of the highest art forms of Mycenaean civilization, and they must have impressed visitors to the palace centers far more than they do us today, when we no longer have the opportunity to admire entire compositions integrated into the spaces for which they were originally intended.

*Fresco with a procession of helmeted males. Plakes House. LH III B2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1293.*

FOLLOWING PAGES: *"The Mycenaean Lady". Fresco from the Cult Center area. 1250 BC. National Archaeological Museum, Π 11670. This beautiful woman with her elaborate hairstyle, formal garments and rich jewelry on her neck and arms apparently depicts a goddess. Seated and majestic, she would have received the procession of believers who brought her costly offerings.*





## *Mycenaean Terracotta Figurines*

Clay likenesses of human figures, animals, and all sorts of objects, figurines and figures (characteristically called idols), form a unique category of finds which characterize Mycenaean civilization through their large numbers, distinctive characteristics, and charm.

The idea to depict figures in a plastic, normally miniature likeness goes back to prototypes from Minoan Crete and the developed civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean, given that there are no earlier parallels from the Middle Helladic period. However, the Mycenaeans assimilated these influences and incorporated them into their own mentality, creating a category of objects which emerged to become one of the most popular forms of their material culture.

The earliest examples of figurines come from the southern Peloponnese and date to the late 15th-early 14th century BC. The full repertoire developed in the course of the Palatial Period (14th and 13th c. BC), though production continued into the Post-Palatial period (12th c. BC).

The overwhelming majority of Mycenaean figurines depicted female figures which Arne Furumark assigned the conventional names “Phi”, “Psi”, and “Tau” due to their resemblance to these letters in the Greek alphabet ( $\Phi$ ,  $\Psi$ , T). One variant of these were the 12th century BC figurines of female mourners found at Perati and on Naxos and Rhodes. In contrast, depictions of male figures are exceptionally rare. In terms of numbers, there follow zoomorphic figurines, primarily depictions of bovines or other quadrupeds without any particular differentiation of species. Other animals, which are rarer, may be identified as horses, deer, dogs, and birds. A very special category is comprised of models of coiled snakes from the cult center at Mycenae. The figurine repertoire also included various groups like the “*kourotrofes*” (women holding a child in their arms), enthroned figurines, riders, animals, and chariots with riders. Depictions of fantastic beings like the sphinx are extremely rare. Finally, this imaginative production also included various other items such as furniture, thrones, beds or stretchers, footstools, offering tables, wheels, and boats.

These clay representations are classified in terms of their production method into two large categories: small-scale, handmade figurines and large-scale, wheel-made idols. The figurines were mass produced and highly standardized, without this having any negative impact on their quality. The idols on the other hand have very particular, almost individualized features. They were of high-quality workmanship, and since each is unique, they are not included among the known types.

As an object of archaeological research since the era of the first major discoveries in the late 19th century, they have been interpreted in various ways. Heinrich Schliemann, in response to the excavation



finds at Mycenae and Tiryns, was the first to identify the female figurines with early depictions of the goddess Hera. Later (1931), Axel W. Persson interpreted the corresponding finds from his excavations at Dendra as effigies for servants in the afterlife, by analogy with the Egyptian ushabtis.

From the middle of the 20th century, their interpretation became associated with their find spot. Figurines are found in tombs, residential complexes, and workshops as well as at public and at private cult sites. In contrast, idols are almost exclusively associated with open-air or covered spaces where religious rituals were conducted by the priesthood of the ruling class.

Their frequent presence in graves—especially those of children—led George Mylonas (1966) to interpret them as toys as well as “Kourotrophoi” or “Psychopompoi”, i.e. human or divine helpers who assumed the role of protecting children in the afterlife. Other scholars have considered them as votives offered by believers, and linked them to the practice of popular religion, within whose framework are reflected the magical beliefs of the Mycenaean which associate the votive with their desire for protection of the health and fertility of humans and animals, and with ensuring a good harvest and safeguarding property. Within this context, the find spots of figurines in workshops or specific rooms in houses (entrances, benches, and hearths) was in particular seen as an act that sought to ward off evil. Furthermore, their discovery at public cult sites considered controlled by the priesthood of the ruling class has reinforced the view that small-scale anthropomorphic figurines depicted believers.

Finally, the discovery of large idols in very important public religious complexes like the Cult Center of Mycenae, the sanctuary on the lower acropolis of Tiryns, the double sanctuary at Phylakopi on Melos, as well as their total absence from graves has led to their interpretation as religious idols depicting the figurines of deities the Mycenaean worshipped. The terrifying idols from the so-called Temple of the Cult Center at Mycenae have been interpreted both as depictions of male and female deities, as believers, and as effigies for the exorcism of evil powers.

Despite the large number of finds and long years of research, the scholarly community has not yet reached a generally-accepted interpretation of the different types or succeeded in answering the question as to whether the find determines the cult use of a site, or whether it is the character of the find spot that suggests its interpretation as an object for secular use, a votive, or a depiction of a deity or a believer.

In the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae, the special category of finds consisting of Mycenaean figurines is richly-represented in all the thematic sections, the chief example being the presentation containing original objects in the first gallery of the typological and chronological classification by archaeologist Elizabeth French, which remains unsurpassed today, a half century after its establishment.



*Clay throne. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 9. LH IIIA (1400-1300 BC). MM 667.*



*The typological development of Mycenaean figurines according to E. French.*

*Female figurine of a kourotrophos. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb III. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 2295.*



*Female figurine, Tau type. West House. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1830.*





*Female figurine of transitional type.  
Panagia Ridge, Tomb Π1. LH IIIB  
(1300-1180 BC). MM 2290.*



*Female figurine, Phi type. Chamber tomb  
cemetery at Asprochoma, Tomb II. LH IIIA  
(1400-1300 BC). MM 2297.*

*Female figurine, Phi type. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb E. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 629.*



*Female figurines, Psi type. LEFT: Petsas' House, Room Γ. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 2280. RIGHT: Cult Center area. LH IIIC Late (1100-1050 BC). MM 2286.*



*Female figurine, Psi type. Chamber tomb cemetery at Vlachostrata, Tomb 4. LH IIIB (1300-1180 BC). MM 2282.*

*Female figurine, Tau type. West House. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1830.*

## *Pottery as the main Guide to Greek Prehistory*

*Hear the sum of the whole matter in the compass of one brief word  
—every art possessed by man comes from Prometheus*

AESCHYLUS, *PROMETHEUS BOUND*, I 505 (trans. H.W. Smyth)

In the Archaic period (6th c. BC), Presocratic philosophy posed the philosophical problem of the “origin of all things”. The four “elements” considered as “first cause(s)” by Aristotle—water, earth, fire, and air—were used by men to manufacture the first composite material, pottery.

Pottery, the main form of material culture in the Helladic world, comprises irrefutable testimony to the presence of man at the site, to his historical course, and to the identity and level of his culture.

The unbroken continuity, the fullness of the repertoire, and the brilliance of the finds are uniquely represented at Mycenae. Pottery, as the main body of the exhibition in the Archaeological Museum, signifies a groundbreaking approach to presenting the remains of an important culture. Shining gold retreats before the human and tangible feel of clay.

Characteristic examples of this art confirm human presence at Mycenae from the end of the Stone Age – beginning of the Early Bronze Age (early 3rd millennium BC) down to the final collapse of Mycenaean rule (late 2nd millennium BC).

Despite the fact that Mycenae must never have been a leading center with an urban character, centralized administration, and monumental architecture during the Early Bronze Age, since no corridor houses or clay sealings were found there, a few handmade pots confirm the presence of their Prehellenic creators at the site.

The great cultural change at the end of the 3rd millennium was connected with the arrival of the first Greek-speaking tribes in mainland Greece after a series of destructions at the large Early Helladic II centers.

These Protohellenes of the Early Helladic III and Middle Helladic periods, who lived in unfortified settlements and established the architectural type of the megaron and practiced internment in cist graves, generalized the use of the potter’s wheel and created two splendid categories of pottery: undecorated Minyan ware and matt painted pottery. Middle Helladic culture, originally based on farming and animal husbandry, reached its apogee in the 17th century, when it came into contact with the civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean, primarily via trade routes.

The high cultural level of neighboring peoples exerted a decisive influence on the austere mentality of the first Greeks. The changes were not confined merely to the impressive grave goods which suddenly

appeared in the graves of Grave Circles A and B in the late 17th and early 16th century BC; they are chiefly recorded as a gradual assimilation of the advanced political and social models of neighboring peoples. For around two centuries (LH I-II: 16th -15th c. BC), Mycenaean pottery would receive influences from Minoan pottery both in technique (with the appearance of lustrous painted ware) as well as in the brilliant, unconventional expression of the Minoan palatial pottery.

The establishment of a Mycenaean dynasty on Minoan Crete, the founding of palatial centers, and the creation of a centralized administrative system on mainland Greece went hand in hand with the dissemination of exceptionally high-quality ceramic products via trade. The Mycenaean quickly incorporated these lessons into their own austere and simple manner of expression, creating a unified pottery style characterized by its structure and stylization. The brilliance and uniformity of palatial pottery marked the apogee of Mycenaean rule (LH IIIA2 – LH IIIB2: 1350-1180 BC), the so-called “Mycenaean koine”.

This hypertrophic ideological scheme gradually collapsed in the course of the 12th century BC as a result of a series of changes which disturbed the balance of the palace world and led to a period with limited economic opportunities and clear tendencies towards disengagement from palatial patronage. Local pottery styles were interpreted as an echo of the breakup of the Mycenaean state, but pottery would enjoy one final burst of brilliance (Middle LH IIIC: 1150-1100 BC), with exceptionally fine examples in the Argolid, the Close Style and the Granary Class, before becoming completely attenuated and mutating in the following centuries into the “dark” power of the Early Iron Age.



*Early Helladic II Bowl. Grave Circle A area. EH II (2700-2200 BC).  
MM 1030.*



*Early Helladic II Bowl. Grave Circle A area.  
EH II (2700-2200 BC). MM 1024.*



*Minyan goblet. Grave Circle B, Grave Δ.  
MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 1032.*



*Amphora. Museum forecourt. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 1033.*



*Amphoriskos. Grave Circle B, Grave Γ. MH III (1700-1600 BC). MM 1034.*



*Rhyton. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 518.  
LH II-III A (1500-1350 BC). MM 1684.*



*Goblet. Chamber tomb cemetery at Souleimani, Tomb 4.  
LH IIB (1450-1400 BC). MM 1046.*



*Vapheio-type cup. Chamber tomb cemetery at Batsourorachi, Tomb 2.  
LH IIB (1450-1400 BC). MM 1043.*



*Beaked jug. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 518. LH IIA (1500-1450 BC). MM 1042.*



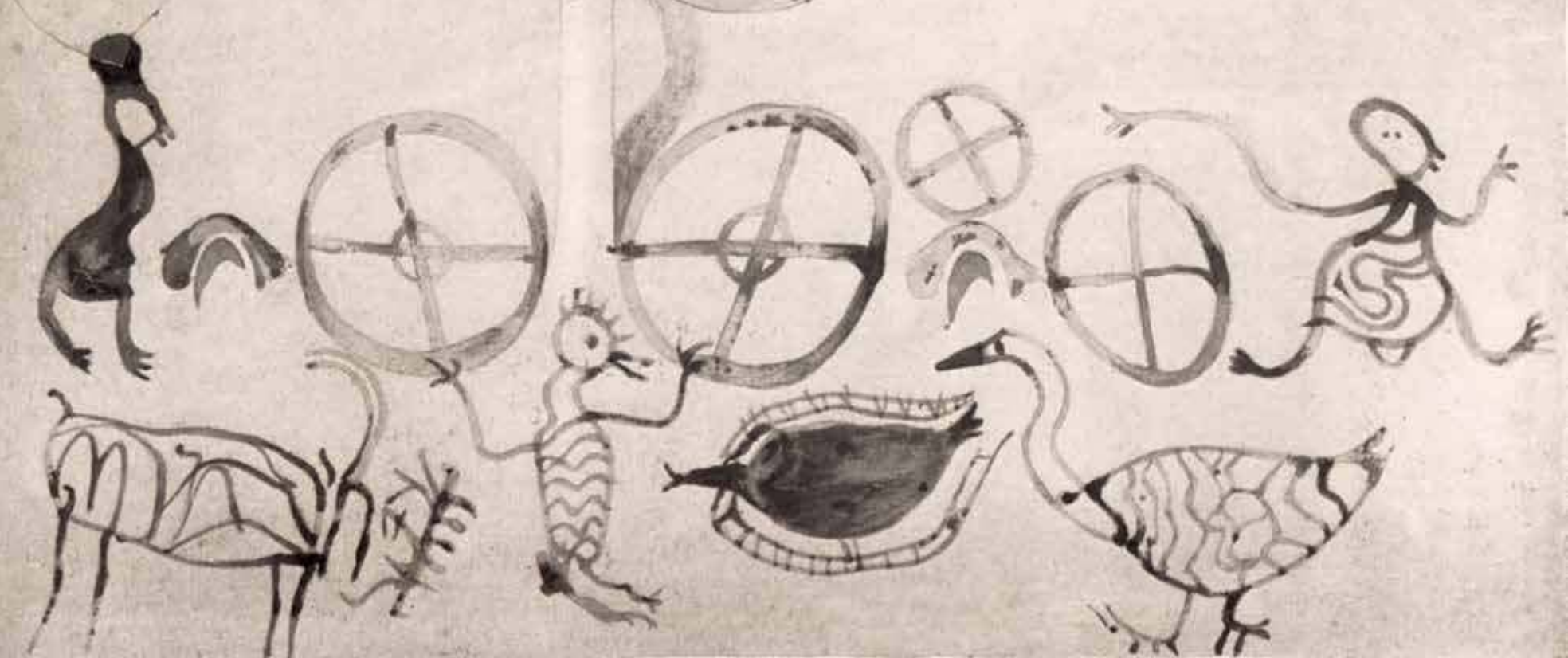
*Jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Loupouno, Tomb VII. LH IIB (1450-1400 BC). MM 1044.*



*Piriform jar, "Marine Style". Grave Circle B, Grave P. LH II (1500-1400 BC). MM 479.*



*Piriform jar, "Palace Style". Grave Circle B, Grave P. LH II (1500-1400 BC). MM 480.*



*Hydria with a pictorial representation. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani, Tomb 521. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 1944. Drawing by A.J.B. Wace, Chamber Tombs at Mycenae. This small vase presents an original pictorial representation disposed on two levels. Above, a human figure in a dance pose occupies the center of the scene, holding an enormous wheel in each hand, with two smaller suspended wheels. Female figures and animals (a goat, scorpion, goose, and another bird) are hastening towards the central figure. Despite its flaws, this early Mycenaean pictorial representation of people and animals has a narrative character. Perhaps it represents a ritual dance in honor of the Sun, concealed in the depicted wheels.*







*Stirrup jar. Chamber tomb cemetery at Kalkani,  
Tomb 523. LH IIIA2 (1350-1300 BC). MM 1061.*



*Stirrup jar. House of the Oil Merchant.  
LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1064.*





*Kylix. Panagia Ridge, House II. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1052.*



*Kylix. "Laboratory" excavation. LH IIIB  
(1300-1180 BC). MM 1319.*



*Stemmed bowl. Room with the Fresco. LH IIIB1  
(1300-1250 BC). MM 329.*



*Bowl. Cult Center area. LH IIIB2 (1250-1180 BC). MM 1065.*



*Bowl. Cult Center area. LH IIIC Early (1180-1150 BC).  
MM 1073.*



*Bowl. Lion Gate. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1000 BC). MM 1078.*

*Jug. Cult Center area. LH IIIB1 (1300-1250 BC). MM 1051.*

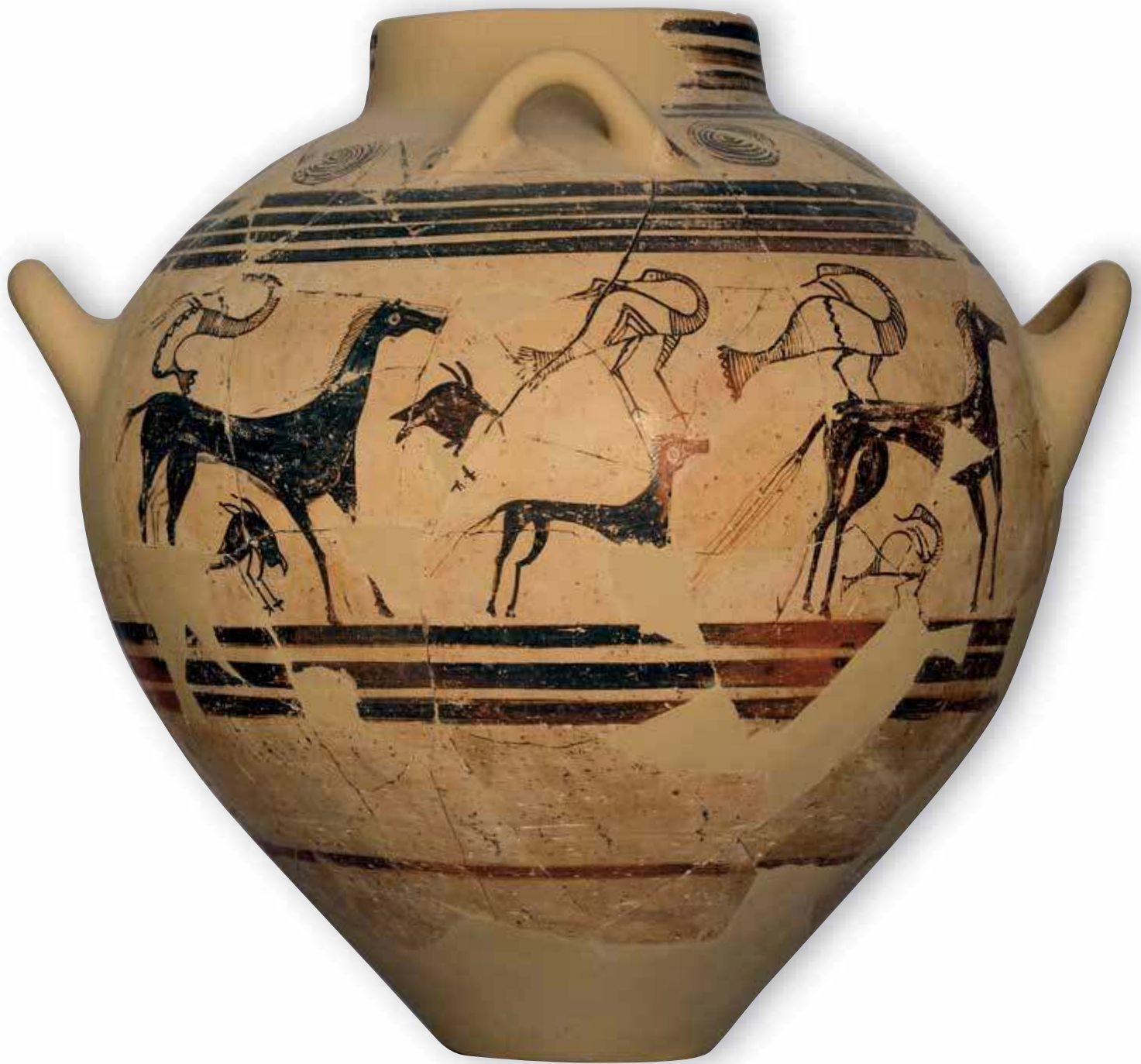


*Jug. Cult Center area. LH IIIC Early (1180-1150 BC). MM 1075.*



*Jug. Chamber tomb cemetery at the 3rd Kilometer, Tomb 502. LH IIIC Late (1100-1050 BC). MM 2448.*





*Collar-necked jar decorated with birds and horses. Palace area. LH IIIC Middle (1150-1100 BC). MM 1961. This composition with horses and foals roaming freely and accompanied by birds is one of the loveliest examples of the pictorial style of the Post-Palatial Period. The scene, which has no close parallels, may reflect the tendency of the Mycenaeans to disengage themselves from the guardianship of the wanakes following the collapse of the palace system of governance. Perhaps this unique vase served as a tomb marker for some member of the new ruling class in Mycenae.*











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All errors and omissions are the exclusive responsibility of the author.



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MYCENAE



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