



Royal Burials in Mycenaean Greece

HPAR4005

Early Royal Burials

- Dramatic increase in wealth of Greek mainland at beginning of LBA:
 - MH III-LHI: Shaft Graves, Mycenae
 - LH I: development of tholos tomb, e.g. Vapheio
 - LH II: Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos
- Emergent elites consuming luxury goods from Crete



Gold rings, Pylos

Early Royal Burials at Mycenae

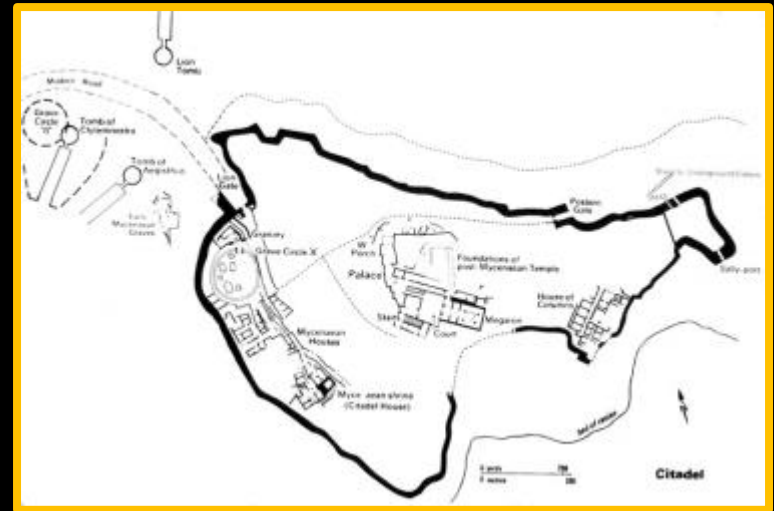
- Early Mycenaean period first evidence for kingship?
- LH I characterised by wealthy burials
 - Shaft Graves
 - First *Tholos* tombs
- Mycenae: later reverence of Circle A
 - Remembered as burial ground of kings of Mycenae down to 1st century AD



Grave Circle A, Mycenae

Shaft Graves: Mycenae

- Circle A discovered by Schliemann in 1876
 - Staggering wealth
 - Identified as burial ground of the ancient rulers of Mycenae
 - Homeric epitaph: “Mycenae rich in gold”
- Circle B excavated in 1951:
 - More detailed information on context & deposition of burials
 - Predates Circle A
- Relationship between both circles?



Plan of Mycenae

Grave Circle B

- Established at end of MH period over prehistoric burial ground
 - Circular enclosure wall
 - Creating ties with ancestors & legitimising control over resources
- 26 graves:
 - 15 males
 - 6 females
 - 2 sub adult males & 2 sub adult females
 - Wealthy child burials suggests inherited status



Detail of Circle B

Grave Circle B

- Shaft graves holding inhumations:
 - Position of burial
- Debris from Funerary feast thrown into shaft:
 - Animal bones & molluscs



Grave Upsilon

Grave Goods

- Primarily pottery
- Later burials are increasingly wealthy
- Some gender differences
- Emergence of a warrior elite at beginning of LBA:
 - Males with swords



Matte-painted ware

Grave Goods

- Latest burials are most wealthy
- Graves Omikron & Gamma marked by plain stone stelae
- Exotic grave goods:
 - Amber necklace
 - Rock crystal duck vase
 - Minoan amethyst seal
 - Electrum mask



Grave Circle A

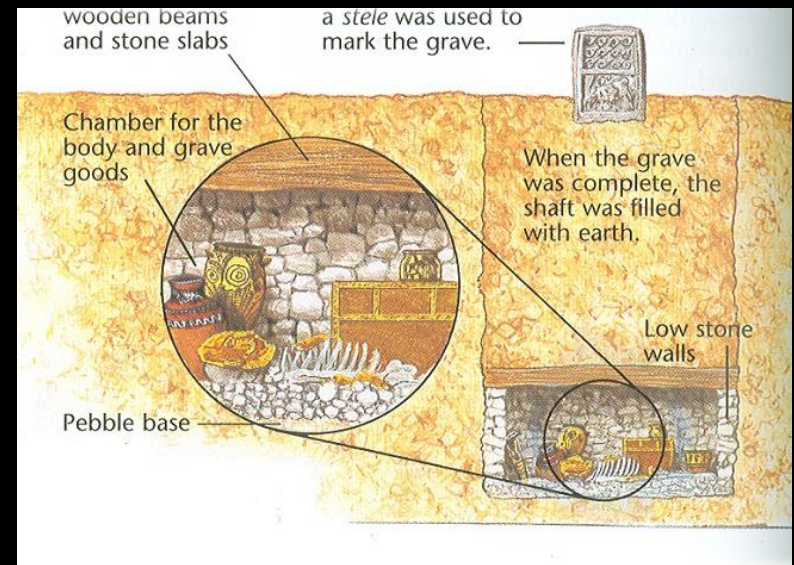
- Initial use overlaps with the final use of Circle B
- Six graves containing 19 burials:
 - 9 men, 8 women & 2 infants
 - Shaft Graves marked with decorated stelae
- Similar burial ritual & similar range of goods, but richer & more elaborate
- Different treatment of Circles by later inhabitants



Grave stela

Grave Circle A

- Gender differences:
 - Range of grave goods
 - Diet: stable isotope analysis
- What might this tell us about Mycenaean society?
 - Male social role (hunting/warriors)
 - Females: marriage value



Reconstruction of burial

Conspicuous Consumption

- Large quantities of gold
 - Removing imported luxury materials from circulation
 - "Mycenae rich in gold"
- Symbols of power used to legitimise power?
- Bodies covered in gold (not worn in life):
 - Rosettes etc sewn onto clothes/funerary shrouds



Gold adornment

Conspicuous Consumption

- Face masks: male burials only
- Significance of practice?
 - Does not appear to survive into later Mycenaean period



Gold face mask

Conspicuous Consumption

- Females: personal adornment:
 - Pins
 - Earrings
 - Necklaces (including amber)
 - Signet rings (with “masculine” iconography)
- Use of precious, imported exotics
- Do they have access to wealth in their own right?
- Is this representative of dowry/marriage wealth



Earrings



Signet ring

Conspicuous Consumption

- Drinking vessels of precious metals
 - Used in funerary feast
 - Consumption of specialised liquids is a strictly controlled social event
 - Demonstrates membership of exclusive group



Nestor's cup

Conspicuous Consumption

- Libation vessels (*rhyton* – *rhyta*):
 - Ritual performance: liquid offerings
 - Extensive use of gold & silver
 - Ostrich egg rhyta



Lion's-head rhyton



Siege rhyton



Bull's-head
rhyton

Conspicuous Consumption

- Warrior elite: ceremonial weapons
- Swords:
 - Elaborate gold leaf hilts
 - Chased decoration on blades
- Inlaid daggers:
 - Mix of cultural influences on iconography



Sword



Inlaid daggers



Interpretations

- Vast quantities of precious metals & ceremonial equipment removed from circulation
- Part of very visual ceremony/ritual within a special circle enclosure:
 - Area set aside specifically for the **special dead**
- Symbols of power
- Evidence for inherited wealth
- Warrior persona of male elite
- Revered by later Mycenaeans
 - Burials of the early rulers of Mycenae?

Development of the *Tholos*

- 16th-15th century BC: other wealthy burials of found throughout southern Peloponnese
- Common characteristic: extensive use of gold for personal adornment & drinking equipment
- Introduction of monumental circular built tomb:
 - *Vapheio tholos*



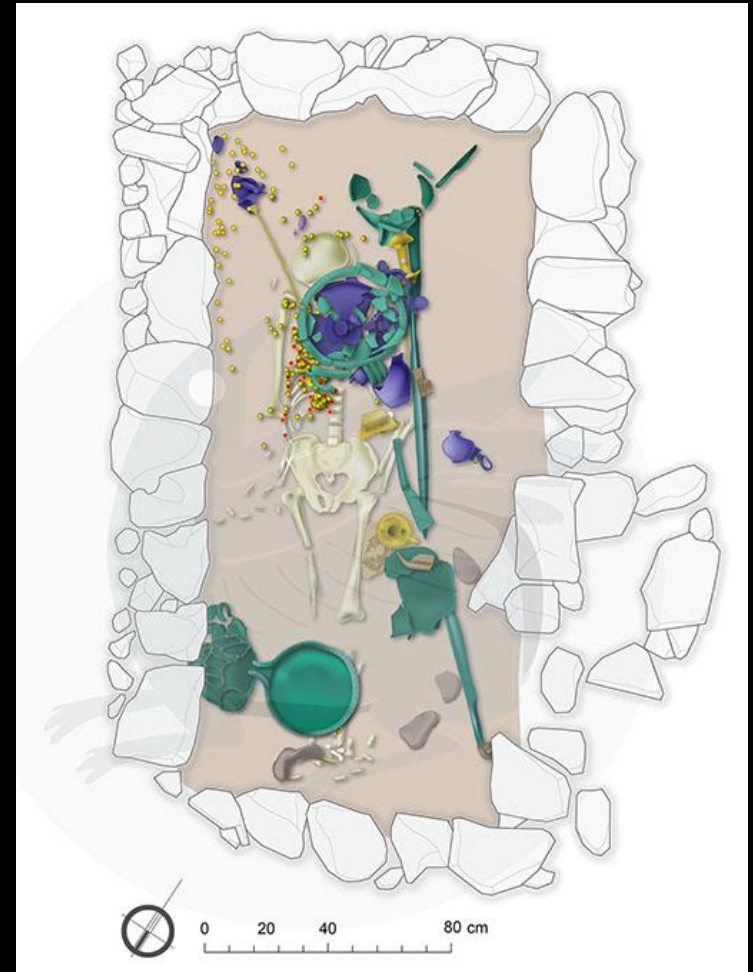
Vapheio cup



Vapheio tholos

Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos

- LH II Pylos
- Incredibly unlooted burial in stone lined cist
- Male burial (in his 30s) provided with over 1400 objects:
 - Primarily Minoan luxuries
 - Imported Baltic amber



Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos

- Grave goods:
 - 4 Minoan gold signet rings
 - Gold necklace
 - Necklace of 1,000 carnelian, amethyst, & jasper beads
 - 50+ Minoan sealstones
 - Toiletry articles: 6 combs & bronze mirror
 - Silver cups
 - Elaborate bronze sword with an ivory hilt.



Ivory comb



Bronze mirror

Rings from Griffin Warrior Tomb



Combat Agate

- “arguably the finest work of Aegean glyptic ever discovered” (Stocker & Davis 2017, 584)
 - 3.6 cm long: minute scale & detail of the engraving is unparalleled
- Minoan (LM I) product for Mycenaean consumption:
 - Parallels in gold signet rings from Mycenae



Combat agate



Signet ring, Mycenae

Summary

- Apparent explosion in wealth in southern Greece at beginning of LBA
- Access to imported luxuries & objects of Minoan craftsmanship
 - Mycenaeans beginning to take part in international exchange
- Primarily deposited in select burials:
 - Emergence of Mycenaean warrior elite
- LH II: development of tholos tomb
- Wealthy burials attested throughout Peloponnese, most importantly at Pylos