# Hybridisation: Shaft Graves and Early Mycenaean Greece

## Entanglements

# Cultural Hybridity

- "…cultural mixture is the effect of the practice of mixed origins" (Friedman 1995,: 84)
- Hybridisation: construction of new identities & new social practices in a contact zone
  - Mix of cultural similarities & differences
  - Social practice involving active social agents

Feasting scene, Ugarit

# Middle Ground

- Interaction creates new social structures & practices
  - Mutually beneficial social interaction & exploitation of differences
  - Development of mutually understood system of values
- Great Lakes fur trade:
  - Social interaction made binding through exchange of culturally appropriate gifts appealing to values of both sides

Great Lakes fur trade

# Shared Cultural Milieu

- "Colonisation" against a background of shared cultural values:
  - Elite interaction
- Spread of culture over a geographic area, but no evidence for military interaction/control
  - Is there a degree of control & advantage on part of one social group?

Gold signet rings, Pylos

# Lost in Translation

- Transformation of external influences by merging them with existing values/practices
- Translation:
  - Foreign practices, objects, ideas made accessible
  - Value depends on their integration into social practices
- Social Imaginary:
  - Negotiation of value & meaning linked to how people perceive the world
  - How they choose to attach significance to the exotic
  - Objects are what they become

Amber necklace, Mycenae

# Early Royal Burials

- Dramatic increase in wealth of Greek mainland at beginning of LBA, c. 1650 BC:
  - MH III-LH I: Shaft Graves, Mycenae
  - LH I: development of tholos tomb, e.g. Vapheio tholos
  - LH II: Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos
- Emergent elites consuming luxury goods from Crete

# Wealthy Burials

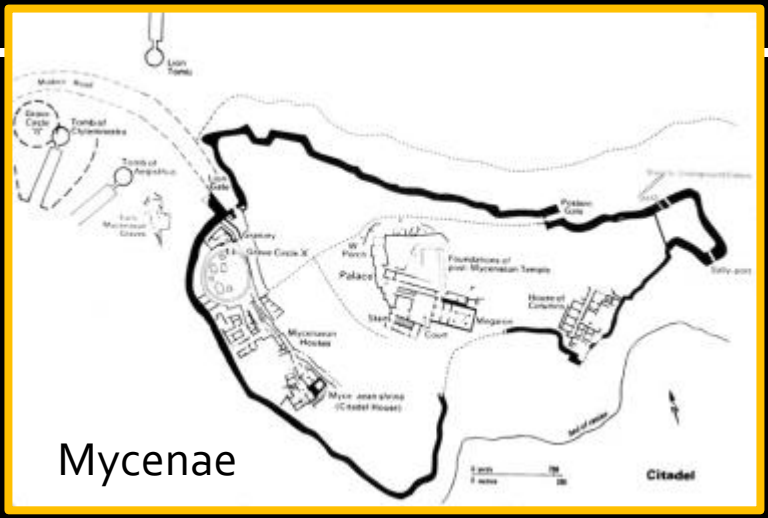
- Exclusive burial grounds:
  - Massive statement of power & conspicuous consumption
- Extensive use of gold for personal adornment & drinking equipment
- Transformation of material world, social practices & ideologies of Mycenaean elite
  - Manipulation of exotic imagery & objects

Grave Circle A, Mycenae

Vapheio tholos

# Mycenae Shaft Graves

- Grave Circle B:
  - Established over ancient burial ground in MH III
  - Enclosed for elite burials
- Grave Circle A:
  - Established LH I, overlapping Circle B
  - Later remembered as burial place of the kings of Mycenae
- Influence from Minoan Crete in construction of Mycenaean world



Mycenae

Grave Circle B

# Circle B Grave Goods

- Pottery
- Latest burials are most wealthy
- Exotic grave goods:
  - Amber necklace
  - Rock crystal duck vase
  - Minoan amethyst seal
  - Electrum mask

# Grave Circle A

- Stands out for consumption of gold
- More explicit adoption of Minoanising elements:
  - Luxury vessels & ritual performance
  - Signet rings
  - Weapons

Gold jewellery

# Drinking Sets

- MH: ceramic drinking sets were a prerequisite:
  - Two-handled *kantharos* & a jug
- Continuity of practice into Shaft Grave period:
  - Final communion with dead at graveside important element of ritual
  - Traditional MH form persists (but in gold)

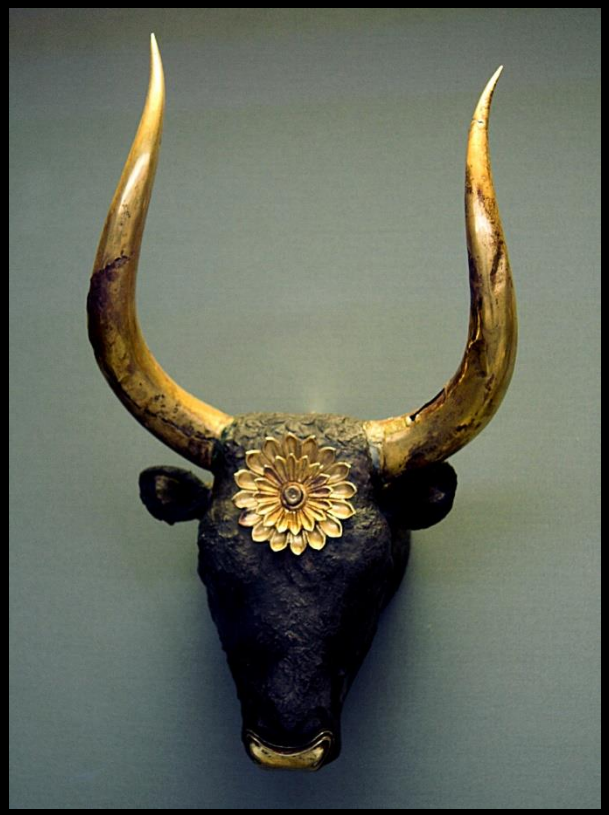
# Luxury Drinking Sets Vessels

# Conspicuous Consumption

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

Lion's-head rhyton

# Libation Vessels



Ostrich rhyton

# Signet Rings

- Only 3 Minoan seal stones:
  - In contrast to 43 from Vapheio
  - More than 50 from Pylos
- Not fully integrated in Mycenaean lifeways?
  - Or too precious to be buried?
- 2 gold signet rings in Tomb IV:
  - Minoan material item
  - Iconography adapted from Mycenaean taste

Battle in the Glen

Chariot scene

# Conspicuous Consumption

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

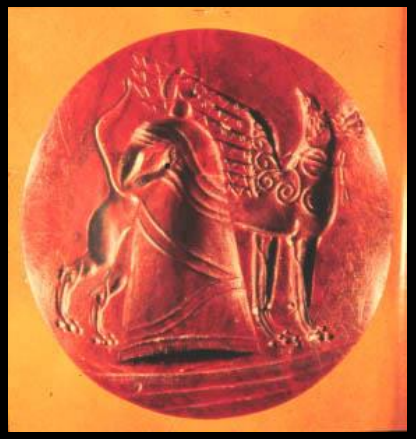
Sword

Inlaid daggers

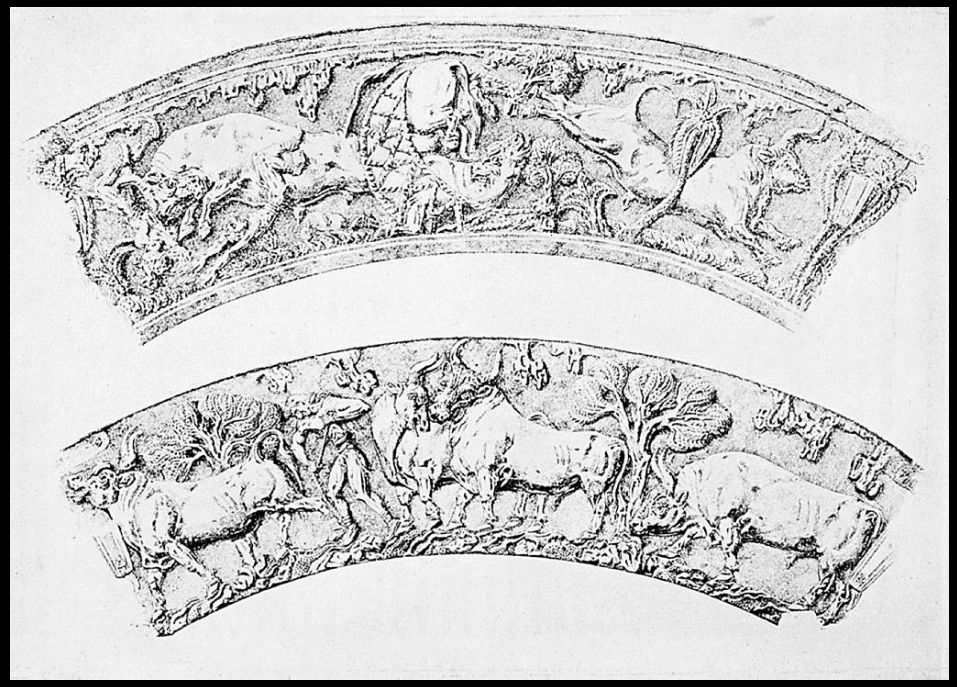
# Vapheio

- Tholos tomb, LH I
- Although looted some finds from cache in floor:
  - 2 gold cups
  - 43 sealstones
- Minoan or Minoanising influences

Vapheio cups

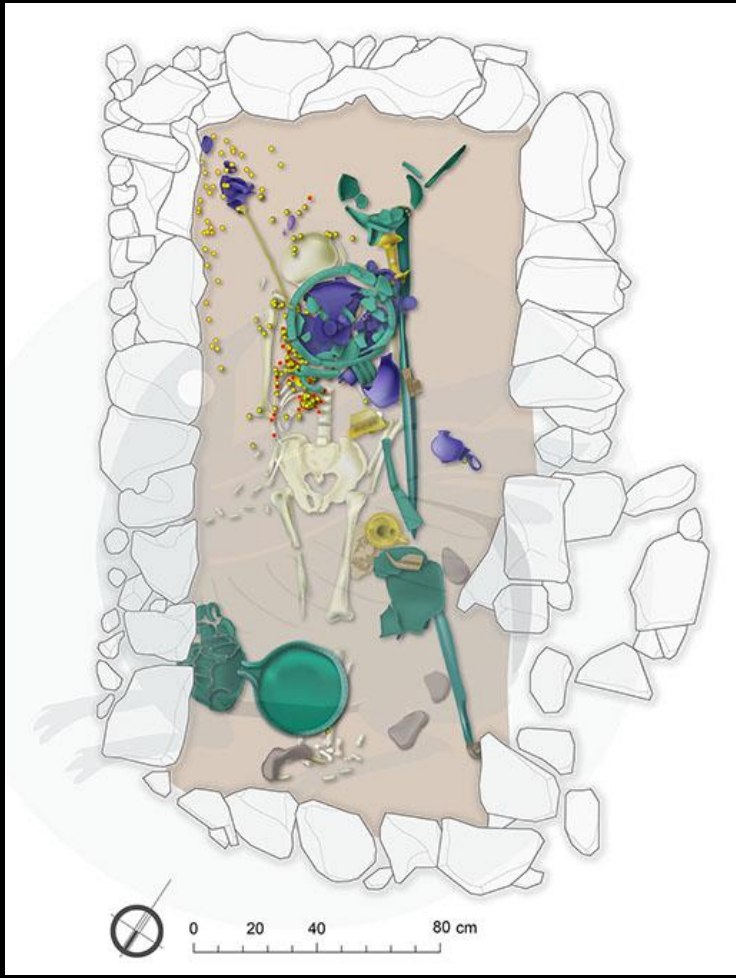


Seal stone



# Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos

- LH II Pylos
- Incredible 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

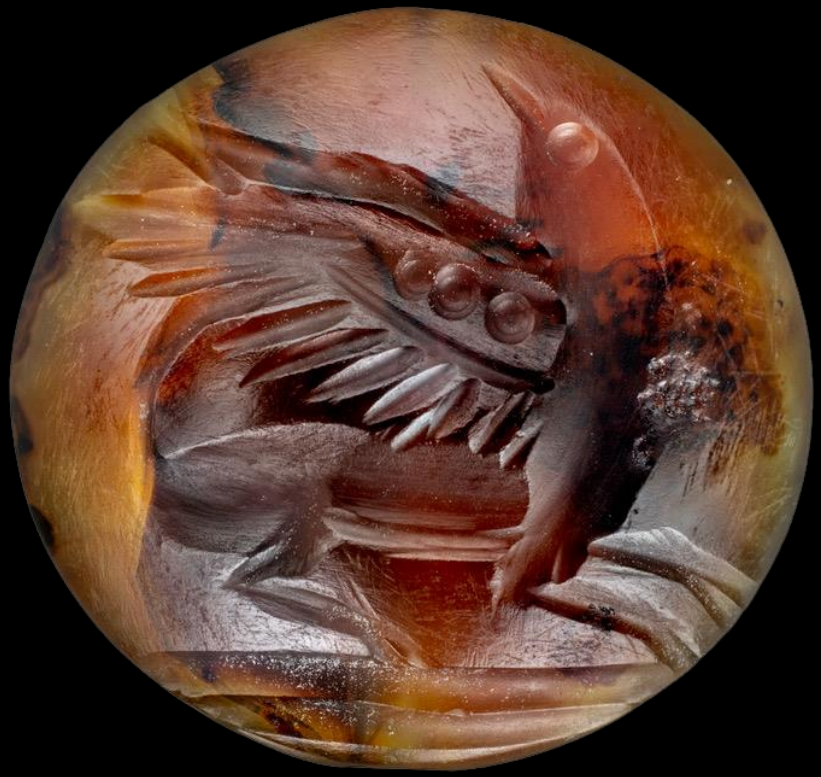
- Grave goods:
  - 4 Minoan gold signet rings
  - Gold necklace
  - Necklace of 1,000 carnelian, amethyst, & jasper beads
  - 50+ Minoan sealstones
  - Toiletry articles: 6 combs & bronze mirror
  - Silver cups
  - Elaborate bronze sword with an ivory hilt.

Ivory comb

Bronze mirror

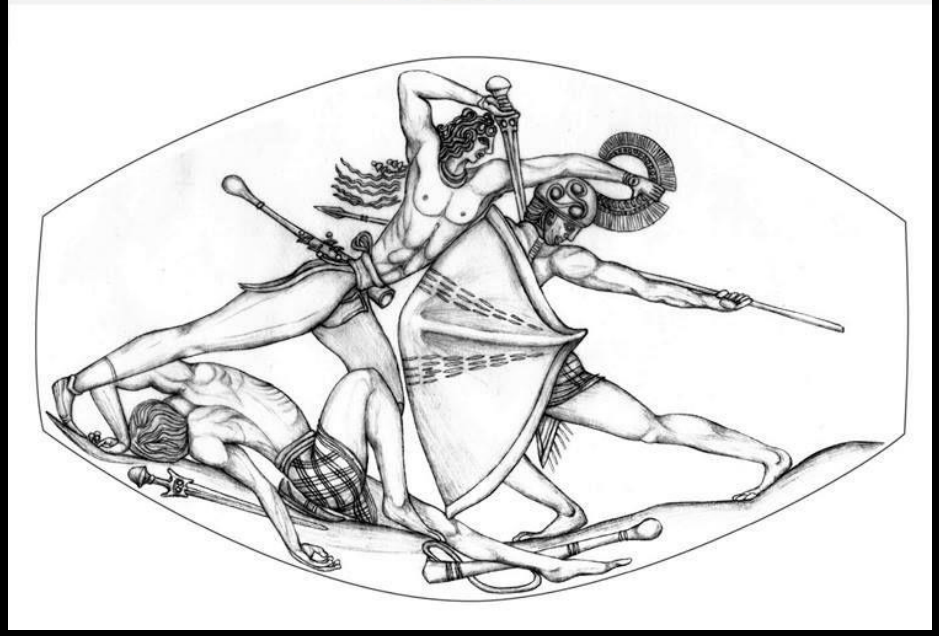
# Adoption of Minoan Seals

- Seal stones & signets used on Crete for some 300 years
  - Development of sophisticated lapidary techniques
  - Iconography
- Ones available for study:
  - Pristine: use life?
- How are these incorporated in Pylian society?
  - Status symbols?
  - Used as seal stones?
  - Personal effects?



Griffin seal stone, Pylos

# Sealstones



# 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

# Rings from Griffin Warrior Tomb

# Summary

- Transformation of Mycenaean society at beginning of LBA through contact with Minoan Crete
- Adoption of certain aspects of Minoan culture (but variable – time & place)
- Adaptation of Minoan iconography to meet Mycenaean ideologies
- Mixing of social practice: new ways of doing things in ritual performance