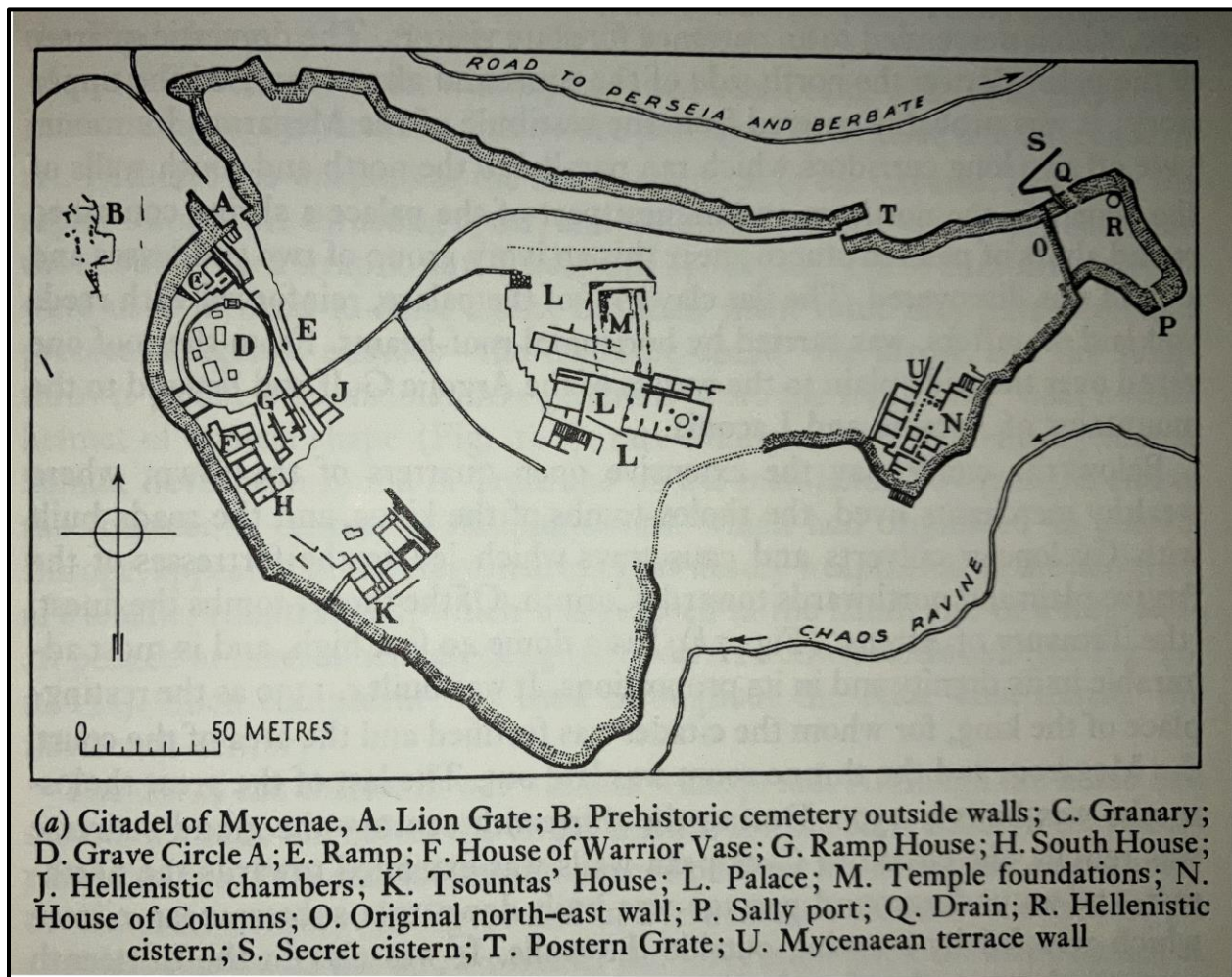


Mycenaean Identity “Pinterest Board”



(Author, 2025)

Mycenae, located in the North-eastern arm of the Peloponnese and at its height in the early bronze age, is known for its burials that reflect its rise to power. In popular media, the king Agamemnon is a well known figure. However, what does it mean to be Mycenaean?



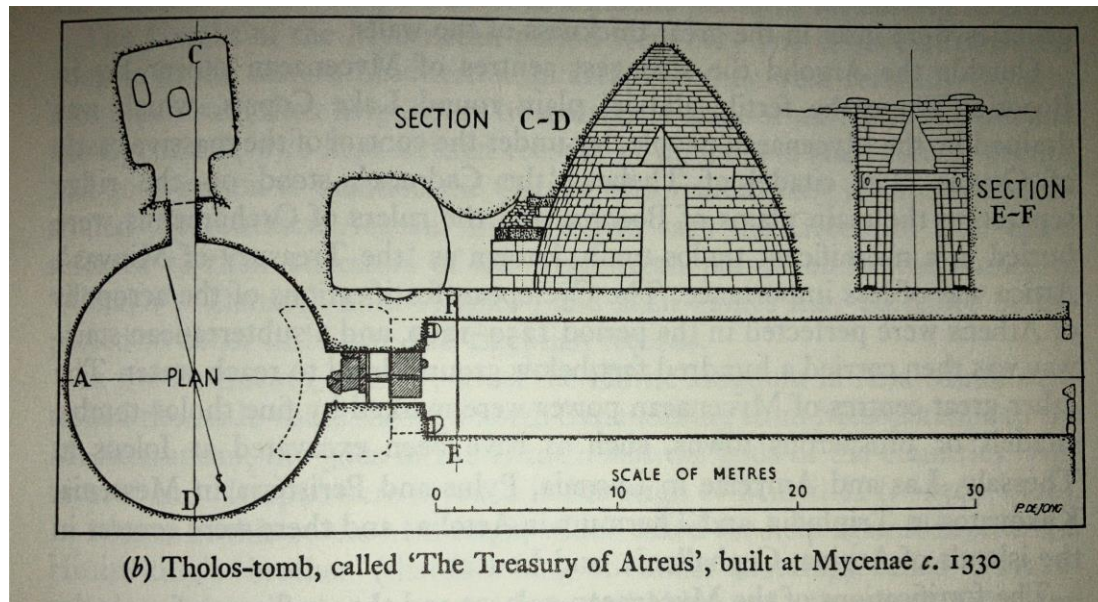
(Fig 7 of Hammond, 1991)

The citadel of Mycenae is an impressive site to this day and is obviously the remains of a great civilisation. Lives would have been lived within the walls, daily life gone about, trade and bartering occurred. But does the place make it Mycenaean, or the people?



(Author, 2025)

Identity is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “who or what something is.” (Hawker, 2003) This definition does little to help define what a Mycenaean may have been, how they may have seen themselves, or how others say them. It lacks the nuance of culture, ethnicity, materiality, and status, topics explored in Feuer’s *Being Mycenaean: A View From the Periphery*.



(Fig 7 of Hammond, 1991)

Any book or other source that discusses Mycenae will always discuss the grave circles, shaft graves, and tholos tombs found at the site. Sites of death such as graves are treasure troves for archaeologists, with grave goods and skeletal remains providing insights that remaining literature may not always be able to provide, if it is available.



(Trepte, 2008)

Grave Circle A is one of the grave circles at Mycenae. It is one of the more obvious examples of Mycenaean culture still standing within the physical remains of Mycenae. The rituals regarding the dead must form some part of what it means to be Mycenaean, otherwise it would not have been practiced.

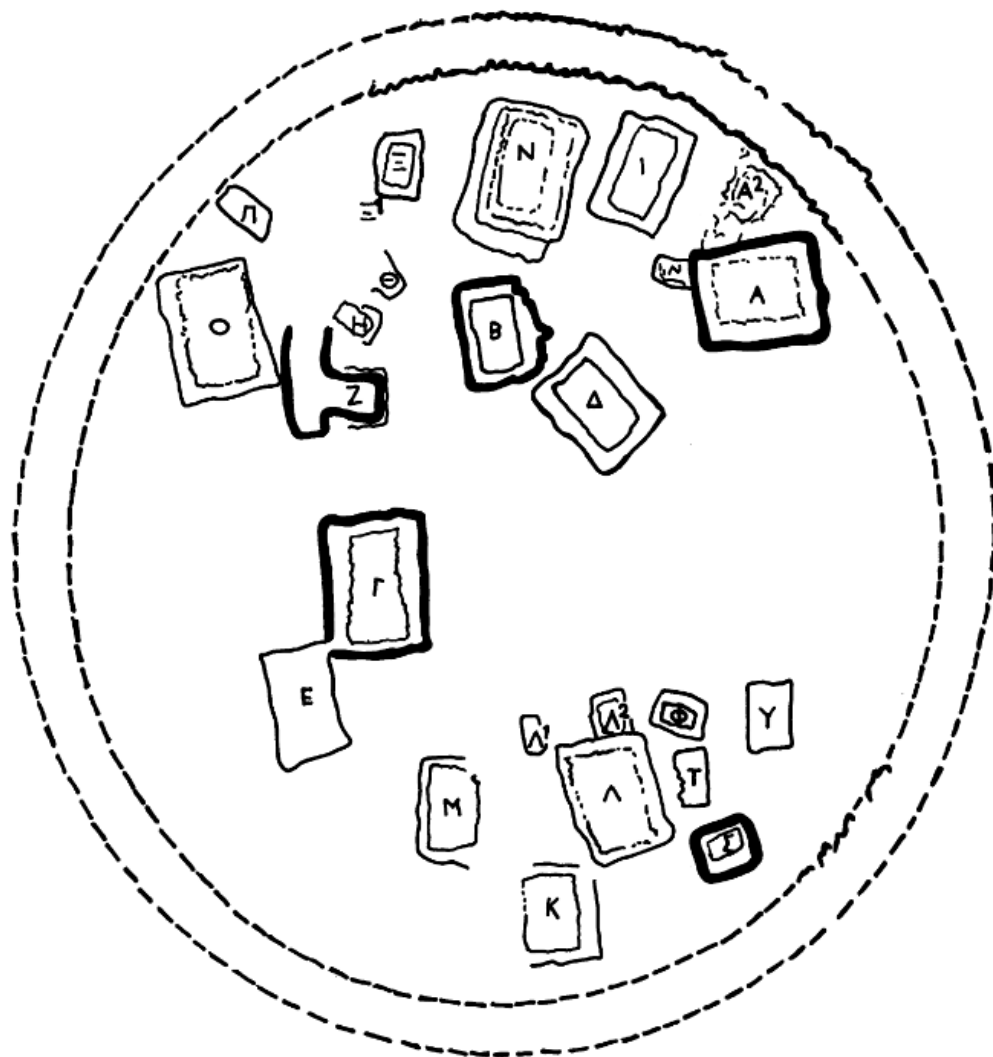


FIG.1. Plan of Grave Circle B; graves from which skulls were reconstructed marked with heavy outline (after Dickinson, *Origins*, fig. 7).

(Fig 1 of Musgrave et al., 1995)

Grave Circle B is another more obvious example of Mycenaean culture, revolving around death and ritual. The grave goods and skeletons found within these graves makes up a significant portion of the academic discussion around Mycenae and Mycenaean culture.

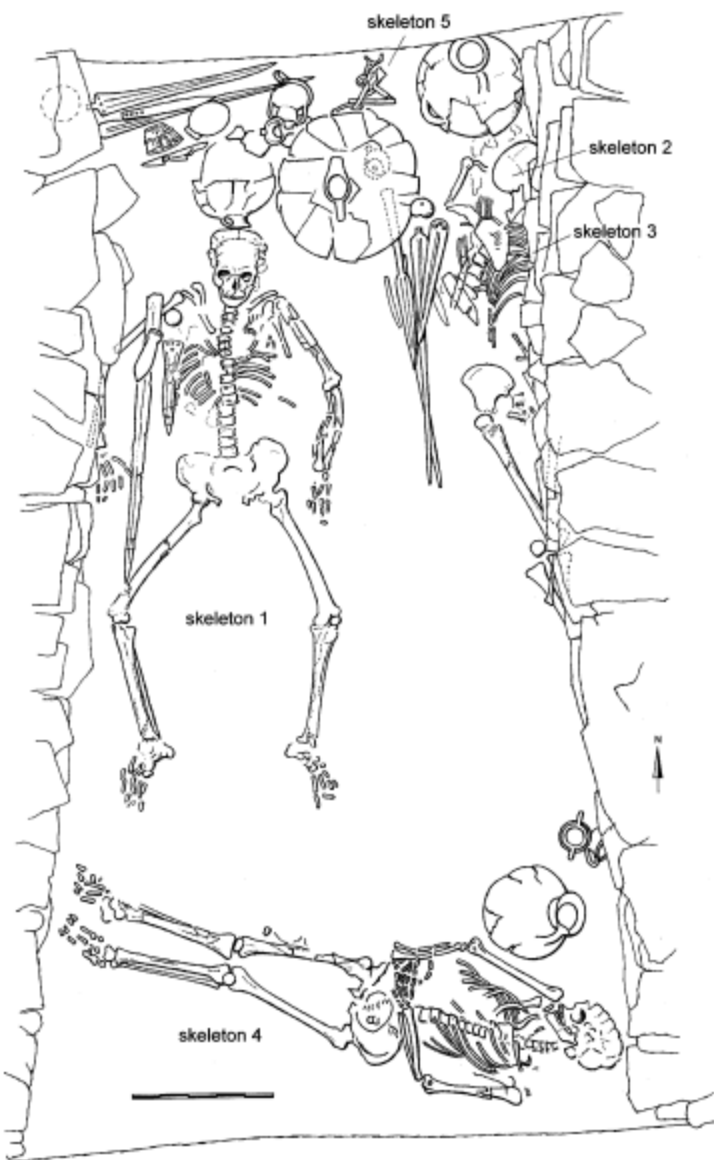


Figure 4 Primary and secondary burials in grave Γ (based on Mylonas (1973, figure 5)). Skeletons 1 and 4 are primary burials; skeleton 3 is a secondary, only partly disarticulated burial; and skeletons 2 and 5 are fully disarticulated secondary burials, pushed into a heap.

(Fig 4 of Voutsaki, 2010)

Death makes a fundamental part of how modern people, both academic and general, perceive Mycenaean identity, but is that all Mycenae has to offer?



(adapted from Fig 2 of Nakassis, 2012)

Literature has been found from Mycenae, mostly administrative tablets as opposed to what we might expect from other places in “Ancient Greece,” this one detailing amounts of wheat and seed. In the red box, the adjective *wa-na-ka-te-ro*.



(adapted from Fig 2 of Nakassis, 2012)

The symbols in Linear B of the adjective *wa-na-ka-te-ro* (Palaima, 2006) highlighted.



(Author, 2025)

Wa-na-ka – the Linear B for *wanax*, or the Greek *ἄναξ* meaning “Lord,” (Morwood & Taylor, 2002) but at the time of the Mycenaeans, “King.” Indicates the ruler of a settlement, and part of what Feuer describes as a ‘distinctive’ part of Mycenaean culture.



Fig. 3. Blade 764 from Grave Circle A, Grave V (Schuchhardt 1891b, fig. 287).

(Fig 3 of Harrell, 2014)

Decorative, but functional, weapons found within graves at Mycenae are another impressive sight, though techniques used for such items may not have been originally Mycenaean.



(Fig 3 of Boyd, 2014)

Pottery is another common aspect of Mycenaean culture. Found within Mycenae and throughout the Aegean, it is a certain factor of the identity of the Mycenaeans. Ceramics are fundamental for everyday living but are also capable of displaying wealth and artistic superiority, even to other cultures who may not possess the same definition of wealth.

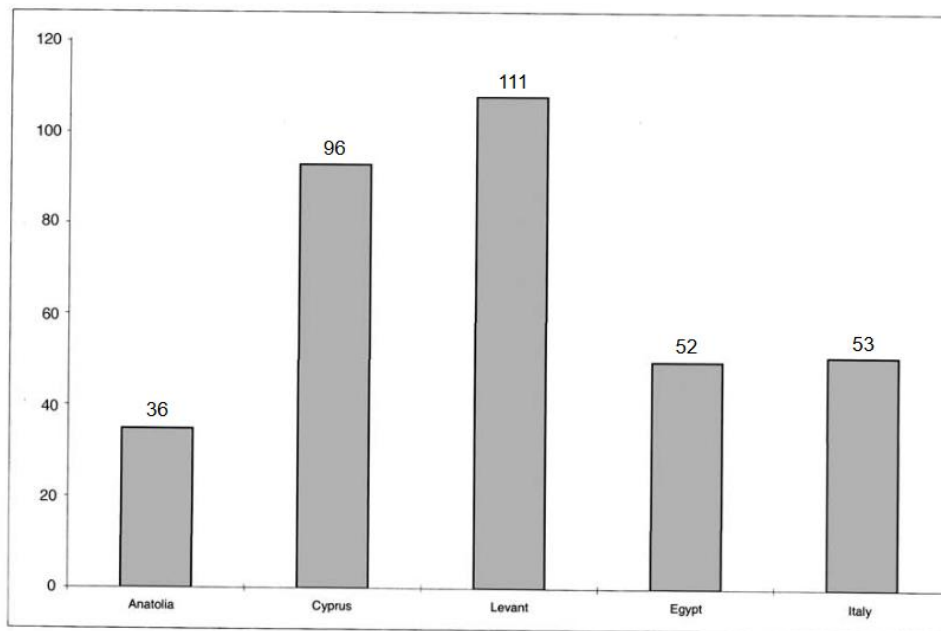


Fig. 2.3 Number of sites with Mycenaean pottery per area

(Fig 2.3 of van Wijngaarden, 2002)

This graph displaying geographical locations with a 'number of sites with Mycenaean pottery per area' shows just how far the reach of Mycenae spread. What was seen to be

“Mycenaean” must have been identified throughout these various locations both by the inhabitants of the time and archaeologists.



(Orlovic, 2005)

The Lion Gate at the entrance to the Mycenaean citadel is an impressive feat of engineering, likely to affect foreigners who may observe it. Feuer describes the material culture of architecture as ‘distinctively Mycenaean.’ As one of the remaining parts of the citadel, tourists today and those of the ancient world associate it fervently with Mycenae and the Mycenaeans.

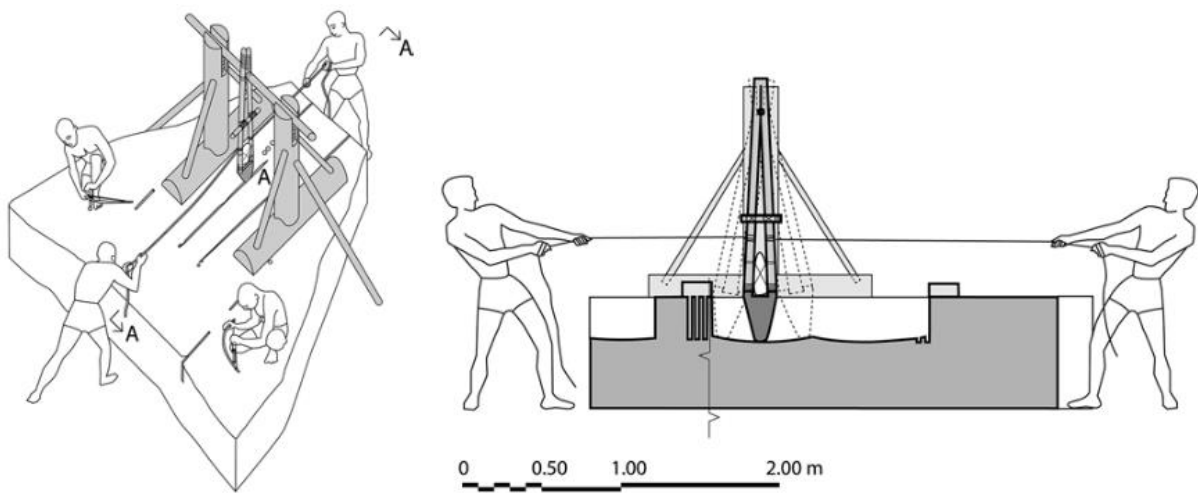


Fig. 18. Construction phase 3 of the Lion Gate relief, showing conjectural pendulum saw machine in action: *left*, isometric view; *right*, cross-section view of workers cutting through left side of column shaft (cross-section A-A) (drawing by G. Bianco and N. Blackwell).

(Fig 18 of Blackwell, 2014)

Instead of Mycenaean identity being the impressive displays of power in infrastructure and material culture, could it be the people behind those displays? Are the people who created these items fundamental to them and the fact they are Mycenaean, and could it still be Mycenaean if it were the exact same items produced by another people?



PRAG ET AL
SEVEN FACES FROM GRAVE CIRCLE B AT MYCENAE
(a) Reconstructed head of B5a with hair, (b) Reconstructed head of A62 with hair and beard, (c) Reconstructed head of F55 with hair and beard, (d) Reconstructed head of F50 with hair. (Courtesy University of Manchester)

(Musgrave et al., 1995)

Reconstructing faces for the skulls found in the graves from Grave Circle B reconnects us to these people from a vastly different time. When viewing a skeleton, it is easy to see just that – a skeleton. Returning some of the more recognisable humanity to these people reminds us that they did not see themselves that way. Whilst their skeleton displays parts of their life with ease, such as generic facial features, muscle strain, or arthritis, they did not see themselves as one.

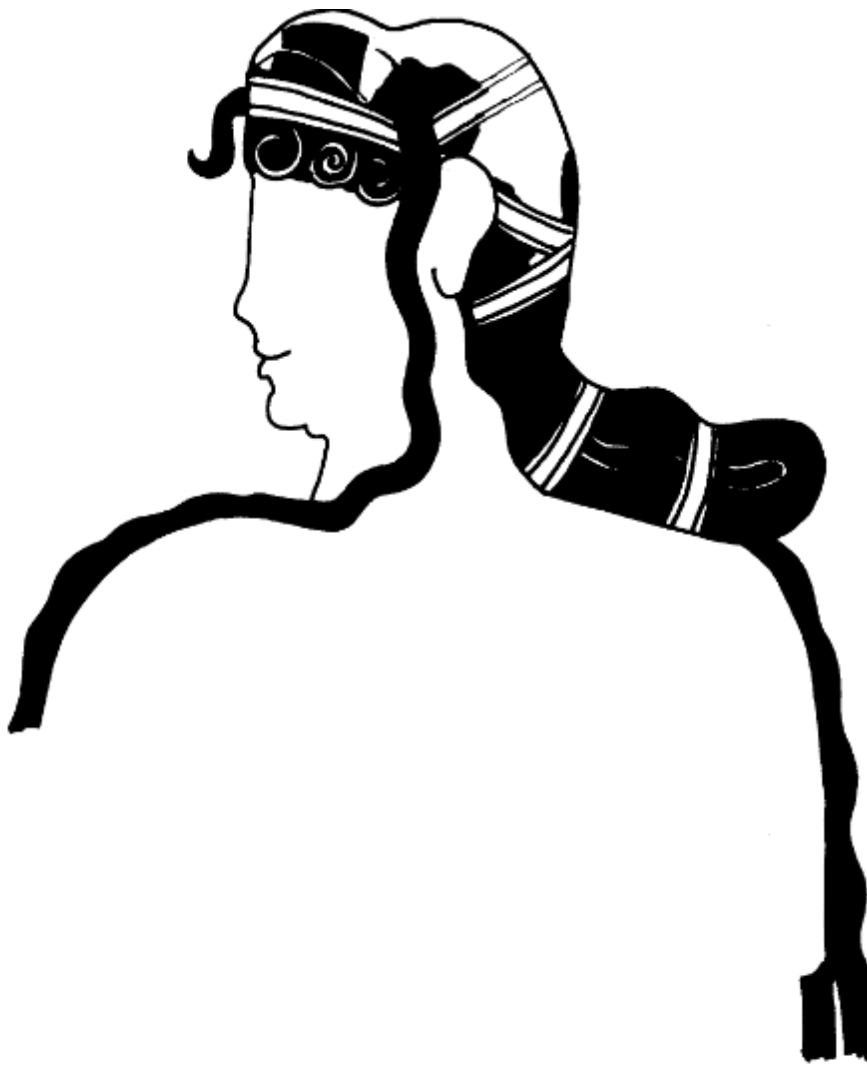
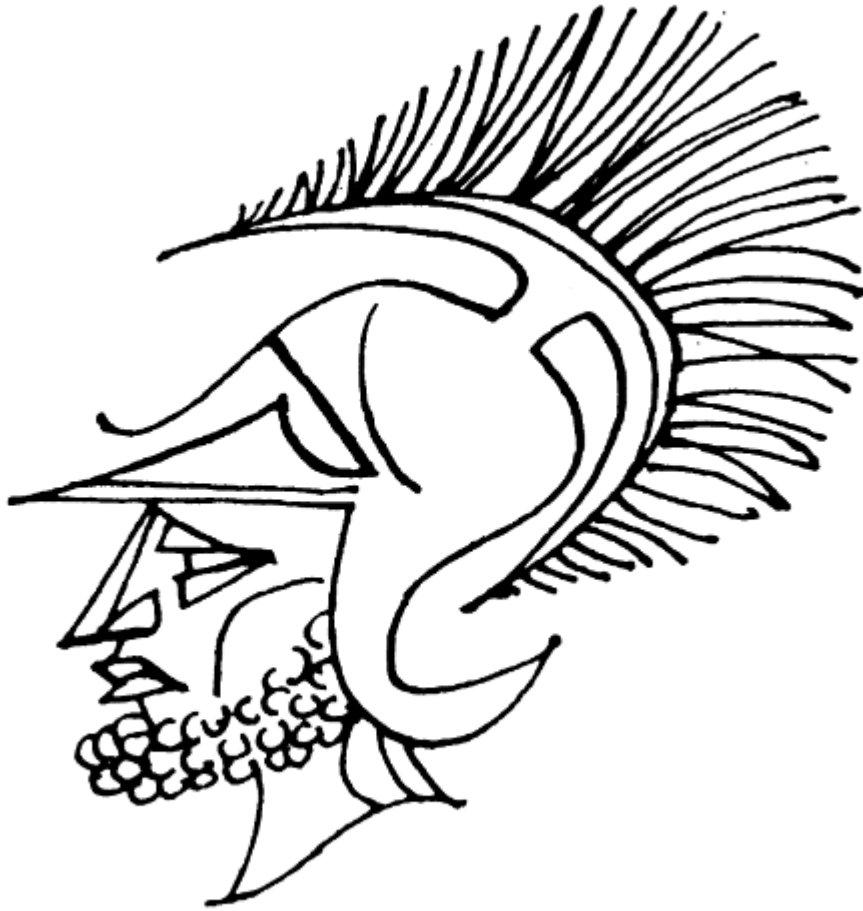


FIG. 11. Hairstyle of 'Mycenaean Lady': fresco fragment from House of the High Priest, Mycenae, Late Helladic III B2, c.1200 BC.

(Fig 11 of Musgrave et al., 1995)

This fresco fragment showing a hairstyle from Mycenae may shed a small amount light on how the Mycenaeans viewed themselves, instead of how others viewed them through it being their own depiction of themselves.



(De Vaca, 2009)

A sketch from De Vaca's poem *Mycenae*, displaying how a modern audience might imagine a Mycenaean to appear.



(E. Gilliéron père, as in Abrahamitis, 2011)

The so-called *Mask of Agamemnon*, as seen in this recreation by E. Gilliéron père, is one of the most famous grave goods to have come from the graves at Mycenae. Whilst it is possible to theorise how the Mycenaeans may have seen themselves, what remains of their civilisation lies in their grave goods and in the communications between other cultures. The identity of the Mycenaean for many will always be from the view of an outsider looking in.

Reflection

I rely quite heavily on *Being Mycenaean: A View From the Periphery* by Bryan Feuer for what an actual Mycenaean identity may have looked like. This is because the vast majority of sources about Mycenae I encountered were discussions and reanalyses of the grave circles, or of material goods of Mycenaean origins found in places that are not Mycenae. Whilst these are imperative in forming the concept of a Mycenaean, it wasn't really the angle I was trying to go for. Trying to form an 'insider looking out' perspective of identity for any people who did not write down their perspective will always be difficult, more-so with a culture the likes of Mycenae, where literary texts mostly revolve around agriculture and the social hierarchy. However, this does say something about the identity of the Mycenaeans, as discussed in Feuer's article. In terms of the style of assignment, I feel I have examined more sources looking for images than I would have done if I were addressing the same topic in essay form, however, I struggled a little with the concept? I think I would have found it easier to incorporate these images into a larger essay format. Also, I know more Linear B than I did three days ago, which is always a bonus.

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