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THE LOCATION OF THE TREASURY OF ATREUS

Summary. The Treasury of Atreus, the largest and most impressive of the nine tholos tombs found at Mycenae, stands by itself at the southern edge of a bowl in the east slope of the Panagia ridge. This paper argues that the tomb was constructed on this particular spot so that it would be seen from the trackways/roads that led to Mycenae from the east, south-east and south-west and from the main pathway to the palace. The view of the acropolis hill and Mt. Profitis Ilias from the space occupied by the earthen mound above the tholos also appears to have influenced the choice of location. It is suggested that the position of the Treasury of Atreus was, like the tomb itself, a political statement, calculated to show that the ruler who built the tomb succeeded in extending the territory of Mycenae across the central Argolid.

INTRODUCTION

Capital of the legendary kings Atreus and Agamemnon, Mycenae was clearly an exceptionally important and extremely powerful polity of Late Bronze Age Greece. It is situated at the northern end of the Argive plain, a fertile region in the north-east Peloponnese (Fig. 1). Nearly 280 m above sea-level, the acropolis hill, upon which the citadel was constructed and the settlement was centred, lies between two much higher peaks, namely Profitis Ilias and Zara, rising to the north-east and south-east of Mycenae, respectively. The acropolis hill is separated from these mountains by two deep ravines: the Kokoretsa (on the north side) and the Chavos (on the south side). At the acropolis, the Chavos ravine, which runs to Mycenae from the east, turns south to follow a course between Mt. Zara and a long hill called the Panagia ridge.

Mycenae boasts nine tholos tombs, divided into two groups by the Panagia ridge. There are four tholoi on the east side of the hill. They are, in order of construction, the Tomb of Aegisthus, the Lion Tomb, the Treasury of Atreus (known locally as the Tomb of Agamemnon) and the Tomb of Clytemnestra (Iakovidis and French *et al.* 2003, 48, 51–2, 56; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 35–6; Wace 1949, 16–18; but see Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 45–6 on the difficulty of placing tholos tombs in chronological order). The other five tholoi are located on the west side of the ridge (Fig. 2). It has been observed that those on the east side are larger, more ornate and closer to the acropolis than those on the west side, and so are thought to have been built by rulers of Mycenae. The tholoi on the west side of the Panagia ridge are regarded as tombs of the aristocracy (Dickinson 1977, 63; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 36; French and Shelton 2005, 182).

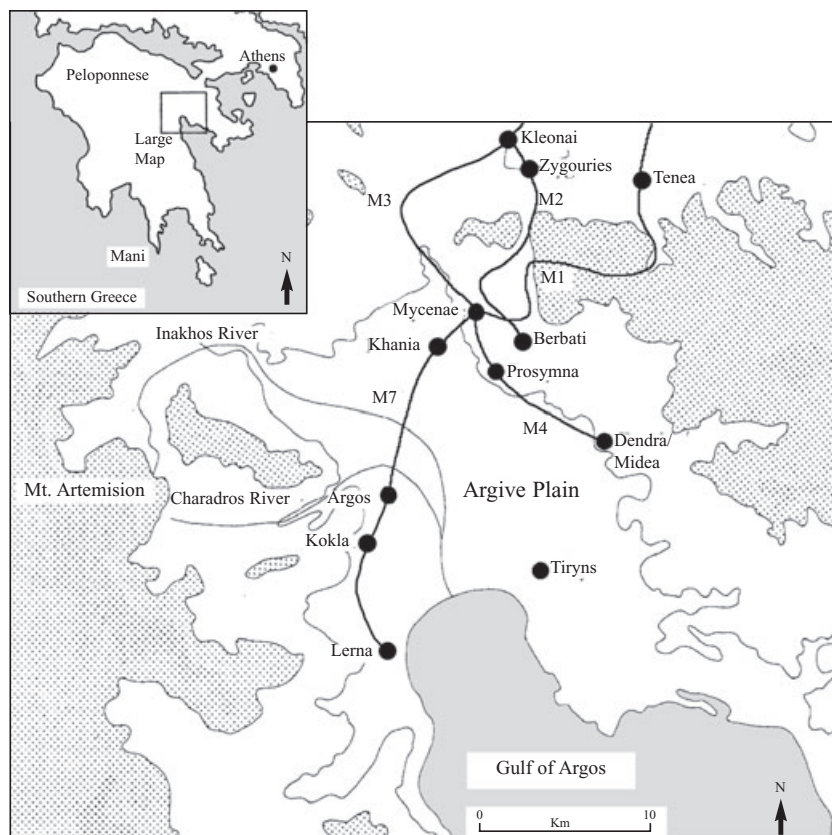


Figure 1

The central Argolid in the Late Bronze Age, showing the sites mentioned in the text and the probable courses of five of the roads leading to Mycenae. (Author)

Of the four ‘royal’ tholoi, three are set close together in the area immediately north-west of the acropolis. The fourth – the Treasury of Atreus – stands by itself at the southern edge of a bowl in the east slope of the Panagia ridge (Fig. 2). Certainly, this tomb could have been constructed in the space occupied by its successor (the Tomb of Clytemnestra), but instead was built away from its predecessors (the Tomb of Aegisthus and the Lion Tomb). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to explain why the Treasury of Atreus was built halfway along the Panagia ridge and not beside the acropolis.

The Treasury of Atreus

A masterpiece of Bronze Age architecture, the Treasury of Atreus is the largest and most impressive of the nine tholos tombs found at Mycenae. Immediately in front of the tomb, there is an artificial terrace about 27 m square, supported by a wall of large unworked blocks. Except for its north-east corner, which is preserved reasonably well, this retaining wall is in a ruinous

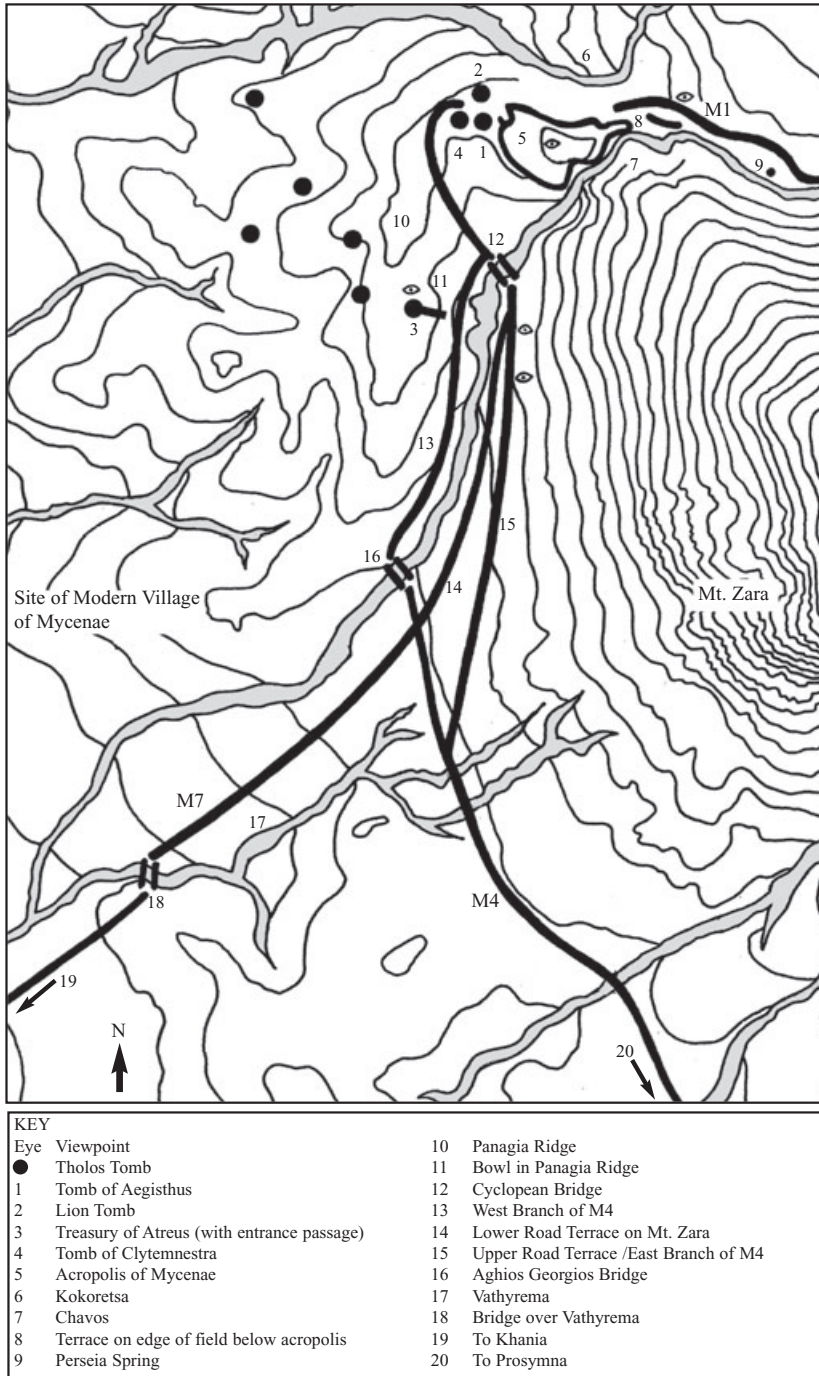


Figure 2

Mycenae, showing the location of the nine tholos tombs and the routes of the roads mentioned in the text. (Based on Wace 1949, fig. 2; with author's additions)



Figure 3
The Treasury of Atreus. (Author)

condition. The tomb's entrance passage, oriented east–west, is 6 m wide and 36 m long. Its walls, like those of the doorway and the chamber, are built of ashlar work in locally quarried conglomerate.¹ The facade at the inner end of the entrance passage is 10.50 m high. It is pierced by a doorway 2.70 m wide at ground level and 5.40 m high (Fig. 3). Framed by two receding fasciae, the doorway, like the relieving triangle above, was originally flanked by a pair of elaborately carved half-columns of green marble. The doorway, which is 5.40 m deep, is spanned by two enormous lintel blocks. The inner lintel is 8 m long, 5 m wide and 1.20 m thick and weighs about 120 tons, making it the heaviest block ever used in Greek architecture (Santillo Frizell 1997–98, 107; 1998, 173; 2003, 19).

Shaped like an old-fashioned beehive, the chamber, which is made up of 33 courses of perfectly fitting ashlar blocks, is 14.50 m in diameter and 13.20 m high. All the blocks were dressed to fit both the horizontal and vertical curves of the vault; many have nail holes in them, indicating that ornaments, probably of bronze, once adorned the walls. On the north side of the chamber, there is a doorway, 2.50 m high, leading to a rock-cut side-chamber about 6 m square.

A great mound of earth covers the upper part of the vault, which projected above the surface of the hillside. The eastern half of this mound has suffered badly from erosion, and as a result the mound's highest point is no longer directly above the top of the dome but several metres to the west (Wace 1956, 117). Excavations around the tomb revealed that the mound was supported at its base by a retaining wall built of rubble packed with clay. Over 1 m thick and preserved to a height of about 1.50 m, it had a facing and coping of well-dressed blocks of poros stone, giving a good architectural finish (Wace 1956, 116–19). After the tomb was sealed (by blocking up the doorway with masonry and filling up the entrance passage with earth), the mound and its supporting wall, together with the massive terrace in front of the entrance passage,

1 The conglomerate is a yellowish colour and contains small pebbles of calcite. Consequently, when first cut and set the blocks forming the walls of the east-facing entrance passage and façade would have shone and sparkled in the morning sunshine, adding to the visual impact of the newly constructed tomb.

would have ensured that the Treasury of Atreus remained a respected and prominent feature in the landscape at Mycenae.

For a long time now the construction date of the Treasury of Atreus has been a bone of contention, opinion being divided over whether the tomb was erected in mid-LH IIIA or mid-LH IIIB. Whilst there is some support for the later date (e.g. Mylonas 1966, 122; 1983, 174–5; Pelon 1976, 482–3), most scholars deem the earlier date to be correct (e.g. French 2002, 69; Cavanagh and Mee 1999, 94; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 36). After an examination of all the relevant evidence, this author adheres to the opinion that the tomb was raised in the middle of the LH IIIA phase. This view informs the arguments below.

ROUTES, HILLS AND VIEWS: THE LOCATION OF THE TOMB

Since the entrance passage was hewn out of bedrock and the lower half of the chamber was constructed inside a large cylindrical shaft sunk into the side of a hill, it is clear that the site of a tholos tomb was to some extent determined by local geology. It goes without saying that hard rocks were generally avoided and areas of soft rock were preferred (Mee and Cavanagh 1990, 225; Wells 1990, 127). Mts. Profitis Ilias and Zara, as well as the acropolis hill, consist of hard Triassic and Jurassic limestones, whereas the Panagia ridge and the hills adjoining its western side are made of marls (soft, impure limestones) and conglomerates, formed during the Pliocene and Pleistocene periods (Higgins and Higgins 1996, 45–7). Given this, it is not surprising that all of the tholos tombs at Mycenae are located west of the acropolis hill.

Since the Treasury of Atreus is situated within the same area of bedrock as the other eight tholoi, there appears to be no simple geological explanation for the location of the tomb. However, this author believes, and this paper will argue, that the choice of site for the Atreus Tomb was greatly influenced by the topography of Mycenae.

Roads M4 and M7

Mycenae was the focus of a network of well-built roads. One road – M4 – ran south-east from Mycenae, linking the site with settlements on the east side of the Argive plain. It has been traced as far as Prosymna, but probably terminated at the citadel of Midea (Wace and Stubbings 1962, fig. 25) (Fig. 1). A person travelling to Mycenae up this highway would have come to a fork in the road south of the settlement (Jansen 2002, map 2). The branch to the left crossed the Chavos at the Aghios Georgios Bridge, situated about 1 km south-west of the citadel, and then, as indicated by the remains of road terrace walls, proceeded towards the acropolis along the east slope of the Panagia ridge. The branch to the right ran along the foot of the west slope of Mt. Zara before crossing the Chavos at a bridge approximately 200 m south-west of the citadel (Iakovidis and French *et al.* 2003, 30, 57–8, map 7; Jansen 2002, 48–50, map 1). Mylonas, who discovered the remains of this bridge, states that it was built of large limestone boulders assembled in the Cyclopean style. He also found sections of roadway leading to and from the crossing (1966, 28, 87; 1983, 157).

It is possible that both branches merged near the north end of the Cyclopean bridge to become a single highway again; this road would have terminated at the acropolis (Jansen 2002, map 1). It would be wrong, however, to suggest that both branches were built at the same time. Although bridges in the vicinity of Mycenae were customarily constructed in the true Cyclopean technique, the Aghios Georgios Bridge, which is partially preserved, was not. Its imposing south

face is composed of large rectangular and roughly square blocks of limestone and conglomerate laid in courses, indicating that the bridge was built later than the one closer to the acropolis. It follows, therefore, that the road which ran along the foot of Mt. Zara was built first, and so constitutes the original course of M4 (Mylonas 1966, 28, 87; 1983, 157).

Interestingly, the Mycenae Survey identified not one but two lines of Mycenaean road terrace – an upper and a lower – running along the base of the west face of Mt. Zara. They are built of large unworked boulders (Iakovidis and French *et al.* 2003, 30, 57–8, map 7). The upper road would have provided the shortest route around the side of Mt. Zara, and so should be regarded as the eastern branch of M4 (Fig. 2).

The lower road terrace, according to the authors of the *Archaeological Atlas of Mycenae*, formed part of the highway that led to the farmstead at Khania. This highway – M7 – ran between the lower Chavos and the Vathyrema, crossing the latter at a bridge south of the modern village of Mycenae (Fig. 2). The ruins of the Mycenaean farmhouse at Khania lie about 700 m south-west of the remains of the bridge (Iakovidis and French *et al.* 2003, 59, maps 9, 10, the roads). Although no traces of M7 have been found beyond Khania, it seems certain that the road continued to Argos (Lavery 1995; French 2002, 69, 120, fig. 3). The artery may even have stretched as far south as the settlement at Lerna, on the shore of the Gulf of Argos (Wace and Stubbings 1962, fig. 25) (Fig. 1).

Since the two road terraces on Mt. Zara were not excavated, we do not know their exact date of construction.² We can be sure, however, that they replaced unmetalled tracks leading to the relatively easy crossing over the Chavos where the Cyclopean bridge was erected at some point in the Mycenaean era. On the opposite side of the crossing, there is a natural amphitheatre, which held part of the town of Mycenae (French 2002, fig. 25).

Walking along the line of either road terrace towards the crossing point, one sees the Treasury of Atreus to the north-west just before reaching the orchard of olive trees at the foot of Mt. Zara. The tomb is partially hidden from view by the foliage of the trees and bushes that surround it today. Still, it is an eye-catching landmark, because, as stated above, it is situated immediately to the south of the bowl in the Panagia ridge; the bowl makes the tomb stand out from the rest of the ridge (Fig. 4). Of course, the tomb would have been even more conspicuous in the Late Bronze Age, when it was not covered in vegetation and the mound, rubble-poros wall and terrace were all in their original condition. Considering both the general position of the tomb (on the east side of the Panagia ridge) and its specific position (beside the bowl), it can thus be suggested that the Treasury of Atreus was sited so that it would be seen by anyone approaching Mycenae from the south-east or south-west.

Continuing along the line of the road terraces, one soon finds oneself standing exactly opposite the Treasury of Atreus. Although the tomb at this point is on one's left and is therefore on the edge of one's field of vision, it is difficult to ignore, since it looks down on you from its elevated position on the ridge. The curve of the mound, which forms a distinctive bow-shaped silhouette on the skyline, contrasts with, and yet complements, the remains of the rectangular terrace below (Fig. 5). The tomb seems like an observation post for a sentinel charged with monitoring the movement of people along the foot of Mt. Zara and over the Chavos into the town of Mycenae. Perhaps in the eyes of the inhabitants of Mycenae the spirit of the ruler interred in

2 It is possible that the roads were constructed as early as LH IIIA2, since a stretch of road of this date was found at Mylos Cheliotou, near Ancient Corinth.

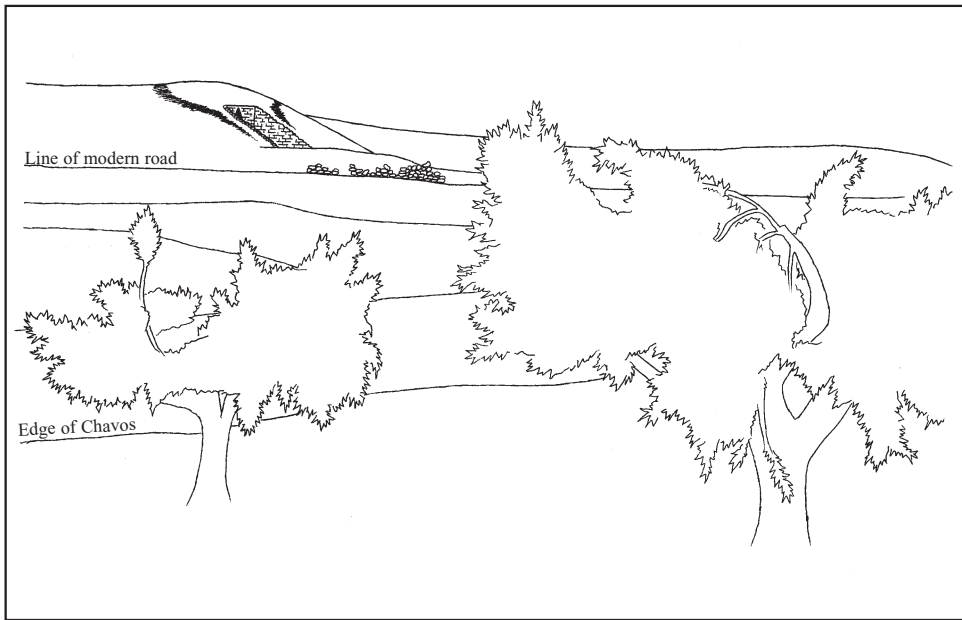


Figure 4

View of the Treasury of Atreus from the orchard of olive trees at the foot of the west face of Mt. Zara. (Author; based on photographs)

the Atreus Tomb fulfilled a protective function, guarding two of the main approaches to the settlement from his vantage point on the Panagia ridge.

Road M1

The Treasury of Atreus is also visible from M1, a road that connected Mycenae with settlements and valleys to the east and north. Lavery found remains of this road near Klenia, indicating that it stretched at least as far north as the settlement and plain of Tenea (1995, 264, map 2) (Fig. 1). The best-preserved sections of this highway, however, are found on the south and east slopes of Kontovouni, Kutsojanni and Limniatis, three of the hills that surround the Berbati valley, which lies to the east of Mycenae. Sherds from trial trenches sunk into the roadway indicate that M1 was constructed in LH IIIB2 (Mylonas 1966, 87; 1983, 157; Wells *et al.* 1990, 227), although, like M4 and M7, this highway must have replaced an unmetalled track, since it too followed a natural route to Mycenae.

The course of M1 from the Berbati valley to Mycenae is fairly clear.³ First, the road went over the saddle between Kontovouni and Voriki Diaselo, a spur of Mt. Zara. Next, it crossed the

3 M1 itself did not go past Mastos hill, the centre of the main Mycenaean site in the Berbati valley; however, Jansen found the remains of a LH branch road running in the direction of the hill from the section of M1 on the south slope of Kutsojanni (2002, 37, maps 1, 2). Moreover, it is thought that a Mycenaean road or track followed roughly the same course as the modern country road that stretches from the west flank of Kontovouni to Mastos hill (Mylonas 1966, 86; Jansen 2002, 35, maps 1, 2).

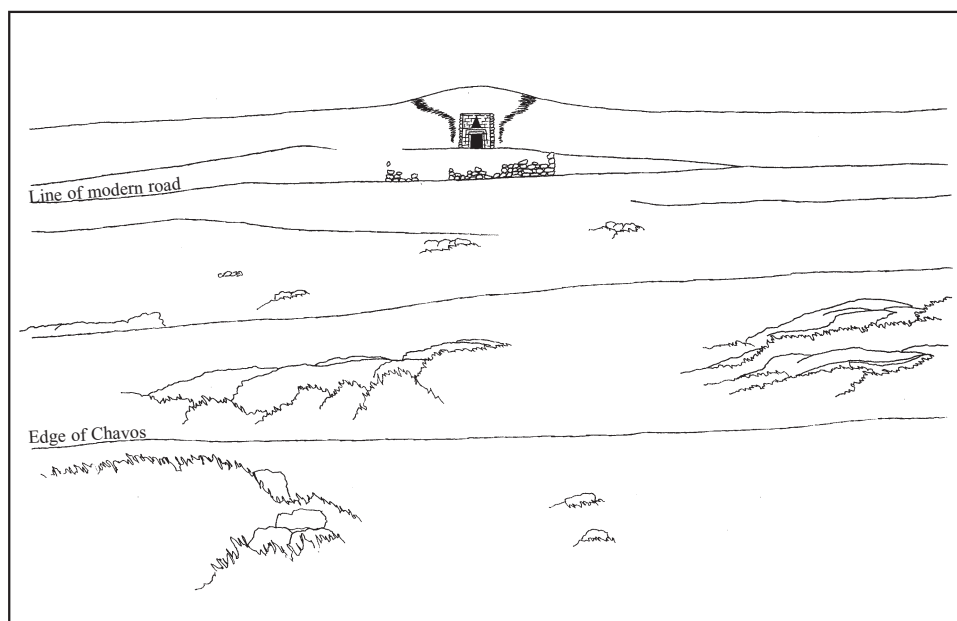


Figure 5

View of the Treasury of Atreus from the foot of Mt. Zara, looking directly at the tomb. (Author; based on photographs)

upper Chavos at the Dragonera Bridge, and then headed due west along the north bank of the ravine. About 1 km from Mycenae, there was a fork in the road where another highway – M2 – branched off from M1. M2 curved round the west side of Mt. Profitis Ilias and then proceeded northwards to the sites of Zygouries and Kleonai (Lavery 1995, 264, map 2; Wace and Stubbings 1962, fig. 25); M1 continued west towards Mycenae, passing the Perseia spring (Fig. 6).

The exact course of M1 from the Perseia spring to the acropolis is open to some debate. One possible route is along the edge of the field immediately below the east end of the acropolis. Here there is a long, narrow terrace supported by a wall of unworked limestone blocks. Although identified as a stretch of M1 road terrace (Iakovidis and French *et al.* 2003, 55, map 7), this terrace is in fact quite unlike the surviving sections of M1 on the slopes of Kontovouni and its neighbours. These sections are characterized by retaining walls of Cyclopean masonry pierced at short intervals by culverts, which allowed water flowing downhill to drain away. The construction fills are of stones and earth, and the road surface, which is preserved in places, is of earth, clay, pebbles and sand (Mylonas 1966, 86–7; 1983, 156–7). The retaining wall of the terrace near the acropolis, however, has no culverts and is not built in the Cyclopean technique. Moreover, the fill of the terrace appears to be composed entirely of earth (Figs. 7 and 8). I am not convinced, therefore, that it was part of M1.

I agree with Wace (1949, 46–7, fig. 2) that M1 in fact followed the same course as the modern country road. There is no archaeological evidence to support this suggestion, although it is true to say that the construction of the modern road, which is sunk slightly into the ground, would have obliterated any remains of a Mycenaean predecessor. Instead, the topography of the area immediately to the east of the acropolis and the gentle grade of the modern road support the idea of continuity.

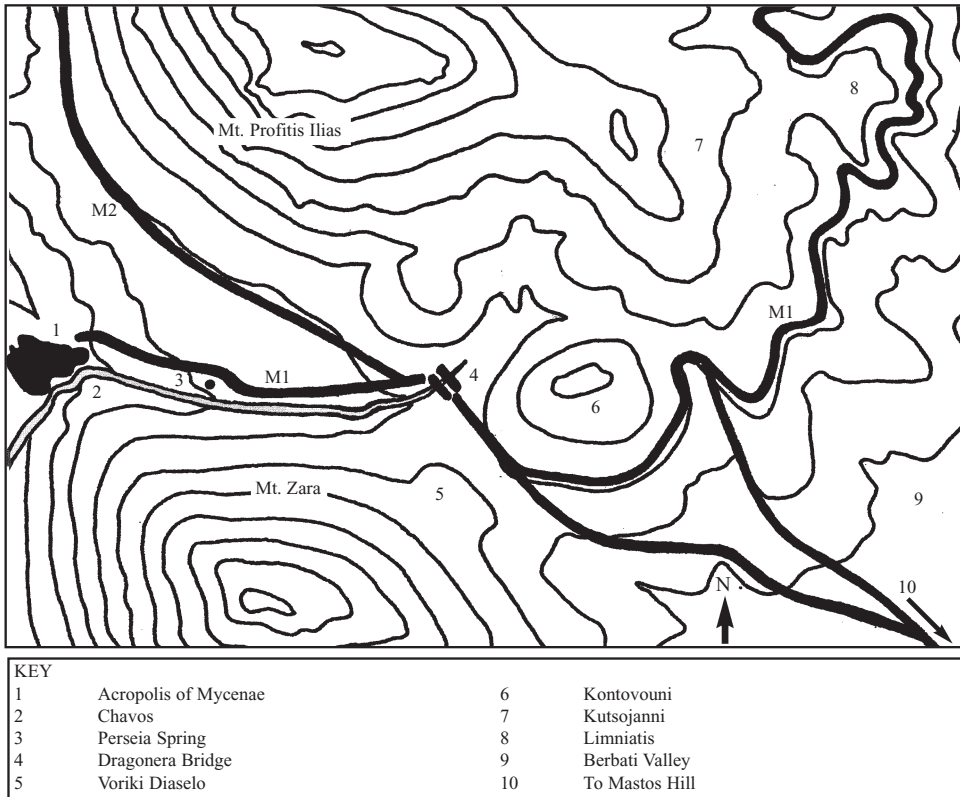


Figure 6

The course of road M1 from the Berbati valley to Mycenae. (Based on Jansen 2002, map 1)

Walking along the line of the modern country road towards Mycenae, one's eyes inevitably become fixed upon the citadel, and as the road curves round to the right one immediately notices the wide U-shaped gap between Mt. Zara and the acropolis hill, which affords a view of the region to the west of the citadel. Through this gap – the Chavos gorge – one can see the Treasury of Atreus. The sides of the gorge frame the Treasury of Atreus perfectly, creating a gun-sight view of the tomb (Fig. 9). It seems clear to me, then, that the Atreus Tomb was sited so that it would be seen by anyone approaching Mycenae from the east.

The pathway to the palace

M1, like M4, terminated at the acropolis. In mid-LH IIIA, the main ascent to the summit was, as later, on the west side of the hill. A ramp, erected in the MH period and repaired and resurfaced when the first Cyclopean circuit was constructed in LH IIIA2, ascended from south to north beside Grave Circle A to the area known as the north quarter. From here, a 'road' ran along the north slope of the hill to the base of the upper acropolis (Mylonas 1966, 26–7, 59).

As is well known, the upper acropolis was the site of the palace of Mycenae. The scattered remains of walls and floors associated with MH pottery indicate that the first elite residence was erected in the Middle Bronze Age. This proto-palace appears to have been quite



Figure 7

A section of the terrace wall running along the edge of the field immediately below the east end of the acropolis. Note the fill of earth behind the wall. (Author)



Figure 8

A section of the retaining wall of the Mycenaean road on the south slope of Kontovouni. Note the Cyclopean masonry and the two culverts. (Author)

large, although the evidence is too fragmentary to permit a reconstruction of its plan (Wace 1949, 71, 75, 82, 84, 86–7). It is clear, however, that from the MH period until the end of the LH IIIB phase, when the citadel of Mycenae was destroyed, the palace was constantly altered and extended in order to make it larger and more luxurious.

A major remodelling of the palace occurred in LH IIIA2. Unlike the earlier phases, when the layout and size of the palace were dictated by the shape and extent of the hilltop, the



Figure 9

View of the Treasury of Atreus from the modern country road, looking through the U-shaped gap between Mt. Zara (left) and the acropolis hill (right). As the road slopes down to the right, the tomb disappears behind the corner of the acropolis hill. (Author)

site itself was altered and enlarged to conform to the architect's blueprint of the new residence. Artificial terraces were constructed on both the west and south sides of the upper acropolis. The west terrace facilitated access to the palace; the south terrace supported several important structures, including the Main Megaron, which was oriented east–west. Since the south-east corner of the south terrace rested on a section of the original Cyclopean circuit, the new palace must have been built after the acropolis was fortified for the first time.

At the end of LH IIIB1, the palace was consumed by fire, but was rebuilt on an even grander scale. Most of the walls and other architectural features visible on the hilltop today belong to this, the final, phase in the development of the palace. The state apartments are reasonably well preserved, and as a result one can easily trace the route from the foot of the upper acropolis to the heart of the whole complex: the Main Megaron (Fig. 10A).

A person wishing to enter the Main Megaron first had to climb up a short flight of stone stairs constructed within a triangular fissure in the rock on the north side of the hill. From the landing at the top, our visitor would have proceeded west, ascending a second flight of stairs, built at right angles to the first, and then a gently sloping ramp, which terminated at a small cobbled court in front of the Propylon, the main entrance to the palace.

Located at the north–west corner of the upper acropolis and oriented north–south, the Propylon was an H-shaped structure, about 7 m square, composed of two monostyle porches and closed by a door in the middle of the cross-wall. This Propylon replaced an earlier one, which stood on the same site. Although no dating evidence for either phase was found, the architectural history and development of the palace suggests that the first Propylon was built in LH IIIA2 and the second in LH IIIB2. There is no doubt, however, that the later Propylon was used until the palace and citadel were destroyed at the end of the LH IIIB period (Mylonas 1966, 66–7; 1983, 95; Iakovidis 1983, 57–8).

In front of the south porch of the Propylon, there was a small court. From this court, our visitor would have proceeded due south along the entrance passage, which sloped gently up to

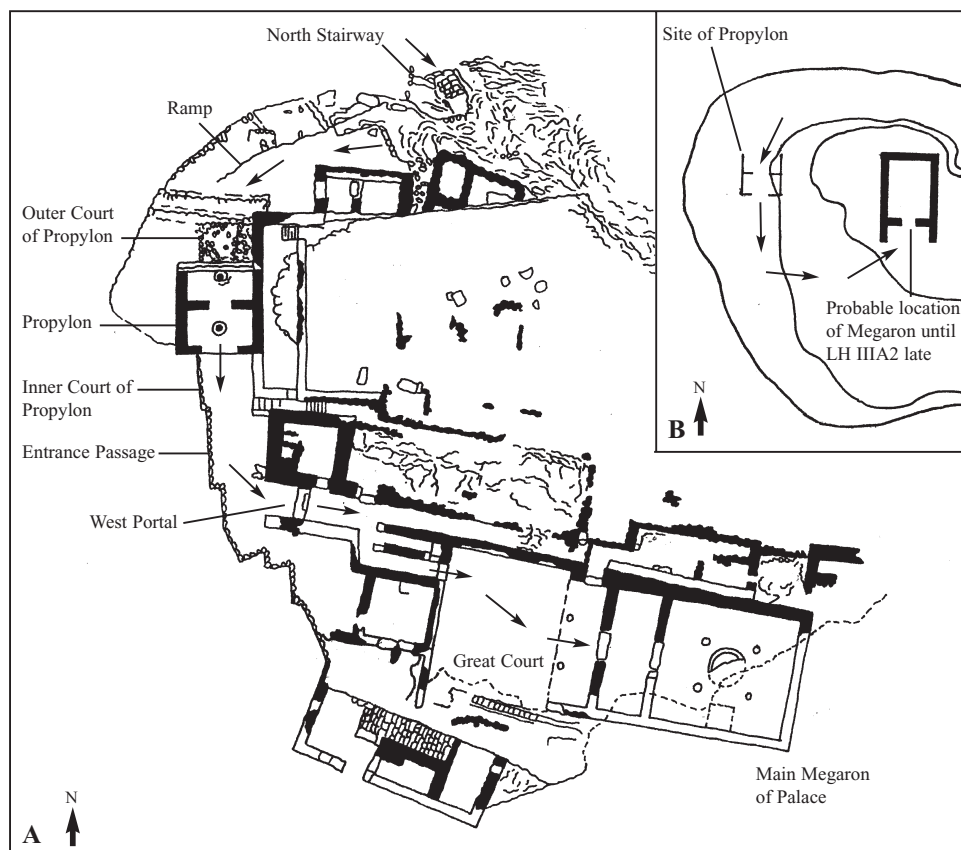


Figure 10

The Upper Acropolis of Mycenae. A. The remains of the palace and the route to the Megaron. (Based on Iakovidis 1983, plan 12). B. The original route to the summit. (Based on French 2002, fig. 14)

the West Portal, beyond which was a corridor with a dogleg leading to the Great Court and the Main Megaron. The small court and the entrance passage were flanked on the left by the west façade of the palace but otherwise were unenclosed and open to the sky (Mylonas 1983, 95–6). Consequently, as our visitor exited the south portico of the Propylon he/she would have been greeted by a magnificent view of the Argive plain.

The view consists of three distinct zones. The west slope of Mt. Zara and the east face of the Panagia ridge, with the Chavos running between them, fill the foreground. Behind these slopes, there is a great swathe of the Argive plain itself. In the distance, the Artemision range rises above the plain and the Gulf of Argos and the Aspis and the Larissa of Argos lie straight ahead. In the centre of this panorama and forming the focal point of the view is the Treasury of Atreus. Again the bowl beside the Treasury of Atreus helps the tomb stand out from the rest of the ridge, and the northern edge of the bowl mirrors the slope of the walls of the entrance passage. Interestingly, the mound of the tomb sits directly below the gorge of the Charadros River, the only discernible break in the mountain range on the western side of the plain. The two



Figure 11

View of the Argive Plain, with the Treasury of Atreus in the centre of the panorama, from the site of the small court in front of the south porch of the Propylon. Note that the mound of the tomb sits directly below the gorge of the Charadros River. It remains below the gorge from the outer court of the Propylon to the West Portal. (Author)

sides of the gorge seem to point to the tomb, and the hill nestling within the gorge echoes the shape of the mound (Fig. 11).

Here, it is important not only to state that the Propylon, its two courts and the entrance passage all rested on the artificial west terrace of the palace, but also to reiterate that this terrace did not exist in mid-LH IIIA. There is a consensus of opinion amongst the excavators of Mycenae, however, that the original path from the foot to the top of the upper acropolis followed basically the same route as the one just described. Joining the end of the 'road' from the MH ramp, this path, the course of which was dictated by the contours and configurations of the hilltop, climbed to the north-west corner of the upper acropolis, and then, passing through the site of the Propylon, proceeded south for a short distance before turning east to the summit (Mylonas 1966, 59, 66 n. 52, 75–7, fig. 14; 1983, 93, fig. 74; French 2002, 61, fig. 14; French and Shelton 2005, fig. 1) (Fig. 10B). This route constituted the easiest natural ascent to the top of the hill, and consequently was employed from the earliest occupation of the acropolis until the stairs, ramp and west terrace were constructed.

Given the route of the original path to the summit and the superb view of the Argive plain from the west side of the upper acropolis, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Treasury of Atreus was set into the east slope of the Panagia ridge so that it would be seen by anyone entering the palace of Mycenae. What is more, it is evident that when the palace was completely remodelled in late LH IIIA2 the view of the plain and the Atreus Tomb from the west side of the upper acropolis was not only preserved by creating an unenclosed entrance passage but was in fact emphasized by strategically placing the Propylon at the north-west corner.

The mound of the tomb

We have discussed the view of the Treasury of Atreus from the acropolis; the view of the acropolis from the tomb is certainly no less spectacular or significant. Wells observed that the Treasury of Atreus faces the citadel of Mycenae (1990, 128). This is indeed true, but it is only half the story. Viewed from on or around the mound of the tomb, the acropolis hill not only sits exactly in front of Mt. Profitis Ilias, but also has the same silhouette as the mountain. Consequently, the acropolis looks larger and more impressive, and appears to be protected by Mt.



Figure 12

View of the acropolis, with Mt. Profitis Ilias behind, from the mound of the Treasury of Atreus. (Author)

Profitis Ilias (Fig. 12). It goes without saying that this view, which, in my opinion, must have influenced the siting of the Treasury of Atreus, is peculiar to this specific spot on the Panagia ridge. From the mound to the north end of the ridge, the view gradually changes until the acropolis hill sits between Mts. Profitis Ilias and Zara.

DISCUSSION

It is evident from the above analysis that the architect of the Treasury of Atreus identified a unique point in the landscape at Mycenae. He discovered that the area immediately to the south of the bowl in the east flank of the Panagia ridge was visible from three of the principal trackways leading to Mycenae. He also noticed that, if viewed from the north-west corner of the upper acropolis, this area lies directly below the Charadros gorge, and standing on the spot he saw that the acropolis hill sits precisely in front of and presents the same profile as Mt. Profitis Ilias. On this site the Atreus Tomb was constructed.

The question then arises, why was such a distinctive site chosen for the Treasury of Atreus? The answer, I believe, is connected to a major change in the political geography of the central Argolid in the LH IIIA period. In this region in LH IIIA1, besides Mycenae, there were tholos tombs in use at Berbati, Dendra (the cemetery of Midea), Kokla (near Argos) and probably Prosymna (Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 38–40; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 81). By the end of the period, however, these tholoi had been abandoned, although tholos tomb construction and use continued at Mycenae. Since tholoi in the Argolid were the preserve of the highest social

class, the restriction of the tomb type to Mycenae strongly suggests that by the middle of LH IIIA this centre had gained ascendancy over some of its rivals in the region (Mee and Cavanagh 1984, 53; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 64, 134; Voutsaki 1995, 58–9, 62–3; 2001, 204).

It must be mentioned here that there are two tholos tombs at Tiryns; however, we know neither their date of construction nor their period of use. What we do know is that in LH IIIA1 Tiryns was fortified for the first time and its elite residence was completely remodelled. The Main Megaron of the new palace was equipped with a podium for a throne, arguing for the existence of the institution of kingship at Tiryns in the period (Kilian 1988a, 134–6; 1988b, 294–6). This does not necessarily mean, however, that the polity remained politically independent; it is possible that Tiryns became a vassal kingdom of Mycenae during the Palatial (LH IIIA–B) period.

In mid-LH IIIA, the Treasury of Atreus was erected. Bigger, more elaborate and much better built than both the Tomb of Aegisthus and the Lion Tomb, the Atreus Tomb far surpassed its predecessors as an expression of wealth and power. The tomb has already been described, but it will suffice to mention here that the inner lintel block alone would have required a hauling party of about 1000 men to transport it by sledge from the quarry to the building site (Cavanagh and Mee 1999, 96, 100) and the green marble used to decorate the façade was imported from the Mani peninsula of the southern Peloponnese (Higgins and Higgins 1996, 57). Clearly, the construction of the tomb involved an unprecedented investment of time, energy and resources. It certainly appears that the *wanax* (king) who constructed the Treasury of Atreus had at his disposal the human and material resources of a region considerably greater in extent than that controlled by his ancestors (Wright 1987, 176). In other words, the size, decoration and architectural quality of the Atreus Tomb support the suggestion that the territory of Mycenae expanded in the LH IIIA period and that political power within a large part of the Argolid became concentrated in the hands of the *wanax* at Mycenae.⁴

I would argue that the builder of the Treasury of Atreus not only wanted to express his status as the greatest and most powerful ruler of Mycenae thus far through the architecture of the tomb but through its position in the landscape, too. The site chosen for the tomb was perfectly suited to convey the political message that this individual managed to extend his authority over the central Argolid. As stated above, the Atreus Tomb was sited so as to be visible from the trackways that led to Mycenae from the east (M1), south-east (M4) and south-west (M7). I believe that the aim of this was to show that the ruler of Mycenae who built the tomb succeeded in acquiring control of settlements and lands in these directions. It certainly seems significant that the tholoi abandoned by the end of LH IIIA1 lie to the east (Berbati), south-east (Dendra and Prosymna) and south-west (Kokla) of Mycenae. Moreover, the fact that the trackways were later metalled lends weight to the suggestion that Mycenae held sway over other sites in the central Argolid. This is because the construction of a road network presupposes the existence of a central authority to plan, initiate and oversee the building work (Loader 1998, 114).

4 For an estimate of the amount of time and energy required to accomplish the three main tasks involved in constructing the Treasury of Atreus (namely clearing the site, quarrying and transporting the building materials, and raising the walls and dressing the stone) see Cavanagh and Mee 1999. For a discussion of the propaganda value of the construction process (particularly the transportation and placement of the inner lintel block) see Santillo Frizell 1997–98; 1998; 2003. She contends that the propaganda was aimed primarily at the high civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, although I would argue that the target audience was the elites of the palace-states of Mycenaean Greece and the inhabitants of the settlements of the central Argolid.

We also noted that the palace/acropolis and tomb face each other, and that the lines of sight from one to the other continue to prominent natural features behind or in the distance, thereby tying the two diametrically opposed residences of the *wanax* together and also knitting both of these to the surrounding landscape. It seems that the aim of placing the Treasury of Atreus in the centre of the panoramic view of the Argive plain from the west side of the upper acropolis was to remind those who entered the palace of what the ruler achieved in his lifetime. By linking the tomb visually to the Charadros gorge and the hill within it, the viewer is made to survey the vast tract of farmland between the tholos tomb and the Artemision range. Thus the view cleverly binds the palace (the home of the *wanax* during his lifetime), the Atreus Tomb (the home of the *wanax* in death) and the Argive plain (the domain of the *wanax*) together.

The view of the acropolis and Mt. Profitis Ilias from the mound of the Treasury of Atreus focuses the viewer's attention on the seat of the ruler's authority. With the mountain rising directly behind, the acropolis looks particularly powerful and impressive, which seems to imply that the *wanax* associated with the tomb was an exceptionally powerful ruler. The symbolism of the view would not have been lost on anyone who visited the tomb either before or after it was sealed. We can be sure that the *wanax* of Mycenae took great pleasure in showing honoured guests around his tomb during his lifetime. After his death, the mound of the tomb appears to have become a focus of ritual activity. In 1955, Wace dug a few trial trenches around the Treasury of Atreus. In one of these, he found masses of Mycenaean potsherds in front of the remains of the mound's rubble and poros retaining wall (1956, 117). Vast quantities of LH sherds, together with many almost complete pots and a large number of terracotta figurine fragments, also came to light in front of the surviving arc of the rubble and poros wall that surrounded the mound of the Tomb of Clytemnestra. These deposits of pottery are thought to be the remains of offerings to those buried in the tombs, and suggest that the area within the supporting wall of a tholos tomb was considered a sacred precinct (Hood 1953a, 23–4; Hood 1953b, 84; Taylour 1955, 212–13, 221). Perhaps the view of the acropolis from the Treasury of Atreus enhanced the significance of this ritual activity.

Lastly, it is important to consider the spatial relationship between the Treasury of Atreus and the other tholos tombs at Mycenae, because this appears to highlight the special status of the ruler who constructed the tomb. As stated at the beginning of this paper, there are two groups of tholoi at Mycenae: one – on the east side of the Panagia ridge – evidently built by the ruling dynasty, and the other – on the west side of the ridge – probably built by members of Mycenae's aristocracy (Dickinson 1977, 63; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 36; French and Shelton 2005, 182). Because of its unique position in the landscape, the Atreus Tomb belongs, paradoxically, to both groups and to neither group. Situated on the east side of the ridge, it clearly belongs to the same group as the Tomb of Aegisthus and the Lion Tomb. However, it was built about 500 m away from these tholoi. As regards the tholoi of the second group, all of which pre-date the Treasury of Atreus (Iakovidis and French *et al.* 2003, 44–6; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, 35; Wace 1949, 16–18), they all lie within a narrow belt running north-west to south-east. Since the Treasury of Atreus sits at the south-eastern end of this belt, it may be included within this group, too (Fig. 2). However, it is separated from the other five tholoi of the group by the crest of the Panagia ridge. Consequently, it can be argued that the Treasury of Atreus served as a symbol to unite the two most influential social groups at Mycenae. At the same time, however, the spatial separation of the tomb from all the other tholoi at the site indicates that the *wanax* who built the Treasury of Atreus regarded himself as someone with a unique and distinct status in Mycenaean society.

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Hampshire

ABBREVIATIONS

BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BSA	<i>Annual of the British School of Archaeology at Athens</i>
LH	Late Helladic
MH	Middle Helladic
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
OpAth	<i>Opuscula Atheniensia</i>
SIMA	Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology

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