

Life in the Mycenaean Age

We have seen that Mycenaean palaces were situated at the top of citadels, as the kings were literally superior, and that within the palace was the *megaron* with a courtyard in front of it.

The courtyard at Mycenae was accessed by the grand staircase, and this was probably the main approach to the palace. At Tiryns the courtyard had covered walkways on three sides called *porticoes*. The palaces were not just one storey high. The ground floor was stone and the upper level was half-timbered. Columns, doors and ceilings were all made of wood and so were vulnerable to fire.

There were other rooms and apartments for court officials within the complex. There were also workshops. There were even administrative offices, sometimes called *archive rooms*, where records were kept, carefully written on clay tablets (see Linear B tablets). The impression given is one of small, dark rooms accessed through dark corridors.

Activity 21

This YouTube reconstruction gives an impression of many buildings crammed next to each other: [zzed.co.uk/11261-reconstruction](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.co.uk/11261-reconstruction) Do you agree that the rooms appear dark?

The king was believed to be close to the gods and a cult area was at Mycenae. This was not a huge display of religion but rather a set of rooms, rather private, with a cult room for idols. Men and women were involved in cult activity. Sixteen idols were discovered here, suggesting that the Mycenaeans worshipped many gods.

The palaces also had bathrooms. Below is the bathroom in Nestor's Palace at Pylos with a bath tub. There is no running water so that must have been poured over the bather. Notice the step to get in.

Bath, Pylos

At Tiryns the royal women probably had their own bathroom too. For the palace, a constant supply of water was essential to fill the two large storage containers found there. The floor gently tilts to allow drainage, and holes in the granite block floor suggest wooden panels were fixed around the edge.



Activity 22

On YouTube take a virtual tour of Nestor's palace at Pylos. Is it as cramped as Mycenae? [zzed.co.uk/11261-Nestor-palace](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.co.uk/11261-Nestor-palace)

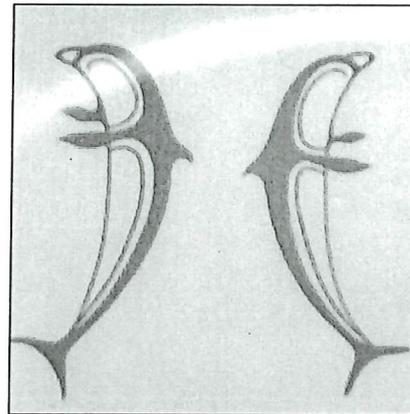
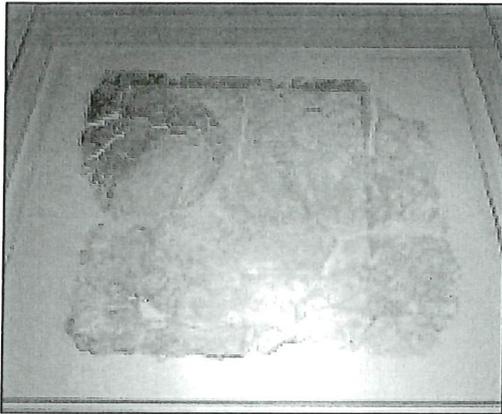
Decoration

Having entered the palace complex, a visitor would have been impressed by the decoration.

Floor

On reaching the courtyard in front of the megaron, a visitor would have instantly noticed the openness and light. The courtyard at Mycenae is 11 m by 15 m. Looking down, the visitor would have seen the floor covered in plaster and divided into coloured painted squares and linear designs. This is similar to the decoration of the palace floors at Pylos and Tiryns. The image below is a floor panel from Tiryns. It shows a red square with two leaping dolphins, back to back.

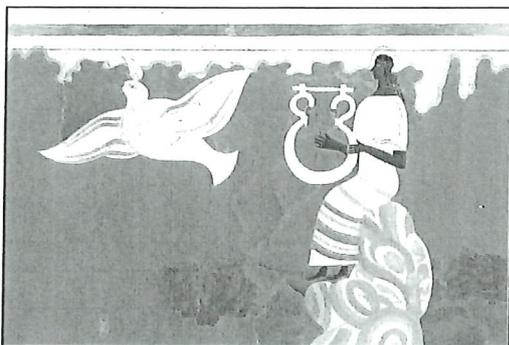
Flooring from Tiryns



Walls

The most impressive decoration for a visitor was the plastered walls. These are known as *frescoes*. *Fresco* is a method of painting walls that have been freshly plastered. The plaster is still wet and water is used to mix dry *pigments*, natural dyes, to merge with the plaster, and with the setting of the plaster, the paint becomes part of the wall. At Mycenaean sites, the quality is outstanding, with still-vivid colours and exciting combinations (e.g. brown and turquoise). In addition, frescoes are a wonderful source showing what Mycenaean life was like as they have detailed depictions of nature, sports, warfare and clothing.

At Mycenae the megaron and courtyard were brightly decorated. The frescoes show women, in elaborate dresses, in procession. There are also spirals, lotus designs and rosettes. The four pillars holding up the roof of the throne room were also plastered and decorated. Similar designs have been found at Tiryns. The throne room of the megaron at Pylos shows a man playing a lyre, and a flying bird. The colours of the original fragments are still dominated by bright red.



Pylos

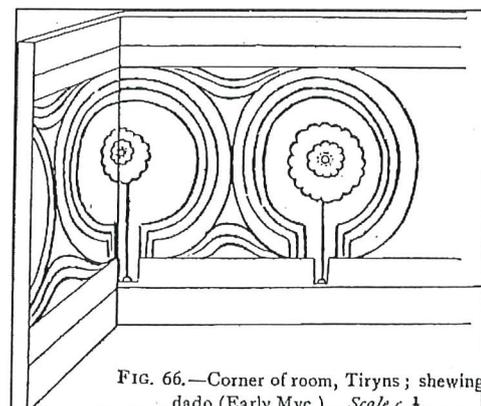


FIG. 66.—Corner of room, Tiryns ; shewing dado (Early Myc.). Scale c. h.

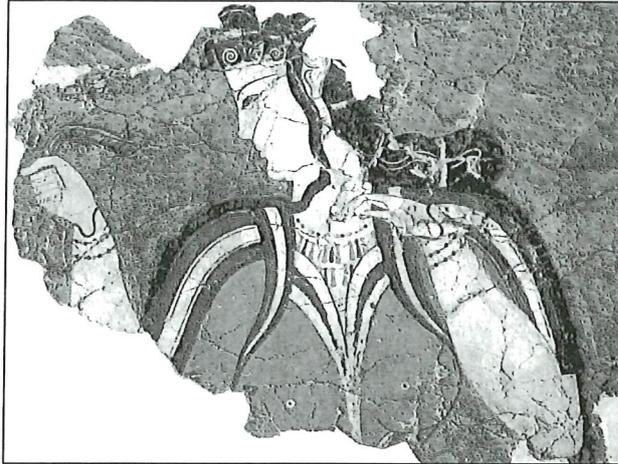
Tiryns

Lady holding a necklace: House of the chief priest, Mycenae. (Prescribed Material)

This fresco from Mycenae has been given several names: Lady of Mycenae or the Goddess with Necklace. She is part of what was originally a larger scene from a building identified as the 'High Priest's House'. The image below shows the lady/goddess looking very serious and deep in thought, as her eyes are looking down. This is an important moment as she accepts the gift of a necklace, which she holds tightly in her right hand. She wears a short-sleeved bodice. Her hair has been styled carefully and adorned.

Activity 23

Study the picture and list the jewellery which the lady is wearing.

**Cult centre, Mycenae (Additional Material)**

On the slope of the hill outside the palace, just up the hill from Grave Circle A, was the shrine area where a cult room, also called a temple, with a staircase, columns and platforms, was located. Another set of rooms was decorated with frescoes that included a woman holding what may be *wheatsheaves* (bunches of wheat), and partially preserved panels depicting humans. The success of growing crops such as wheat was essential to the citadel.

Guided Activity 9

See how similar the image of the woman is to that of Lady with the Necklace.

Look at: hair, eyes, finger positions, skin colour.

Lady with the wheatsheaves.
House of the Frescoes.



Organisation of Mycenaean society

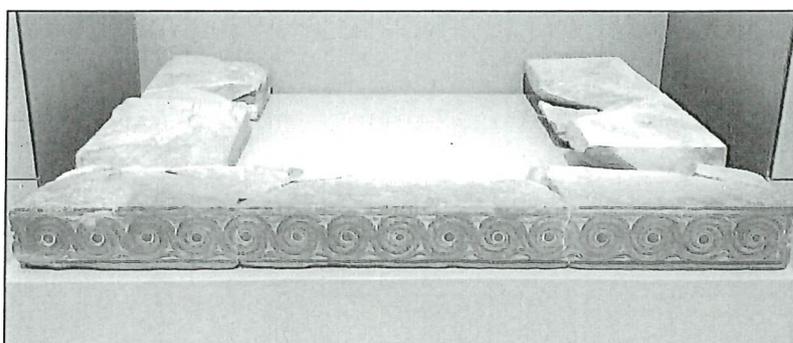
Guided Activity 10

Use these two YouTube presentations and/or the Internet to find out and make notes about the following members of the Mycenaean society: [zzed.co.uk/11261-Mycenaean-1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.co.uk/11261-Mycenaean-1) and [zzed.co.uk/11261-Mycenaean-2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.co.uk/11261-Mycenaean-2)

wanax	King/overlord
lawagetas	Leader of the aristocracy with religious and military duties
telestai	Priests
(h)eqetes/eqeta	Aristocracy landowners who had chariots and wore special clothes. They were called 'son of', which is called a <i>patronymic</i> .
kerisiwa	Council of elders
lawos	Regular army
damos	Community who held land collectively
doru/slaves	Property of the above

The king and the megaron

Throne of Tiryns



Activity 24

Why do you think the throne was placed on a raised platform like the one above?

Mycenaean power was based on a sole ruler who dominated over those who were ruled, and this was an accepted form of society. The overlord held court, sitting on his throne, and a visitor was likely to be attending the palace for this purpose. Other members of the aristocracy would be in attendance. The megaron could only be accessed through the doors of the anteroom so guests could be checked easily. The king conducted state business here and religious ceremonies. Frescoes from Pylos show figures eating and drinking. Many artefacts associated with drinking have been found at Mycenae.

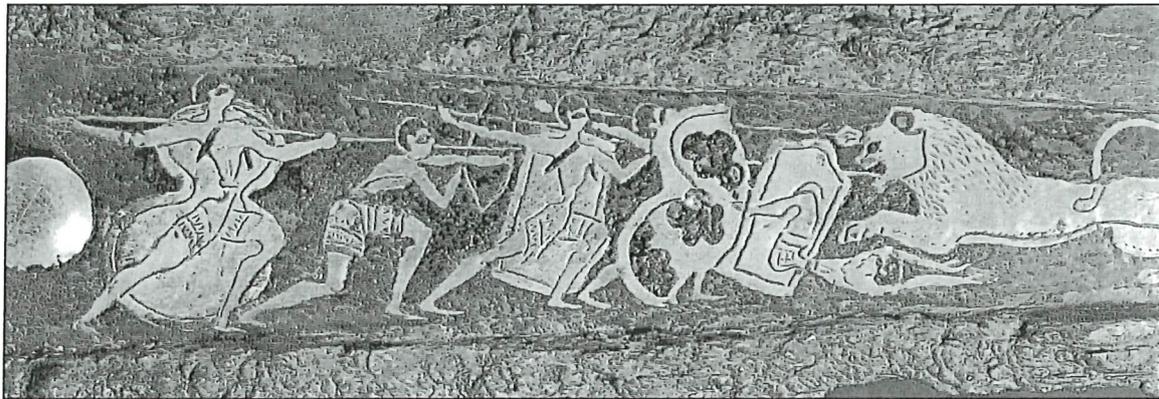
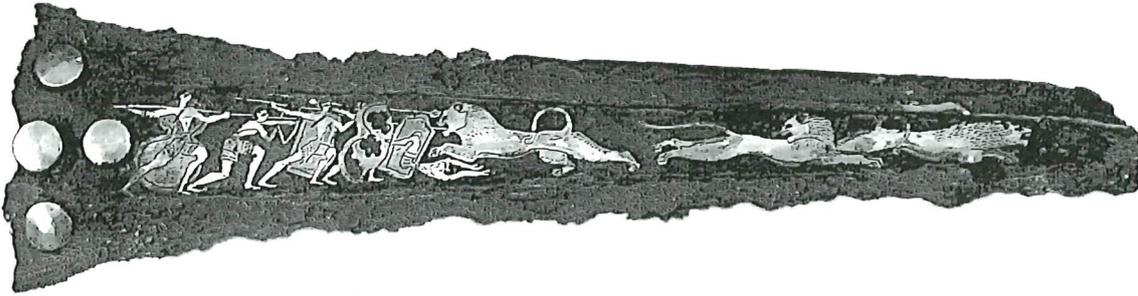
Cup of Nestor Mycenae Grave Circle A Shaft IV



Hunting

From the evidence of their frescoes and other artefacts the Mycenaeans spent a good deal of time hunting.

Dagger blade showing hunting scene from Grave Circle A, Mycenae (Prescribed Material)



This dagger is an *ornamental piece*, meaning it was not used for actual hunting. The dagger is made of bronze with gold, silver and niello *inlay*. It shows the wealth of the owner. In making the dagger, silver or gold decorated figures were placed on the heated bronze dagger blade. These figures were already decorated with scenes by inlaying gold, silver, copper, alloys of these metals, and *niello*. Niello was made by mixing powders of copper, silver, and lead. It was added as a powder or paste, then fired until it melted and was pushed into lines engraved in the metal. This helped give details such as the lion's mane. (Some scholars do not believe that niello was used now but the examination board accepts that niello was used.)

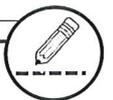
The scene on the dagger shows four hunters fighting a lion, which has already attacked a fifth hunter, who is lying down. There are also two fleeing lions on the far right end of the dagger, with one looking back towards the hunters. The male hunters are shown in different positions and are not stiff or static. These figures have narrow waists, broad shoulders, and large, muscular thighs. Because of the way the bodies are represented, some scholars think the dagger was made by a Minoan craftsman or at least was influenced by the Minoan society which came earlier and overlapped the Mycenaean period.

Shields

Activity 25

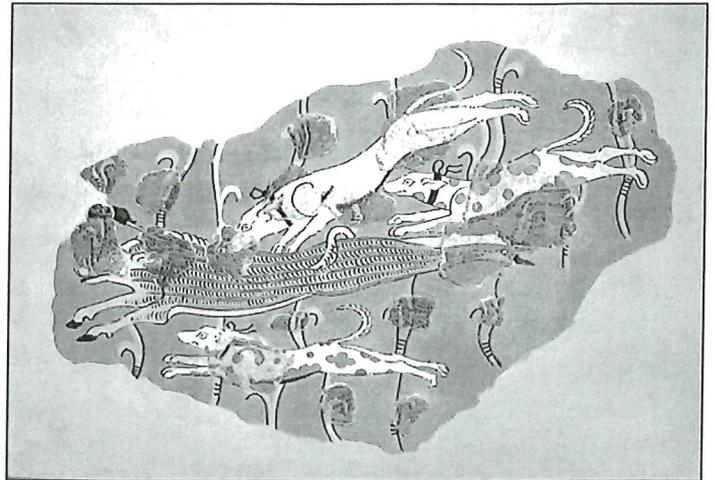
Study the dagger blade and look at the shields that the men carry.

1. Draw both types. Notice the different shapes.
2. Which shield is made with cow hide? How can you tell?



A fresco from Tiryns showing a hunting scene (Additional Material)

This beautiful blue fresco shows hunting with dogs. There is water around and the marshy ground is indicated by the curving plants. The hounds are shown springing at their victim from every side. The huntsman, whose hand appears at the corner of this fragment, is holding his spear.



Stag hunt from Pylos (Additional Material)

This fresco shows a hunter after a galloping stag. The hooves can be seen in the right-hand corner. The hunter is wearing a white tunic with black spots, white shoes and *greaves* (shin guards). He is pulling his arm back to strike with a spear in his hand.



Guided Activity 11

The images above show hunting scenes which you may be asked to describe.

You may be asked what else we can tell from them. Look closely at the images again and answer these questions:

1. What weapons were used to kill animals?
2. What protection did the hunters have when hunting?
3. What do you think the hunters did with the animals they caught?



Signet ring (Additional Material)

Grave Circle A shaft IV at Mycenae

Signet rings were precious objects and may have been used by the Mycenaean rulers as personal seals. The ring shows a battle scene.

**Guided Activity 12**

Why do you think the owner of this ring had a hunting scene put on it?

In your answer you could consider: the metal from which the ring is made, the scene on the ring, what the owner wanted people to think about him.

Activity 26

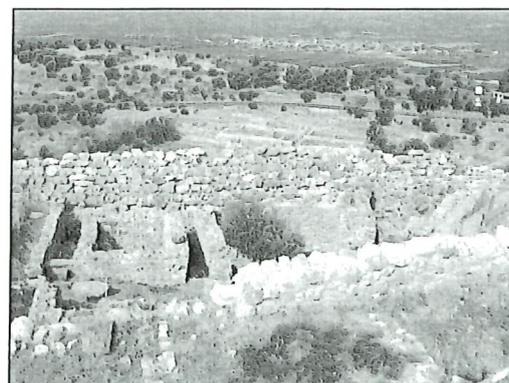
Check that you know what the following mean:

artefact	
fresco	
greaves	
niello	
pigment	
portico	
wanax	

Armour and weapons

Outside the palace at Mycenae, yet within the walls of the citadel, were several houses. The people who lived in these houses were those who hunted and were leaders of armies, so were probably aristocrats. The sudden growth in wealth of the Mycenaeans may have come from their looting, and this theory has contributed to the belief that the Mycenaeans were 'warlike'. The house below is named 'The House of the Warrior Vase' as a huge vase was discovered there.

House of the Warrior Vase, Mycenae



Warrior Vase (Prescribed Material)

This is a large (41 cm high) *krater*, made of clay. It is a Greek vase used for mixing water and wine together. The Greeks always added water to their wine. The person who owned this was rich enough to have such a large bowl.

This krater is well known because of the figures that are shown marching to the right in single file. The figures are men in full armour.

This armour is a skirt or kilt with a fringe, probably of leather. It has a protective top, again probably leather. The men in the procession are ready for battle and by the handle on the left is a woman waving them off.

**Activity 27**

Identify and describe the following from the pot:

helmets	
greaves	
shields	
spears	Short
own supplies	Small sack hanging from their spears
kilts	With fringes

The Warrior Vase is a good example of what the Mycenaeans found important in their society. The depictions of the warriors demonstrate how they viewed war and their warriors. Certainly the Warrior Vase gives the impression that the Mycenaean army was organised; the men all look the same – they even have identical beards. These men are not individuals but rather they make up an important team of fighting troops.

Activity 28

What shape are the shields? What evidence is there of other types of shield used by the Mycenaeans?

Helmets

Head of Odysseus (Additional Material)

Found at Mycenae, this is a small decoration found on a piece of furniture. People used to call this the Head of Odysseus from a description in Homer:

Meriones gave Odysseus a bow, a quiver and a sword, and put a cleverly made leather helmet on his head. On the inside there was a strong lining on interwoven straps, onto which a felt cap had been sewn in. The outside was cleverly adorned all around with rows of white tusks from a shiny-toothed boar, the tusks running in alternate directions in each row. Homer, *Iliad*, 10.260–265



The small decoration (right) shows a man wearing a helmet made of boars' tusks sliced into rectangular plates. To use the tusks most efficiently, the curves alternate in each row. For each helmet, it has been calculated that 30–40 boars were needed. This may also explain the importance of hunting to the Mycenaeans.

As the years went by the design of helmets changed. On the Warrior Vase the helmet has a horn at the front to protect the forehead. It sticks out at the back to protect the neck. There is an axe shape on the top with a plume. This is a *horned helmet*.

[On the other side of the Warrior Vase the helmets are different. They are spiky and called *hedgehog helmets*, possibly because they were made from hedgehog skin.]

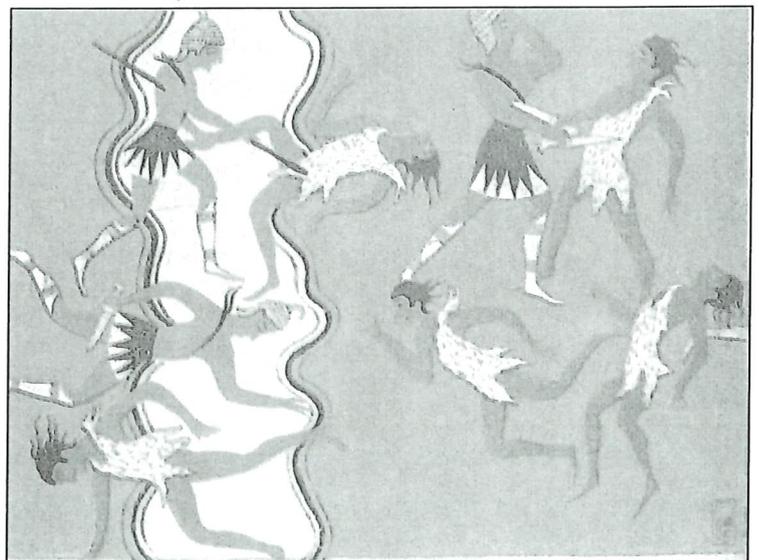


Activity 29

Study the fresco from Nestor's palace at Pylos and answer the questions which follow.

Battle scene between the Mycenaeans and 'barbarians' (name given to non-Greeks).

1. What type of helmets are the Mycenaeans wearing?
2. What other armour do the Mycenaeans wear?
3. What weapons do the Mycenaeans have?
4. What impression do you think the Mycenaeans want to give of the 'barbarians'?
5. From this fresco, what impression have you formed of the Mycenaeans?



Weapons

Hunting weapons	Fighting weapons
Short spears Bows and arrows (Swords)	Short spears Swords

'Battle in the Glen' ring from Mycenae (Additional Material)

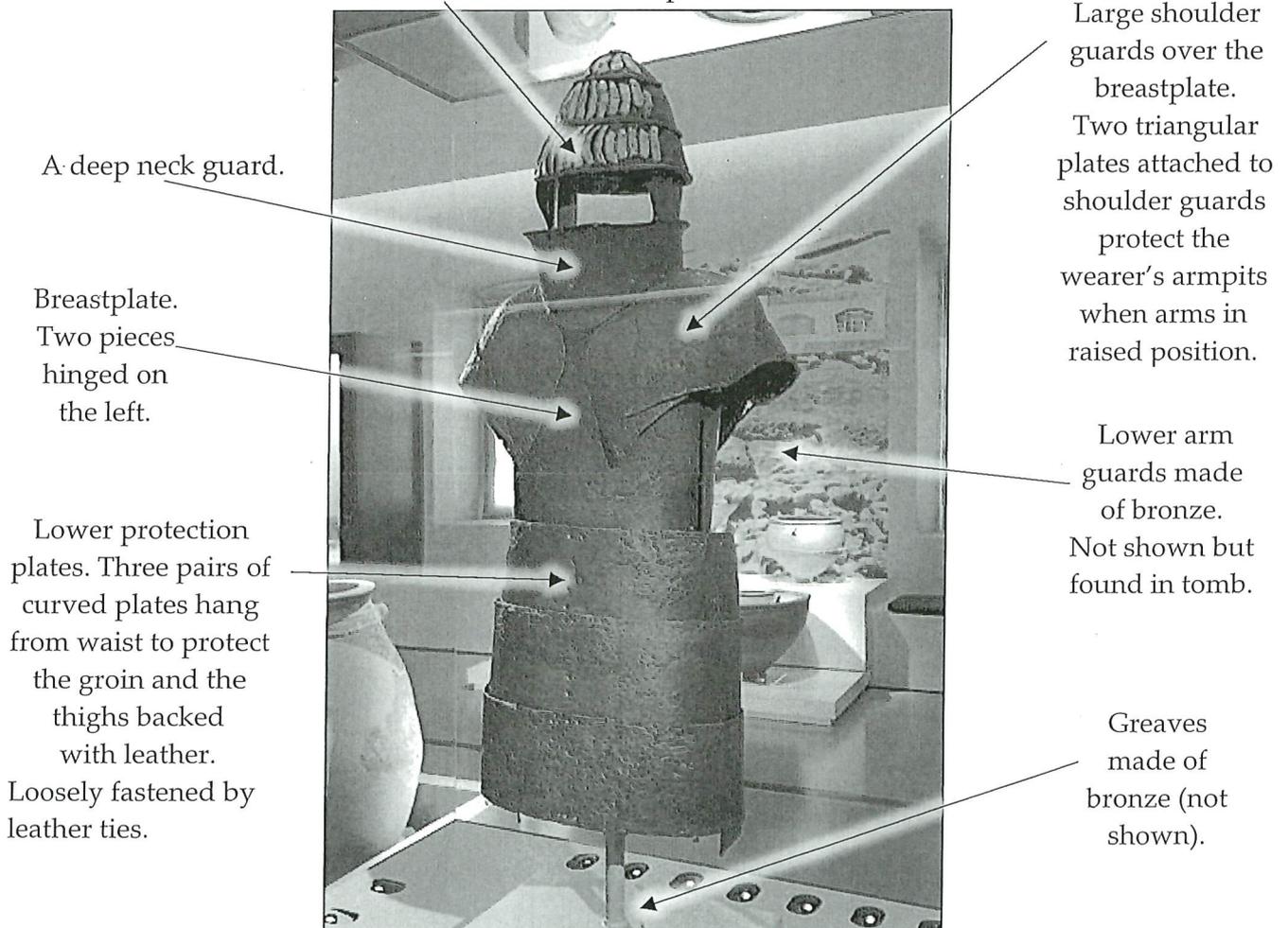
Two swordsmen fight one-to-one in the centre of this signet ring. A spear man with his long body shield is defending from behind. Notice his helmet with a plume and the swordsman's kilt fringes.



Dendra armour (Additional Material)

This is the only full suit of armour, called a *panoply*, found. It was discovered in one of the tholos tombs at Dendra near the Mycenaean citadel of Midea. It is made up of 15 different pieces held together with leather laces. The complete panoply forms a heavy tubular suit of armour, which would have been difficult to walk or even fight in.

Slices of boars' tusks made up a boars'-tusk helmet.



Activity 30

Compare this suit of armour with the armour worn on the Warrior Vase. In which would you rather fight? Why?



Limitations in our evidence

There are limitations to our evidence about the Mycenaean armour and weapons. This should always be considered in questions which ask learners to 'Consider how far...' A counterargument can be introduced by 'however' or 'on the other hand'. Examiners will look for these words.

Some counterarguments to consider:

1. Much of the evidence we have was found in graves and not on battlefields.
2. Much of it is highly decorative and was probably not designed to be used in warfare.
3. Although some artefacts are mentioned in the work of Homer, he did not write history.
4. Depictions on pots may glorify or literally paint a positive picture.

Chariots

Chariots for hunting

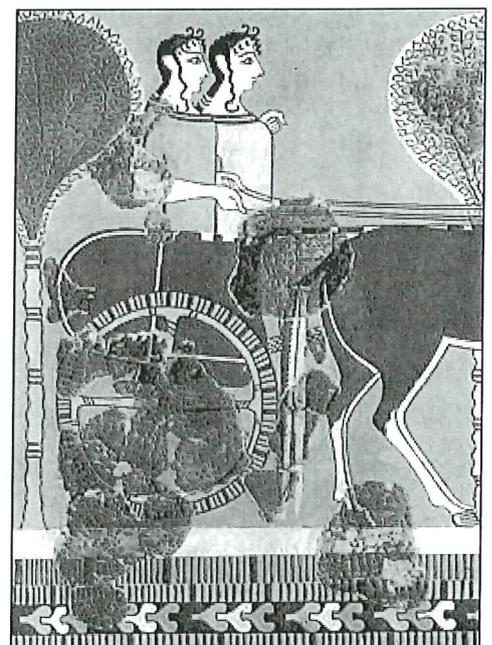
Chariots were not just used for war. The signet ring seen earlier (p. 28) shows two men hunting a deer using a chariot. It would have been very bumpy riding in one, even when the ground was quite flat, as there was no suspension. One man is holding the chariot steady and another is shooting at the deer with his bow.

Chariots for travel

The fresco on the right from Tiryns shows two women (or goddesses) driving a chariot. Women are shown with white arms in frescoes. In addition these women have the same type of hair arrangement as the lady with the necklace fresco. They seem to be using their chariot for travelling and stand in a more elaborate chariot with high sides covered in skin. This seems to be a luxury model!

Chariots for warfare

The chariot was used in warfare on mainland Greece. Many Mycenaean citadels overlooked plains. For example, Mycenae looked over the plain of Argos, where wheat was grown. Chariots could be used for fighting on the plain. However, the ground would still have been rocky and rough so chariots had to be quite sturdy.



Below (left) is the first depiction of a war chariot in Bronze Age Greece. It is carved into yellow sandstone and marks a grave in Grave Circle A. The warrior is alone in a *box chariot* and fighting with a spear. The chariot has just two wheels and only four spokes to the wheel. His enemy is in front of the horse.



In Homer we are told that warriors dismounted to fight, which is what is happening in the fresco above (right). The warrior's charioteer has driven him to the fight and he has dismounted to fight with his spear. The chariots seem to have been a mode of transport to get close to a fight, not for charging about on the battlefield.

Activity 31

A chariot was an expensive piece of equipment. To maintain it a citadel and aristocrat needed the following. Can you think why?

Carpenter	
Charioteer	
Horse trainer	
Leather and metal worker	

So, were the Mycenaeans warlike?

It would be easy to suggest that the Mycenaeans were warlike. The following suggests that they were:

1. A range of different weapons and armour found
2. A number of weapons and pieces of armour found
3. Fortified nature of sites such as Mycenae
4. Images in art support the idea of a warlike society
5. Reference to episodes from the *Iliad*

However, there are other aspects to Mycenaean society which should be considered.

Women in Mycenaean society

As in many Bronze Age societies, the role of women was not equal to that of men. However, in Mycenaean society women did have rights and duties. This fragment (Additional Material) says:

Eritha the priestess claims that the land she holds is a 'freehold' on behalf of her divinity, but the damos says that she holds a plot of leased communal land. Tablet: PY Ep 704

Eritha was from Pylos. She held an important position: *priestess*. She was administering land, according to her, on behalf of the goddess, so should not pay taxes. The community, *damos*, did not agree and said the land was community land and she had to pay taxes. Women had important roles but also had to pay the taxes due. Another woman at Pylos called Kessandra received extra rations of wheat and figs. She seems to have been more important than other women at Pylos. Some scholars think she was a supervisor and gave out the rations.

On the other hand, women had the roles of mothers and slaves.

During the Month of Sailing.

And he is performing a holy ceremony.

And he is bringing and carrying gifts to the shrine at Sphagianes.

To Potnia: 1 gold goblet, 1 woman

The king (possibly), *he*, is going to perform a ceremony in honour of the female goddess Sphagianes. He is quite happy to hand over a woman as a servant or slave. She probably had no say in the matter. The palace records at Pylos list 750 out of 900 women as slaves.

Traditional role of women:

Bringing up children
Carved ivory

Women's clothing is especially difficult to distinguish from clothing of the earlier Minoan period. Women wore the same long skirts and short-sleeved tops. It was accepted in Minoan society that women displayed bare breasts. The same was true for Mycenaean women, although an open blouse or bodice with short sleeves was mostly worn on the upper half of the body.



This can be seen in the fresco on p. 24 where the lady with the necklace has a blouse covering.

The skirts of Mycenaean women were perhaps the most impressive. Layers and frills (see p. 36) would have required a lot of material, and the most popular colours were white, red and yellow. The clothes conformed to the body and emphasised the curves. They were not just squares sewn together.

Clothing in the Mycenaean period varied depending on the occasion, as is the same today. For religious ceremonies, the Mycenaean women dressed up in all their finest clothes, and it tends to be these we see in frescoes. No material has survived from Mycenaean times, but this would have been natural fibres such as wool, linen and leather. Linen is made from the fibres of the stalks of the flax plant which grew on the Peloponnese.

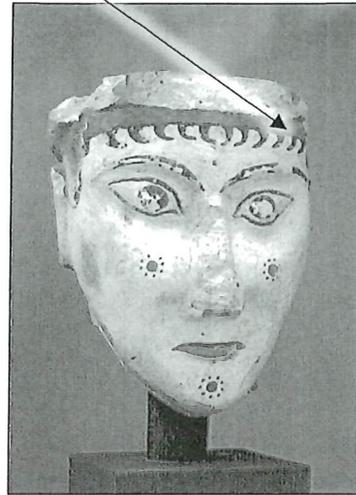


Activity 32

How did the Mycenaeans obtain wool and leather?

Hair was elaborate and tied off the face with a ribbon called a *fillet*.

Linear B sign for a woman is clear.



Sample Activity 3

Compare the women in these two images. What are they wearing, and how is their hair arranged?

Image 1

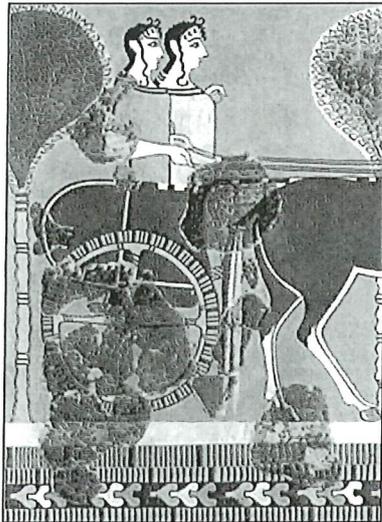
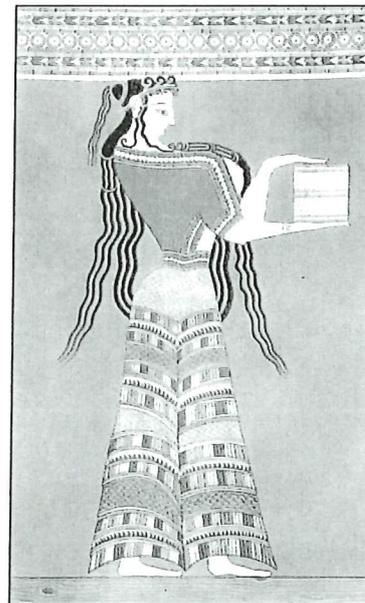


Image 2



SAMPLE ANSWER: Her hair is highly stylised with large curls at the front upper part of her hair and small side bits fall on her shoulder and separate in two directions. She has a bun and ponytail on the back of her head. Her hair is decorated with a red band. The others look the same. They are plain and she has lots of colour. She has stripes and they don't.

Comment: She and her do not make clear who is being discussed. There is plenty of detail on the hair of Image 2, which will gain credit. It is not sufficient to say 'they don't' as this is not an effective comparison. Little has been observed of image 1.



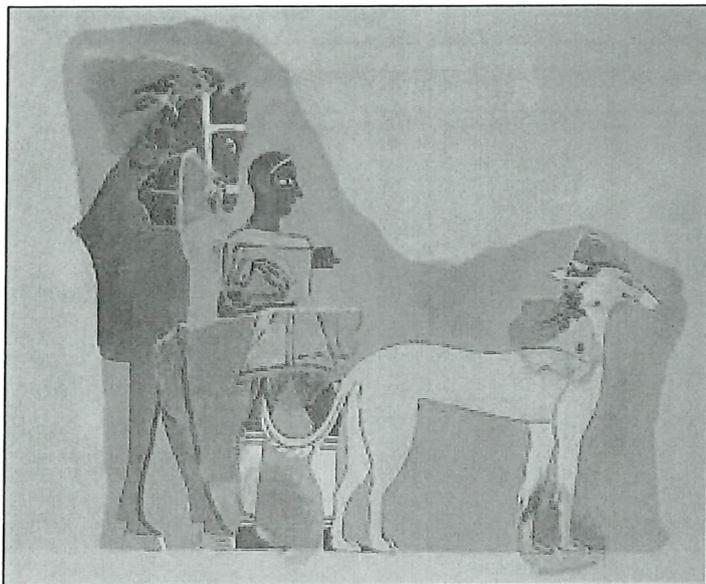
Activity 33

Try to improve on the response in the sample activity above.



Men

Men are depicted as wearing short tunics and white greaves, both of which were probably made out of linen.



Perhaps when gathered in the megaron a longer version was worn.



This also had fringing or frills.

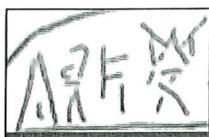
Independent Learning 4

Find images of Mycenaean clothing. Analyse the images by asking yourself:

1. What can be seen in the image: woman, man, colours, clothing types?
2. What was the status of the person in the image?
3. What information is missing from the images?

Linear B tablets

The Mycenaeans were keen record keepers. The palaces had an archive room. They had a form of writing, *script*, which they used to keep account of goods and payments in the citadel. Linear B is a script that is based on the syllables of words: *ti-ri-po-de* (left to right) used for writing Mycenaean Greek for tripod: *de-po-ri-ti*.



tripod



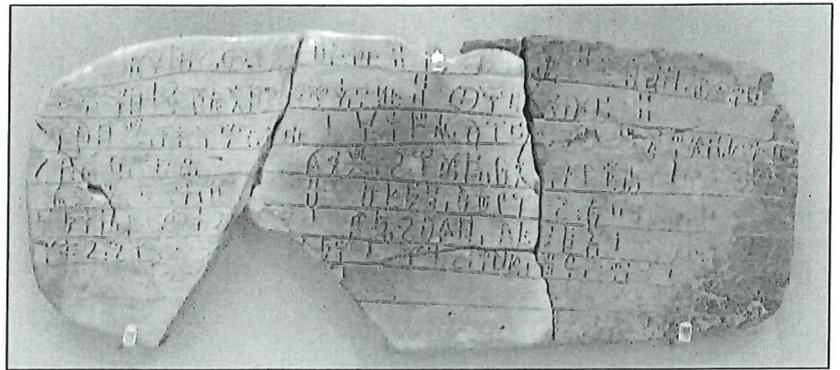
For this reason, Linear B is called a *syllabary script*. However, Linear B is also based partly on pictures (above right). These are called *ideograms*. Linear B represents the earliest form of Greek. The script predates the Greek alphabet by several centuries. The oldest Mycenaean writing dates to about 1450 BC.

It was not until 1952 that a *cryptologist* called Michael Ventris worked out what was on the tablets. He broke the 'code' and scholars realised that the writing was an early form of Greek. When this was translated our knowledge of Bronze Age Greece was completely changed.

Preservation

The tablets were made of grey-brown clay, which was

1. cheap
2. easily obtainable from the ground
3. easily rolled out into thin page-like sheets
4. easy to make marks on when the tablets were wet
5. dried and a record kept



BUT, after a few months the clay tablets would have crumbled.

Four thousand tablets were found at the Minoan palace of Knossos on Crete. In Greece, one thousand tablets were found at Pylos. Both palaces were destroyed by fire and as a result the tablets were baked hard. This helped their preservation.

Some ideograms of Linear B: we have already seen the ideogram for woman.

U+10080	U+10081	U+10082	U+10083	U+10084	U+10085	U+10086	U+10087	U+10088	U+10089	U+1008A	U+1008B	U+1008C	U+1008D	U+1008E	U+1008F
U+10090	U+10091	U+10092	U+10093	U+10094	U+10095	U+10096	U+10097	U+10098	U+10099	U+1009A	U+1009B	U+1009C	U+1009D	U+1009E	U+1009F
U+100A0	U+100A1	U+100A2	U+100A3	U+100A4	U+100A5	U+100A6	U+100A7	U+100A8	U+100A9	U+100AA	U+100AB	U+100AC	U+100AD	U+100AE	U+100AF
U+100B0	U+100B1	U+100B2	U+100B3	U+100B4	U+100B5	U+100B6	U+100B7	U+100B8	U+100B9	U+100BA	U+100BB	U+100BC	U+100BD	U+100BE	U+100BF
U+100C0	U+100C1	U+100C2	U+100C3	U+100C4	U+100C5	U+100C6	U+100C7	U+100C8	U+100C9	U+100CA	U+100CB	U+100CC	U+100CD	U+100CE	U+100CF
U+100D0	U+100D1	U+100D2	U+100D3	U+100D4	U+100D5	U+100D6	U+100D7	U+100D8	U+100D9	U+100DA	U+100DB	U+100DC	U+100DD	U+100DE	U+100DF
U+100E0	U+100E1	U+100E2	U+100E3	U+100E4	U+100E5	U+100E6	U+100E7	U+100E8	U+100E9	U+100EA	U+100EB	U+100EC	U+100ED	U+100EE	U+100EF
U+100F0	U+100F1	U+100F2	U+100F3	U+100F4	U+100F5	U+100F6	U+100F7	U+100F8	U+100F9	U+100FA	U+100FB	U+100FC	U+100FD	U+100FE	U+100FF

Activity 34

Who might need or want these?



Activity 35

Imagine you are a record keeper at a Mycenaean palace. Make a list, using Linear B, of items useful for the following:

1. A warrior
2. An aristocrat's wife
3. The king's cook

What we learn about Mycenaean society from the Linear B tablets

The tablets form long lists: animals and agricultural produce, cloth and clothing, pots, furniture, military people, weapons, and chariots.

This tells us about:

1. the types of supplies
2. items important enough to keep track of
3. the wool industry
4. farming practices
5. military kit and organisation
6. landownership



R

Start from L

Pylos Tripod tablet (Prescribed Material) Archive Room, Pylos

This document consists of three lines of text, separated by two horizontal lines, and was read from left to right. It uses syllabic characters together with ideograms of vases. The text lists cooking items such as the grill, bowl, shovel and tripod.



Activity 36

1. Find the two ideograms for a tripod.
2. Find ideograms of Greek vases. Are they all the same?

Lists of offerings to the gods show us that most of the classical Greek gods and goddesses were already worshipped by the Mycenaeans.

Zeus	<i>di-we</i>	God of the sky. This is linked to our word <i>divine</i> .
Poseidon	<i>po-se-da-wo-ne</i>	God of the sea
Dionysus	<i>di-wo-nu-so</i>	God of wine
Hera	<i>e-ra</i>	Queen of the gods
Artemis	<i>a-ti-mi-te</i>	Goddess of hunting

and

wanax	<i>wa-na-ka</i>	Name given to Mycenaean king/overlord
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Limitations

We do not get a complete picture of Mycenaean society from the tablets because:

1. the Linear B tablets are accounts and lists rather than literature – they do not give us an understanding of the feelings of the Mycenaeans
2. they are impossible to date as they are clay
3. no literature or historical accounts exist to compare
4. they are only a record of a short period of time

Trade and economy

The Mycenaeans were not *self-sufficient*, meaning not all of the items listed in the Linear B tablets were produced in or near the Mycenaean citadels. For example, there is very little copper and no tin in Greece. So items had to be *imported*, brought in, which involved trading with suppliers. In return they *exported* goods. The Mycenaeans developed trade throughout the Mediterranean to the east and west and beyond and were very successful.

Examples of countries and goods

Country	Goods
Egypt	Gold, ivory, stones and gems, papyrus for rope and sails, flint for arrowheads
Cyprus	Copper
Spain	Tin
Syria	Textiles, ivory
Britain (Cornwall)	Tin
Denmark	Amber for jewellery

As the Minoan society declined and Mycenaean society grew, there was a time of peace in the Mediterranean. Navigation developed and this helped trade. The increase in power of the kings led to their desire to show off their wealth through objects. In 1954 the wreck of a Mycenaean ship was found near the coast of Gelidonya, south Turkey. It had sunk around 1200 BC with a load of metal tools, and bronze and tin *ingots* (solid lumps) were found. The Uluburun shipwreck, discovered in 1982 just off the west coast of Turkey, was carrying a huge cargo of copper and tin ingots, 175 glass ingots in blue and turquoise, other precious stones and amber, jewellery, weapons, and foodstuffs such as figs and grapes.

Activity 37

List the objects found in the Uluburun shipwreck as shown here: zzed.co.uk/11261-Uluburun

Export

The Mycenaeans in turn exported their agricultural products. The main exported products were olive oil, scented oil and wine. The Egyptians wanted timber as they had very few trees. Manufactured products such as weapons (swords have been found in Georgia), vases and textiles were also exported. Amber inscribed with Linear B symbols has been found in Germany. Imports and exports also included people.

Guided Activity 13

Imagine you have been sent to Egypt by the King of Mycenae on a trade mission. What will you take and what will you get in return? You could discuss what is valuable to you and what you want the goods for. The Egyptians are happy to trade more than timber. (There is no money – you will have to barter.)

What happened to the imports?

The imports were usually given to artisans in the Mycenaean palaces to create artwork, luxury items, and military equipment. There were workshops at Mycenae and Tiryns. The Mycenaeans were masters of the decorative arts.

Frescoes

Activity 38

Reread pages 24–36 about frescoes.



Independent learning 5

1. Collect pictures of frescoes from the key Mycenaean sites such as Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos and Gla.
2. What colours are most successful? Why?
3. What different types of images are there?
4. What images do you like the most? Why?



Gold and metalwork

Gold is a soft metal which can be worked in different ways. Here are some terms relevant to metalworking:

repoussé	A design is hammered onto an object from above or from the back
filigree	Fine wire twisted
inlay	Heated metal is placed over another metal to form a shape
cloisonné	Decorative work in which enamel, glass or gemstones are separated by strips of wire on a metal backing
granulation	Drops of gold are put on an object for a spotted effect
hammering	Sheet of metal beaten into a shape

Repoussé

The craftsman used a hammer and a small nail.

He pressed the gold down to create 3D images.

Made in Tiryns, this is the largest signet ring known.

Lion-headed *daemons* approach a goddess.

She holds a cup.

Behind her is an eagle, representing power.



Repoussé and filigree

Gold Pyxis Grave V

Grave Circle A (Prescribed Material)

A gold hexagonal *pyxis* or beauty box.

The wooden box is covered in 12 gold panels.

The panels are edged in filigree.

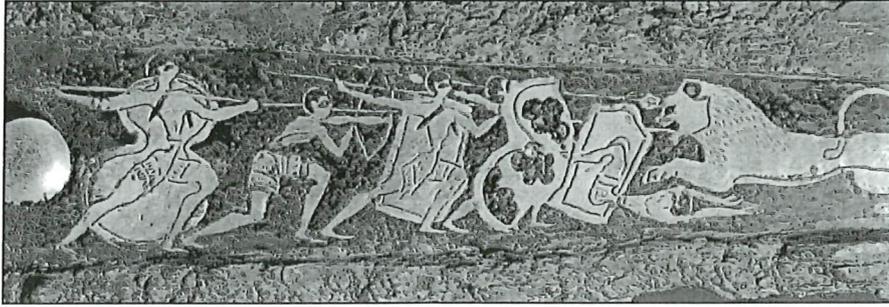
The inside of each panel has been beaten from behind.

Lions chase a deer.



Inlay

On the hunting dagger, gold and silver were heated and laid over the bronze.



Hammering, granulation and repoussé

Gold Rhyton, Grave IV, Grave Circle A

Mycenae (Prescribed Material)

A *rhyton* (plural: *rhyta*) was a cup in the shape of an animal's head. Here it is in the shape of a lion's head. Sheets of gold were hammered into shape. Blobs of gold were dropped to make eyes and nostrils. Hair/mane was made using the repoussé technique. This cup was used for pouring wine at ceremonies.



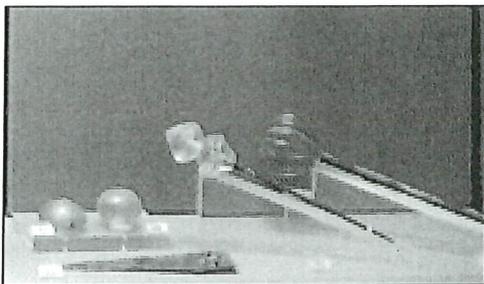
Activity 39

'Mycenae rich in gold' Homer says. In your opinion, how far was Homer's statement true?

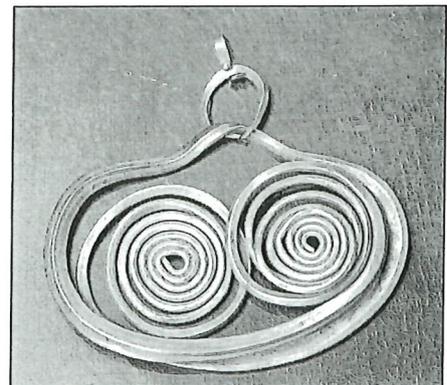
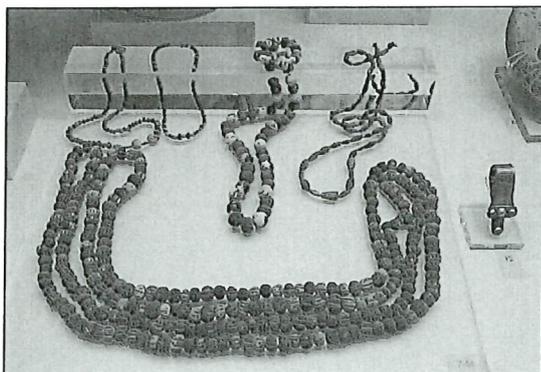


Jewellery

Looking at the evidence from frescoes, jewellery was mostly worn by women. In women's graves, hairpins made of crystal and amber have been found as well as numerous earrings.



Glass beads
From Dendra



Ivory

Ivory comes from elephant tusks, and as elephants are not found in Greece the ivory must have been imported. Ivory from the hippopotamus has also been found. Ivory was used to carve small decorative objects, all of which would have been very expensive, and owners would have been of high status.

Guided Activity 14

Compare this ivory figure with the carving on p. 34.

- What similarities can be seen?
- What does this carving tell us about women's clothing?
- What does it not tell us about clothing?

These are some of the questions to consider when asked:

'How useful is this source?'



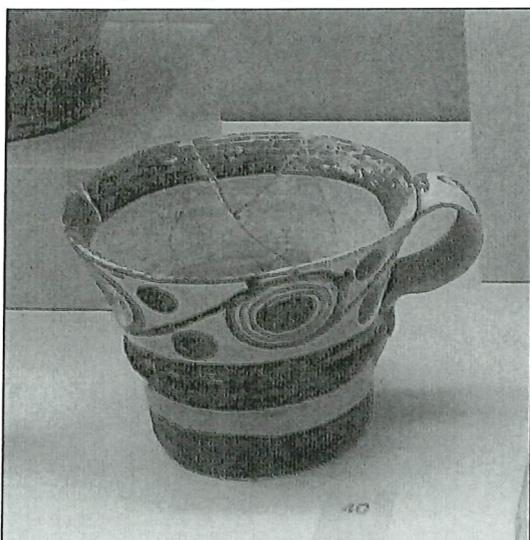
Pottery

Pottery means more than Greek vases. The Mycenaeans made many objects out of clay. Clay was cheap and easily available.

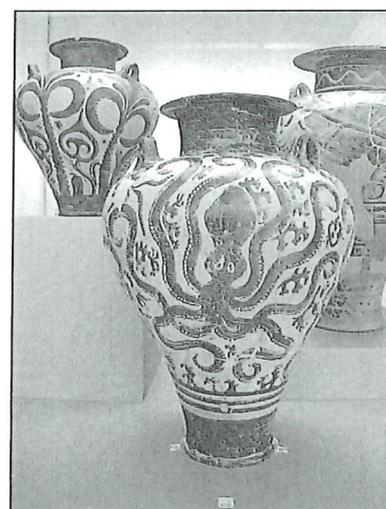
burial caskets	Quick to make after a death
bath tubs	Would not leak once dried. Cheaper than metal.
drinking vessels	Could be quickly produced and mass-produced. Could be made into interesting shapes.
jars and vases	Cheap clay meant very large vessels could be made.
cooking pots	Quick to replace after breakages.

Fashion in painting on pottery changed over the years. To begin with *linear designs*, decorations with lines, were popular. Then more *naturalised motifs*, such as vases with an octopus. As production expanded, Mycenaean vases started to have standard patterns. These are called *koine* (common to all). Finally, as the Mycenaean age ended there was a mixture of previous styles.

Vapheio pottery cup Asine



Octopus amphora

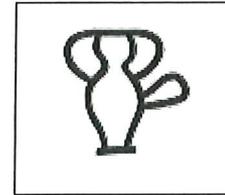


Koine pottery, which has been found on the islands north of Sicily, is almost identical to koine pottery found in Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean. Because koine pottery is so similar, it is virtually impossible to tell where in Mycenaean Greece a specific vase was made.

Mycenae stirrup jar

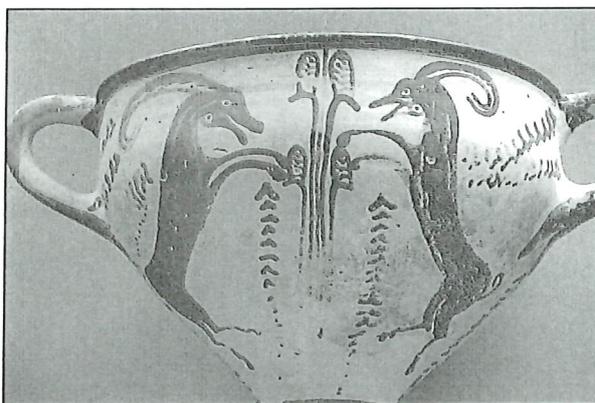


The same in Linear B

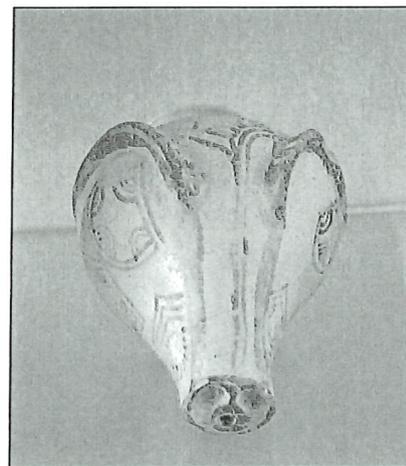


Linear B mentions various sorts of vessels made of clay.

Vessel	Use
pithos	Huge vessel often sunk into the ground for storage
amphora	A transport jar for wine, or dry goods such as corn
stirrup jar	To transport olive oil
stamnos	Wine jar
krater	Vessel for mixing water and wine
kylix (plural: <i>kylixes</i>)	Drinking vessel with long stem and two handles
rhyton	Animal-shaped drinking vessel. The finger was placed over the hole at the bottom or removed for amusement at parties. It also had ceremonial use for the blood at a sacrifice.



Rearing goats design
Kylix



Boar
Rhyton

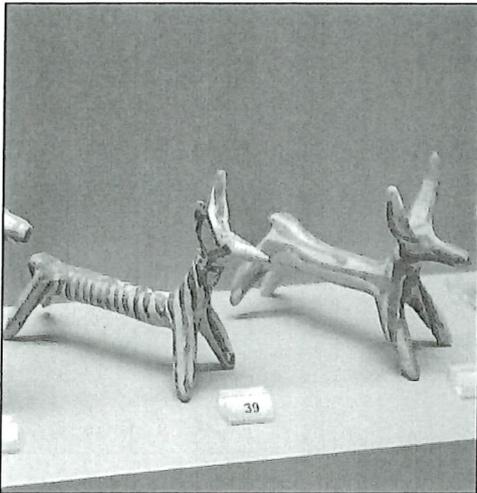
Activity 40

You are a tradesman and need to fill your ship with goods to sell to overlords around the coast of Greece. What are you going to fill your ship with, and why?



Clay was so soft and pliable that many different decorative figures could be made. Small animal figures have been found. The ones below are from Mycenae.

These animals are long-horned bulls



These horses pull a chariot

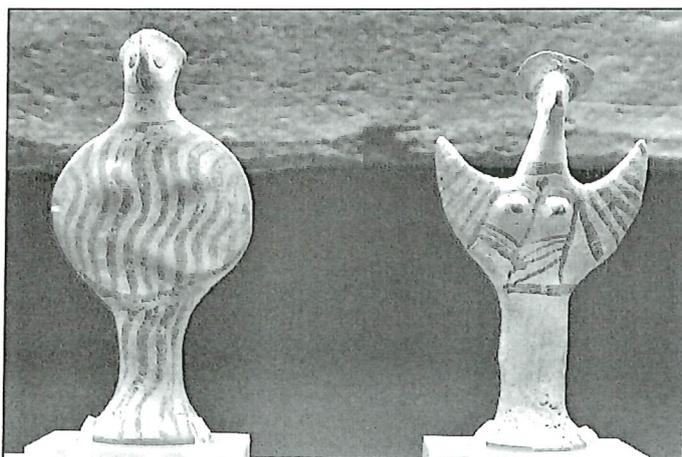


Phi/psi/tau figures

These figures were small, about 10 cm high. They are made of clay. Some people say they were toys, like collectables, and others say they are offerings to the gods as many have been found on shrines and graves. They may also have represented certain goddesses or the worshippers themselves. In 1941 a Swedish archaeologist called Furumark sorted them into groups as they reminded him of the Greek letters: phi, psi, and tau.

Phi

Φ



Psi

Ψ

Tau

T

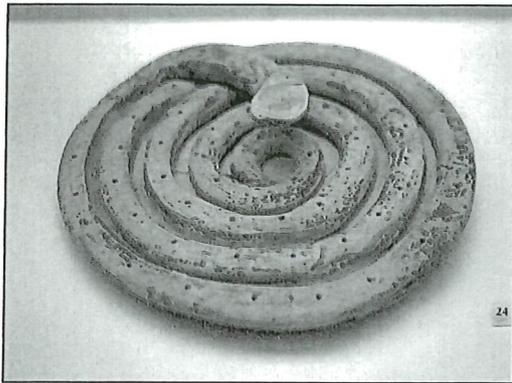


The finds in the shrine

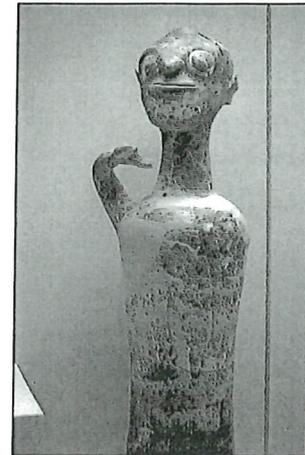
Also known as the temple or cult centre, the shrine was a complex building with many rooms, one with a staircase and niches for offerings. It contained a huge number of figures and was decorated with frescoes. There is no written evidence to explain what happened during the ceremonies or at the shrine. There were goddesses, especially ones linked to nature and the household and war. People brought small gifts and figures and probably sacrificed animals as altars have been found at Mycenae and Tiryns. Wine offerings called libations were also poured at ceremonies using ceremonial cups like the gold rhyton.

Figures from the shrine at Mycenae

Terracotta snake associated with Goddess of the Household



This human-like figure may be a goddess



Independent Learning 6

Find images of items made from clay. List them under Mycenae and Tiryns to use as additional examples in examinations.

Burial

The Mycenaeans believed in some sort of life after death. Until the body had disintegrated they believed that the person needed lots of the things which they had when alive and buried the objects with them. These are called *grave goods* or *funerary objects*. The person passed from this world to the next when only the skeleton remained. The bones were then not thought to be important and were pushed to one side for the next person. The more important people, such as kings, were believed to still communicate with the living, and so their goods were kept safe in deep pits in the huge chambers.

<p>Cist graves Dendra</p>		<p>A shallow pit was dug and a stone lining was set in the sides with a stone lid. These were very small and the body could not be laid out flat.</p> <p>These are the earliest type and there are 10 cist graves on Grave Circle B at Mycenae.</p>
<p>Shaft graves</p>		<p>There are 14 shaft graves in Grave Circle B. These were dug deeper (12 m), and wider: 3 m x 4 m. These could hold several bodies. The bottom of the shaft was lined with low stone walls. The base was covered in pebbles and the body was laid on top with objects around it. A stone or a plank of wood was placed on top and the shaft was filled.</p> 

Chamber tombs	These tombs, unlike the shaft tombs, were carved into the soft bedrock of a hillside. They took the form of a small house with walls sloping inwards. Bodies were often buried in the floor of these tombs or placed on shelves around the edge.
Tholos tombs	The beehive-shaped rooms made of large stones, built to house the dead. The bodies of rulers and royalty were placed in a side chamber with their objects.

Shaft graves were marked by a *stele* or a pillar. Hunting scenes and warfare are common and we do not know whether this was a standard scene or whether the person buried liked these activities.



Notice the standard swirls on each stele.

Man with spear out hunting



Death masks

Many of the bodies were found with detailed gold masks placed on their faces. These may have been attempts at a portrait of the person. Schliemann believed this mask was the face of Agamemnon, but the dating is wrong. The sheet of gold would be warmed to make hammering easier, then repoussé details were added with a fine tool to make the eyebrows and moustache.

17 cm high x 25 cm wide.

Gold death mask Grave V,
Grave Circle A Mycenae (Prescribed Material)





Activity 41

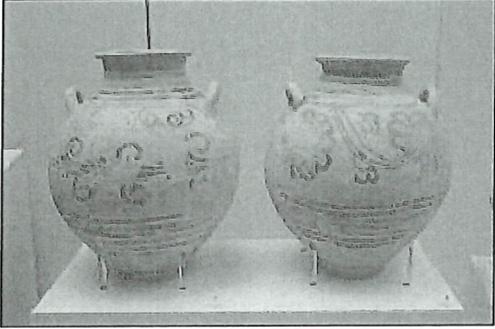
For further discussion of this mask see YouTube Khan Academy: [zzed.co.uk/11261-mask](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.co.uk/11261-mask)

An independent activity idea would be to have a picture of the mask printed / stuck ready in the middle of a blank sheet of paper so that notes can be added as it is discussed.

Ornate jewellery and drinking vessels also accompanied the bodies. The artefacts were made from precious metals and materials such as gold, silver, bronze, alabaster and amber. Ceremonial daggers and swords have been discovered as well, suggesting that the Mycenaeans were a warrior culture.

Objects from the tombs

Shaft Grave Circle A	
<p>Grave III, 'Grave of the Women' Mycenae. 1600–1500 BC, contained three female and two infant interments.</p> 	<p>The female skeletons were covered in gold jewellery and wore massive gold crowns called <i>diadems</i>. The children were covered in a gold foil. Gold repoussé pieces were found, which were decorations on the original clothing. The jewellery included large silver and bronze pins with rock crystal.</p>
<p>Grave IV</p> 	<p>By far the largest grave at 6 m x 4 m, this grave held what have become some of the more famous grave goods at Mycenae.</p> <p>Cup of Nestor</p> <p>Lion hunting dagger</p> <p>Battle in the Glen signet ring</p> <p>Hunting signet ring</p> <p>Lion's head rhyton</p>
<p>Grave V</p> 	<p>Agamemnon death mask</p> <p>Gold pyxis</p> <p>Gold cup</p>

Grave Circle B	Poorer funerary gifts
Grave O 	The head and chest of the woman buried were covered with various precious materials, including over a hundred amber beads and spacers.
Grave N 	

Independent Learning 7

Research more graves from Grave Circle B such as N or Γ.

1. What impression have you formed of the person in this grave?
2. How useful are grave goods in teaching us about the status of the dead person?
3. What is missing to give you a full picture?

Guided Activity 15

How far do burial and graves show that the Mycenaeans had respect for the dead?

1. Work involved in constructing burial sites
2. Decoration on tholoi tombs and stelai
3. Range and quality of grave goods

Counterargument

1. Not all graves were huge, such as cist graves
2. Pushing aside bones once the soul had moved on
3. Limited to richer people; little evidence of poorer people

Activity 42

A summary of some finds in their context can be found on YouTube. This presentation would also be useful as revision: [zzed.co.uk/11261-finds](https://www.zzed.co.uk/11261-finds)

A grid could be a way of setting out the finds, e.g. armour, vessels, frescoes, warfare.

Troy



Activity 43

Look again at p. 4. Remind yourself where the different Mycenaean sites are and notice the position of Troy.

The story of the Trojan War

Important to the study of the books of Homer in Section B is knowledge of the Trojan War story. It begins with a wedding, that of Peleus, a mortal, and Thetis, a (minor) sea goddess. This was an unusual marriage where mortals and the divine met. It was decided not to invite the goddess Discord/Strife. However, she turned up and threw a golden apple onto the wedding table. Attached to the apple was a label which read: 'For the most beautiful'. Three goddesses immediately claimed the apple. In Homer they have Greek names: Hera, wife of Zeus; Athena, goddess of wisdom; and Aphrodite, goddess of love.

Zeus refused to judge so the goddesses approached Paris, son of Priam of Troy. Each goddess tried to persuade him. Hera offered him power; Athena offered him wisdom; Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world. This was Helen, wife of Menelaus of Sparta, a town in southern Greece. Paris chose Aphrodite. Mortal time must have passed as Peleus and Thetis had a son, Achilles, who grew up and had a son of his own.

During this time it was arranged that Paris should meet Helen and they returned together to Troy. Menelaus sailed to Troy after assembling a huge gathering of Greek troops. With him were Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, Achilles and Odysseus. The Greeks surrounded Troy in a siege lasting 10 years. Homer's *Iliad* describes many events of the war and predicts the eventual death of Achilles.

To break the deadlock the Greeks came up with the idea of a wooden horse. It was hollow and Greek soldiers hid inside. The Greeks sailed away to a nearby island called Tenedos. After some deliberation, the Trojans took the horse inside the walls, relieved that the war was over. The Trojans celebrated and then while they were asleep, the Greek soldiers climbed down from the horse, opened the gates of the city and then burned the city.

The Greeks wait in the wooden horse



'Troy' was a city which was **in existence** during the Bronze Age and the Mycenaean period. However, it was not a Mycenaean citadel like Mycenae and Tiryns. We have no real proof that it was even called 'Troy'. Some ancient documents called it 'Wilusa', and, according to Homer, the people were Greek, although some scholars think that they spoke Hittite, being in an area which was part of the Hittite empire.

How Greek they were is debatable as:

1. It would be unusual for the Greeks to sail across the sea and attack another Greek citadel so far away.
2. Many Mycenaean sites kept palace documents, called the Linear B tablets, and no such documents have been found for Troy. Scholars think their language was different.

However, Troy was an important site of the Mycenaean period and objects found at Troy show links with other Mycenaean settlements. It is also important as it was the supposed site of the Trojan War and subject of Homer's *Iliad*.

Where was Troy?

Heinrich Schliemann, 1822–1890, was a German archaeologist who searched for Troy, believing it to be a real place. He used Homer's geographical descriptions in the *Iliad* to form his decisions and eventually found a site in Turkey known as Hissarlik. From a series of excavations we now know that people lived at Hissarlik during the Mycenaean period but they also lived there before and afterwards. Archaeologists have removed the many *layers* of Troy and found different 'versions'.

Excavations at Troy

Troy I	3000 BC	Oldest settlement Walls of small stones and clay still visible today
Troy II Schliemann's Homeric Troy	2500–2200 BC	Like early Mycenaean fortifications: ramparts, towers, palace, houses
Troy III	2200–2100 BC	Successive villages built on the debris of Troy II Decline in prosperity
Troy IV, Troy V	2100–1900 BC	Fortress, huge walls, towers, gates, houses
Troy VI	1900–1300 BC	Possible Homeric Troy
Troy VIIa, b1, b2, b3	1300–950 BC	VIIa: most favoured
Troy VIII Troy IX	750 BC – AD 500	Iron Age Troy to Roman Troy

The evidence for and against Troy VI and Troy VIIa being the site of Homer's Troy

Troy VI	Troy VIIa
For	For
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Largest settlement 2. High walls with towers 3. Royal palace 4. Wealthy city 5. Large number of inhabitants in house which did not save on space 6. Destroyed around the expected time of the Trojan War 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walls and towers 2. Crowded housing indicating shortage of space 3. Poor-quality housing may have been built in a hurry 4. Storage jars in the floor to save space and stock up on food in a siege 5. Destroyed by a fire 6. Arrowheads found in this layer 7. Only lasted a very short time (30–40 years)
Against	Against
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Occupation spread out beyond the walls indicating agricultural community 2. Not looted 3. Not burned 4. Some scholars say it was destroyed by an earthquake 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indication of less wealth, which does not fit Homer's description 2. Only a few arrowheads (3), not enough for complete destruction

Activity 44

Which 'Troy' do you think is Homer's?

Can you see any flaws in the arguments above?



Activity 45

Did Troy ever exist? See this YouTube discussion: [zzed.co.uk/11261-Troy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.co.uk/11261-Troy)

