

On to the Greek mainland

Mycenaean Art

# Mycenaean Civilization

- Mycenaean is the term applied to the art and culture of Greece from ca. 1600 to 1100 B.C.
- The name derives from the site of Mycenae on the Peloponnesian peninsula in Southern Greece, where once stood a great Mycenaean fortified palace.
- Mycenae is celebrated by Homer as the seat of King Agamemnon, who led the Greeks in the Trojan War.
- In modern archaeology, the site first gained renown through Heinrich Schliemann's excavations in the mid-1870s, which brought to light objects that seemed to correspond to Homer's description of Agamemnon's palace.



- During the Mycenaean period, the Greek mainland enjoyed an era of prosperity centered in such strongholds as Mycenae, Thebes, and Athens.
- Local workshops produced utilitarian objects of pottery and bronze, as well as luxury items, such as carved gems, jewelry, vases in precious metals, and glass ornaments.
- Contact with the Minoans on Crete played a decisive role in the shaping and development of Mycenaean culture, especially in the arts.
- Wide-ranging commerce circulated Mycenaean goods throughout the Mediterranean world
- The evidence consists primarily of vases, but their contents (oil, wine, and other commodities) were probably the chief objects of trade.

# Mycenaean Architecture

- The Citadel of Mycenae
  - The Lion Gate
- The Treasury of Atreus
  - Beehive style tomb
- The Citadel of Tiryns
  - The great walls
- The Palace at Pylos
  - The megaron

- Besides being bold traders, the Mycenaeans were fierce warriors and great engineers who designed and built remarkable bridges, fortification walls, and beehive-shaped tombs—all employing **Cyclopean masonry** —and elaborate drainage and irrigation systems.
- Their palatial centers, "Mycenae rich in gold" and "sandy Pylos," are immortalized in **Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey***.

# The Citadel of Mycenae





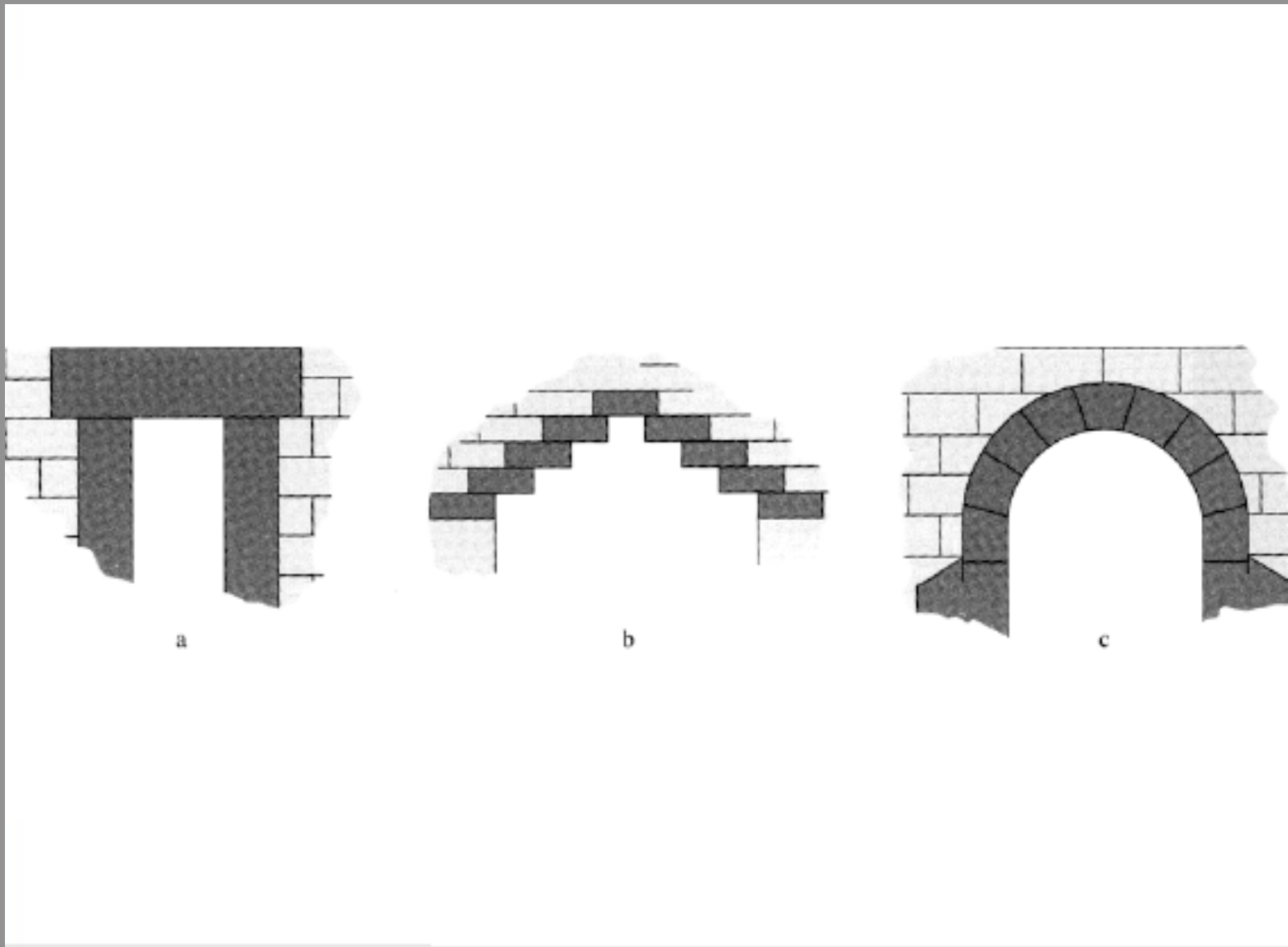
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# Lion Gate Mycenae



- Monumental gateway to the citadel
- Formed of megaliths, but much different in purpose than Stonehenge
- Post and lintel construction with a relieving arch above
  - The corbel arch relieved the lintel of the pressure of the upper level stones
  - The walls rose to a height of about 50 feet.



a

b

c



- As in other Near Eastern citadels, the gate had two guardian figures.
- Pair of lions nearly 9.5ft tall carved into a triangular piece of stone
- Their now missing heads were made separately of stone, wood, gold or bronze.
- The lions flank a Minoan style column.
- This gate was the entrance to a formal walkway, which led to the palace of the king.



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Walk way to the king's palace called The Great Ramp



Tombs were more important in the Mycenaean culture than the Minoan. Ruling families laid out their dead in opulent costumes and jewelry, and surrounded them with ceremonial weapons.

# Supposed Ring Grave of Agamemnon



*Brett Walton 2003*

# The Treasury of Atreus

1300-1200 BCE

# Beehive tombs

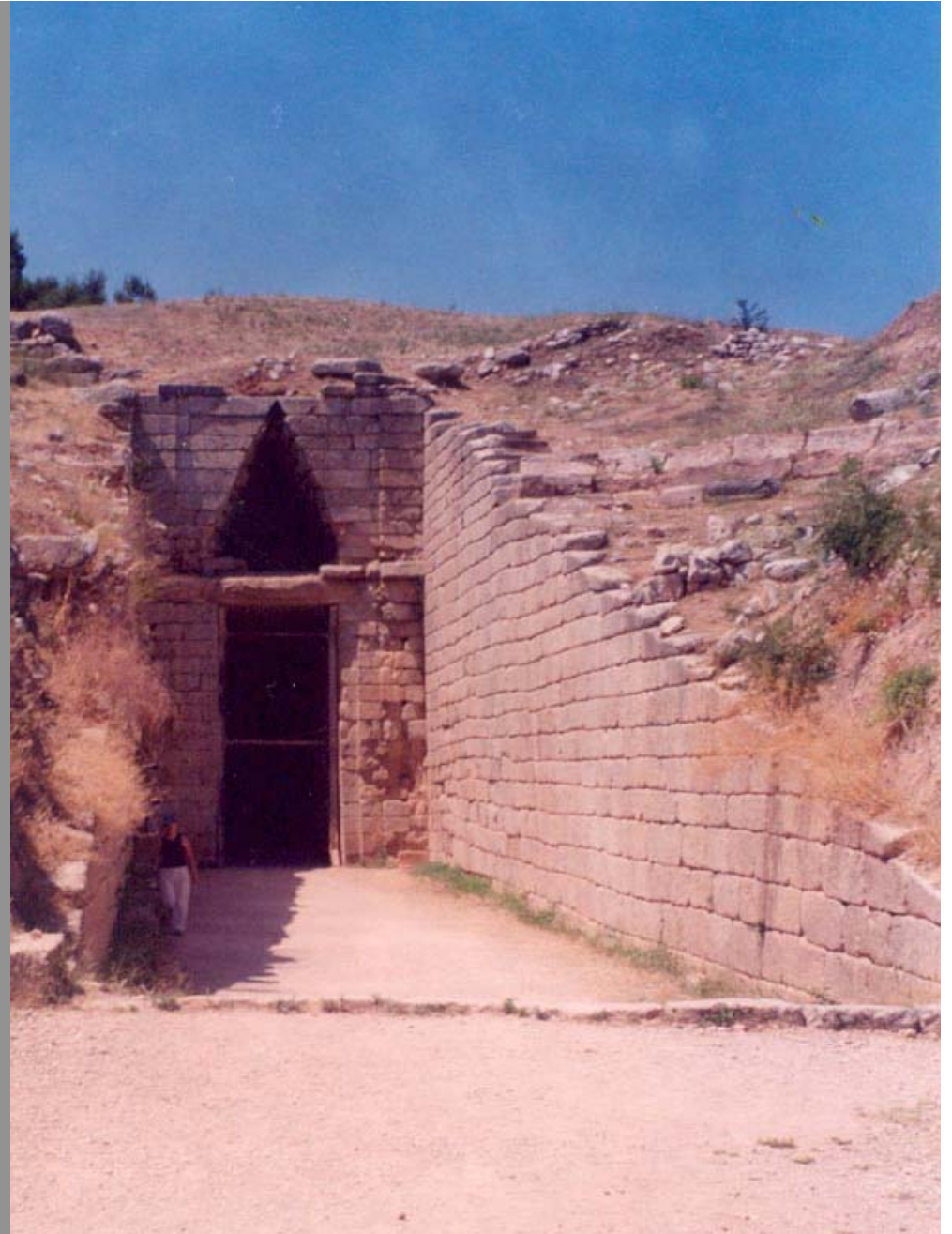
- About 1600 BCE, royalty on mainland Greece began building large above ground tombs called **Beehive Tombs**.
- More than 100 have been found in Greece, and nine in the vicinity of Mycenae.
- They are similar to the prehistoric tombs found in the United Kingdom .



# Treasury at Atreus

- The most impressive of the beehive tombs
- Built about 1200 BCE
- Example of Cyclopean construction
- A walled passage through the earthen mound was 120 feet long and led to the tomb's entrance.

# Entrance to the mound





- Corbelled beehive vault in the Treasury of Atrius
- Probably not connected with Atrius, who was the father of the Greek kings, Menelaus and Agamemnon
- It remained the largest uninterrupted interior space in Europe for over a thousand years, until the Romans built the Pantheon.

# The Citadel of Tiryns

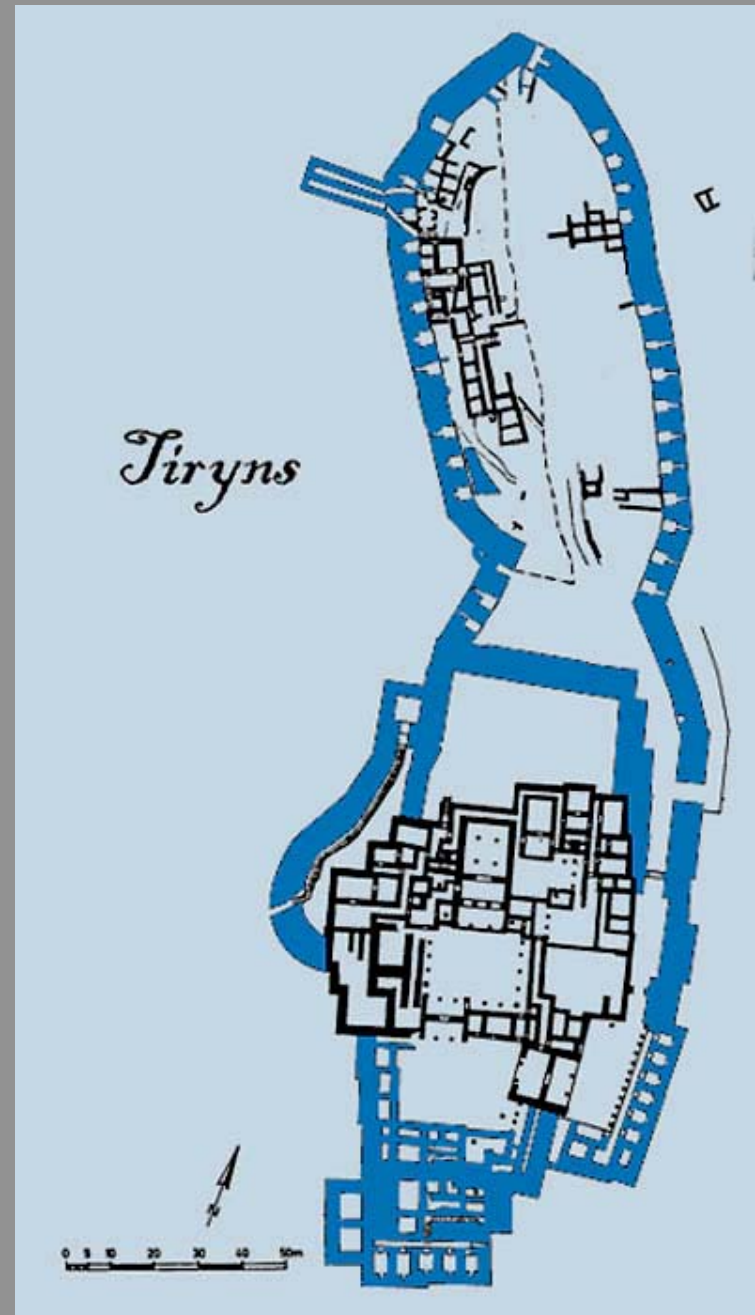
1600-1200 BCE

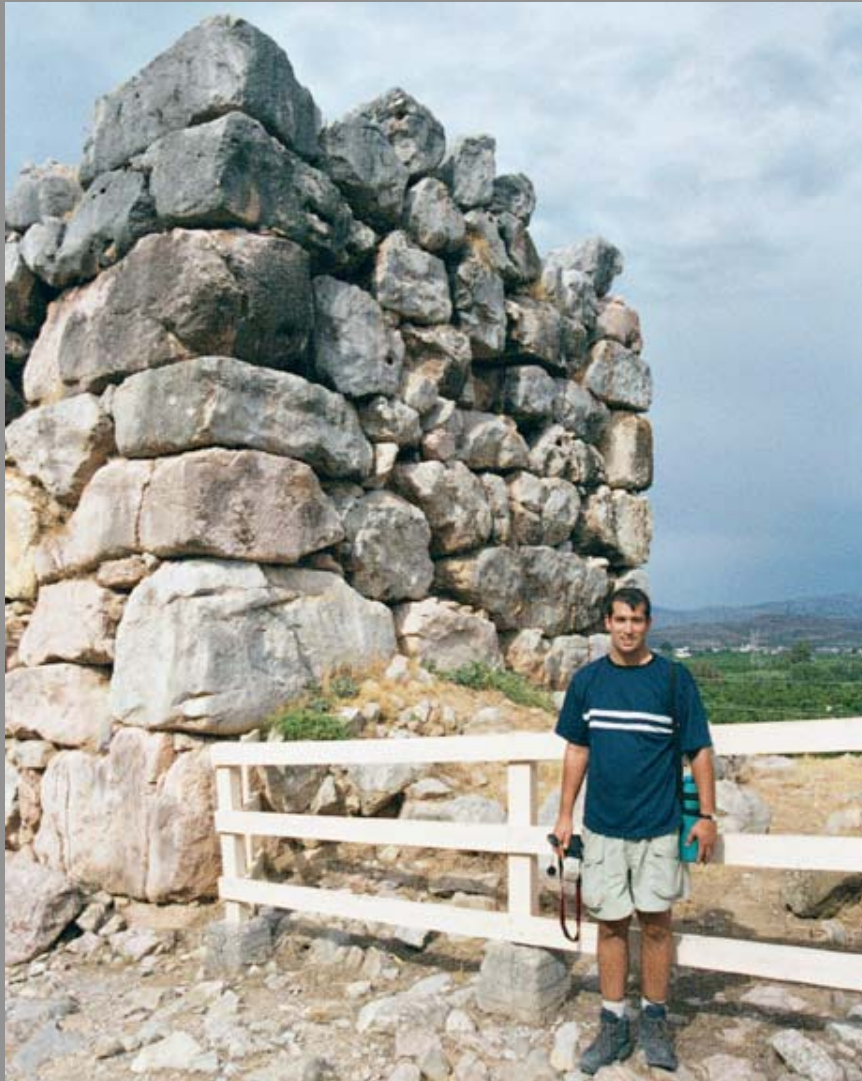


# The Citadel at Tiryns

- Located 10 miles from Mycenae and closer to the coast
- Unlike Mycenae, Tiryn lacked good natural defenses
- However, architects of the citadel drew on their knowledge of military strategy when they designed the citadel
- The main entrance gate was approached by a ramp that ran clockwise around the ring wall, forcing attackers to approach with their right sides exposed to the defenders above. (shields were carried on the left)
- Homer refers to this fortress as, *Tiryns of the great walls*

# Plan of the citadel of Tiryns





- The Cyclopean walls which surround the citadel have a total perimeter of approximately 2,300 ft and a width between 12 and 26 ft.
- The fortifications, over double their present height, were stronger than those of Mycenae since Tiryns was not located on a naturally strong site.



- Corbel vaulted room
- Ran inside the great ring wall.
- Provided space for storing arms, sheltering soldiers and towns people in time of attack.
- Openings in the wall allowed the people inside the chance to attack any invaders.



# The Palace at Pylos

Built around 1250 BCE close to the sea on the southwestern Peloponnesian peninsula.

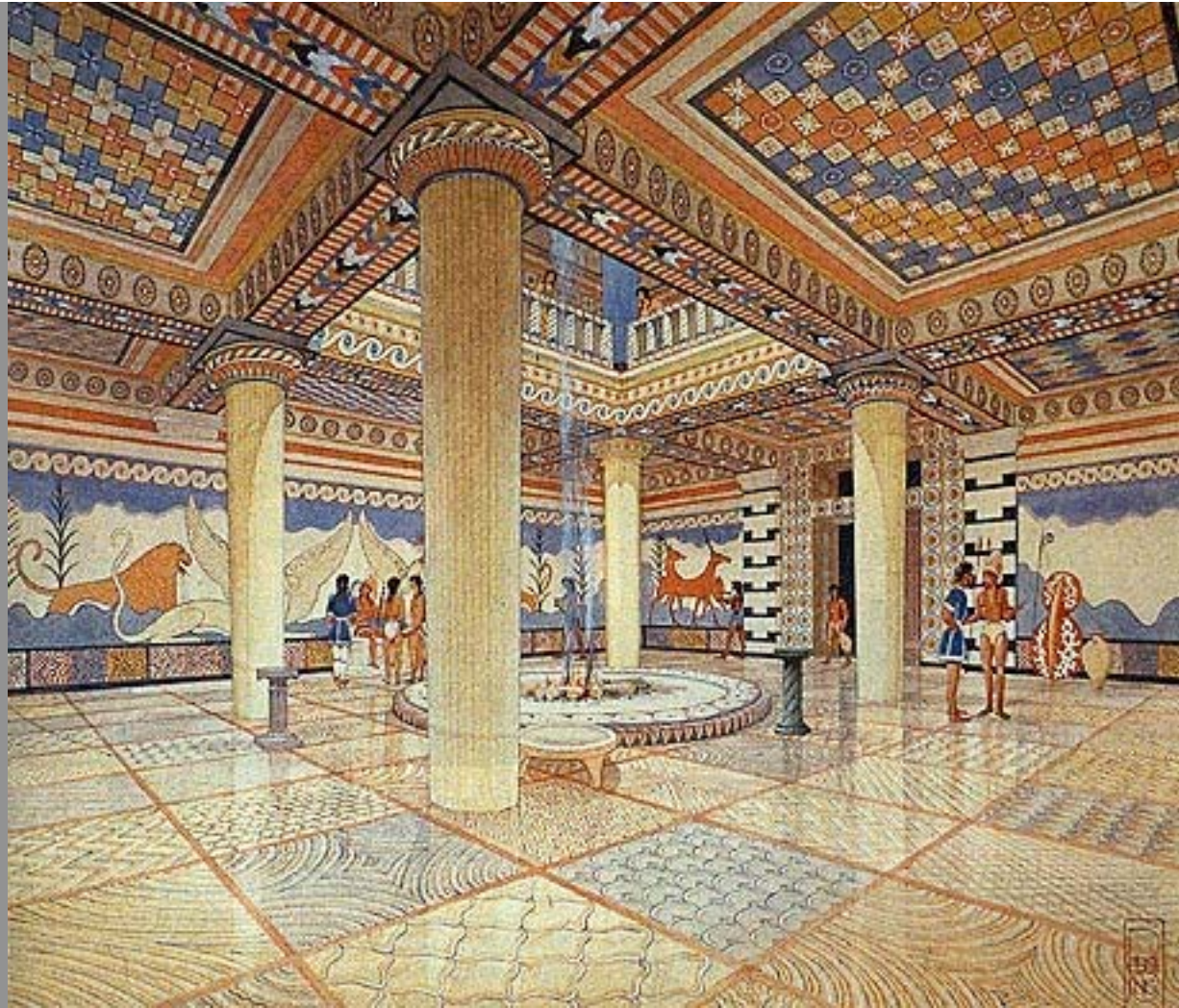
The people of Pylos believes their remote location offered them protection and therefore no fortifications were constructed.

# The Megaron Plan

- **Megaron** was a large audience hall found in many Mycenaean citadels.
- Main courtyard led to porch, then a vestibule and then the megaron or great room.
- Much simpler plan than the endless corridors in a Minoan palace.

# Typical Megaron Plan

- Four large columns around a central hearth supported the ceiling.
- The roof section above the hearth was either raised or open to admit light and air and to permit smoke to escape.
- Megaron was eventually associated only with royalty.
- **Later the Greeks adapted the form of the megaron for their temples which they saw as palaces for their gods.**



- The Megaron at Pylos was a magnificent display of architectural and decorative expertise.

Linear B tablets were discovered at the palace site. They contain an inventory of the tremendous wealth of furniture and artwork at the palace.

The linear B tablets also suggest that the king stood at the head of a highly organized feudal system.

Perhaps the people at Pylos should have been more interested in fortifications and security because the palace was destroyed by fire during an uprising only 100 years after it was built.



**Warrior Vase**, from Mycenae,  
Greece, ca. 1200 BCE.

Approx. 1' 4" high

National Archaeological  
Museum, Athens.

**Comparison: Harvester Vase**,  
from Hagia Triada (Crete), Greece,  
ca. 1500 BCE. Steatite, greatest  
diameter approx. 5". Archaeological  
Museum, Herakleion.





- By the late thirteenth century BCE, mainland Greece witnessed a wave of destruction and the decline of the Mycenaean sites, and the withdrawal to more remote refuge settlements.

# The Trojan Connection

- One consequence of Mycenaean colonization and trade was the attack on Troy, which took place about 1220BCE.
- Although Homer tells us the war was over the abduction of Helen by the Trojans, the war probably was over control of trade routes along the coast of Asia Minor.
- Troy was destroyed in the war, but Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* remain as accounts of this epic struggle.



Gold  
Funeral  
Mask  
(Could it be the  
Mask of  
Agamemnon?)

1500 BCE  
Mycenaean



# Walls of Troy, present day Turkey

