

MYCENAE DESTINATION GUIDE



Introduction to the Mycenaeans

The Mycenaeans, a Bronze Age culture existing between 1700 and 1100 BC, played a vital role in the development of classical Greek culture. Mycenaean civilization is renowned for its technical and artistic achievements and gave Greece the palatial administrative system, monumental architecture, impressive artifacts and early versions of the Greek language. Mycenaean culture has inspired many artists over the centuries. Perhaps the most famous works are the epic poems by Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Myceanea - The City

Mycenae is one of the greatest cities of Mycenaean civilization. It was the kingdom of the

legendary Agamemnon, the king who sacked Troy. The citadel served as the most important and richest palatial center of the Late Bronze Age in Greece. The ruling class inhabited the palace and the artisans and merchants lived outside the city walls.

In the Late Mycenaean period (1400-1100 BC), Mycenae became the dominant power in the Aegean. It was most likely responsible for the colonization of the Cyclades, Crete, Cyprus, the Dodecanese, northern Greece, Macedonia and some portions of Italy. Mycenaean goods could be found in markets as far as Egypt, Syria and Palestine.

Mycenae Demise

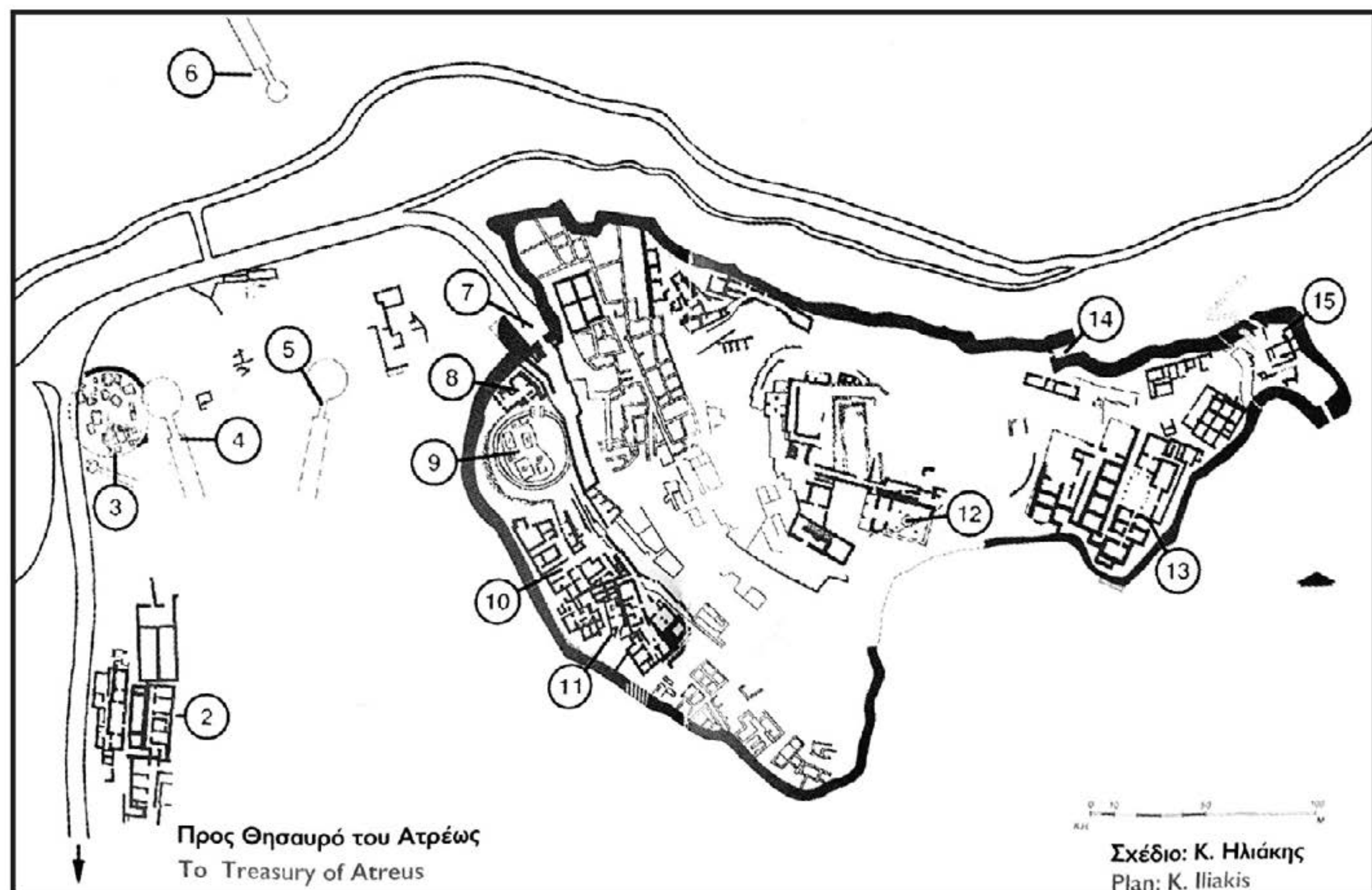
Around 1100 BC, the city was burned and destroyed, perhaps by invading Dorians, but the area was not abandoned. Archeological evidence shows that a new temple was erected in the early 6th century BC and that the city sent 400 men to fight against the Persians at Thermopylae in 480 BC. In 470 BC, Argos, its aggressive neighbor, besieged the city and destroyed it. It was later revived for a time, but visitors to the site in 160 BC found it in ruins.

Rediscovery

Excavation of the site began in 1840, but the most exciting excavations were undertaken by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876. Schliemann was a German businessman with a passion for Homer and archaeology. He was convinced that

Homer's poems were based on historical fact and not just fiction, as commonly believed. He is also credited with the discovery of what is now widely considered to be the ruins of Troy.

The Site



Cyclopean Walls

As you approach the entrance, you'll notice the Cyclopean Walls. They are made of huge limestone boulders fitted together roughly. Ancient people believed that the Cyclops built the walls because it was impossible for men to move the large stones. Tools were not often employed to construct these walls. Where the stones fit together roughly the cracks were filled with smaller limestone. Cyclopean Walls are characteristic of Mycenaean architecture.

- 3-Grave Circle B
- 4-Tomb of Klytemnestra
- 5-Tomb of Aegisthus
- 6-Lion Tomb
- 7-Lion Gate
- 8-Granary
- 9-Grave Circle A
- 10-Mycenaean houses
- 11- Mycenaean shrine (Citadel House)
- 12-Palace (Megaron)
- 13-House of Columns
- 14-North Gate
- 15-Underground cistern

The Lion Gate

This is the earliest known piece of monumental sculpture in mainland Europe. Though the lions' heads are missing, it is remarkable that the carving is composed of a single large stone.

The entrance was designed to impress those entering the citadel with its power and wealth. The lions' pose (with their front paws up on the base of the pillar) was probably influenced by Asian culture.

Grave Circle A

Just to the right of the Lion Gate are six royal shaft graves. The graves, from the late Bronze Age

(around the 16th century BC) consist of deep, rectangular shafts above stone-walled burial chambers. The nobility were entombed here; 19 bodies were found when the graves were excavated. The graves were undisturbed—and therefore, never looted—until they were discovered in 1876. The many artifacts buried with the bodies here are now on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens and are some of the most beautiful ancient objects ever found.

The Palace

Follow the path leading to the palace. The palace entrance opened onto the Great Courtyard, an uncovered area. The courtyard leads to the Megaron, which was the central royal chamber. A round hearth in the center was surrounded by four pillars supporting the roof. The floor was

paved with gypsum and the walls would have been covered with stucco and painted with decorative motifs.

The Eastern Section

Head to the eastern section of the citadel. Here you can explore the fortifications dating from the 12th century BC and there are very good views of the ramparts. The underground staircase leads down 99 steps to a secret cistern deep beneath the citadel. You can also take a look at the North Gate, where the shape of the walls was designed to give the defenders an advantage.

Tholos Tomb of Aegisthus and Tomb of Klytemnestra

Located outside the walls, between the parking lot and the Lion Gate, these are some of the earliest tholos tombs (vaulted tombs that look like beehives). These tombs were buried beneath an earth mound and the only entrance was through the dromos, an open-air corridor. The top of the Tomb of Aegisthus has collapsed and you can look down into the interior. The Tomb of Klytemnestra is very well preserved. The dromos is still intact.

Treasury of Atreus

South of the parking lot, this is the most outstanding of the tholos tombs. You can walk in this tomb, where a Mycenaean king was buried with his weapons and enough food and drink to

sustain him on his journey to the underworld.
Take a moment to appreciate that it’s over 3400
years old!



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