



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



World Heritage  
Convention

# MYCENAE

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ARGOLIS





**M**ycenae was the main centre of the Mycenaean world, and gave its name to a period and a civilisation that evolved throughout the entire Greek world between the 16th and 12th c. BC and spread to all the known sites of this period in the Mediterranean basin.

The Mycenaean acropolis, dominating the surrounding area and the Argive plain, uniquely placed to control the communication routes in all directions – to the Peloponnese and to mainland Greece – and naturally strongly defended, was the most appropriate site to house the royal house of the Atreidae and their people.

Life on the hill goes back much further. The excavations begun in 1874 by Heinrich Schliemann, which still continue today, have demonstrated that the site was inhabited already in the 3rd millennium BC; they have also brought to light brilliant creations of the Middle Helladic period (1900-1580 BC), attesting to the glory and might of a ruling house earlier than the Atreidae, possibly the dynasty associated with the founding-father of Mycenae, Perseus and his descendants, down to the king Eurystheus, who imposed the “twelve labours” on Herakles and was finally killed by the Herakleidae in Attica.

The dynasty of Atreus and his descendants, Agamemnon, Orestes and Teisamenos followed. This dynasty imposed itself on the other local rulers in the Peloponnese, mainland Greece and the Aegean, as far afield as Minoan Crete, and led the Greek expedition against Troy. Within the impregnable Cyclopean walls of the citadel, unfolded the life and terrible sufferings of the family of Agamemnon; the names of its members (Clytaemnestra, Iphigeneia, Electra, Orestes, together with Agamemnon’s rival Aegisthus) furnished material for the Homeric poems, the ancient Greek tragic poets, and post-Renaissance classical European and international literature.

These figures cannot be identified with particular monuments with any certainty. What is certain, however, is that on the acropolis at Mycenae is to be found the remains of the life and the work of the Mycenaeans and their ancestors.

## **THE MONUMENTS**

The visitor meets the most important of the Mycenaean monuments on the road leading from the modern village of Mycenae to the acropolis:

- 1. Treasury of Atreus:** the most representative and best preserved example of a tholos tomb (1250 BC).
- 2. Complex of houses:** They include the house known as the House of the Oil-merchant.

**3. Grave circle B:** a cemetery of royal tombs dating from the Middle Helladic period (17th-16th c. BC). The excavation of these brought to light some masterpieces of art, now on exhibition in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

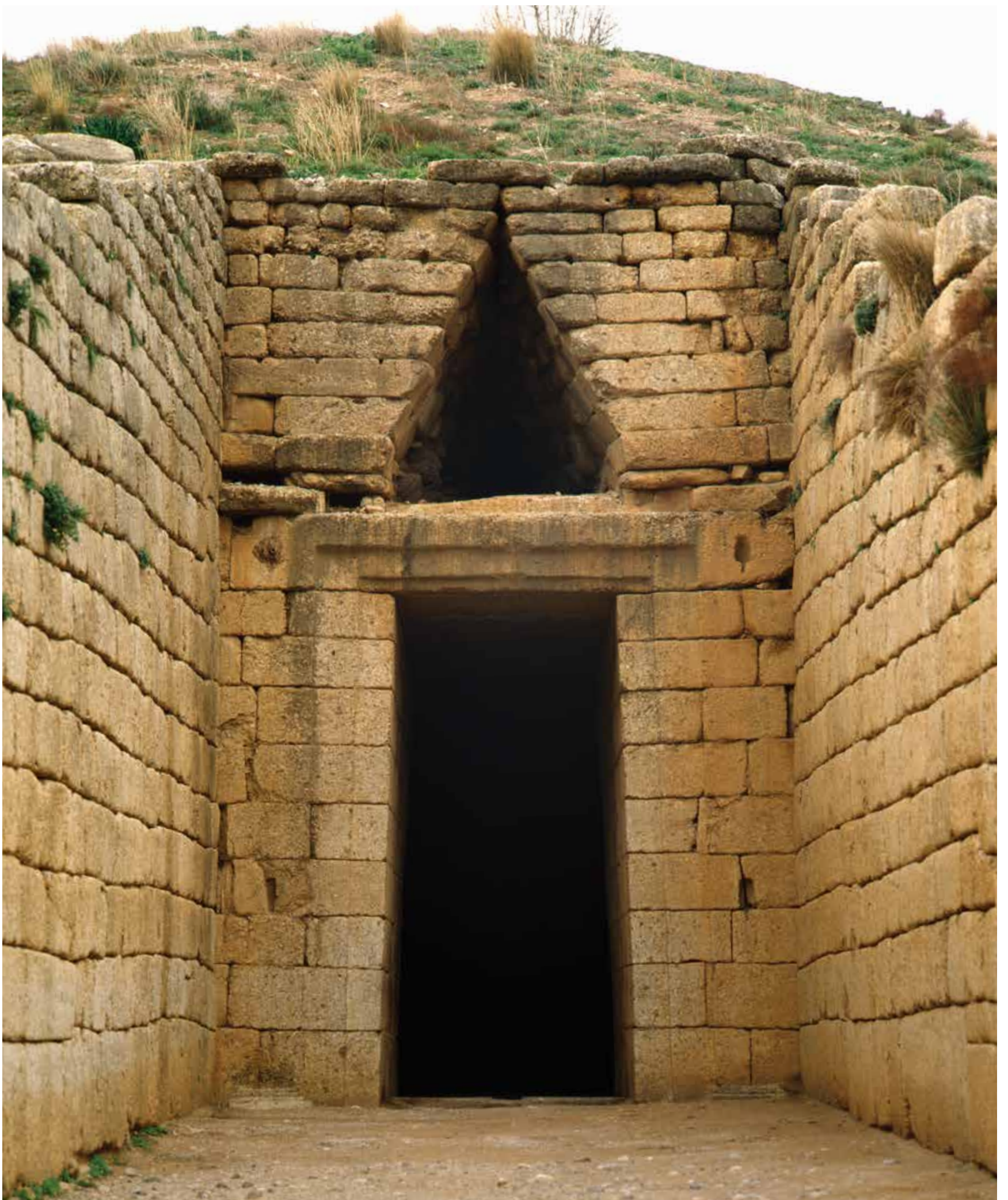
**4. Tholos tomb “of Clytaemnestra”** (1400-1300 BC).

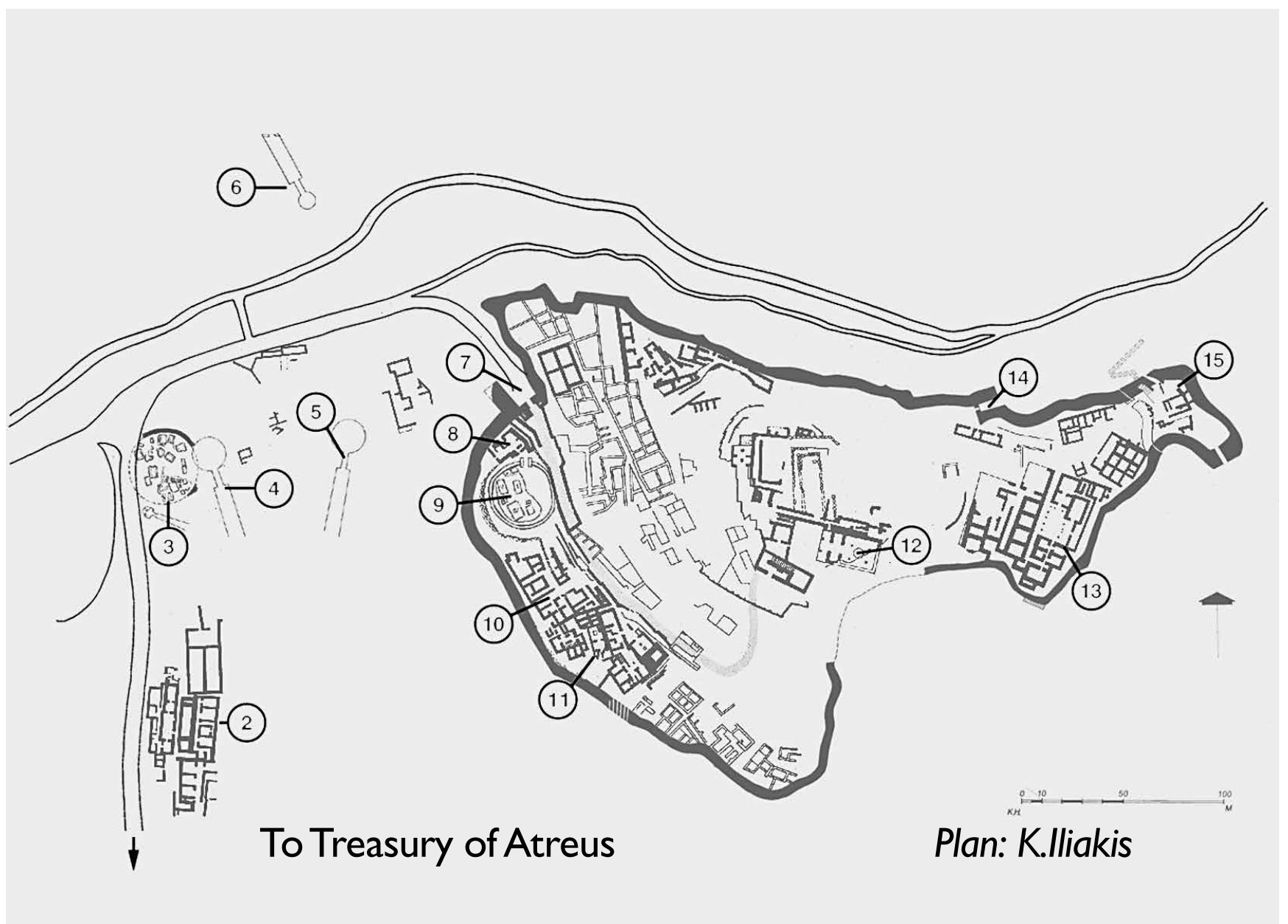
**5. Tholos tomb “of Aegisthus”** (1510-1460 BC).

**6. Tholos tomb “of the Lions”** (1460-1400 BC).

**7. Lion Gate:** the main, monumental entrance to the fortified citadel. Its name derives from the relief group of two confronted lions covering the triangle above the lintel. Its construction, and that of the Cyclopean walls, which are about 900 m long and 5.50-7.50 m thick, with a height up to 12 m, are amazing technical feats for the period at which they were built (1350-1200 BC), and have been attributed with some justification to the mythical Cyclopes.

**8. Granary.**





**9. Grave circle A:** cemetery of royal tombs dating from the beginning of the Late Helladic I period (16th c. BC). When it was in use, the cemetery lay outside the walls. Gold funeral masks and a variety of other masterpieces, now on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, were discovered during its excavation.

**10. Groups of houses belonging to the ruler's subjects.**

**11. House of the Figurines:** cult centre, in which some very important anthropomorphic and serpentine figurines were found, now on display in the Nafplion Archaeological Museum.

**12. The Palace,** with its monumental staircase, central courtyard and the **megaron** – the focus of the public life of the king. It is a sparse, rectangular building divided into a propylon, a vestibule and a main hall. The main hall is the throne room, with its centrally placed hearth sunk in the ground and surrounded by four columns that supported the opaoion in the roof. The architectural type of the megaron foreshadows the form of the Classical ancient Greek temple of historical times.

**13. House of the Columns and artists' workshops.**

**14. North Gate.**

**15. Cistern.**

The site is densely covered with ruins that are difficult to interpret, since the remains of the period with which we are concerned are surrounded by the relics of later times, especially of the Hellenistic period. At this date the citadel, bereft of its former glory, continued to offer shelter, because of its location, to those who sought refuge there in times of disorder and confusion.



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MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS OF GREECE



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