

Mycenae and Tiryns (Greece)

No 941

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Archaeological Sites of Mycenae and Tiryns
<i>Location</i>	Region of the Peloponnese, Province of Argolid
<i>State Party</i>	Greece
<i>Date</i>	1 July 1998

Justification by State Party

[*Note by ICOMOS* Although the two sites form a single nomination, separate dossiers have been supplied by the State Party. The justifications for each are given below, preceded by a section relating to the joint nomination, in which no proposals are given for criteria.]

It is proposed that the archaeological sites of Mycenae and Tiryns be included on the World Heritage List as a unity which represents the most characteristic examples of Mycenaean citadels. Both Mycenae and Tiryns represent masterpieces of human creative genius. They have similarities and differences, and constitute a continuous entity since they complement one another.

Mycenae

The site of Mycenae represents a masterpiece of human creative genius as it shelters outstanding works of monumental architecture and sculpture that are unique in the world: the massive citadel walls with the Lion Gate and the relief of the Lions, the Treasury of Atreus, Grave Circle A, and the underground reservoir.

Criterion i

Mycenae, the most famous centre of the Mycenaean world, has been described by Homer in his legendary epic poem, the *Iliad*, bequeathing the spirit of the Mycenaean civilization from antiquity to the world of today. Since Homer's time, a continuous interchange of human values within an increasingly worldwide cultural area has exerted a significant influence on the evolution of civilizations.

The religion, the writing, and the architecture of the Greeks in classical times have fundamental roots in the Mycenaean culture. Furthermore, the *megaron* anticipates the plan adopted for the Greek temples, whilst the relief of the Lions is the first example of a

monumental sculpture that was to have a great future.

Criterion ii

Mycenae is not only the main archaeological site of the Mycenaean civilization which flourished in the Aegean and spread around the Mediterranean between 1600 and 1100 BC, but it also represents an exceptional testimony to the achievements of this civilization in art and technology as well as in the advanced level of economy and social organization achieved at the time.

Significant stages in monumental architecture were achieved with the construction of the massive defensive walls of Mycenae and the beehive-shaped *tholos* tombs. Outstanding artefacts (metal objects, gems) were found in the tombs of Grave Circles A and B.

The site of Mycenae also displays some characteristic elements of the unique Mycenaean economic and social organization, with its elaborate exchange network, based on centres ruled by a *wanax* around whom everything revolves - palace, workshops, store-rooms, and cult centre. It also includes the unique Access Ramp, built to enhance the power of the Palace and Grave Circle A, built for ancestor worship.

Criteria iii and iv

With the discovery of Mycenae by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876, the legendary centre of Homer and the home of Agamemnon, one of the most popular heroes of the Homeric epics, became history. Its legendary rulers, the Atreides, were considered by the Greeks of antiquity as their ancestors. They also inspired many artistic and literary works of outstanding significance through the centuries in different parts of the world.

Criterion vi

Tiryns

Tiryns represents a major stage in the earth's history, since it dates from the Mycenaean civilization, the first palace civilization with urban characteristics and a centralized administrative system in Europe.

Its architecture represents a masterpiece of human creative genius. The walls can be described as a creation that goes beyond the limits of the human mind, as shown by the use of the word "cyclopean" attributed to them in the Homeric poems, derived from the Cyclopes, legendary giants from Lycia, who were thought to have been their builders. The architectural ensemble of the cyclopean walls and the palace complex is an outstanding testimony to the most important prehistoric period of the Greek civilization.

Criterion i

The Mycenaean palace administrative system with its centralized structure operated for five centuries. At the peak period of prosperity (1300-1200 BC) the Mycenaean areas had a homogenous society known as the Mycenaean *Koine*. This wide homogeneity is evident in religion, language, and art. In addition, the idea of a common ethnic consciousness reached its apogee.

Criterion ii

The city outside the citadel of Tiryns was very extensive and fully organized. The palace administrative system controlled agricultural production, stock-raising, and trade. This complicated political, social, and economic

system, which evolved in Mycenaean times, bears exceptional testimony to an early stage of Greek civilization.

Criterion iii

The Mycenaean citadels are unique examples of fortification. The cyclopean walls enclose public buildings, workshops, store-rooms, and cult centres. The realization of this massive construction work demanded precise architectural planning and supervision by highly qualified architects. The architecture of the fortified citadels, which have been well preserved up to the present day, represents an outstanding example of a unique form of architectural expression.

Criterion iv

The Mycenaean civilization is a highlight of human history. The strongly centralized administrative system, the monumental architecture, the art objects, and the earliest indications of the Greek language preserved on the Linear B tablets inspired Homer, who described the impressive Mycenaean world in his poems, especially the *Odyssey*. The spirit of the Mycenaean civilization has survived to the present day through the Homeric epics, which were orally transferred and taught in schools up to the end of the classical world. The Homeric tradition led Schliemann to search for and to reveal the most important centres of this civilization. Thousands of visitors influenced by this written tradition continue to visit Mycenae and Tiryns in search of the traces of the legendary kingdoms of Agamemnon and Proitos. Overall, the Mycenaean civilization, and especially the two important centres of Mycenae and Tiryns, have outstanding universal significance as highlights of human civilization.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Mycenae and Tiryns are *sites*.

History and Description

History

The Mycenaean civilization developed on the Greek mainland in the Late Bronze Age (16th century BC). It was essentially a continuation of the Middle Helladic culture, transformed by Minoan influences from Crete.

Knowledge of its two earlier periods I (c 1580-1500 BC) and II (c 1500-1400 BC) comes mainly from burials, notably the shaft graves at Mycenae. Towards the end of Period II more elaborate tomb types developed - large chamber tombs for families and beehive-shaped (*tholos*) tombs for royalty.

The apogee of the Mycenaean civilization came in Period III (c 1400-1120 BC), when strong citadels and elaborate palaces were built. Towards the end of this period a script, known as Linear B, came into use; the language used has been shown to be an early form of Greek, confirming that the Mycenaean were Greek speakers of Indo-European origin.

The political structure was that of an autocratic monarchy, the ruler of which was known as the *wanax*, who administered his territory by means of an hierarchical structure of officials. There was a special class of priests and priestesses. The people were organized in an elaborate class system, and slavery was widely practised.

The site of *Mycenae* is known from excavations to have been occupied from the Neolithic period (c 4000 BC). During the Middle Helladic Period a cemetery was established on the southern slopes of the natural hill which included Grave Circle B (dated to the 17th century BC) and Grave Circle A (16th century BC). The Palace was constructed on the summit of the hill and surrounded by massive cyclopean walls in three stages (c 1350, 1250, and 1225 BC respectively). In the final stage the underground reservoir was also fortified.

A series of *tholos* tombs were built on the southern and south-western slopes of the hill during the Mycenaean Period - the so-called Tomb of Aegisthos (c 1500 BC), the Lion Tholos Tomb (c 1350 BC), the Tomb of Clytemnestra (c 1220 BC), culminating in the Treasury of Atreus, at some distance from the others. Four large buildings, believed to have been royal workshops, were built in the 13th century BC in the vicinity of Grave Circle B.

The Palace was abandoned at the end of the 12th century BC and a number of buildings were damaged by fire. However, the site continued to be occupied until 498 BC, when it was conquered by Argos and its inhabitants were expelled. The top of the hill was levelled at this time for the construction of an Archaic temple. The site was re-occupied briefly in the Hellenistic period, when another temple was built and a theatre constructed over the Tomb of Clytemnestra. By the time the Greek traveller Pausanias visited Mycenae in the 2nd century AD it had been completely abandoned for many years.

As at Mycenae, the earliest human occupation known at *Tiryns* is from the Neolithic period. The oldest architectural remains, on the Upper Citadel, are from the early Bronze Age (c 3000 BC). The level of this area was built up in the Middle Bronze Age (1900-1600 BC) to accommodate new buildings.

Tiryns flourished during the Mycenaean period. A new fortified palace complex was constructed in the 14th century BC. The defences were extended in the early 13th century BC, and the Lower Citadel was also fortified. Following earthquake and fire damage, the site was reconstructed, the new defences enclosing an area of 20ha; the extra-mural settlement covered more than 25ha.

The fate of Tiryns with the decline of the Mycenaean civilization paralleled that of Mycenae. It was not finally abandoned until the deportation of the 5th century BC, by which time it had lost its power and influence.

Description - Mycenae

The site is located on a small hill on the lower slopes of Mount Euboea, at the crossing of the road from the Argolid Gulf to Corinth and Athens.

The area of the *Citadel* or *Acropolis* is surrounded by massive walls 6-8m thick, which probably originally stood to a height of 18m. Three stages of construction can be identified, the first two from the Mycenaean period using massive blocks of limestone, first undressed, latter hammer-dressed) and the third Hellenistic (dressed small blocks).

The walls are pierced by two gates. The *Lion Gate* is made from four large blocks, a lintel, and two side posts; the relieving triangle over the lintel is a block of limestone with the famous Relief of the Lions. The *North Gate* is a slightly smaller version of the Lion Gate, with a plain relieving triangle.

The *Granary*, built up against the inner side of the wall, was a brick two-storeyed structure.

Following the line of the Lion Gate is the *Great Ramp*, a steep massive construction in cyclopean stone blocks flanked by low walls which leads to the top of the hill and the Palace.

The *Palace*, covering *c* 170m by 50-80m, is built at several levels on an area of levelled ground revetted by cyclopean walls. Its present form is that of the late Mycenaean period. Features include the rectangular *Propylon*, consisting of two monostyle porticoes, the *Main Court*, and the *Megaron*, the main palace building, which was a complex of rooms, porticoes, stairways, and corridors built on several levels created by terracing.

The *Underground Reservoir* was constructed in the 12th century BC in a deep cutting in the rock. A staircase leads down to a cyclopean portal and thence to the cistern proper, the walls of which are clad in hydraulic cement.

The area on the south-east of the Acropolis is known as the *Cult Centre*, since the buildings excavated there produced numerous altars, shrines, and frescoes depicting religious rituals.

Grave Circle A was created in the 16th century BC, when a low circular wall was built round a group of large royal shaft tombs (as well as a number of lesser tombs, destroyed by Schliemann's excavations). The tombs originally had low rubble walls supporting the horizontal beams of the slate or reed roofs. In the 13th century BC larger walls were built to bring the cemetery up to the level of the entrance to the citadel.

A group of 13th century BC *buildings*, the purpose of which is not known, lie outside the walls. Also outside the defences is *Grave Circle B*, which contained fourteen royal shaft graves and some smaller ones. Like *Grave Circle A*, it was enclosed by a low wall.

The *Tomb of Aegisthos* (all such attributions to historical characters are fanciful and not supported by evidence) has a long narrow *dromos* (entrance) leading to a *tholos* (beehive-shaped chamber), the upper part of

which has collapsed. It is the oldest of this group (*c* 1500 BC). The slightly later *Tomb of the Lions* is comparable in form and size, as is the 13th century *Tomb of Clytemnestra*.

The most splendid monumental structure at Mycenae is the *Treasury of Atreus* (also known as the *Tomb of Agamemnon*). Built around 1250 BC, it was cut into the hillside. The *dromos* and *tholos* are lined with carefully cut blocks. It has a monumental facade 10.50m high, originally elaborately decorated, with a doorway in the middle. The *tholos* is 14.60m in diameter and 13.50m high.

Description - Tiryns

Tiryns is situated 20km north-east of Mycenae on an isolated rocky hill that rises 26m above the fertile Argolid plain. Its strategic position commands the roads to Argos, Mycenae, Nauplion, and Epidauros.

The cyclopean *walls*, built of stones even larger than those of Mycenae, are in places up to 8m thick and 13m high. They enclose an area of *c* 20ha. The entrance, on the eastern side, is approached by a large ramp. The *outer gate*, which is similar in size to the Lion Gate at Mycenae, opens out into the space between the outer and inner walls through a second gate.

To the north there is an open defended area, thought to have served as a place of refuge in troubled times for the population of the surrounding area. Concealed stairways give access to underground *springs*, as at Mycenae.

The main part of the *Upper Citadel* is reached through a forecourt, with a colonnade on one side, and the *Great Propylon*, consisting of two porches with columns. The colonnade is in front of a series of galleries (there are others to the south) built in a remarkable style, with walls corbelled inwards and terminating in an acute angle at the top.

Next comes the *Outer Palace Courtyard*, which leads in turn through another defended gateway (a smaller version of the Great Propylon) into the *Central Courtyard*. Opening out of this colonnaded open space, with an altar in its centre, is the *Megaron*, the walls of which must have been lavishly decorated, to judge from surviving fragments. Other parts of the Palace cluster around the courtyard; of especial interest is the *Bathroom*, the floor of which is a single limestone slab weighing more than 20t.

The entire complex opens out to the west, the direction of the sea. This was accessible by means of an impressive flight of steps approached through a small postern gate.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Both sites are protected under the provisions of the 1932 Greek Antiquities Law No 5351, as amended in 1981 (Laws Nos 1126 and 1127), which declares all cultural property to be the property of the State. Permits

are required from the competent authority for any form of intervention on protected sites.

The boundaries of the archaeological site of Mycenae and its buffer zone were established by Ministerial Decree No 2160 of 1964. Protection extends to the Citadel (Acropolis), the areas outside the walls, and the wider surrounding area, including the natural environment of the site. Those for Tiryns are covered by Decrees 241 of 1956 and 379 of 1991.

Management

Both sites are the property of the Greek State. The protected area (buffer zone) around Mycenae has either been expropriated by the State or belongs to the Municipality of Mycenae or private individuals. In the latter case, there are strict controls over the use of the land. Similar considerations apply at Tiryns.

Overall management is vested in the Ministry of Culture and delegated to the Directorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities. Direct management (including maintenance, administration, investigation, restoration, and conservation) of the sites is the responsibility of the 4th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, based in Nauplion.

Each site has its own curator, who is an archaeologist from the 4th Ephorate. Daily site inspections are carried out by the curators and their site guards (ten at Tiryns and twelve at Mycenae). Professional and technical backup services are provided by the 4th Ephorate in Nauplion, which is close to both sites.

- Mycenae

The Programme for the Restoration and Conservation of Mycenae, which began in 1997, has been combined since March 1998 with that of the Work Team for the Conservation of the Monuments of the Asclepion of Epidauros. Restoration work has been completed on a number of sections of the site. A five-year extension of the programme will include a study of the environment and architectural documentation. Financing for this Programme is assured from the Ministry of Culture, the Credits for the Execution of Archaeological Works Distribution Fund, and the EU Delors II credits.

A detailed 1½-year Master Plan has been developed, important aspects of which include the creation of a new entrance system and an extensive network of paths leading to platforms for viewing the site. Information signs in Greek and English, hitherto completely lacking, are being installed. Work has been completed on the new Site Museum, which will house interpretative material and finds from the site, as well as storage and laboratory facilities. Its siting near the North Gate will help to reduce visitor pressure on the Lion Gate.

Current visitor numbers are 500,000-700,000 annually. A new and much larger parking area, with a shuttle service to the site, is to be constructed in the nearby modern town.

- Tiryns

A programme of restoration and conservation has been in progress under the direction of the 4th Ephorate for

several years, concentrating on restoration of the walls and the area around the Acropolis. These had been in a poor state of repair for some years, as a result of which access to the site was restricted.

A detailed study of future requirements in the Acropolis itself has been carried out by the German Archaeological Institute and is currently being implemented.

A further programme relates to the visitor management and facilities on the site. It covers the creation of pathways, increased parking, installation of restaurant and other facilities, and the rehabilitation of an old building on the site as an information centre.

Current visitor numbers are 20,000-50,000 annually.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Mycenae was excavated by Heinrich Schliemann in 1874-76. Subsequently, a number of limited excavations have been carried out by Greek and British archaeologists. During recent years a topographical survey has been carried out on the buildings (by the British School of Archaeology in Athens), two aerial surveys have been made of the entire site and its surroundings, and the entire Acropolis and the structures outside the walls have been recorded.

Schliemann also excavated at Tiryns (in 1884), and his work was carried on by his assistant, Wilhelm Dörpfeld. Latterly, more intensive work has been carried out on the Acropolis by the German Institute of Archaeology. The most recent architectural and topographical survey took place in 1980.

Considerable restoration and conservation work has been carried out at Mycenae, but this has only begun recently at Tiryns, where there have been serious problems associated with the stability of the walls.

All work at the two sites has been carried out in conformity with strict Greek practice. Only at Tiryns have interventions been more drastic, but these were occasioned by the need to stabilize the walls, which were dangerous in places.

Authenticity

The authenticity of both sites is very high. Neither site has been subject to interventions of any kind since they were forcibly evacuated in the 5th century BC. Indeed, both were lost until rediscovered in the 19th century.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Mycenae and Tiryns in 1999.

Qualities

The Mycenaean civilization marked a major step forward in European cultural development. The two great archaeological sites of Mycenae and Tiryns

together demonstrate the spirit and the achievements of that civilization more than three millennia ago.

Comparative analysis

The role of the Mycenaean civilization in the evolution of European culture is unique in its significance and influence. Mycenae and Tiryns are the most outstanding sites of that culture, and complement one another in the material evidence that they provide of the Mycenaean civilization. For these reasons, therefore, it is impossible to look for comparative sites.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

For *Mycenae* it is important that the new management plan should be implemented with the minimum delay. This plan should be complemented by a plan for regular inspection and maintenance. It would be desirable if greater attention could be given in presentation to the post-Mycenaean levels on the site.

At *Tiryns*, as at Mycenae, it is recommended that the well formulated management plan should be complemented by a regular inspection and maintenance plan.

The area of ancient Tiryns proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List is restricted to that in State ownership. Whilst that part in private ownership is protected by law, ICOMOS feels that it would be more logical if the entire area of the ancient city could be included in the nominated area.

ICOMOS does not wish to make the implementation of these recommendations a condition of inscription, since the cultural importance of the two sites is undeniable and they are currently well managed. So far as the extension of the site proposed for inscription at Tiryns is concerned, it is recognized that this may well present legal problems that will require considerable time for negotiation. The State Party is encouraged to initiate this process straight away, with the objective of proposing an extension at some time in the future.

Brief description

Mycenae and Tiryns are the imposing ruins of the two greatest cities of the Mycenaean civilization which dominated the eastern Mediterranean world in the 15th to 12th centuries BC and which played a vital role in the development of the culture of classical Greece.

Recommendation

That these properties be inscribed, as a single site, on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iii, iv, and vi*:

Criterion i The architecture and design of Mycenae and Tiryns, such as the Lion Gate and the Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae and the walls of Tiryns, are outstanding examples of human creative genius.

Criterion ii The Mycenaean civilization, as exemplified by Mycenae and Tiryns, had a profound effect on the development of classical

Greek architecture and urban design, and consequently also on contemporary cultural forms.

Criteria iii and iv Mycenae and Tiryns represent the apogee of the Mycenaean civilization, which laid the foundations for the evolution of later European cultures.

Criterion vi Mycenae and Tiryns are indissolubly linked with the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the influence of which upon European literature and the arts has been profound for more than three millennia.

ICOMOS, September 1999