

IN PERSPECTIVE

SUMMER 2024

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME...

Architecture in the service of physical protection is exemplified by the ancient Mycenaean citadel at Tiryns in present day Greece. Although defensive structures had been planned and built for thousands of years, the formidable walls of this fortification were among the first to rely on massive stones.

The Tiryns site had been occupied for hundreds of years and the settlement rebuilt many times. Successive structures expanded to larger and more elaborate forms resulting in the development of cyclopean masonry which uses large, irregular blocks of stone. It was thought that only the Cyclops, a mythical race of giants, were capable of moving such stones, hence the name.

Wei Wei, an OAA Intern Architect, together with Jordana Knelsen and several other associates of the CMA, designed and constructed this model of Tiryns at a 1:300 scale as it might have been at the height of its development in about 1250 BCE.

- Peter Brueckner

THE CITADEL

Although probably belonging to the same kingdom as Mycenae, the capital of Bronze Age Greece, Tiryns likely had significant independence as a city, exercising administrative and religious functions. These are reflected in its architecture.

Tiryns' need to be able to defend itself gave rise to its most prominent and enduring characteristic, the almost unbreachable walls. Up to 9 meters high and 5 to 8 meters thick, they were built of largely unworked stone blocks as much as 3 tonnes in weight. These were fitted closely together without mortar with a central filling of rubble. Security was enhanced



Wei Wei.



The CMA's model of the Tiryns citadel.

by a complex series of gates designed to be readily defensible. Cisterns to collect and hold water were cut into the underlying rock. Accessible by tunnels, they would have provided a significant measure of self sufficiency, particularly important during sieges. Corbelled arches, simpler than arcuate arches, were still in use and appear in passageways and tholos tombs.

The upper citadel was the location of the palace and other elegant buildings with official status presumably housing royalty and a priestly class. Several courtyards and a colonnade were accessed through propylaea, the formal entrances that were a typical feature of Mycenaean architecture.

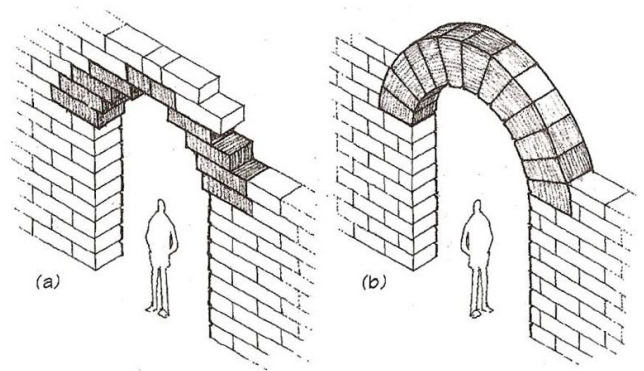


The remains of the cyclopean walls at Tiryns as they are today.

A Great and a Little megaron in the upper citadel attest to the importance of the site. A megaron is a large building used for ceremonial purposes, both religious and secular. It is often likened to a temple. The Great Megaron at Tiryns is believed to have significantly exceeded the outer walls in height to make it visible from a great distance. The layout of the megaron conforms to a defined plan with a ritual fire and a throne. Elaborately decorated with frescos and columns, it likely drew on older Minoan designs including the characteristic round wooden columns that expand towards the top. In turn, the megaron is believed to be the precursor of the classical Greek temple.

The distinctly less elaborate lower citadel appears to have had ample room for housing workers to maintain

the palace: attendants, craftspeople, administrators, soldiers and so on. Little remains of their dwellings but, while the architecture is simpler, its quality and dimensions still exceed the usual Mycenaean domestic architecture. Alcoves with corbelled ceilings were built into the walls, perhaps as storage space.



Difference between a) a corbelled arch, and b) a true arch. Corbelled arches are built with successive courses of block projecting farther into the opening until they meet.

Although it is not shown in our model, there is evidence that a Lower Town surrounded the citadel. The settlement would have provided the economic and commercial infrastructure in a symbiotic relationship to make the fortress both necessary and viable. It consisted of closely spaced buildings, often in association with courtyards.

There have been several archeological studies of Tiryns since the first major excavation by Heinrich Schliemann and Wilhelm Dörpfeld between 1876 and 1885. More recent information has been obtained through the work of Klaus Kilian and Joseph Maran who worked on the site over the past 25 years. We gratefully acknowledge Professor Maran's assistance in the preparation of this display.

Unfortunately, much material has been removed from the site over the centuries making the interpretation of some findings speculative. This model is based on currently available evidence, including data obtained from other Mycenaean ruins.

- Wei Wei

Bibliography

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