

MYCENAEAN ROYAL TOMBS

In 1876, a German businessman and passionate amateur archaeologist named Heinrich Schliemann made an exciting discovery at Mycenae. He unearthed six royal tombs, dating back to around 1600BC, which provided a great step forward in our knowledge of the Mycenaeans, their religious beliefs and way of life.



Pottery figure of a Mycenaean goddess

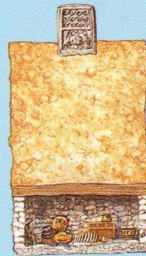
RELIGION

From the many objects found in the royal tombs, archaeologists concluded that Mycenaean religious beliefs were similar to those of the Minoans. Both cultures seem to have believed in life after death, and rated goddesses more highly than gods.

SHAFT GRAVES

The earliest royal tombs were shaft graves. These are very deep holes in the ground where several bodies, usually from the same family, were buried. The graves could be as deep as 12m (40ft).

Objects such as pots and weapons were buried with the dead for use in the afterlife.



This shaft grave is marked by a tombstone above ground.

THOLOS TOMBS

By about 1500BC, beehive-shaped tombs, known as *tholos* tombs, were being used to bury members of the royal family. The dead person was buried with great ceremony, along with valuable possessions, such as weapons and ornaments.

Pausanias, a Greek historian, believed these tombs were treasuries, rather than tombs, because of the magnificence of the things inside. Unfortunately, they were easy to break into, so very few have been found with their treasures intact.



INTERNET LINK

For a link to a website where you can see photographs of Mycenaean tombs and some of the spectacular treasures found in the tombs, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com

The scene here shows a reconstruction of a funeral procession to a tomb known as the Treasury of Atreus, after a legendary Mycenaean king.

Many of the king's possessions, including his war chariot, were buried with him. Mourners and musicians accompanied the body, and a sheep was led in to be sacrificed.

