

Artisans in the Service of the Royalty at Dendra and their Role in the Formation of Fashion Trends

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Abstract: Through its remarkable finds the necropolis at Dendra, covering the periods LH IIB–IIIB, offers an eloquent picture of the luxury possessed by the aristocracy up to the final phase of the early Mycenaean period. It is a time when art and crafts shift away from the hitherto Minoan influences to create forms and symbols that are purely Mycenaean, in search of a new identity. Metalwork of an advanced workmanship, testifying to the presence of highly skilled craftsmen, furnished the distinguished deceased in the necropolis. Craftsmen in the service of the elite seem to have circulated between various areas of the Aegean and Cyprus, forming through their creations common codes between its members. Being one of the few unlooted tholoi of the period, the Dendra tomb gathers most of those features that became fashionable in art and crafts among the early Mycenaean elite. A re-evaluation of the grave goods can therefore provide the impetus for a discussion on the production, manufacture and trade of luxurious items, especially metalwork, at the threshold of the Mycenaean Palatial period.

Keywords: Dendra, warrior burials, metalwork, metal vessels, tholos tombs

Within the fragile socio-political landscape of the early Mycenaean period, the elite families fought for the establishment of their political and economic power over the region,² and at the same time shared a network of common values and symbols of prestige. A remarkable resemblance distinguishes the grave goods of the warriors, who were furnished with the same sets of weapons, vessels of bronze, gold and silver (indicating dining sets), mirrors with ivory handles and combs, necklaces of gold relief beads, signet rings and seal stones.³

The tholos tomb at Dendra, one of the few unlooted tombs of the period, provides information on the symbols used by the elite towards the end of the Prepalatial period and offers the opportunity for a discussion on those elements that distinguish the art and crafts at the dawn of the Palatial period.

On 26 July 1926, and after a rather disappointing three-week session, the excavator Axel Persson and his crew, convinced that the tomb had been disturbed, began to empty the pits of the chamber's floor, covered with small ornaments, agate and faience beads.⁴ Starting from the easternmost pit, a gold signet ring with a scene of women in front of a shrine was the first precious find unearthed.⁵ Over the next two weeks, an array of superb artefacts would follow. At the time, they were comparable only to the ones found inside the unrobbed pit of the Vapheio tholos tomb by Christos Tsountas in 1889.⁶

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² On the emergence and establishment of the new Mycenaean elite, identified by homogenous burial practices and grave goods see, among others Papadimitriou 2001, 200, 207; Papadimitriou 2016; Wright 2008, 148–150.

³ The occupants of several tholoi and chamber tombs in the Argolid, Messenia and Crete belong to the same 'generation' as the deceased in the Dendra tholos tomb; for a list of contemporary tombs based on similar grave goods, see Konstantinidi-Syvridi – Paschalidis 2015, 408, 414–415.

⁴ Persson 1931, 29–30.

⁵ Persson 1931, 13, pl. 17.2; CMS I, no. 189.

⁶ Tsountas 1890. Of course, Heinrich Schliemann and Panayiotis Stamatakis had unearthed the six tombs of Grave Circle A in Mycenae in 1876/77, see Karo 1930/1933.

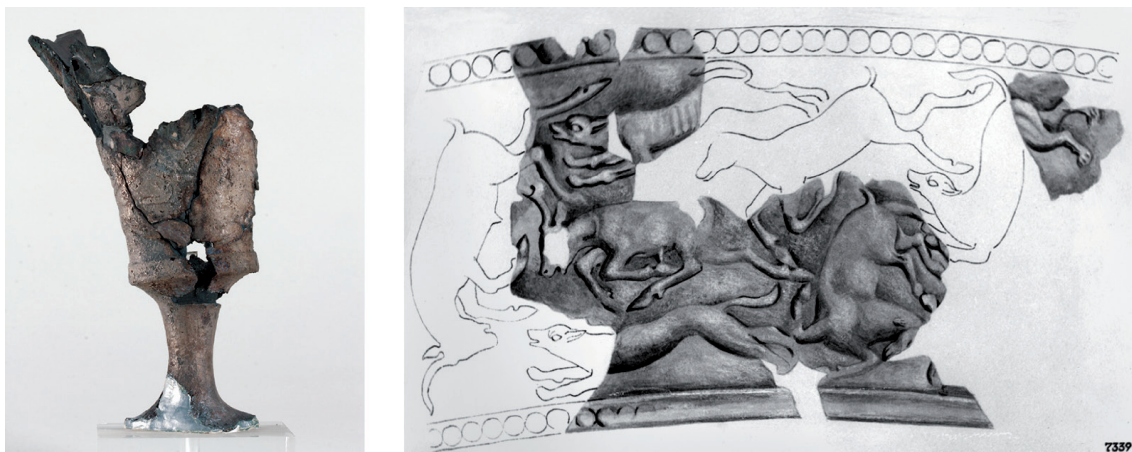


Fig. 1: Silver chalice decorated with hunting scenes found on the 'king's' breast, tholos of Dendra (a. photo: I. Miari, NMA photographic archive; b. Reconstruction after Persson 1931, pl. 17.2)

The pits of the tholos tomb held three burials,⁷ those of a woman placed next to a man in the same pit along the west side of the chamber, and another one of a young girl of a slightly earlier date, and Persson, amazed by the wealth of their grave goods, conventionally named them 'king', 'queen' and 'princess'.⁸ Indeed, the pits held an unusually large number of silver and gold vessels; jewellery of gold, ivory, stone, glass and faience; gold-hilted bronze swords and exotic items, which indisputably place the Dendra 'royalty' among the most distinguished people of their time.

The pottery, remarkably poor – also a common feature of the warrior burials of the Prepalatial period⁹ – consists of sherds of a LM IIIA1 stirrup jar on the floor of the chamber, in the pits and in the dromos of the tholos tomb;¹⁰ a beaked jug; a triple handle from spout to shoulder and a few sherds from carinated kylikes of LH IIIA2 date,¹¹ providing a *terminus post quem* for the date of the burials. However, some objects, based on stylistic grounds, date a little earlier.¹² The first burial unearthed in the pit was that of the woman. A gold and silver cup with bull's heads decoration lay between her bent right arm and the chest, and a carnelian gem decorated with two wild boars was found near to her left wrist.¹³ A miniature gold box was placed a little higher up close to the head.¹⁴ As the two burials are more or less contemporary and the male one held most of the finds, Persson suggested that the woman was 'offered' to accompany her husband in the grave.¹⁵

The 'king' was completely hidden under treasures:¹⁶ A quantity of glass and faience objects, mostly curled leaves, encircled his head and in Persson's opinion imitated the boar's tusks of a helmet. However, the fact that most of the accessories have suspension holes only on the upper side indicates that they probably belonged to a headdress. Near the neck were two beads, one drop-shaped of rock-crystal and one ivy-shaped of agate. The famous large cup of gold with the

⁷ For the anthropological study, see Fürst 1930.

⁸ From the four pits in total, the easternmost held the burial of the young girl; the third pit held no bones, only minor finds and the fourth held the remains of human and animal burials, including the skull of a dog, see Persson 1931, 18.

⁹ Konstantinidi-Syvridi – Paschalidis 2015; Davis – Stocker 2016, 635.

¹⁰ Persson 1931, 39, 66–67, fig. 46.

¹¹ Persson 1931 mentions as parallels the carinated kylikes from Zygyouries (Blegen 1928, 153), which belong to shape FS 267, starting from LH IIIA2.

¹² According to Drakaki 2011, 64 n. 29, the 'queen's' sealstone exhibits strong stylistic and compositional similarities with CMS II.3, no. 310, a LM II–III A seal.

¹³ Persson 1931, 48–50; Drakaki 2011, 61 (CMS I, no. 184).

¹⁴ Persson 1931, 58, pl. 28; Konstantinidi-Syvridi 2012, 50.

¹⁵ Persson 1931, 70.

¹⁶ For the description of the finds that follow, see Persson 1931, 31–37.

octopuses lay highest up on his breast and contained four metal rings with bezels and six seal-stones, with typical Neopalatial motifs.¹⁷ Lower down on the ‘king’s’ breast, a silver chalice lay to the right (Fig. 1a–b), decorated with hunting scenes (deer and hounds); to the left lay a large shallow silver cup without decoration and below it another silver cup of the Vapheio type, pressed badly out of shape by the weight of the soil.

The lower part of the body was covered by a shallow bronze vessel. At the ‘king’s’ right side, a Type B sword with a gold-mounted hilt (possibly an heirloom)¹⁸ rested with its hilt against his shoulder. To his left side, three bronze swords were arranged in the same manner, one of Type C1 and two of D1,¹⁹ all richly decorated with gold-mounted hilts and pommels. At his feet, a gold-mounted sword of Type C1, four spearheads and two knives, as well as a pair of lead horns were placed in a disorderly heap that may be considered the gifts of his friends and co-warriors.²⁰

In the layer between the ‘king’ and the ‘queen’, in the middle of the pit, Persson discovered the ostrich egg with gold mountings, an undecorated stone lamp and a necklace consisting of 61 gold beads in the shape of a conventionalised ivy leaf.

Re-evaluating the Finds

The wealth of valuable metalwork, especially in vessels, is a typical feature of several contemporary tombs from the Argolid, Messenia and the region of Knossos.²¹ Furthermore, the custom of placing a precious vessel on the chest or the hands of the deceased, as is the case with both the ‘king’ and the ‘queen’, is known from examples from both the mainland and Crete.²²

Typologically, the gold and silver vessels from the Dendra tholos fall into the four basic shapes that appear in the warrior burials of the period, with minor variations:²³

The hemispherical shallow cup – best represented here by the ‘king’s’ octopus cup – has a few parallels in Crete in both metal and clay and several more on the mainland.²⁴ The shape and variants have been extensively discussed by Robert Laffineur.²⁵ However, it is worth commenting on a couple of technical details that are noticeable on the octopus cup (Fig. 2). On the Cretan examples, the body and handle are made from a single thin gold plate; on the examples from the mainland however, the handles are made from a separate sheet and fixed onto the body with miniature rivets.²⁶

Furthermore, the rolled rim on the octopus cup is formed separately from several strips of gold, folded over a strip of bronze. This is seen again on a gold cup from Dendra, Chamber Tomb 10, only now the rim is made of a cast ring, and on a silver cup from Chamber Tomb 2 (Fig. 3) with a gold-plated bronze ring around the rim.²⁷ Both are decorated with a similar band of conventionalised ivy leaves and are of virtually the same dimensions.

¹⁷ Poursat 2014, 112–115.

¹⁸ Sandars 1961, 27.

¹⁹ Sandars 1963, 121 (discussion on the ‘king’s’ swords), 123–124, 144–145; see also Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993.

²⁰ Harrell 2014, 3–17.

²¹ Konstantinidi-Syvridi – Paschalidis 2015, 408, for relevant bibliography.

²² For the mainland cf. the recently excavated tomb of the ‘Lord of the Rings’ in Pylos (now more commonly referred to as ‘Griffin Warrior’) (Davis – Stocker 2016); for Crete, see Sellopoulo, Tomb 4, where a small silver cup had been placed in the region of the stomach of two warrior burials (Popham et al. 1974, 201–202), or in the chamber tomb of Ayios Ioannis, Knossos, where again a warrior was furnished with a gold cup (Hood 1956).

²³ Davis 1977, 276–286; Laffineur 1977; Poursat 2014, 100–103.

²⁴ Hurwit 1979, 416–417.

²⁵ Laffineur 1976, 197.

²⁶ Davis 1977, 269.

²⁷ Persson 1931, 99–100 (Chamber Tomb 2, NMA 7314); Persson 1943, 74–75 (Chamber Tomb 10, NMA 8743); Davis 1977, 267–269, 286–288.



Fig. 2: The 'king's' octopus cup, tholos of Dendra (photo: Y. Patrikianos, NMA photographic archive)

Based on those close parallels, a local manufacture has been suggested,²⁸ although it is also possible that one cup is an import and the other two represent local imitations. The hypothesis of a local manufacture is further reinforced by the type of the raised handle terminating in a double papyrus at its lower end, common in both gold cups. Another rare feature of the octopus cup is the rendering of the decoration: in order to appreciate the full image, one must turn the cup around in one's hands, and the decoration is best seen on the inside of the cup. Stylistically, this rendering does not belong to the Cretan tradition, and perhaps it should be interpreted as a Mycenaean innovation.²⁹

The Vapheio cup is a standard Minoan type and becomes the drinking vessel *par excellence* of the early Mycenaean period.³⁰ In the tholos tomb, it is represented by another one of the 'king's' cups, made of silver – although now largely decomposed – with an inner lining of gold (Fig. 4). The use of an inner lining is already known from the famous gold cups of the Vapheio tholos tomb,³¹ although the use of two different metals for the inner and outer surface seems to be a new feature. A silver cup of a similar shape was found outside Chamber Tomb 12 of Dendra, and although much of the decoration is now damaged, it originally consisted of bulls' heads and double axes.³²

The silver cup or goblet with wishbone handle and a button, usually bearing an inner lining of gold, finds parallels in Grave Circle A of Mycenae,³³ the tholos tomb of Vapheio,³⁴ Chamber Tomb 10 at Dendra,³⁵ the chamber tombs of Mycenae³⁶ and the tholos at Kazarma.³⁷ The finest

²⁸ Davis 1977, 269.

²⁹ For the parallel of a LH IIIA ivory pyxis from the Agora in Athens, see Immerwahr 1971, 166, pl. 35.

³⁰ Davis 1974.

³¹ Davis 1977, 256.

³² Davis 1977, 263–266.

³³ Karo 1930/1933, pl. 136 (NMA 786, 787), pl. 106 (NMA 212); Davis 1977, 157–159, 247–248.

³⁴ Tsountas 1890, pl. 7, no. 15; Davis 1977, 260–261 (NMA 1875).

³⁵ Persson 1943, 89, fig. 99.4; Davis 1977, 269–271 (NMA 8759).

³⁶ Davis 1977, 296–297 (NMA 3147).

³⁷ Davis 1977, 310–311.



Fig. 3: Silver cup with gold-plated rim and handle, Dendra, Chamber Tomb 2 (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)



Fig. 4: Silver cup with an inner gold lining, the 'king's' burial, tholos of Dendra (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

example by far is the 'queen's' cup (Fig. 5):³⁸ the decoration consists of five bulls' heads with long curved horns and curled forehead, adorned with small gold inlays.³⁹ The wishbone handle, already well known in Cypriot pottery,⁴⁰ and the rosette-shaped button, most probably a Mycenaean addition, must originally have been decorated with inlaid metal as well.

The only parallel to the 'queen's' cup so far is the well-known cup from Enkomi Tomb 2.⁴¹ Its decoration consists of six bulls' heads between lotus flowers, richly adorned with inlay, while a composition of rosettes in arcades covers the lower part. The Enkomi cup is dated to LC IIA (LH II – beginning of LH IIIA) and is rightfully considered to be one of the most impressive objects of its period. The decoration on top of the wishbone handle is formed by a thin black metal sheet wrapped around the handle, which was then hammered and inlaid with gold. The fine lines on the bucrania are often interrupted indicating that they consist of thin metal inlays that follow a primary incision.⁴² Although the Enkomi cup is much better preserved than the Dendra example,

³⁸ Persson 1931, pls. 1, 12–15; Davis 1977, 284–286 (NMA 7336).

³⁹ Persson 1931, 48–50.

⁴⁰ Mostly bowls that belong to White-Painted IV and V wares of Middle Cypriot III (c. 1750–1650 BC), see Karageorghis 2003, 67–68; cf. also Davis 1977, 286 n. 617, for examples from Crete and the relevant bibliography.

⁴¹ Schaeffer 1952, pl. 116, figs. 116–117 (French Mission, Nicosia Museum, inv. no. 4207).

⁴² Giunlia-Mair 2012, 107.



Fig. 5: The 'queen's' silver cup, tholos of Dendra (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)



Fig. 6: Detail of the 'queen's' cup with one of the bull's heads, tholos of Dendra (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

the fine chasing of the details and the more diligent setting of the inlay into a designated grooved area on the Dendra cup (Fig. 6) betray the work of a more experienced artist.

Black copper inlay with gold wire was already practised in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom (19th century BC) at the time of the 12th Dynasty on metal statuettes and ritual weapons.⁴³ The technique applied here seems to be a Mycenaean version. In 1992, Katie Demakopoulou, Director of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, together with a team of chemists, ran XRF tests on the Dendra cup, among other Mycenaean artefacts, in order to find out the composition

⁴³ Giunlia-Mair 1996.

of the black inlay.⁴⁴ The results showed that it is a silver alloy with a small percentage of copper and gold (5–10%). Similar results were gained more recently from the analysis of the Enkomi cup concerning the silver alloy, while the gold alloy contains 3% copper and 8% silver. Furthermore, experimental reconstruction in Cyprus confirmed that the black colour could be achieved by treating the whole surface of the decorated object with acidic compounds (i.e. copper salts and alum).⁴⁵

Both analyses confirm that the black inlaid decoration on daggers and vessels of the early Mycenaean period presents a wide range of bronze alloy compositions with variable quantities of gold and silver, some lead or arsenic. As far as their iconography is concerned, it seems that, although it draws from the Minoan repertoire, their manufacture cannot at present be attributed to local Cretan workshops, due to the absence of similar items on Crete.⁴⁶

During this period, silver seems to be a more popular metal for vessels than gold and this certainly has to do with the exploitation of the silver-rich lead mines in Laurion and perhaps in Siphnos.⁴⁷ However, the lead isotope analysis of silver vessels from the Shaft Graves of Mycenae showed that this particular class of objects was possibly made of silver imported from Transylvania,⁴⁸ although local silver was available from the above sources. Quantities of silver scraps are known from several tholoi and chamber tombs. The fact that silver easily oxidises should explain why we do not have more sets of silver drinking vessels like the one from Shaft II in the Chamber Tomb 10 of Dendra, consisting of a shallow silver cup, three silver goblets and a silver krater,⁴⁹ or the one from Kokla, which includes seven silver vessels, one-handled and two-handled kylikes and conical cups, carefully placed on a stone bench and on the floor beneath it.⁵⁰

The traditional, mainly Minoan shapes of metal vessels, previously known in clay, may indicate their symbolic or even ritual use⁵¹ and certainly emphasises the high rank of the owners. Some of them must have been placed as heirlooms in the tombs, although not the ones made of silver, since it so easily decomposes. In this context, it has been suggested that the 13 vessels recorded in the Linear B tablet PY Tn 316 as offerings to a number of deities were ceremonial heirlooms that were used repeatedly in drinking rituals. They comprise a single cup or bowl without handles, a cup with small handles, either a goblet or a kylix and a chalice. Quantities of golden ritual and drinking vessels in the shape of a bull's head and a Vapheio-type cup are also recorded in a Linear B tablet from Knossos, today in the Ashmolean Museum.⁵² It seems plausible that the production of such metal vessels continued as late as LH IIIB, as is the case with other types of artefacts with symbolic affiliations.⁵³ The procession frescoes and the Ayia Triada sarcophagus provide further evidence for the use of precious metal vessels, where vessels of gold and silver appear among the carried objects as the red and blue colours suggest.⁵⁴

⁴⁴ Demakopoulou et al. 1995, 137–153.

⁴⁵ Giunlia-Mair 2013, 98.

⁴⁶ Demakopoulou et al. 1995, 152; the sole exception seems to be a dagger from Knossos (unpublished, Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion, inv. no. M 567).

⁴⁷ Stos-Gale 2014, esp. 187 for relevant bibliography, 195.

⁴⁸ The lead isotope ratios consistent with the Transylvanian ores were found amongst all groups of vessels from different graves and from other Mycenaean sites, see Stos-Gale 2014, 204–205.

⁴⁹ Persson 1943, 74–75, 94–95; Davis 1977, 269–275.

⁵⁰ Apart from this group of vessels, from the floor of the tholos came a gold hemispherical one-handled cup with embossed decoration of whorl shells on the rim and handle and a circular gold sheet with similar decoration, which probably belonged to an unpreserved silver vessel, see Demakopoulou 1990, 119; Demakopoulou – Aulsebrook 2018.

⁵¹ See, among others, Whittaker 2008, 93–95.

⁵² PY Ae 2031 (1375–1350 BC).

⁵³ I.e. necklaces with beads in the shapes of ivy, rosettes and papyrus which may have actually adorned figures in a ritual context, see Pliatsika 2012, 615–617.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the conical rhyton held by one of the male figures in the Knossos procession, Poursat 2014, 88, pl. 51.



Fig. 7: Tholos of Dendra: a. The 'king's' long sword with gold embroidery; b. Detail of the technique on the handle (photos: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

The inventiveness of metalworking artisans was not exhausted in creating vessels. We should classify as an early Mycenaean achievement another advanced technique, first noticed by Christos Tsountas in Mycenae, who named it χρυσοκέντηση (gold embroidery):⁵⁵ minute gold bars are sewn together and then soldered onto an organic surface to produce a mosaic-like result that is then further decorated with incised patterns (Fig. 7).⁵⁶ Parallels so far come from Grave Circle A of Mycenae, the Mycenae Chamber Tombs 78,⁵⁷ 81 and 93, Vapheio, Kakovatos, Prosymna, Dendra, and the burial of the 'Lord of the Rings' of Pylos⁵⁸ and indicate the Mycenaean origin of the technique.

At this time more than ever, artisans were thoroughly familiar with the combination of metals on the same artefact, not only for their value or in order to achieve polychromy (e.g. with the metal inlay) but also for the symbolism metals might carry. For the early Mycenaean period, this symbolism remains unknown to us; there is, however, richer evidence from contemporary Cyprus, Egypt and the Levant, where precious metals were linked to political and religious power.⁵⁹ Whatever the case was, the symbolism of the metals undoubtedly played an important role, apart from any other technical or aesthetic reasons, i.e. for the sake of polychromy.

⁵⁵ Tsountas 1897, 122, pl. 7.4–6 (sword no. III).

⁵⁶ For a preliminary presentation of the technique and possible remains of gold embroidery in Kakovatos, Tholos C, Vapheio and Knossos, see Xenaki-Sakellariou 1982; more recently, Konstantinidi-Syvridi et al. 2014, 341–343 (the technique is currently under experimental reconstruction by the above team).

⁵⁷ The tomb produced two swords, one of Type D1 (with gold embroidery) and one of Type A, a diadem of lily-shaped beads and two silver one-handled cups, see Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 215–219.

⁵⁸ For a brief discussion and relevant bibliography see Steinmann 2020, 389 (note however a typographical error, it is Mycenae Tomb 93 instead of 82); Davis – Stocker 2016, 634.

⁵⁹ Persson 1943, 57, mentions that in the Babylonian religion silver is the symbol of the moon, copper of Venus, lead of Saturn and iron of Mars; cf. also Gillis 1999; Müller 2012, 467–468.



Fig. 8: Two of the ‘king’s’ finger rings that had been placed inside the octopus cup, tholos of Dendra (photos: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Finger rings combining two or more metals on the bezel belong to this period (LH IIB–IIIA):⁶⁰ only five examples have been thoroughly examined so far,⁶¹ coming from Mycenae, Chamber Tomb 71 (gold, silver and bronze, NMA 2972), Asine (gold and iron covering bronze, NMA 10275), Kalyvia in Phaistos (gold, iron and bronze, HM 48), Heraklion (gold, iron and bronze, HM 2921), while a silver finger ring covered with iron was also worn by the ‘priest’ in Anemospelia.⁶² Furthermore, both Tholos A of Kakovatos⁶³ and Chamber Tomb 7 of Aidonia⁶⁴ produced examples of similarly manufactured rings (iron with gold) but with only partly preserved bezels due to intense corrosion.

However, none of those finds is comparable to the ‘king’s’ finger rings (Fig. 8) that had been placed inside the octopus cup, along with the six sealstones already mentioned. The quantity and the materials of the rings⁶⁵ indicate again the high social and perhaps religious rank of the ‘king’. The simplest of his finger rings consists of two sheets of silver and has no remnants of the bezel; the other three each consist of silver, lead and iron in successive layers. The ring and the inner sheet of the bezel are made of silver, the intermediate layer of lead, and the top layer of iron.

Unfortunately, the presence of lead prevented us from acquiring any useful results from the radiography conducted at the National Museum in Athens; and because of corrosion we will perhaps never know whether the rings originally held a gold-plated bezel like the ones found in Mycenae and Asine. In any case, the use of lead between silver and iron poses questions: was it used in order to make the ring heavier or did the Mycenaeans already know what the Romans did not, namely that lead prevents the corrosion of silver and iron?⁶⁶

For the rest of the jewellery from the tholos, there is not much to comment on, apart from the fact that there is a very restricted number of motifs that are repeated on relief beads and plaques of gold, glass or faience: ivy leaf, lily, rosette and papyrus. The iconography, as in the other sectors of art, is still balancing between Minoan and Mycenaean elements. Although the subsequent period will create more versions of those types and some new forms, they will be of a more conventionalised rendering.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Poursat 2014, 108 (with relevant bibliography), pls. 37–38, fig. 109.

⁶¹ CMS I, nos. 91, 108; CMS II.3, no. 113; also Müller 2012, 467 n. 36, with results of XRF tests run on two of the rings.

⁶² Dated to MM IIB–IIIA, see Sakellarakis – Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 650–651, fig. 717.

⁶³ NMA 5682; see Müller 1909, 275, pl. 13.35.

⁶⁴ Demakopoulou 1996, 27; furthermore, preliminary analyses on the gold rings of the warrior burial in Pylos indicate that they are not made of solid gold either, see Davis – Stocker 2016.

⁶⁵ The ‘king’s’ finger rings will be the focus of a separate publication by the author and Maria Kontaki, conservator of antiquities at the Metals Laboratory of the NMA.

⁶⁶ See, among others, Facsády – Verebes 2009, 997–998.

⁶⁷ Higgins 1980, 70.



Fig. 9: Gold earrings from Dendra, Chamber Tomb 10
(photo: G. Patrikianos, NMA photographic archive)



Fig. 10: a. Necklace of gold beads from Dendra, Chamber Tomb 10; b. The ivory 'Lady from Prosymna' wearing a similar necklace (photos: a. G. Patrikianos; b. P. Pheleris; NMA photographic archive)

Since the tholos tomb provided only a few simple types of jewellery, any substantial discussion of the jewellery of the period needs to be based on the only other burial in the necropolis of Dendra that can be paralleled with the 'king's' in respect of the wealth of luxurious items and materials, that is the female one from Chamber Tomb 10.⁶⁸ The magnificent pair of gold earrings consisting of an outer circle with the pattern of foliate band – a popular motif of the period – which encloses a rosette pendant (Fig. 9), finds its closest parallel on an ivory inlay from Aidonia, Chamber Tomb 7,⁶⁹ confirming once again that the same motifs were reproduced in several media and materials, denoting not only aesthetic preferences, but also symbolic connotations.⁷⁰ Thus, it should not be taken as a coincidence, that necklace beads similar to those of the female burial in

⁶⁸ Persson 1943, 75–87.

⁶⁹ Demakopoulou 1996, 55, no. 28.

⁷⁰ Eder 2015, esp. 228.

Chamber Tomb 10 (Fig. 10) are worn by the contemporary ivory figurine from Prosymna Chamber Tomb 51.⁷¹

Toilet implements continue to play a significant role in female burials, and cosmetic boxes reappear after the examples from Shaft Grave III in Grave Circle A at Mycenae, only now they take the form of miniature metal pendants, with suspension holes on the body and lid. This is at least the case with the cylindrical box which was found near the ‘queen’s’ neck (Fig. 11) and with the two boxes from Tholos A at Archanes, all three of them decorated with granulation.⁷² The Archanes pendants – one rectangular and one elliptical – were found in the undisturbed layer of the side chamber of Tholos A and belonged to the LM IIIA1 female burial, which was also furnished with some iron jewellery in the region of the chest.

Chamber Tomb 10 at Dendra also revealed a beautiful silver spoon, which had been placed inside a luxurious silver goblet decorated with flying birds. It bears a pattern of ivy leaf that was also reproduced in several media including the gold pendants from the large necklace of the ‘Lord of the Rings’.⁷³



Fig. 11: Gold miniature pendant in the shape of a cylindrical pyxis (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Epilogue

The palatial economy of the subsequent period will radically change the picture of the manufacture and production of artefacts. Techniques requiring extremely high skill, like gold embroidery and the combination of metals in massive rings will not survive, neither will masterpieces like the octopus or the bulls’ heads cups. Although many tombs of the period have been found robbed and one could argue that such masterpieces did exist, but have not yet been found, evidence from abroad⁷⁴ confirms what is already known from mainland tombs: as only pottery (mainly stirrup jars) was exported, it seems that in their prime the Mycenaean were more interested in exporting luxurious pottery, oil and textiles, than masterpieces of high quality.⁷⁵

The new artistic profile of the industrialised palatial production will dictate standard, almost lifeless shapes and motifs. The eclectic taste of the early Mycenaean rulers will disappear with them; only a few features will outlive their era – like the vessels of ritual character or specific shapes of relief beads that served as a communicative code – as a conscious effort to continue previous traditions related to cult and religion.

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⁷¹ Blegen 1937, 224–225, 461–463, fig. 573.

⁷² Sakellarakis – Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 603; at the 11th Cretological Conference (Rethymnon 2011), Nota Demopoulou presented another miniature pyxis pendant of gold (unpublished) from a rock-cut tomb in Poros, Heraklion, of MM III–LM I date.

⁷³ Davis – Stocker 2016, 627.

⁷⁴ For exported Mycenaean pottery, see Rutter 2010, 415–429.

⁷⁵ Cf. Eder 2015 for the ideological dimension of jewellery.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Silver chalice decorated with hunting scenes found on the 'king's' breast, tholos of Dendra (a. photo: I. Miari, NMA photographic archive; b. Reconstruction after Persson 1931, pl. 17.2)

Fig. 2: The 'king's' octopus cup, tholos of Dendra (photo: Y. Patrikianos, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 3: Silver cup with gold-plated rim and handle, Dendra, Chamber Tomb 2 (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 4: Silver cup with an inner gold lining, the 'king's' burial, tholos of Dendra (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 5: The 'queen's' silver cup, tholos of Dendra (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 6: Detail of the 'queen's' cup with one of the bull's heads, tholos of Dendra (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 7: Tholos of Dendra: a. The 'king's' long sword with gold embroidery; b. Detail of the technique on the handle (photos: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 8: Two of the 'king's' finger rings that had been placed inside the octopus cup, tholos of Dendra (photos: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 9: Gold earrings from Dendra, Chamber Tomb 10 (photo: G. Patrikianos, NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 10: a. Necklace of gold beads from Dendra, Chamber Tomb 10; b. The ivory 'Lady from Prosymna' wearing a similar necklace (photos: a. G. Patrikianos; b. P. Pheleris; NMA photographic archive)

Fig. 11: Gold miniature pendant in the shape of a cylindrical pyxis (photo: M. Kontaki, NMA photographic archive)