

**A CONCISE GUIDE
TO MYCENAE &
TIRYNS**

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A concise guide to Mycenae & Tiryns by Pericles Collas

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by
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P. C.

FROM ATHENS TO MYCENAE

The direct route from Athens to the plain of Argos, in which Mycenae and Tiryns are situated, passes through various interesting places which can be visited by the traveller if he has the time. Both road and railway follow almost the same course, in fact they often cross each other until they reach the village of Fichtia, the final station to Mycenae. However, tourist offices often organize bus trips direct to the sites of Mycenae and Tiryns,

From Athens the **Sacred Road** or *Hiera Hodos* (today: *Ierà Odòs*) follows the line of the ancient road of this name leading to Eleusis. The name was given to the road because it was that followed by the sacred processions from Eleusis to Athens.

After a little more than nine kilometers one reaches the **Monastery of Daphni** dating from the end of the 11th century A.D. A visit will reward the visitor with the view of some of the most beautiful Byzantine mosaics in Greece. Two km. from Daphni there is, on the right, a rock with niches for offerings which marks the site of an ancient **precinct of Aphrodite**.

On reaching the sea, the road turns northwards. There one can see the **lake of Koumoundouros**, which is the first of the two ancient tarns called the Rhetoi, which were dedicated to Demeter and Kore.

21 km. from Athens one comes to **Eleusis**. It was the site of the mystic, religious ceremonies (mysteries, festivals and processions) in honour of Demeter and Persephone or Kore. The local antiquities are of some interest (sacred precinct, museum and acropolis).

Megara. The modern town is built on the site of ancient Megara of which traces only remain. In classical times Megara was often an enemy of Athens. The greatest historical significance of the town is that it founded important colonies.

Skyron's Rocks, shortly after Megara, form an impressive barrier of reddish rock, on the right of the road which at this point passes near the sea. This portion of the road is now named Kaki Skala (Evil Stair or Harbour) and is notorious from the ancient tale about the robber Skyron who hurled his victims into the sea.

The **Corinth Canal**, which one crosses by bridge or ferry boat, is 6 km. in length and cuts across the isthmus of Corinth which joins the Peloponnese to the mainland of Greece.

Modern **Corinth** lies about 5 km. from the Canal, and another 5 km. further on one finds the ruins of ancient Corinth, famous in classical times and also later for the important role it played in the early history of Christian-

ity. The interesting castle of Acrocorinth and the smaller one of Penteskoufi are near the ancient city. The two castles can be seen to the right of the road, shortly after Corinth.

Dervenakia. 28 km. from Corinth, a narrow gorge opens at the point Agios Sostis. In 1822, the Greeks under Kolokotronis achieved one of the most important victories against the Ottomans, during the Greek Revolution. The pass is known as the pass of Dervenakia. The ancient road joining the Corinth area with the plain of Argos crossed this pass.

Fichtia. The village and railway station of Fichtia are 29 km. from Corinth. The carriage road on the left leads to Harvati at a distance of 2 km.

Harvati. This village is near the archaeological site of Mycenae. One can find comfortable accommodation at the hotel "La Belle Hélène" and the Tourist Pavilion.



Fig. 1. Gold mask, 26 cm. high, from one of the shaft graves at Mycenae (No. 7).

MYCENAE

HISTORY AND LEGEND

Mycenae is among those sites whose attractions lie both in the legends born on their soil and in their factual history. Indeed it was here that a circle of tragic legends originated, legends

which inspired poets and writers, and gave the first impetus to archaeological research on the site. Even today these legends exercise the irresistible charm of poetry on us, this apart from the fact that the real interest of the site is that it was here that the first Greek civilization was born, the Mycenaean, from which the classical Greek civilization later developed.

The Mycenaean civilization flourished, roughly between the years 1650 and 1100 B.C., in several parts of Greece where it left important remains (Athens, Orchomenos, etc.), and reached its pinnacle at Mycenae and the nearby Argive plain ; it is here that its most impressive remains have been found.

The fact is that, before the massive grandeur of the Mycenaean ruins and the majestic beauty of the scenery, the visitor can scarcely confine his thoughts to the few facts we know about the place, however important these may be. It is natural that his thoughts should also wander to the local legends, even if we do not know whether these have their origin in historical fact. Moreover, the archaeologists' spade has revealed clear traces of fire and destruction, mute evidence of unnamed wars and conquests, which undoubtedly occurred but of which we do not possess, and may never possess, any written historical confirmation.