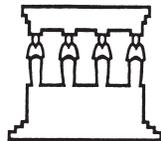


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Identities and ‘precious’ commodities at Midea and Dendra in the Mycenaean Argolid

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The material basis for this investigation is the so-called precious finds from the LH IIIB2 destruction deposits at the Mycenaean citadel site of Midea. These finds reflect the inhabitants’ specific choices regarding the type of material and type of object. In characterizing these and other specific Midea finds, a better understanding of the character of the site and its inhabitants will follow. The objects, which the inhabitants chose for adornment or which were politically or socially appropriate to produce, own and display, will serve as a starting point in the endeavour to reconstruct Midean identity; a process which may prove useful when tracking emulative and competitive behaviour in the Argolid.

Introduction¹

The finds, which here are referred to as ‘precious’, are made of glass, gold and ivory. These materials were used for making ornaments, beads and other jewellery. The find categories and the precious objects themselves are presented along with their find contexts whereupon they are compared with similar, published, precious finds from the citadel.² The precious objects at Midea occur somewhat unexpectedly in the LH IIIB2 destruction debris together with a mixture of other objects, the majority of which are pottery sherds. In most cases the objects must have originated elsewhere and were therefore found out of context in the destruction debris which seems to either have had fallen from upper storeys or have eroded from further upslope. Irrespective of where the commodities came from and whether they were the outcome of production and/or represent the remains of personal belongings, the precious finds reflect the inhabitants’ specific choices regarding the type of

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1. The initial part of writing this article was carried out as a P.M. Warren Visiting Professor in Aegean Prehistory at the Institute of Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition in 2012, at the University of Bristol. I am truly grateful for having had this opportunity and I am also grateful for the generosity and helpfulness of especially Nicoletta Momigliano and Peter Warren.
 2. Schallin 2012.

material and type of object. In characterizing these and other specific Midea finds, a better understanding of the character of the site and its inhabitants will follow. The objects, which the inhabitants chose for adornment or which were politically or socially appropriate to produce, own and display, will serve as a starting point in the endeavour to reconstruct Midean identity; a process which may prove useful when tracking emulative and competitive behaviour in the Argolid.

Identity and mobility

People were mobile in the spacious sense in Mycenaean times and travelled short or long distances within their region and beyond. Then, as well as now, a region was composed of a mixture of inhabitants with different backgrounds; some had lived there for generations and some were new to the locale and had either come from outside the region or from within. The various kinds of things/objects and material, which were brought into the region naturally also express mobility. Single or multiple examples of the material culture functioned as agents, which led to developments in various aspects of the Mycenaean society as the immigrants, traders and entrepreneurs brought with them new ideas, practices and things. Thus the collective regional identity was composed of a variety of cultural expressions and was continuously changing, developing along the lines of ongoing ideas and practices.³

In order to better understand the relationship and the flow of influence, ideas and customs between the various regional Argive citadel sites in the Mycenaean period, we first need to define each community's individual, local identity. The region was marked by strong competitive and emulative customs which are evident in all its cultural expressions, most noticeably to us in the remains of art and architecture; we may also assume that it was present in other spheres of society which are embedded and more difficult to observe.

Apart from presenting the Midean 'precious' objects, this paper also aims to compare the general character of these objects with those from the nearby cemetery at Dendra in order to evaluate the presupposed link between the sites. The earliest excavator at Dendra, Axel W. Persson, took it for granted that the Dendra cemetery was used for burying the dead from Midea;⁴ a supposition which has not yet been properly investigated.

I am aware of the difficulty of comparing material from a settlement with material from cemetery tomb contexts which may vary considerably from

3. Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005, 1–2.

4. Persson 1931, 3–4.

settlement contexts with specific paraphernalia belong to a cemetery which would not be used in a settlement site and *vice versa*. Nevertheless, certain traits may exist which would link the sites and which would either indicate/prove or disprove a close relationship and positively identify the Dendra cemetery as the burial place of the Midean inhabitants. Since 'precious' objects and jewellery have indeed been found at Midea, and since precious objects, especially jewellery, were used by and worn by both the living and the dead;⁵ the Midea–Dendra comparison regarding these classes of objects is especially appropriate here.

Defining a Midean identity

The local Midean identity I seek to define and explore should not be confused with ethnicity or the search for a geographic location of origin, or origins, of the Midean inhabitants. The identity I want to define is a group identity,⁶ most probably consisting of a number of sub identities, such as gender, age, class, etc.⁷ These Midean group identities were signalled by a set of material culture traits. Hypothetically, each Late Bronze Age subgroup in the Argive region chose to express themselves by a set of unique cultural traits, which were determined by the specific constraints and characteristics of their habitat and their relationship with their neighbouring subgroups. The various traits, of which the Midean local identities were composed, were of course mixed and entangled; this is quite natural considering the nature of the competition and emulation in the Argive region in Mycenaean times. Nevertheless, in my view each citadel communicated their particular modes of identity expressions and it is my aim to define such sets of identity markers for the Midean LH IIIB2 inhabitants.

By focussing on the material evidence it will be possible to deepen our understanding of the next level, the regional collective identity in the Argolid. More specifically, I will examine how the Mycenaean society was structured socially, economically and ideologically, especially in the Argolid where written evidence is insufficient for making far-reaching conclusions in this respect.⁸ The Linear B evidence from the Argolid is not as informative regarding palace organization as, for instance it is for Pylos where the Linear B documents called the 'Ta series' inventory sacrificial equipment.⁹

5. Younger 1992; Nightingale 2000, 9.

6. Weissner 1983; Shennan 1989, 17–22; Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005, 23.

7. Meskell 2002, 280.

8. Shelmerdine and Bennet 2008.

9. Bennet 2008, 154.

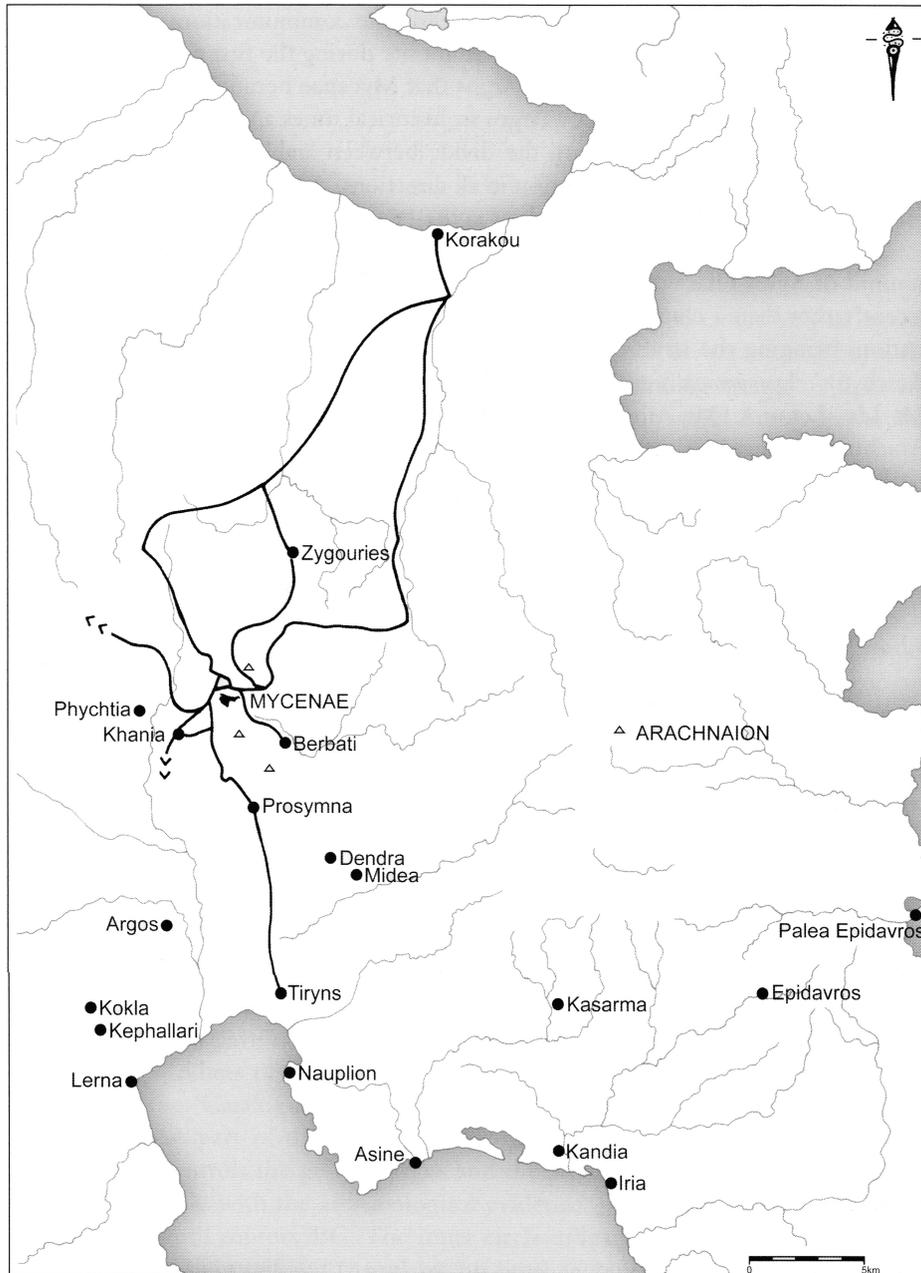


Fig. 1. *The Argolid (Copyright Mycenae Archive).*

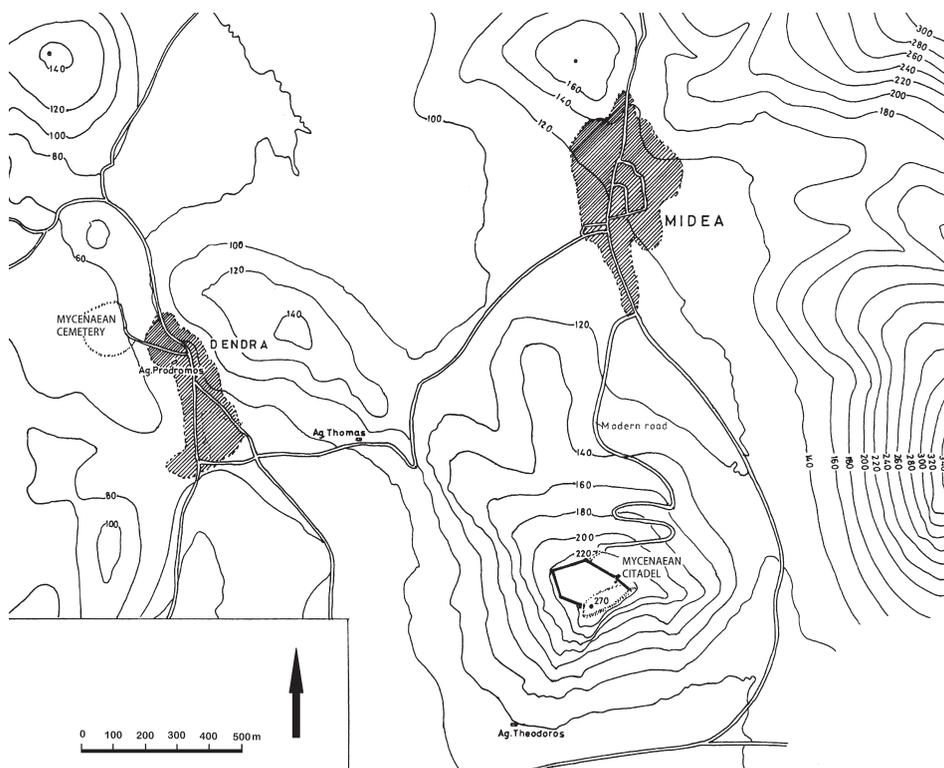


Fig. 2. *The locations of the citadel on Midea and the cemetery at Dendra (after Walberg 2007, fig. 2).*

Dendra and Midea

Dendra and Midea are located approximately 1km apart on the fringe of the Argive plain southeast of Mycenae (Fig. 1). Dendra is a cemetery of mainly Late Bronze Age chamber tombs, but other burial structures also exist there, most noteworthy is perhaps the tholos which was the first of the tombs to be excavated. Midea, on the other hand, is a settlement site within a citadel on a 270m high hill. The close relationship between the two sites has always been maintained (Fig. 2) and was one of the original notions of the first excavator at Dendra and Midea, Axel W. Persson.¹⁰

10. Persson 1931, 3–4.

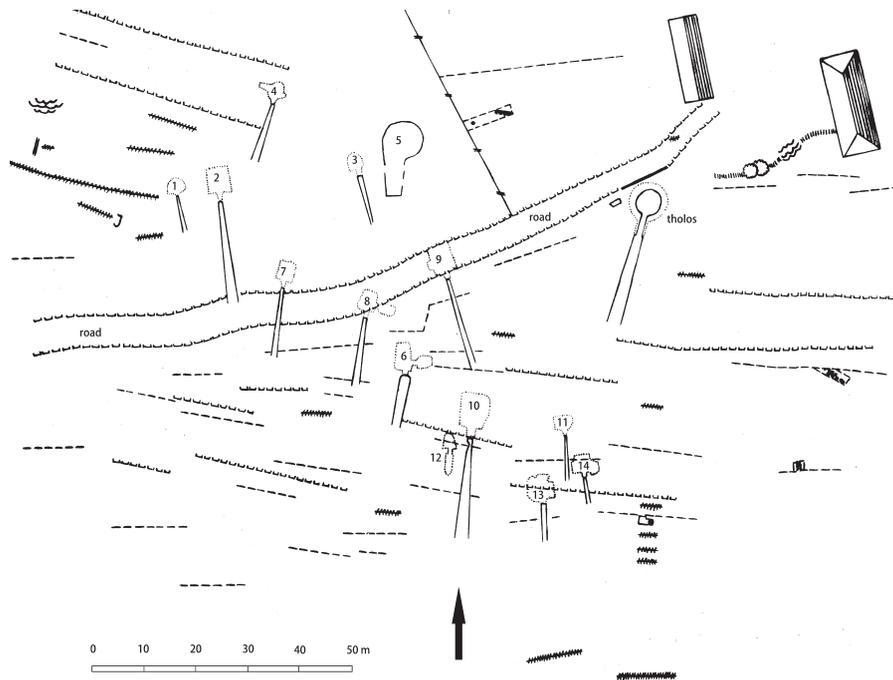


Fig. 3. Late Helladic tombs excavated in the cemetery at Dendra (after Åström 1977:6, fig.1).

Excavations at Dendra

The excavations at Dendra commenced in 1926 when the Swedish archaeologist Axel W. Persson was invited by Nikolaos Bertos, the ephor at Nauplion at that time, to undertake the excavation of a tholos tomb.¹¹

In 1927 chamber tombs 1, 2 and 3 (Fig. 3) were excavated by the Swedes. Bertos excavated two more in the same year: 4 and 5.¹² After a hiatus of twelve years, Persson came back to Dendra in 1939 and excavated six more chamber tombs: 6-11.¹³

In the 1960s new excavations at Dendra were compelled as a consequence of looting in one of the unexcavated chamber tombs. Nikolaos Verdellis, together with Paul Åström, discovered a precious bronze cuirass which in turn led to a new interest in the cemetery and the excavation of chamber tombs 12-14.¹⁴ More recently Evangelia Protonotariou-Deilaki and Evangelia Pappi have revealed additional information concerning the cemetery.¹⁵

11. Persson 1931, 8-9.

12. Persson 1942, 17.

13. Persson 1942, 17-101

14. Åström 1977.

15. Protonotariou-Deilaki 1990; Pappi 2005 (pr. 2013).

The explorations at Midea

Persson naturally became curious about Midea while working at Dendra, and in 1939 he also conducted explorations within its citadel walls.¹⁶ He let one of the younger archaeologists of his team, Torgny Säve-Söderberg, create some test trenches,¹⁷ for example at the East Gate of the citadel wall. The uppermost terrace was also investigated. Since cuttings and some structural remains were observed, it was concluded that buildings had stood there and in his publication from 1942 Persson wrote that the Mycenaean palace had been placed there.¹⁸

While excavating chamber tombs at Dendra in the 1960s, Åström also undertook investigations within the citadel at Midea. He explored some areas close to the East Gate and concluded that the deep layers of ashy soil contained sherds which could be dated to the LH IIIB2 period at the latest.¹⁹

Systematic excavations at Midea started in 1983 as a Greek-Swedish collaboration project. The results have preliminarily been published in *Opuscula Atheniensi*a, and in *Opuscula. The annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome* from 2008. Moreover, two volumes of the final excavation report have hitherto appeared.²⁰

The history of Midea

The most conspicuous feature on the slope of Midea is an impressive citadel wall. The wall encloses an area of 24000 square meters and it is constructed of large blocks in the Cyclopean technique, similar to the Late Bronze Age fortifications at Mycenae and Tiryns. The wall is 450 metres long, 5–7 meters in width and is preserved in a number of places to a height of 7 metres.

The remains within the citadel area date mainly to the Late Bronze Age, however, the finds give evidence of human occupation in several periods from the Late Neolithic throughout the prehistoric period. There was also activity within the walls in Archaic, Classical, Late Roman and Early Byzantine times.

The citadel wall was constructed in the middle of the 13th century, in LH IIIB2. Most of the building remains that have already been excavated belong to the same period (Fig. 4). The archaeological field work has concentrated on the two gates, The East and the West, where rooms have been uncovered built against the inner side of the fortification wall. Excavations have also revealed a habitation area on

16. Persson 1942, 3–16.

17. Persson 1942, 4, fig. 1.

18. Persson 1942, 7–12.

19. Åström 1983, 40.

20. Walberg 1998; Walberg 2007.

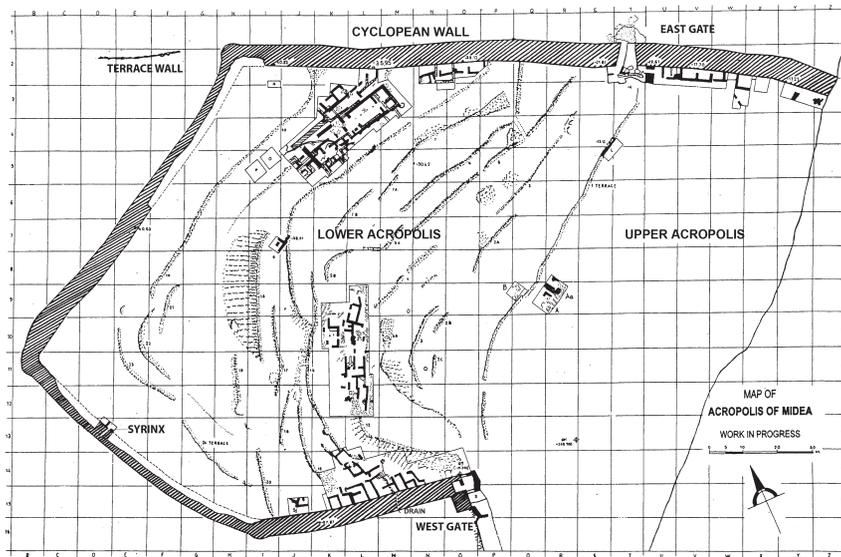


Fig. 4. Ground plan of the Acropolis of Midea (drawing: E. Markou with additions by M. Patapatiou and A. Kiratzis).

one of the middle terraces towards the west. Moreover, a large structure has been uncovered to the north, on a lower terrace. This building is reminiscent in plan of a classical Mycenaean megaron.²¹

Thus we can conclude that the site organisation that was revealed by archaeological excavations is the layout from LH IIIB2 and any earlier remains must have been more or less eliminated in the process. The imposing citadel wall belongs to the same period. Yet, the site experienced a severe destruction at the end of this period, which has left traces in the stratigraphy all over the citadel area. The destruction horizon at Midea consists of deep layers of ashy soil, especially in areas where the soil has accumulated, as for instance against the citadel wall. The conflagration, which befell the site at the end of LH IIIB2 is most noteworthy.²² In spite of the severe destruction, the site was not abandoned, but the data indicates its survival on a reduced scale with the entire original citadel area probably not being taken back into use again. Importantly enough, the megaron was rebuilt with a similar, but slightly different outline which indicates a survival of the site's social organization. However, as time went by the activity in the citadel area dwindled and the latest prehistoric remains date to LH IIIC middle.²³

21. Maran 2001, 117; Walberg 2007.

22. Åström & Demakopoulou 1996; Walberg 1998, 176; Schallin 2012, 511.

23. Walberg 2007, 198; Demakopoulou *et al.* 2010, 11

Preconceived ideas

Persson had already made up his mind concerning the connection between the sites of Dendra and Midea from the start of his exploration and wrote: 'Beyond a doubt the tombs in the western part of the ridge at Dendra are connected with the citadel on the top of the hill and the adjacent town at the foot'.²⁴

Persson envisioned a scenario consisting of a palace at the top of Midea where the king dwelt, and that one of the kings of Midea, his queen and his daughter were buried in the tholos tomb of the Dendra cemetery.

No one has contradicted Persson concerning the alleged connection between Midea and Dendra and thus the general opinion is that the cemetery belonged to the citadel of Midea.

The 'precious' commodities at Midea

Here I will use the evidence of the so-called 'precious' commodities from Midea in an investigation about the alleged connection between Dendra and Midea. I will first present the nature of the finds, which have been found at Midea, as well as my working hypothesis: i.e. that these finds constitute a part of a Midean collective group identity.

The nature of the 'precious' commodities

The 'precious' commodities, or objects I refer to here comprise beads of various shiny or glossy materials such as glass, faience or semi-precious stones. Ornaments, jewellery and other objects of gold, silver or bronze also belong to this category. Thin gold foil often covered the glass beads or was used to adorn perishable materials such as cloth or wood. Material of this kind belonged to the sphere of Mycenaean elite manifestations which were displayed in tombs of the transitional phase between the Middle and Late Helladic periods, but also later.²⁵ The objects were no doubt also worn and used before being deposited in the tombs. They were part of the socially competitive activities in the region at the time when the various lords on the Argive Plain were fighting for prestige and power. The custom of amassing precious goods and putting them into the tombs was therefore a common practice and did not die out but was maintained, at least during the LH IIIA and B periods. However, as time went by it seems as if the ability to procure precious objects became more common and it seems to have

24. Persson 1931, 3.

25. Eg. Bennet 2008; Jackson & Wager 2011; Whittaker 2011; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2012.

subsequently not been an exclusively elite phenomenon. At the same time, the amount of precious objects has a tendency of abating to comprise a more limited selection when found in tombs.

East of the East Gate

The precious finds from the recent excavations in the rooms situated along the inner face of the citadel wall east of the East Gate (Figs. 4 and 5) constitute the basis for this investigation.²⁶ The area designated 'east of the East Gate' is reached by using a narrow and awkward passage leading from the East Gate upwards in an easterly direction to an upper terrace. In the Mycenaean destruction debris of the late 13th century there was a large amount of finds embedded in a soft soil matrix mixed with ash. Most of the finds consist of pottery sherds, but there are also many other small finds of various kinds such as a variety of stone tools; implements of antler, bone and bronze; vessels made of lead and terracotta figurines of the usual Mycenaean kinds, such as bovines and females of the Psi type. There were also a lot of fragments of lime plaster indicating the coated remains of floors and walls. Faunal and botanical remains²⁷ comprise bones, shells, charred seeds, carbonized figs and olive pips. Furthermore, there are fragments of jewellery in precious materials, such as gold and blue glass, as well as ornaments of ivory.

The variety of finds makes it hard to pinpoint an exact function for these rooms. The mixed debris found in the basement rooms probably contained finds emanating from upper storeys. The finds may also have originated from buildings further up the slope, i.e. to the south of the basement rooms. Furthermore, there are indications that the Late Helladic finds were mixed with material from both earlier and later periods. The processing of the material will especially shed light on the meaning of the possible later intrusions. One explanation may be that masses of soil were deposited in the basement rooms at a post-Bronze Age date and that the Mycenaean material then was mixed with both earlier and later finds.

The lack of a clear stratigraphy makes it impossible to state whether the upper storey rooms above the basement represented living quarters, store rooms or workshops. We cannot even be sure that the debris emanates from the rooms in question or from other buildings, once situated upslope to the south of the basement room area.

26. Nilsson & Schallin 2002; Alisøy, Nilsson & Schallin 2003; Nilsson & Schallin 2004; Nilsson & Schallin 2005; Nilsson & Schallin 2006-2007; Nilsson & Schallin 2008.

27. Margaritis, Demakopoulou and Schallin 2014.

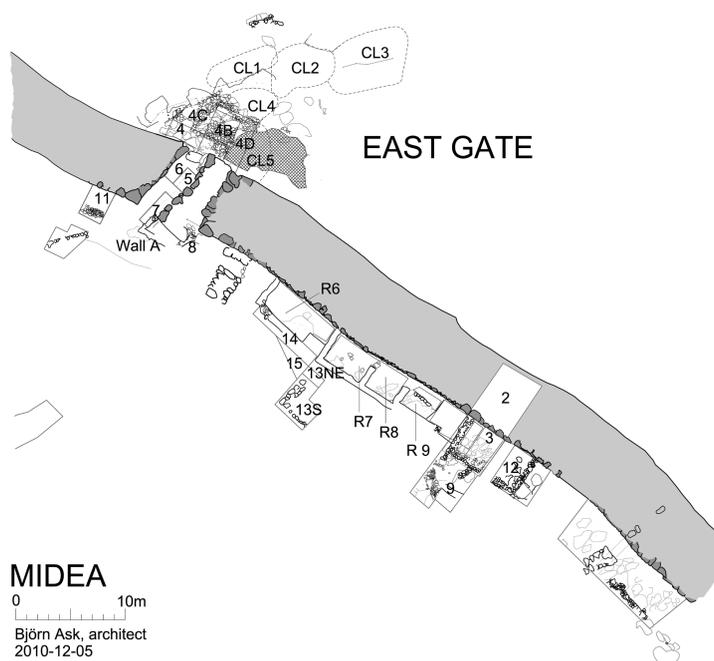


Fig. 5. Ground plan of the areas of the East Gate and east of the East Gate (drawing: B. Ask).

Jewellery and ornaments

Fragments and occasionally intact specimens of small ornaments and pieces of jewellery have been found in the basement debris. These items were therefore not necessarily found *in situ*, and it is not possible to state that they represent remains of the inhabitants' personal belongings or the outcome (however fragmentary) of a local production.

Simple glass beads

A number of simple beads made of blue glass have been found in the basement debris (Figs. 6 and 7). They are all oval in shape and were probably part of, or intended for, one or several necklaces or bracelets. These kinds of beads are common and also occur in other parts of the Mycenaean cultural sphere.²⁸ The same kind of simple beads have been found at other locations at Midea, for instance from the excavations of the buildings on the Southwest slope²⁹ and from

28. Nightingale 2000, 6; Nikita 2003, 28, fig. 3.8 with examples from the Agora Excavations.

29. Demakopoulou & Divari-Valakou 2002, 36, fig. 27.

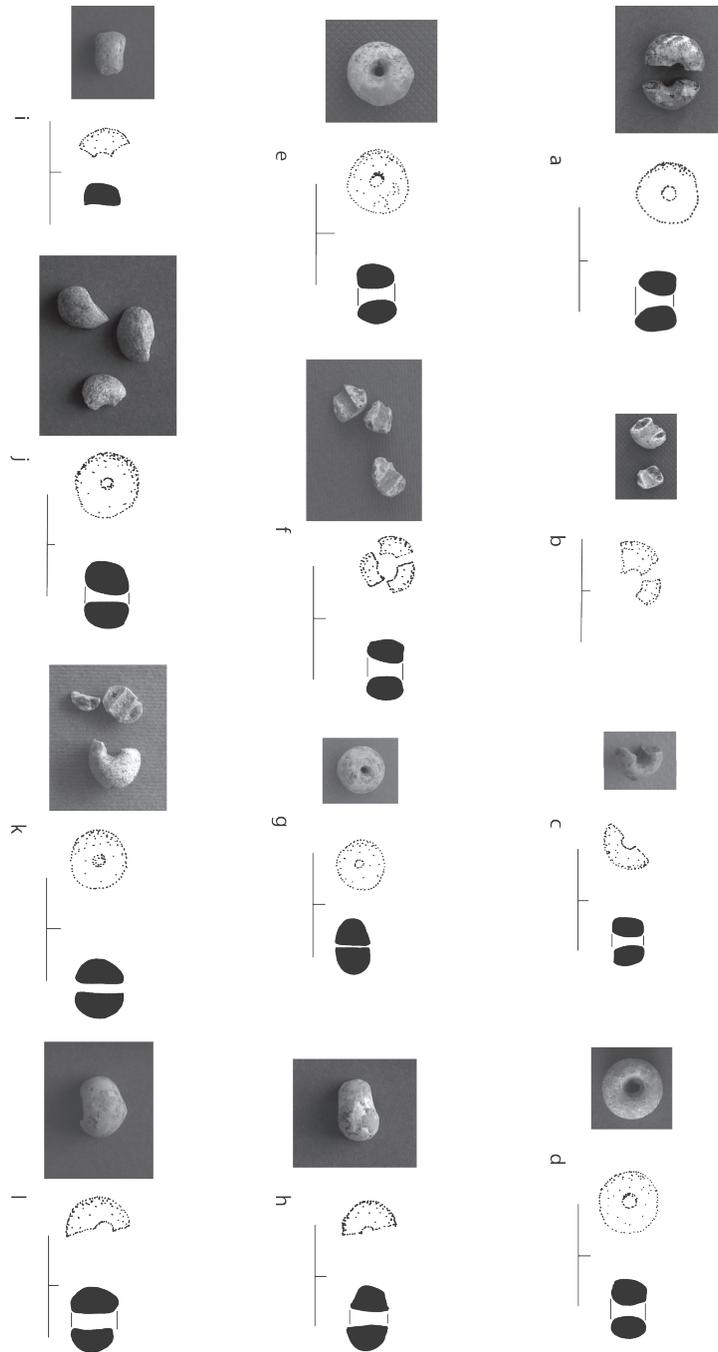


Fig. 6. Simple glass beads with rounded profile from the area east of the East Gate, Trenches 3 and 12.

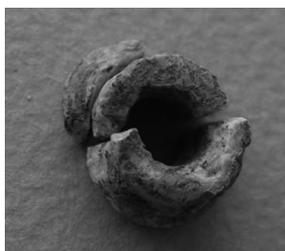


Fig. 7. *Simple glass bead with tubular profile from the area east of the East Gate, Baulk T3/R9.*

the area of the so-called megaron.³⁰ This implies that glass bead necklaces or bracelets were in use by the inhabitants, or stored or produced in several places. The necklace composed of disk-shaped beads found in Niche 1 in the megaron represents a more or less intact piece of jewellery of this kind.³¹ Ostenso remarks that several of the simple beads recovered elsewhere in the megaron area were found outside of their original contexts.³²

Relief beads

A different kind of bead or ornament is more elaborate and is composed of a blue glass plaque with a decoration in relief. Many beads of the same kind were often linked together forming a necklace. However some of the relief beads were just pinned or sewn onto garments.³³

Four such beads occur in the area east of the East Gate. One of these depicts a motif consisting of fantasy creatures set against each other in a heraldic way (Fig. 8). An identical bead with the same motif was found in trench R, on the west side of the Midea citadel area.³⁴ An almost identical bead with the same motif, but not executed in such detail, comes from one of the Mycenae chamber tombs.³⁵ The demons are of the same kind as the ones on the famous gold signet ring from Tiryns of the 15th century.³⁶ The Midea examples, however, are less beastlike and more insect-like. Another relief bead from the same Midean context consists of a plaque at the one end of which there is a ribbed cone, or a so-called trochus shell

30. Walberg 1998, 157, pl. 111; Walberg 2007, 177, figs. 218-219.

31. Ostenso 2007, 178: G27 and G24.

32. Ostenso 2007, 178.

33. Hughes-Brock 2008, 133.

34. Demakopoulou & Divari-Valakou 2002, 32, fig. 35.

35. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 133, no. 4551.

36. Higgins 1980, 188, fig. 241.

(Fig. 9).³⁷ 'Cut-out' examples come from Midea.³⁸ Beads of this type occur, for example at Tiryns³⁹ and from the Mycenae tombs.⁴⁰ A third kind of relief bead is broken with only one end of the bead remaining. It represents a curled leaf relief ornament (Fig. 10). Intact parallels come from the Mycenae Chamber tomb 93⁴¹ and from Thisbe in Boeotia.⁴² A fourth example from the East Gate area at Midea is covered with gold foil (Fig. 11). This type of bead is common in the Mycenaean Argolid and is also represented outside the Argolid.⁴³ The gold was formed in a mould and details were added by a granulation technique afterwards. Other similar beads often have small, dark blue blobs set in small hollows, but there are no remains of such decoration here. The motif depicted on the bead represents a well-known figure from the Mycenaean pottery repertoire, an Argonaut – a sea-snail. Here the motif is set heraldically in pairs. Close parallels to the Midean bead come from Chamber tombs 8 and 88 at Mycenae.⁴⁴

The Midean bead is actually the only gold find to have so far come from the material found in the citadel. Gold was most certainly considered extra precious in Mycenaean times. This is evident from the rich grave offerings and also in the way the metal was used to shape beautiful works of art. Even so, gold beads are fairly plentiful, especially in undisturbed Mycenaean tombs.⁴⁵

Ivory ornaments

Some ivory ornaments occur among the finds. One depicts the motif of a papyrus plant which also derives from the pottery decoration repertoire (Fig. 12). It is a common motif during the Mycenaean period in the Argolid. The same motif occurs on a steatite mould from Midea⁴⁶ which indicates that it was intended for the production of glass beads with this motif in relief.

Another ivory object is of special interest. It is probably made of elephant instead of hippopotamus ivory which Krzyzskowska considers to have been

37. Ostenso 1998, 157: G6.

38. Walberg 1998, pl. 111, G6; Walberg 2003, pl. G42.

39. Nightingale 2000, 9.

40. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 27, no. 2271(2); pl. 92, no. 2963.

41. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 132, no. 4550 (12).

42. Hughes-Brock 2008, pl. 6.2.

43. Higgins 1980, 166, 171-172, figs. 206 and 214; Nikita 2003, 29-30.

44. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 6, no. 2299 and pl. 117, no. 3153, 13.

45. Hughes-Brock 1999, 282.

46. Demakopoulou & Divari-Valakou 1994, 32, fig. 37.

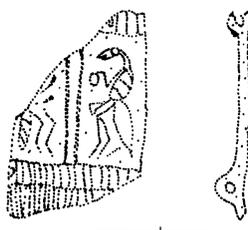


Fig. 8. *Glass relief bead depicting a Mycenaean 'demon'.*



Fig. 9. *Glass relief bead with a trochus shell.*

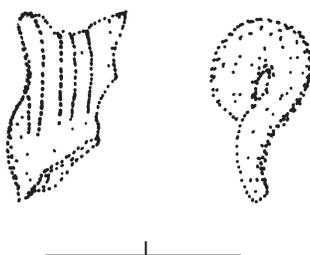


Fig. 10. *Glass relief bead in the shape of a curved leaf.*



Fig. 11. *Glass bead coated with gold leaf depicting Argonauts.*

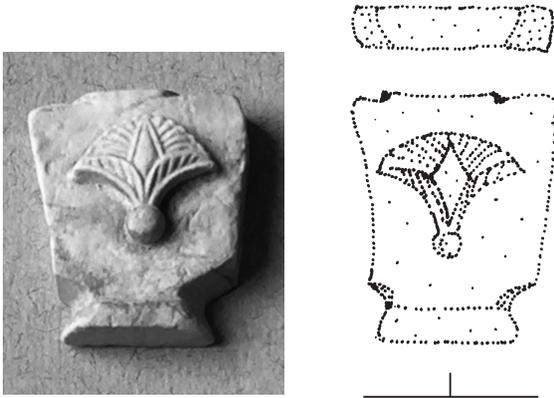


Fig. 12. *Ivory ornament with papyrus decoration.*

used for more simple ornaments.⁴⁷ It is a relief plaque in fragments depicting two figures in profile (Fig. 13). It was found in a possibly mixed Mycenaean level, and does not necessarily belong to the Mycenaean era, but possibly to a subsequent period. The fleshy lips and chin have no parallels in the Mycenaean ivories we know, but on the other hand, the muscular leg is reminiscent of the leg on an ivory plaque from Mycenae, tomb Rho.⁴⁸ Moreover, the vivacity and strength immanent in the image seems to belong more to the Mycenaean way of rendering a motif than the more stiff appearance of artistic expressions during the Archaic times. However, a possible Archaic date to this delicate piece of art should not be too surprising, since there is definite evidence for Archaic activity in this area at Midea close to the East Gate.

Chronology

These 'precious' items are therefore typical for the Mycenaean Argolid and especially for the palace sites since they express the connection with, or the wish to belong to, the elite sphere of the Mycenaean society. In the Argive region the objects were produced, or transformed from imported raw material, such as glass paste and elephant or hippopotamus ivory, to finished objects.⁴⁹ Chronologically, the objects belong to the heyday of the Mycenaean era: LH IIIA and B periods.⁵⁰

47. Krzyzkowska 1988, 233.

48. Poursat 1977, 68, no. 240 (9562), pl. 19.

49. Bennet 2008, 164.

50. Nightingale 2000, 6.

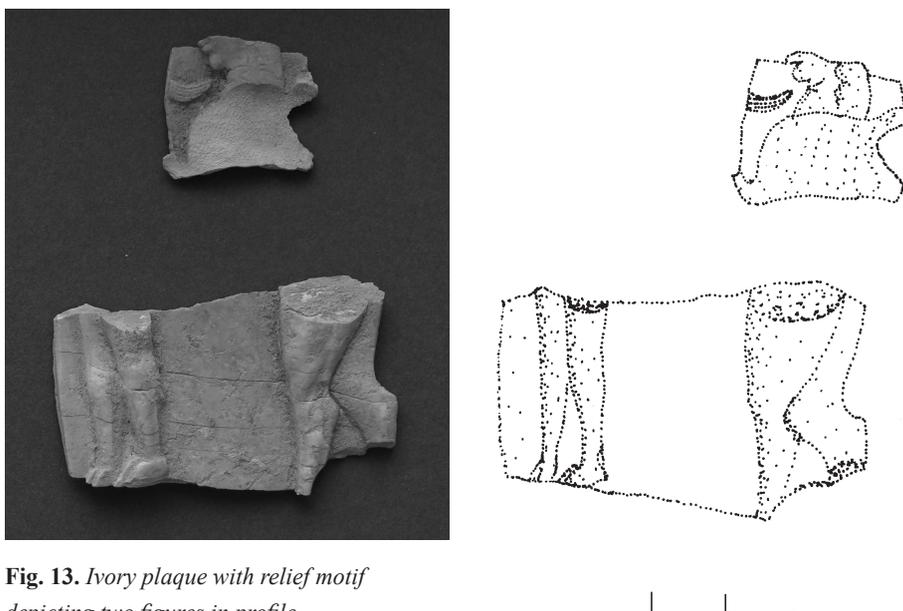


Fig. 13. *Ivory plaque with relief motif depicting two figures in profile.*

Location

Except for the ivory inlay depicting an elaborate papyrus plant (7), all the objects presented above derive from the area east of the East Gate (Figs. 4 and 5). The ivory inlay was found in Trench 11 in connection with a shallow stone packing. The precious objects from the upper level, east of the East Gate are concentrated to the trenches following the inner side of the citadel wall. All the small blue glass beads come from Trenches 3 and 12, which border each other. They may have belonged to one and the same necklace. Two of the relief beads also come from Trench 3, and more beads and an ivory plaque were found further downslope in rooms following the inner outline of the citadel wall.

The implication of the finds

Objects have been found belonging to the category of ornaments and jewellery all over the excavated areas within the citadel at Midea. The fact that the jewellery and the ornaments only occur as single stray finds may indicate that the inhabitants brought their finery with them when they left the site, regardless of whether they fled from a catastrophe or due to political, economical or other reasons. Only the overlooked scraps were left behind. The golden relief bead must have been dropped from an already broken necklace, or it was torn off the person who wore it.

Only fragments remain, but the objects reveal a high level of artistic skill and sophistication.

As can be deduced from the stratigraphic evidence, the precious objects are most often found together with other debris from the LH IIIB period, the period which predated the destruction and the ensuing fire catastrophe that left large parts of the site in ash and ruins. The haphazard way in which the precious finds seem to be distributed reflects the fact that they were most often not found in situ, but in secondary contexts, in mixed debris containing soil, which seems to have been moved around before being deposited. The area east of the East Gate at least, seems to consist of this kind of debris. The walls of the Mycenaean basement rooms are deep here and there is a lot of space for soil to be packed, either through erosion or with the help of people in later periods who were wishing to create level ground for their activities. The fragments and scraps of the jewellery and ornaments then become only a reflection of the richness, which may once have been stored within the citadel. The types of objects conform to what we find at nearby sites and also with those at the cemetery at the nearby Dendra which is assumed to have been the burial ground for the inhabitants at Midea.

The 'precious' objects belong to the kind of Mycenaean valuables of exotic connotation which were used in strategies of elite self-representation. The objects were thus uniquely associated with the palaces.⁵¹ Such self-representation is seen in the rituals of burial practices of the elite, which included elaborated feasting.⁵² Lena Papazoglou-Manioudaki discusses examples of such practices at Dendra and Mycenae.⁵³

The relief beads are a speciality for the Mycenaean Argolid. They must have been manufactured there and were not imported. The motives vary and are both abstract and representational.⁵⁴ The relief beads may have been an insignia of some kind of religious or other official or social status. According to Hughes-Brock, they conveyed social messages, and when found outside the Mycenaean social sphere they may be seen as a type of badge of ethnicity.⁵⁵ The relief beads were produced in the palaces by a special class of blue glass workers: *ku-wa-no-wo-ko*.⁵⁶ The gold bead from the area east of the East Gate at Midea, together with other relief beads and the steatite mould from the West Gate area therefore indicate that production of relief beads was taking place at the site as has previously

51. Bennet 2008, 160–161.

52. E.g. Wright 2004; Whittaker, 2011.

53. Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2012.

54. Nikita 2003, 29.

55. Hughes-Brock 1999, 291.

56. Nightingale 2000, 6; Brysbaert and Veters 2010.

been suggested.⁵⁷ Hughes-Brock discusses the manufacturing processes of relief beads⁵⁸ while Nikita discusses the function of Mycenaean glass beads.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, there is no clear evidence of a production of glass beads at Midea, but this is unsurprising since it is difficult to identify glass-working sites and we may not necessarily expect a single-purpose work space purely for glass jewellery. It is possible that glass working was executed in areas, which may have had other functions.⁶⁰ However, a number of stone moulds at nearby Mycenae more or less certify the existence of glass bead production at this site, even if the moulds were not found in the specific work area. Tournavitou has made a catalogue of glass moulds found in Mainland Greece, including Mycenae,⁶¹ and Susan Lupack also discusses the Mycenaean jewellery workshop areas.⁶² One of the Mycenae moulds is of particular interest for the Midean case. It was found at Mycenae, in the Citadel House area, in a dubious workshop context. It is of particular interest, since it was meant for the production of glass beads in the shape of paired Argonauts, just like the gold-covered glass relief bead from Midea which was presented above.⁶³ The production of vitreous materials has also been attested at Tiryns.⁶⁴

It is likewise uncertain whether Midea housed an ivory workshop. A lot of skill and technique was required to produce beautiful ivory carvings, not only due to the delicacy of the carving, but also during the preparation of the material.⁶⁵ The scant ivory evidence at Midea is not comparable to the vast remains of ivory working in, for example the Houses of the Sphinxes and the Shields at Mycenae.⁶⁶

The local identity of the Mideans

All the material traits at Midea no doubt express the site's and the inhabitants' unique character in comparison with their neighbours. The Midean material traits conform to the Mycenaean culture in general, but there are individual characteristics

57. Demakopoulou and Divari-Valakou 1994, 34; Voutsaki 2001, 196; Hughes-Brock 2003, 12; Demakopoulou 2007, 70.

58. Hughes-Brock 1999, 287-290.

59. Nikita 2003, 33-34.

60. Tournavitou 1997, 230, 232; Nikita 2003, 24; Tournavitou 1988.

61. Tournavitou 1997, 243-253.

62. Lupack 1999, 30-32.

63. Evely 1992, pl. 4; Tournavitou 1997, pl. 7.

64. Panagiotaki *et al.* 2005; Brysbaert and Wetters 2010, 34-35.

65. Krzyszkowska 1984, 124; Krzyszkowska 1988, 214; Velsink 2003, 9.

66. Tournavitou 1995, esp. 123-206.

which can be identified when studying various aspects of the site and the finds. The material traits mirror the inhabitants' social status, their preferences, their occupation, and their relations with neighbouring sites in the region.

The 'precious' finds from the area east of the East Gate at Midea could have been produced at the site. It is possible that production of ivory ornaments and glass beads of various kinds was taking place, even though we still have no real proof of this. Another possibility is that the 'precious' objects had been produced elsewhere and were kept and stored at the site, i.e. that they were the inhabitant's personal belongings. The ornaments may have decorated pieces of furniture, but the beads were used for necklaces or other jewellery which may have been worn on specific occasions by certain members of the community who were perhaps designated various roles in a social hierarchy.

The precious objects were used as prestige items and were displayed at social gatherings, such as feasts and funerals; they were subsequently deposited in tombs. The presence of these finds at Midea tells us that the inhabitants conformed to the common standards of Mycenaean elite behaviour and that they were competing in prestige with the same sort of commodities as their powerful neighbours in Mycenae and Tiryns.

Only further study of all kinds of Midean finds will inform us of the specific relationships between Midea and its neighbours. A first step towards a characterization of a specific Midea identity is presented below where the 'precious' finds of Midea are compared with the precious finds from Dendra: Midea's alleged cemetery. The aim is to deduce possible expressions of similar identities.

The 'precious' objects at Dendra

The following is an overview and a selection of the contexts and the nature of the precious objects found in the Dendra tombs. The most relevant examples are brought forward with finds comparable to the 'precious' ones at Midea.

The tholos

Three human skeletons were found buried in two pits under the floor of the tholos chamber. Rich finds are connected with all three interments, such as gold drinking vessels, necklaces, gold rings, etc.⁶⁷ Human bones were also found mixed with animal bones in another pit under the floor of the chamber. The bones were

67. Persson 1931, 13–18, 31–40.

accompanied by some round faience beads.⁶⁸ In a fourth pit under the chamber floor charcoal and fragments of gold, bronze, burnt ivory and beads of faience and semi-precious stones were found.⁶⁹

Additional human bones from at least three individuals were found scattered in the tomb on the chamber floor. In connection with these bones, Late Mycenaean vase fragments were found along with a number of small gold objects, some long pierced agathe beads, a hundred or so faience beads which were shaped like grains of wheat and an almond shaped stone engraved with a deer.⁷⁰

Furthermore, a burial was found in the dromos, close to the stomion, more than two metres above the floor-level of the chamber. A Protogeometric amphora accompanied the dead, but there were no precious objects connected to this burial.⁷¹

The chamber tombs

Chamber tomb 2 displays a number of peculiar constructional details. Its dromos is 20 metres long, which is unusually long for a chamber tomb, and the chamber was hewn in the shape of a house with a saddle roof.⁷² Inside the stomion, a door opening leading from the dromos into the chamber, a pit had been dug within which 35 bronze objects were stacked, the majority of which comprised of large vessels.⁷³ Pieces of cut sand stone were found in the chamber which proved to be a bench with square depressions in the corners, or according to Persson a slaughtering table,⁷⁴ when put together. Furthermore, there were two hewn stones, each with a small projection at one end. Along the short inner wall, there was a low hearth or altar built of small stones and covered with plaster.

On the chamber floor, there were also quite a lot of small precious finds, such as gold objects of various kinds and glass beads, etc.⁷⁵

Since no human bones were found in connection with these finds, Persson interpreted this tomb as a cenotaph.⁷⁶ However, a burial had been inserted into the dromos at a later date. The skeleton of a woman, according to Persson, was

68. Persson 1931, 18.

69. Persson 1931, 18.

70. Persson 1931, 12, 29-31.

71. Persson, 11, 41, fig. 24.

72. Persson 1931, 73-75, 93, fig. 65.

73. Persson 1931, 76-77, figs. 50 and 51.

74. Persson 1931, 77-80, figs. 52-53.

75. Persson 1981, 105, fig. 80.

76. Persson 1931, 80.

not actually found in the chamber, but in the dromos. She was accompanied by a bronze needle and some spindle whorls.⁷⁷

Chamber tomb 3 contained a disarray of the bones of ca 7 individuals. Among other finds, such as Psi figurines, there were precious objects comprising four tweezers, rings of gold wire, a bronze knife and lead wire.⁷⁸ Precious finds from *Chamber tomb 6* comprise a sealstone, an amethyst bead, glass beads and bronze arrow heads.⁷⁹ Among other finds from *Chamber tombs 7 and 8* were a gold ring, beads of gold, amethyst and glass, a sealstone of agathe, lots of pieces of boars' tusks and arrow heads of flint and obsidian.⁸⁰

Chamber tomb 10 was equipped with many precious finds of amber, faience, gold and glass, as well as silver vessels and an ornate silver spoon.⁸¹

Similarities in 'precious' objects between tombs at Dendra versus citadel at Midea

The next step in this analysis is to demonstrate any possible links between the sites of Midea and Dendra regarding the 'precious' objects which would indicate a shared expression of identity.

There are of course general resemblances in the material record which both Midea and Dendra shared with their Mycenaean neighbours, but there are no obvious cases of similarities which we could see as direct proof of a close relationship. However, some shared traits can be observed. The Midea and Dendra similarities are here compared with examples from the Mycenae chamber tombs, which were presented by Xenaki-Sakellariou.⁸²

A sword pommel of light agate from the 'king's' burial in the tholos⁸³ is the same kind as the stone sword pommel found in Niche 1 in the Midea megaron,⁸⁴ although the materials differ. Sword pommels also occur in the Mycenae chamber tombs. There is one ivory example which corresponds to a similar example from the Midea megaron.⁸⁵

77. Persson 1931, 74, 92, fig. 63.

78. Persson 1931, 86-90, fig. 62.

79. Persson 1942, 27, fig. 30.

80. Persson 1942, 36, fig. 36; 46, 48-49, figs. 50-53.

81. Persson 1942, 84-85, 87-89, figs. 92-101.

82. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985.

83. Persson, 1931, 35, no. 11, pl. 25 bottom.

84. Walberg 2007, 179, pl. C.

85. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 129, no. 3212 (7).

The simple round glass beads that occur in the basement debris in the rooms east of the East Gate were also found in a niche in the Midea megaron⁸⁶ as well as other places at Midea. They also occur abundantly in some of the tombs. Seal stones of various types occur both in the tombs and at the site. In the tholos tomb, specifically inside one of the gold cups in the king's burial, six lentoid seal stones of agate were found.⁸⁷ The agate seal found in Trench RJ in the building complex on the Southwest slope on Midea is made from the same material.⁸⁸ Moreover, the amygdaloid shape is similar to another seal from the Dendra tombs, which probably also depicts bovinds.⁸⁹ Seals of various types are likewise commonly found in the Argive tombs.

There is also a similarity regarding a kind of grain-shaped glass bead, which occurs in both tombs and in the citadel area.⁹⁰ The same kind of elongated glass beads in the shape of grains are identified as being typical of Mycenae and are common in the Argolid.⁹¹

Arrow heads of flint or obsidian can perhaps not obviously be classed as prestige items or 'precious', but seem to have been used as display pieces in the Dendra tombs.⁹² As grave gifts they may signify prestige linked with warfare and hunting, suitable and fitting of elite activities, which were also emulated by less highly ranked inhabitants in the Argive region. The same kinds of arrow heads occur in various contexts at Midea.⁹³ Arrow heads of flint and obsidian also occur, for example, in the Mycenae chamber tombs.

Elaborate glass relief beads, like the fragmentary one found east of the East Gate at Midea (No. 3 above) also occur in the Dendra tombs, in the tholos and in Chamber tomb 2.⁹⁴ However, the relief motives don't seem to be the same and differ as the Dendra examples are pierced in a way which suggests that they were perhaps nailed to something, while the Midea example may represent a bead since it had two perforations running inside the decorative borders framing the central motif. At Mycenae there are exact parallels to the gold foil glass bead decorated with Argonauts in pairs (as demonstrated above when discussing no. 6). From the

86. Walberg 2007, 177-178, figs. 218, 219.

87. Persson 1931, 32, no. 3, pl. 29.

88. Demakopoulou, Divari-Valakou and Schallin 2003, 15, fig. 25.

89. Persson 1931, pl. 25.

90. Persson 1931, pls. 15, 35; Walberg 2007, fig. 219: G28; Demakopoulou, Divari-Valakou & Schallin 2003, 19, fig. 41.

91. Nightingale 2000, 8-9, figs. 19-20.

92. Persson 1942, 46, fig. 50.

93. E.g. Demakopoulou *et al.* 2004, 15, fig. 14.

94. Persson 1931, 105, fig. 80; pl. 8.

Mycenae tombs, there are also exact parallels to the trochus shell glass beads.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the glass relief bead with depicted demons from Midea has an exact parallel from a chamber tomb at Mycenae.⁹⁶

A similarity worth noting is the fact that four bronze tweezers were found in Chamber tomb 3⁹⁷ and a very similar example was found in Room V in the building complex of the southwest slope.⁹⁸ Tweezers of various types are common in the Mycenae chamber tombs.⁹⁹

The Mycenaean iconography was wide and varied. Some motifs are more common than others and occur both in the Dendra cemetery, on the Midea citadel and in the rest of the Mycenaean world. One common example is the rosette, which were used in ornaments of various materials.¹⁰⁰

Another common recurring motif is the Argonaut – FM 22 in pottery terms,¹⁰¹ which is the motif of the gold foil glass relief bead (no. 6 above). The motif occurs on a gold ornament from Dendra,¹⁰² and was commonly used as a motif for ‘precious’ objects.

Significance for a shared identity

Even if the evidence is rather slight when it comes to links and similarities between the two sites regarding the ‘precious’ objects, they are nevertheless there. It seems that Midea and Dendra in fact shared a common language of expression in their way of using this kind of objects. The shared use of ‘precious’ objects, however, is not a local phenomenon or an expression of identity exclusively for Midea and Dendra, but is rather a shared regional, or a wider Mycenaean cultural, way of dealing with the precious objects which mirrors shared customs and similar ways that the elite members of the Mycenaean palace sites communicate self-representation. For example, when comparing the precious objects from Midea and Dendra with the same kind of material from the chamber tombs at nearby Mycenae, there are many particular parallels.

All these similarities regarding the type of grave goods, materials and decorative features signify shared views and traditions among the Mycenaeans.

95. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 27, no. 2271(2); pl. 92, no. 2963.

96. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 133, no. 4551.

97. Persson 1931, 89, fig. 62.

98. Demakopoulou *et al.* 2003, 14, fig. 19.

99. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, e.g. pl 9, no. 2386.

100. E.g. Persson 1931, 105, fig. 80; Walberg 2007, pl. 25:B35.

101. Furumark 1941.

102. Persson 1931, pl. 33:f.

It is quite possible that such similarities are strongest between closely located sites and that they diminish as the distance grows. The similarities in 'precious' objects occurring in the Argive region is obvious, and close similarities in the cultural expressions encompassed vast areas in Mycenaean times. It is possible that the material at Dendra and Midea, when further studied, may reveal other related links which have only been suggested as the materials and contexts have a variety of connotations and each example can be further investigated.

The evidence indicates a specific, but complex relationship between the site of Midea and the cemetery at Dendra. The Dendra cemetery played an important role for the Midean inhabitants and special ceremonies connected the sites. Dendra may possibly have served a wider region as a ceremonial area where the cult connected with the dead was in focus.¹⁰³ The original tombs at Dendra were built in LH II with more tombs being added as time went on. At the same time the old tombs were continuously used, some throughout the Bronze Age. In the LH IIIB when the Midea citadel area was created, the tombs were actively in use.¹⁰⁴ The richest and most affluent interments seem to belong to the early phase, while the later burials, more contemporary with the actual remains from the citadel at Midea are fewer and the accompanying grave goods are more humble. The fact that less valuables are displayed in the tombs is in fact a regional Argive trend. At Midea, there is also evidence of activity in the earlier Late Helladic phases, but there is still no evidence of elite architecture befitting the king of the tholos, who was allegedly buried in LH IIIA1. If there was such architecture at Midea, all of it must have been demolished in the reorganization of the citadel in LH IIIB2. There is therefore a chronological discrepancy in the material evidence regarding tombs versus a citadel. The LH IIIB2 architecture revealed so far in the citadel area belongs to three main categories: rooms built along the inner face of the citadel wall, which were most probably used for storage and/or production; buildings on the central terrace, which were the homes of the inhabitants and the large and monumental structure called the Megaron, which constituted the palace at Midea, and which presumably belonged to, and was used for the activities of, the Midean elite. Persson, not knowing anything about the Megaron,¹⁰⁵ envisioned a palace at the summit of Midea, the remains of which were never especially obvious.

103. Cavanagh & Mee 1998; Gallou 2005.

104. Sjöberg 2001, 156.

105. Persson 1942, 7–12.

The chronological imbalance in the material evidence between the cemetery- and the citadel may even out if we add the evidence coming from the Midean Lower Town: evidence which is insufficiently known, but which has been identified in past fieldwork.¹⁰⁶

Summary and conclusion

This article started out with the aim of presenting the precious objects found in the recent excavations at Midea in the area of the East Gate, and to add these finds as part of the material setup constituting a Midean identity. The 'precious' objects were found in mixed deposits together with a lot of debris emanating from the severe destruction and fire at the site at the end of LH IIIB2. The amount of 'precious' finds from east of the East Gate are limited to a handful, but the published finds of this type from the rest of the citadel area give a fuller picture of the Midean setup. Whether the Mideans themselves actually produced the precious objects on the site is an important question when regarding how we should conceive their identity in relation to their neighbours since Mycenaean glass and ivory production is a potential trait for the existence of a palace organization. The 'precious' objects were used by the Mycenaean elite for self-representation and wearing, owning or displaying. For example, blue glass relief beads demonstrated a social Mycenaean palace elite identity. In order to strengthen the case of a Midean local identity regarding 'precious' objects, the evidence from the nearby cemetery at Dendra was used with the aim of finding the existence of a strong bond between the sites expressed in the material record. From this analysis it was concluded that not only do Midea and Dendra share basic similarities regarding their use of 'precious' objects, but there are some basic similarities in the material which both sites share with other cemeteries and sites in the Argive region as well as in Mycenaean contexts beyond the Argolid.

It has been argued by Voutsaki¹⁰⁷ that Mycenae was in control of the production and distribution of precious goods in the Argolid, especially gold, and that Midea, together with Tiryns, was allied with Mycenae. As an ally it was possible for the Mideans to produce sealstones and ivory, for example, but not gold and ivory objects which were especially valuable and reserved only for Mycenae to produce. This notion corresponds rather well with the archaeological evidence at Midea. There are indeed strong indications of glass working at the site since Nikita mentions semi-worked or malformed glass ornaments in conjunction with

106. Hägg 1963; Åström 1983, 17-21, 56-58.

107. Voutsaki 2010, 101-103.

a steatite mould for casting gold or glass jewellery,¹⁰⁸ but no proper work-shop area has yet been identified. Regarding the ivory- and gold objects at the site, these could have been provided by Mycenae according to Voutsaki's hypothesis.¹⁰⁹

There are a few indications of production of precious commodities at Midea, but there is no proper evidence in the form of workshop space at the site. The small number of indications may either mean that production was going on, but on a limited scale, or else that the few cases of fragmentary raw materials and half-finished products in the eyes of the inhabitants also belonged to the category of 'precious' objects and were kept and treated as such.

The 'precious' commodities at Midea and Dendra are no doubt an important component in the emerging image of a Midean identity, but only further study of the material remains will make this image understandable.

Catalogue

Simple glass beads

Measurements in cm.

1. (Fig. 6) Twelve spherical, perforated blue glass beads with a rounded profile.
 - a. Inv. no. G2002:1. Trench 3. Layer 3. Bead broken in two frags. D. 1.2; pierced hole 0.2.
 - b. Inv. no. G2002:2. Trench 3. Layer 3. Two frags. Est. D. 1.3; Pierced hole 0.4.
 - c. Inv. no. G2002:3. Trench 3. Layer 3S. Half of bead preserved. D. 1.1; pierced hole 0.2.
 - d. Inv. no. G2002:4. Trench 3. Layer 3S. Intact bead. D. 1.2; pierced hole 0.25.
 - e. Inv. no. G2002:5. Trench 3. Layer 3S. Intact bead. D. 1.2; pierced hole 0.2.
 - f. Inv. no. G2002:6. Trench 3. Layer 3S. Bead broken in three frags. D. 1.2; pierced hole 0.4.
 - g. Inv. no. G2002:7. Trench 3. Layer 3S W wall. Intact bead. D. 1; pierced hole 0.15.
 - h. Inv. no. G2009:2. Trench 12. Layer 4a. Half of bead preserved. D. 1.2; pierced hole 0.2.
 - i. Inv. no. G2009:3. Trench 12. Layer 4a. One third of bead preserved. D. 1.2; pierced hole 0.2.
 - j. Inv. no. G2009:4. Trench 12. Layer 4a. Bead broken in three frags. D. 1.4; pierced hole 0.2.
 - k. Inv. no. G2009:5. Trench 12. Layer 4a. Bead broken in three frags: one large and two small. D. 1.5; pierced hole 0.4.
 - l. Inv. no. G2009:6. Trench 12. Layer 4a. One frgm representing half a bead. D. 1.3; pierced hole 0.4.

2. (Fig. 7) One spherical, perforated blue glass bead with an edged, tubular profile.
 - Inv. no. G2007:1. Baulk T3/R9. Layer 4. One bead in three fragments. Max D.1,3; pierced hole 0.3.

108. Nikita 2008.

109. Voutsaki 2010.

Relief beads

3. (Fig. 8) Relief plaque bead of blue glass with string holes along the borders.
Inv. no. G2009:1. Trench 12. Layer 4a. D. 2.2 x 3.5. Th. 0.1-0.5. Between two raised borders, main motif consisting of two winged demons.
4. (Fig. 9) Relief bead/plaque of blue glass with string holes at both ends.
Inv. no. G2002:8. Trench 3. Layer 3S. Intact. Max D. 1.5 x 0.8. The bead/plaque is decorated with a raised border at one end and a trochus shell at the other.
5. (Fig. 10) Curled leaf relief ornament/bead of blue glass.
Inv. no. G2002:9. Trench 3. Layer 3S. Max D. 2 x 1.1. Broken off fragment, consisting of a ribbed, curled leaf.
6. (Fig. 11) Gold relief bead with central string hole.
Inv. no. M2005:1 (MN 31901). Trench 14. Layer 3 N of stone packing. D. 2 x 1. Blue glass covered with gold foil. Motif in relief: heraldically paired Argonauts in “cut-out style”;¹¹⁰ details in granulation technique. Both short sides of bead are damaged.

Ivory ornaments

7. (Fig. 12) Relief plaque/inlay of ivory.
Inv. no. B2004:3. Trench 11S. Layer 2. D. 2.9 x 2.4; th. 0.5. Plaque with slanting sides and with carved flat projections at two ends. Surface depicts an elaborately carved papyrus pattern in relief.
8. (Fig. 13) Relief plaque of ivory.
Inv. no. B2007:1. Baulk T3/R9. Layer 4. Two fragments, which belong to the same plaque, but they don't fit. Th. 0.5.
- a. D. 5 x 3.2. The fragment depicts two pairs of cut-off legs in relief. The legs to the left ends in hoofs, thus representing the legs of an animal, while the legs to the right are rendered as muscular and should belong to a man.
- b. D. 2.1 x 2.1. This damaged fragment depicts the lower part of a man's face - with the hair rendered shoulder long - and torso, and the pointed end of a possible horn of an animal.

110. Nightingale 2000, 6.

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