

Heaven's Own Doom: An Investigation into the Collapse of Mycenaean Greece and the Downfall of Its Sociopolitical Institutions

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Introduction

In the Late Bronze Age (LBA), Greece saw the collapse of the interconnected Mycenaean palatial system. This involved the destruction of the palaces found at various sites, including Mycenae and Tiryns. The reason for why, however, is unknown. Multiple theories for the reason of collapse have developed including ones that follow earthquakes, climate change, and maritime invaders. Born from ideas of stark class differences and class conflict; one of these theories is the idea of revolt from non-elites against the elites. This research looks at that idea through varying theoretical frameworks being applied to data found from the palaces of Mycenaean Greece.

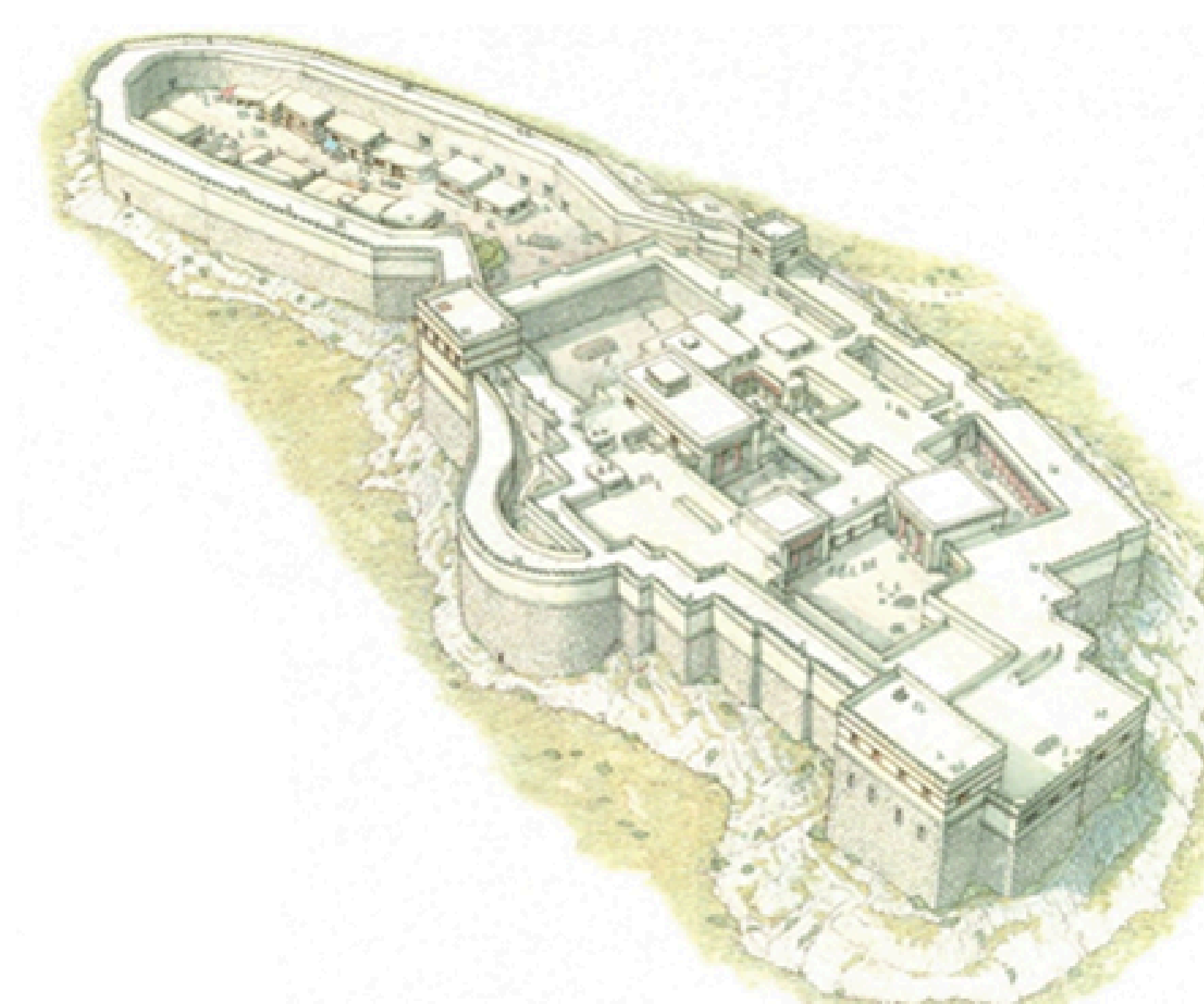


Figure 1: Illustration of Tiryns. Notice the elongated shape, which distinguishes it from other palaces (Fields and Spedaliere 2004:34)

Research Questions

- 1.How did internal struggles between elites and non-elites contribute to the collapse of the Mycenaean palace-states in the LBA?
- 2.What does the archaeological evidence reveal about the dichotomy of elites and non-elites and the power dynamics that possibly led to collapse?

Methodology

- Read, analyzed, and synthesized academic literature surrounding the research questions
- Multidisciplinary approach including archaeology, anthropology, art history, classics, social theory, and briefly archaeoseismology and paleoclimatology
- Visited Tiryns and Mycenae in Greece along with museums containing artifacts from those sites
- Viewed the data from sites through multiple theoretical lens including Agency, Globalization, Institutional Archaeology, and Marxist Frameworks



Figure 2: Image of the remains of the throne found at Tiryns c. 1300 BC. Image by author January 5th, 2025, at the Athens National Archaeology Museum.



Figure 3: 5 golden Mycenaean rings. Tiryns c. 1200 BC. Captured by author January 5th, 2025. Athens National Archaeological Museum..

Data



Figure 4: Lead ring from lower citadel Tiryns, c. 1200 BC. Picture from author January 2nd, 2025. Nafplion Archaeology Museum, Nafplion, Greece.

- Elites likely manipulated craftspeople, through the institution, into creating luxury goods like frescoes, pottery, and jewelry
- Elites used their power, reinforced by the institution and through the creation of luxury objects, to create a repetitive pattern that constantly strengthens the institution
- The palace, as an institution, is also reinforced in its design with an elite centered build focusing on their protection and the protection of the workshops
- The palace sits above everything representing a hierarchy of power



Figure 5: Stone foundations of buildings in the lower citadel of Tiryns. Pictured is the eastern side of Tiryns. Picture by author January 3, 2025.

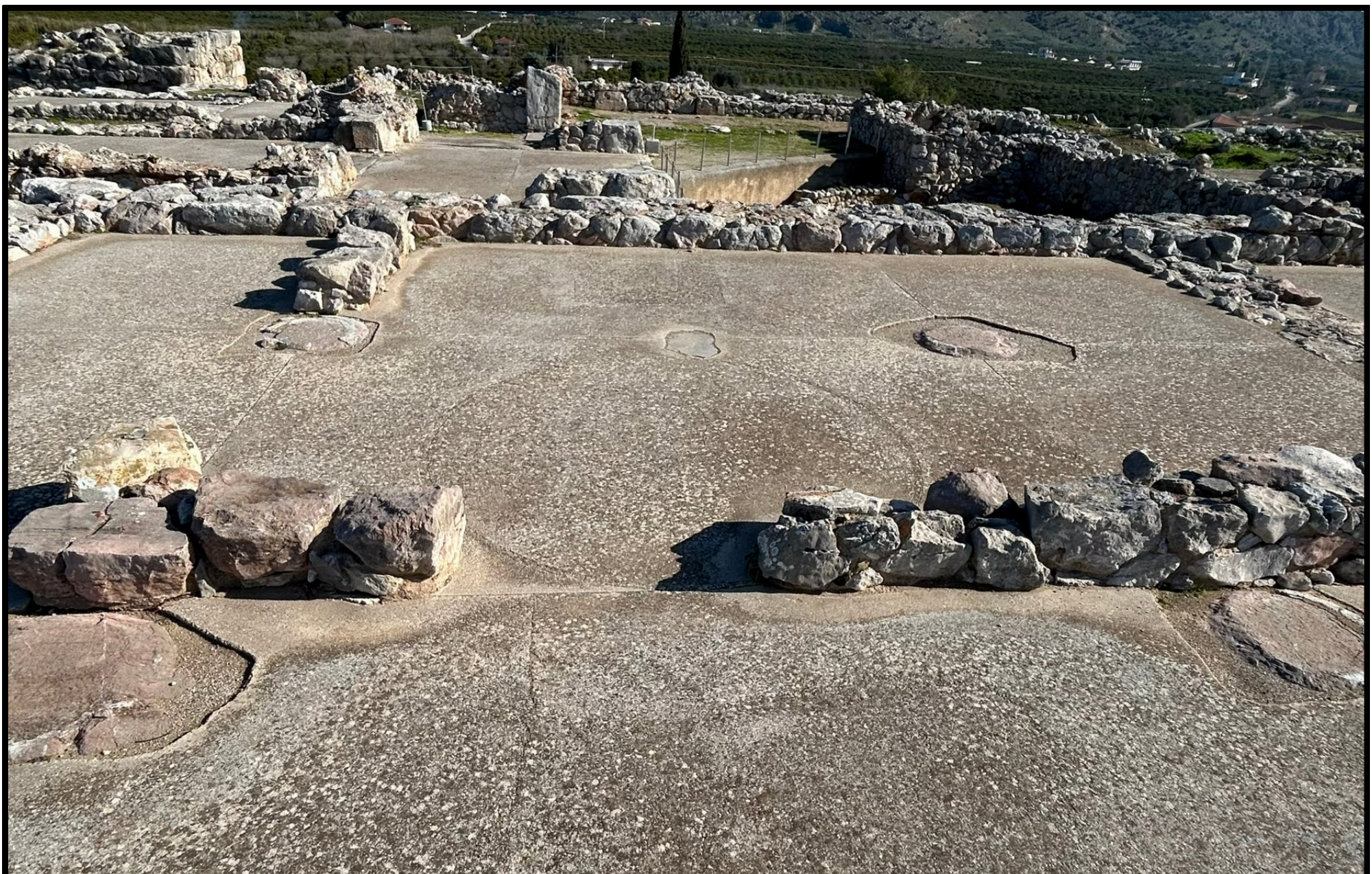


Figure 6: Image of the throne room. Four circles outlining a square shape would have been the pillars. Inside the center of the outline is a circular indent that would have been the hearth. Image taken by author January 3rd, 2025

Theory

- Archaeological institutions, like the palaces, are material and dynamic manifestations of constantly reinforced stability formed through repeated interactions, shaped by and shaping the people involved, and serve the individual through intentional design and repeated patterns
- Mycenaean palaces functioned as elite-driven institutions of wealth, power, and control, where repeated economic and social interactions between elites and craftspeople reinforced institutional stability, despite underlying inequalities and potential unrest that hint at a more complex, unstable reality
- Marxist theories view social change as an inevitable result of class conflict rooted from material production, where contradictions between management and personnel drive the collapse and rebirth of social structures, such as the Mycenaean palaces
- There will always be conflict between management and personnel, as could be seen with the elites and the craftspeople as they create luxury goods for them and continually build upon and reinforce the institution

Conclusion

This research looked at the possibility that the elites of the palaces utilized institutions for their own gain. In the process of that, creating a distinct class difference that eventually led to non-elites rising up and revolting against the rule of the elites. The palaces were destroyed during the uprising and a complete rejection of the palatial system took place.

Bibliography QR Code:

